

CHAPTER SIX

SIX MEDIA STRATEGIES APPLIED BY DAM CRITICS

This chapter is the third of four chapters that focus on how the contending parties advocated their different viewpoints in the media. After describing the media strategies adopted by the dam advocates in the previous two chapters, in this chapter I am going to describe the media strategies which were applied by the dam critics. They adopted six strategies: they first framed of Kedungombo as an unfair land appropriation issue; second, as a human-rights' violation issue; third, as a symbol of the revival of the Indonesian student movement; fourth, as a save-the-children issue; fifth, as a symbol of the political awareness of a politically important Christian minority; and sixth, as an issue to refrain from voting in the upcoming general election.

Kedungombo as an unfair land appropriation issue

Framing Kedungombo as an unfair land appropriation issue was the longest prevailing media strategy adopted by the dam critics, with the widest cooperation from the media. This media strategy was mainly practiced by the lawyers associated with the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI). This strategy was adopted by YLBHI and several other non-governmental groups from 1986 until 1991 in their press releases and other publications.

In framing Kedungombo as an "unfair land appropriation issue," two legal limitations were put forward by YLBHI lawyers during their campaigns: first, obeying the rule of the law, and second, obeying the rule of the court. In arguing for the rights of the farmers displaced by the reservoir, they strictly based their position on respecting the laws and regulations that dictate the appropriation of land by the Indonesian government for public de-

velopment projects. Secondly, they repeatedly emphasized the use of the court of law to settle the legal disputes between the people and the State.

One regulation that was most repeatedly emphasized by many lawyers and other Kedungombo people's supporters was PMDN (*Peraturan Menteri Dalam Negeri* [Minister of The Interior Regulation]) No. 15 of 1975 (Authon, 1988: 6-7; Nusantara, 1988: 16; Nadapdap, 1989; Kambai, 1991). This land appropriation regulation was also one of the main legal bases around which YLBHI attorneys constructed their defense in the case of 54 residents of Kedungpring hamlet in Boyolali district *versus* the Central Java governor and the Jratunseluna Project Manager. This legal battle, in which the villagers sued the government to pay them about Rp 2 billion in compensation plus other benefits, took place at the Semarang Low Court from July 19 until December 20, 1990, with the villagers losing their case.

From the small landowners' perspective, PMDN No. 15/1975 has many weaknesses. First, it does not include all the land-owners, or their representatives, in the Land Appropriation Committee (popularly known as "the Committee of Nine"), which was entitled to determine the compensation rates for the land, buildings, and crops that to be appropriated. This regulation assumes that the landowners' interests can be represented by the village head, or other village functionaries appointed by the village head. Second, this regulation stipulates that the Committee of Nine has to negotiate with landowners and owners of the properties on that land to determine the appropriate compensation rates, taking the market prices of those properties into consideration. It does not stipulate, however, how that negotiation has to take place, or whether the land and property owners have the same rights to determine the compensation rates as do the Committee

members. In relation to that negotiation process, it also does not stipulate the steps that have to be taken by the Committee if no consensus is reached in the Committee's deliberations with the owners of the land and the properties. Third, this regulation does determine that, for large tracts of land (the appropriation of which may involve the relocation of their former inhabitants), the party who will be in charge of that land has the obligation to provide new settlements for the land's former inhabitants. It does not stipulate, however, whether the people who will be displaced from their land have the right to determine where and how they want to be resettled.

In spite of those weaknesses, YLBHI lawyers still used PMDN No. 5 in their defense of the Kedungpring people's rights to utilize the public forum for educating the government and the public about those weaknesses. They wanted to use the court to show the government public that many land disputes had emerged in Indonesia, precisely due to the weaknesses of PMDN No. 15/1975 and other land-appropriation regulations. They also wanted to use the court to campaign for the abolition of PMDN No. 15/1975 and its replacement by a new and better regulation, which would better guarantee the people's land rights. They also wanted to use the court to show the people that the land compensation rates at Kedungombo, which were based on the governor's decrees, could not be imposed upon the people against their wishes, despite the fact that those governor decrees were claimed to be legally based upon PMDN No. 15/1975.

The attempts to use the court as a public education forum failed, due to the authorities' ban on press coverage of most of the sessions of this court. Only some initial sessions and the last session, where only the verdict was read out, could be covered by the Semarang-based journalists. Hence,

apart from those "open sessions," the Indonesian media coverage of the People *versus* the Governor of Central Java was limited to one news story in a Jakarta-based crime magazine, *Detektif & Romantika* , and three news stories in *Yogya Post* .

The ban on press coverage of cases where the citizens challenged the government indicated how the legal system in Central Java mainly served the interests of the authorities. After the Semarang Low Court turned the Kedungombo villagers' accusations down, the governor and the Jratunseluna Project manager repeatedly capitalized on the legal victory in their press statements. The governor also used survey errors of the YLBHI field workers to further reduce the meaning of the Kedungpring people's legal resistance and to highlight the government's rightness. During the Kedungpring court sessions, nineteen plaintiffs were forced to withdraw their accusations, due to double accounting of theouselots and farmlots by the YLBHI field workers. This unfortunate technical error was repeatedly emphasized not only by the governor, but also by the Jratunseluna Project general manager, as well as the Minister of The Interior, to allege that only 34 out of the more than 5,000 households refused to leave the reservoir's green belt.

Yet even after the failure to use the court as a public forum to campaign for reviewing PMDN No. 15/1975, not all roads for carrying on that campaign were blocked. Concerned lawyers and other social activists could still write articles on the subject of land appropriation, since some media were still willing to publish articles about that subject (Halim, 1991a; Halim, 1991b; Reni, 1991 a; Reni 1991b; Hartono, 1991; and Hendaridi and Ruswandi, 1991). Interestingly, none of those social activist authors touched upon that

regulation. In mid-1991, however, the critiques of PMDN No. 15/1975 seemed to reach the government's ears. On June 11, Soni Harsono, the head of the National Land Affairs' Bureau stated that President Soeharto had agreed to review PMDN No. 15/1975 and another Interior Minister's Regulation, PMDN No. 2/1976, which deals with land appropriation for private projects. Both Interior Minister Regulations would be elevated to higher legal levels, such as Government Regulations of Presidential Decrees, taking the landowners' rights into consideration (*Pikiran Rakyat*, 12 June 1991).

be doubted whether the lawyers' criticisms were seriously taken consideration by the president. Soeharto's statement, expressed through Som Harsono's mouth, was uttered less than a month after the inauguration of Kedungombo, where he had stated on that the compensation provided for the displaced villagers could not be reviewed (*Pikiran Rakyat*, 19 May 1991). Soeharto's promise to review PP No. 15 of 1975 was also made g election year, when there were numerous land disputes all over d when students demonstrating with farmers received a tacit blessing from the Army. But regardless of those possibilities, the lawyers confronted the loopholes of the land appropriation regulations could seize this opportunity to present their suggestions to the public. However, that political opportunity simply slipped away.

g rdless of the failure to obtain a legal recognition of the rights of e Kedungpring people in the so-called compensation negotiations, the belief of YLBHI in the impartiality of the court did not seem to waver. Its Semarang branch continued its legal assistance to the Kedungpring villagers by appealing for justice to the Supreme Court in Jakarta, after the High Court

in Semarang had confirmed the December 20, 1990 verdict of the Low Court (*Suara Merdeka* , 7 May 1991). Meanwhile, YLBHI's Yogyakarta branch had announced that it would also take the Central Java governor and Jratunseluna Project officer to court, on behalf of 50 villagers in the Sragen district who also felt unfairly treated by the dam's compensation process (*Pikiran Rakyat* , 6 May 1991).

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Kedungombo as a human-rights violations issue

Apart from framing Kedungombo as an "unfair land appropriation" issue, the second most predominant media strategy adopted by critics of the dam was to frame it as a "human-rights' violations" issue. The government's use of physical force and mental terror to force the local villagers to accept the low compensation rates and the government sponsored resettlement schemes, was the main target of the intellectuals' criticism. One tactic used to attract the public's attention to this forced compensation and resettlement process was to provide legal aid to villagers who wanted to sue the authorities. This was done by YLBHI in the form of legal assistance to two Boyolali villagers, who sued the district head for marking their LD.s with E.T.initials. This was discussed earlier in Chapter Four. A second tactic employed by the dam critics was to published booklet that exposed Kedungombo together with other land appropriation cases where villagers were forced to give up their land.

It was difficult, however, to have the mainstream media cite those nongovernmental publications due to strong press censorship in Indonesia. Hence, in 1991, a coalition of nine Indonesian nongovernment organiza-

tions^ tried to employ a different tactic. They printed a satirical cartoon calendar, which portrayed various land dispute cases in Indonesia that had hit the headlines during the previous three years. The top right part of the calendar showed a big fat man with a big bundle of money in his left hand pouring water over a group of farmers displaced by the Kedungombo reservoir. In the center of the calendar, a bespectacled woman in a bikini, looking remarkably like the First Lady, Mrs. Soeharto, played golf. Nearby, a man looking remarkably like Soeharto sat on several individuals who cried for mercy, with another woman in a bikini sitting in his lap. Men in uniforms with machine guns and clubs were drawn all over the calendar, chasing and beating villagers to make room for reservoirs, golf courses, ranches, and development projects. Five thousand copies of this calendar were printed and distributed to various student communities in Java (*Tapol* , April 1991)-

This 28- by- 20 inch "Land for the People" calendar circulated for two months among student activists in Java before a government crackdown turned it in to a local, and consequently, a national issue. In March 1991, Central Java police and military intelligence agents detained and interrogated student activists and a university professor close to the students in Semarang and Salatiga, while trying to round up all the calendars that had

8) This *ad hoc* coalition represented a "rainbow coalition" of three human-rights, two student activist, two feminist, one legal aid and one environmentalist organizations. The human-rights organizations were the Jakarta-based INSAN (Center for Human Rights Information and Study), the Jakarta-based INFIGHT (Indonesian Front for the Defense of Human Rights), and the Jakarta-based LPHAM (Institute for the Defense of Human Rights). The student activist organizations were the Bandung-based KPM-URI (Student Defense ; Committee for the People of Indonesia) and the Yogyakarta-based LEKHAT (The Foundation for the Analysis of Popular Rights). The feminist organizations were the Jakarta-based K (Rise of Indonesian Women Group) and the Yogyakarta-based FDPY (Yogyakarta Women's Discussion Forum). The legal aid organization was the Bandung office of YLBHI, and the environmentalist organization was the Jakarta-based SKEPHI (Indonesian People's Network for Forest Conservation).

already been distributed. After thirteen persons in the two university towns had been interrogated, a young graduate from Satya Wacana Christian University, Buntomi Wh., and Matheus Hosang, who was still enrolled at the university, were chosen as the main suspects of the "plot."

The two suspects, who were staffpersons of a foundation of student activists, Gemi Nastiti, which was actively involved in defending the Kedungombo people's rights, reportedly had to stand trial for distributing fifty of those calendars. They were charged with violating Articles 137 and 155 of the Criminal Code which forbid the dissemination of material that discredits the government and insults the president. Together, these charges carry a maximum jail term of almost six years. But after leaders of the nine sponsoring organizations publicly claimed responsibility for the production and contents of the calendar, the police silently dropped the case.

Meanwhile, the police declared that Yayak A. Yatmaka or Yayak Kencrit, an artist in Yogyakarta, was wanted for drawing the calendar's cartoons. The radical artist, who was a staffperson of Samin, a foundation involved in alternative education for children, went into hiding (*Jakarta-Jakarta*, 18-24 May 1991).

The media enthusiastically reported the unfolding of this case, which drew much attention from the authorities, the students, and the general public. The Minister for Political and Security Affairs, Sudomo, a retired Navy Admiral, denied that the military had been used to oppress the people (*Jakarta-Jakarta*, 16-22 March 1991). And while in the beginning the calendar had not attracted much attention, during the peak of the interrogations it was in high demand among students in various university towns in Java, raising its retail price from Rp 1,500 to Rp 10,000. Some student activists sent

the calendar to their parents in their home villages to entertain and possibly to educate their parents' neighbors about the land disputes that were taking place all over the country.

At first glance it seems that the rainbow coalition had been quite successful in attracting the public's attention to the use of military, police, and paramilitary force in evicting the people from their land, which was appropriated for various development projects. In hindsight, however, it seems that the crackdown was more of a Service to the Kedungombo dam advocates than to the displaced villagers for the following reasons. First, no Indonesian media reprinted any of the cartoons from the calendar. Second, the two young Christian student activists in Salatiga seemed to be intentionally selected as the main "suspects" of the "plot," and not the sponsoring organizations in Yogyakarta, Bandung, and Jakarta, since a weaker reaction to their apprehension was anticipated than if students from those major university towns were apprehended. Third, even though the Salatiga student activists received numerous solidarity statements, their interrogation and the charges brought against them could also be seen as another lesson to the student activists, after earlier cases in Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogya, , where student activists had been taken to court for several "subversive" charges, did not discourage the students from further involvement in land disputes, including Kedungombo. Fourth, by interrogating the Salatiga student activists, who were supported by the nine organizational sponsors of the calendar as well as the Semarang office of YLBHI, the authorities were temporarily able to divert those groups away from Kedungombo, which was going to be inaugurated by President Soeharto in May 1991.

In terms of influencing public opinion, the media coverage of the calendar case also served the interests of the authorities, since it tainted the image of the eleven organizations affiliated with the case, due to the fabrication of the calendar as "forbidden" material. This fabrication process went as follows. Most of the news coverage of the calendar case focused on the statements and press releases of the police and other security agencies, the Central Java governor, politicians, and pro-government law professors, who systematically framed the calendar as a "subversive" publication. This "trial by the authorities" was turned into a "trial by the press" by the use of words such as "*kalender politis* ", "*kalender gelap* ", and "*kalender terlarang* " in the press reports. The first word is already obvious, the second word means "black calendar," and the third one means "forbidden calendar." Obviously, the last two terms were incorrect, because the calendar had listed all the nine organizational sponsors, and only on May 2, 1991 did the Attorney General ban the calendar, almost two months after the arrests.

When the radius of the media coverage broadened to Yogyakarta, where the police started to investigate the print shop that had printed the calendar and the artist who had drawn the caricatures, the "trial by the press" became even more poignant. One news weekly published the full name and picture of the Yogyakarta artist, with a black bar over his eyes, as if he were a major criminal (*Jakarta-Jakarta* , 18-24 May 1991).

Kedungombo as a symbol of the revival of the Indonesian student movement

As one of the major components of the Kedungombo critics, many student activists and former student activists framed Kedungombo as a symbol of the revival of their movement (Denny J. A., 1991). This image de-

veloped immediately after the February-March 1989 demonstrations, which involved students from 45 campuses in Java and Lombok. Since the mainstream media were not allowed to publish reports about the demonstrations

mediately, most of these news stories appeared in the religious media *Widup*, 16 April 1989; *Media Dakwah*, May 1989; *Amanah*, 19 May-1 June ' *Estafet*, June 1989), as well as in the other nonmainstream media.

Consequently, this framing of Kedungombo as a *national* symbol of the Indonesian student movement, spread to the student movement outside Java and Lombok. An article in a magazine of fishery students at Riau University in Pekanbaru, which called 1989 "The Year of the Indonesian Student Movement," even stated that the student demonstration 1989 started with Kedungombo. A chronology of student actions in the magazine, however, showed that student demonstrations had already occurred in Padang (West Sumatera), Jakarta, and Yogyakarta, prior to the Kedungombo demonstrations. Three out of the six pages of that article described the Kedungombo demonstrations (*Estuaria*, June 1990).

This frame was maintained due to the continuous involvement of students during the period from 1990 to 1991 in supporting public demonstrations by Kedungombo villagers, and in dialogues with the Central Java governor and other authorities to speed up a beneficial solution for the displaced villagers. In contrast to the press ban on the early 1989 student demonstrations, the 1990-1991 activities of students in defense of the Kedungombo villagers were widely covered by the media.

The framing of Kedungombo as a Symbol of the student movement's revival, however, obscured the history of previous student-peasant alliances in the 1980s. Kedungombo was indeed one of the most internationally pub-

licized event of the Indonesian student movement of the 1980s. But contrary to common wisdom, the Indonesian students' involvement in local dam issues did not start with Kedungombo. The students' involvement in local dam issues was also not the most intense in Kedungombo, in terms of the sacrifices which students or former student activists had to pay. In the early 1980s, North Sumatera students and young lawyers supported the villagers displaced by the Asahan hydropower dams with legal and agronomical advice. This caused Mochtar Pakpahan, the head of the Legal Aid Unit of the Nommensen HKBP University, to be fired by the university's president and sent to Jakarta to further his studies. His activities in defending the land rights of 28 village communities affected by the Asahan dams was seen as jeopardizing the university's relationship with the provincial government.

In the mid-1980s, student activists in Central Java, South Sulawesi, and West Java also supported the people who were displaced by the Mrica, Bakaru, and Cirata hydropower dams. In the case of Bakaru, six social activists were sentenced for four years in jail for instigating the villagers' resistance to the predetermined resettlement procedure. A seventh person, Abdul Rasyid Toali, who was also tried together with the six others, studied law at the Hasanuddin University in Ujungpandang and advised his colleagues on legal matters, was freed from any charges, after being detained for a year, together with his six colleagues.

The Bakaru case was only covered by one local newspaper, *Pedoman Rakyat* and one crime magazine, *Detektif & Romantika*. Those media, however, did not mention that four out of the six defendants who received the four-year sentences were also studying in Ujungpandang, and had been active in Islamic and ethnic student associations. And prior to that case,

eighty villagers had already taken the project's main contractor to court for destroying their crops and taking their land before compensation had been agreed upon. This legal protest was only covered by a crime magazine, *Detcktip & Romantika* , The news story did not report, however, that Mustafa, one of the organizers of this legal resistance, was among the seven social aclivists who were tried in late 1985 after the villagers' resistance failed. He was sentenced to four years in jail and had to drop out of college.

In the case of the Mrica resistance, the villagers were organized by Achmad Sulaeman, who originated from one of the inundated villages and had linked the dissenling villagers with the Yogyakarta branch of YLBHI. This case was only covered by two local newspapers, such as *Suara Merdeka* and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* , and one Jakarta daily, *Merdeka* . These media did not mention, however, that Sulaeman studied at the Engineering Department of the Gajah Mada State University in Yogyakarta.

In the case of Cirata, a villager was killed by local security agents for exposing compensation frauds. That person, Mahfuddin Hermanto, had studied law at the Parahyangan Catholic University in Bandung and was active in a not-so-well known legal aid bureau. His assassination was only covered extensively by one crime magazine (*Detektip dan Romantika*) very briefly by two national weeklies (*Tempo* and *Editor*) and a local daily (*PiHran Rj.h/at*). Mahfuddin was probably the First and only former student activist who died for defending the land rights of villagers displaced by dams • in Indonesia.

Finally, at the tum of the decade, the struggle of the Kedungombo villagers was supported by hundreds of student activists from 45 universities in Java and Lombok. In contrast to Bakar or Cirata, not a single student |

supporting the displaced villagers. Some students from the Mataram University in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara province, also joined the protests. Ironically, seven years earlier, Lombok villagers were displaced by the Batujai dam on the island of Lombok itself, which was also infused with corruption, and where many houses were inundated before a compensation agreement was reached. Only two magazines covered this case extensively, *Topik* and *Detektif & Romantika*. The Batujai villagers, however, did not received any attention from the Mataram University student activists at that time.

By framing Kedungombo as one of the most important symbols of the

their governmental supporting agencies managed to hide the general pattern of numerous dam building cases from the public's eye.

Kedungombo as a save-the-children issue

After news about February 1989 student demonstrations was banned from the media, and the reservoir area was declared a "closed territory, a new media strategy was developed by the dam critics, namely the framing of Kedungombo as a "save the children" issue. The decision to embark on this strategy was made at a meeting on February 23, 1989, between Father Mangunwijaya who was recovering from an illness was in the St. Elizabeth hospital in Semarang, and five other social activists who were involved in Kedungombo. The idea was to appeal for public support for the children of the displaced villagers, which was estimated to be about 3,500 children. So, from his bed, Mangunwijaya drafted an ad to be sent to the local newspapers in Semarang and Yogyakarta. Fearing reprisals from the authorities, the Semarang newspapers refused to place that public Service ad. Hence, it was taken to Yogyakarta, where *Kedaulatan Rakyat* agreed to place it on February 27, 1989. The ad, handwritten by Mangunwijaya, ran as follows.

Father Mangun and friends appeal:

We appeal in full conviction for volunteers, for the sake of 3,500 unattended children in Kedungombo which is being impounded, to help them in shifts, as big brother, big sister, teacher, nanny, etc.

We do not have any Capital. Therefore, forgive us, the transportation and daily living costs for a period of 1 to 2 weeks for each shift have to be born by the members themselves.

Please contact our coordinator at the following addresses:

- = The Youth Center of the Mangkunagaran Palace in Solo,
Phone (0271) 5628;
 - = Jl. Sidobali, UH 11/389, Yogyakarta;
 - = p. Imam Bonjol No. 206, Semarang, Phone: 285690.
- St. Elizabeth Hospital, Semarang, 23 February 1989.

With full hope, the undersigned:

1. Y.B. Mangunwijaya
2. Abdul Hakim G. Nusantara
3. Soemedi
4. Setyawan
5. S.T. Wiyono
6. Yayak A. Yatmaka.

The contact addresses and signatories of the public Service ad represented a combination of groups that were already involved in Kedungombo. The uppermost contact address was located at the Mangkunagaran Palace, one of the two old Javanese palaces in Solo (Surakarta), which still command much respect from older Javanese. It was the address of the Bhakti Satria Foundation, and its subordinate, the Palamarta Legal Aid Institute. Bhakti Satria and Palamarta were headed by Setyawan, popularly known as "Wawan," a young prince from the Mangkunegara royal family. His staff-persons were nearly all of royal blood. The second and third contact addresses were the headquarters of Samin, a foundation that worked for alternative education for children, and the Semarang branch office of YLBHI. The representative from Samin was Yayak A. Yatmaka, popularly known as Yayak Kencrit, who had drawn the pictures of eight children on the top of the ad. Two years later he became well known for his caricatures on the "Land for the People" calendar, which sent him into hiding. Two other signatories, Abdul Hakim G. Nusantara and Soemedi, were respectively the national board chairman and the Semarang branch director of YLBHI. The fifth signatory, S.T. Wiyono, was unknown to the author.

Although it was only placed in a local newspaper, this innocent-looking public Service ad forced the authorities to lift the media ban on Kedungombo. In a matter of days, three high-ranking security officers,

Lieutenant General Harsudiono Hartas, Social Political Chief of the Armed Forces, Ret. General Rudini, Minister of The Interior, and Ret. Gen. Soepardjo Rustam, Coordinating Minister for Social Welfare, stated that

V fported Mangunwijaya s humanitarian campaign, as long as it was not used for political maneuvers. •

ad also raised unsympathetic reactions from various groups. The 1 prominence of Mangunwijaya as a well known and vocal Roman Catholic P¹ triggered the suspicion of some Islamic groups, who feared that it was another tactic to proselytize the poor Islamic villagers. The strongest reactions, however, came from Governor Ismail and President Soeharto. On

89, in a meeting with the governor in which the priest and a f

g 'ed the governor s permission to begin their humanitarian ser- •

vice m Kedungombo, Mangunwijaya's request was bluntly turned down. *i* According to Ismail, the Kedungombo children did not need any more help, j because the government had already provided everything that the people needed in Kayen, a resettlement scheme built by the project near the reser- ' voir. Slamet Rahardjo, Mangunwijaya's colleague, a professor at two uni- sities in Semarang, expressed his disappointment through the media i

came to cover the meeting. The second major attack came from j President Soeharto in his Banjarnegara speech. As described earlier, ! Soeharto accused the intellectuals as "only seemingly helping the villagers, (but actually pushing them into misery."

The governor's refusal and the presidenfs condemnation drove most the media to cover the battle of words between Mangunwijaya and Ismail. Most Christian-owned media and *Kedaulatan Rakyat* , the oldest daily in Mangunwijaya's hometown, gave extra coverage to the arguments of the

priest and his supporters. Meanwhile, many Islamic media, a Nationalist newspaper, *Merdeka*, a Surabaya-based magazine, *Fakta*, and the Semarang-based *Suara Merdeka* group gave more coverage to Ismail and other government officials, who supported his position. Meanwhile, two Jakarta-based news weeklies, *Editor* and *Tempo*, kept the debate alive by covering both sides.

This "David versus Goliath" imagery, however, swung the public's attention away from the main issue that Mangunwijaya and his colleagues tried to advocate, namely the lot of the 3,500 children in the reservoir area. No media reported the result of an in-depth investigation of the lot of Kedungombo children. And while Mangunwijaya silently continued to work in the reservoir area, where he finally had to focus on only two hamlets, namely Kedungpring (Boyolali) and Dondong (Sragen), no major newspaper covered the learning groups which Mangunwijaya's volunteers and other social activists were supporting. The faces of the children of the displaced villagers were only superficially covered by the media, in the form of photo illustrations. A few articles in the mainstream media and in the non-mainstream media covered the educational needs of the Kedungombo children. Only after the Kedungpring learning group was closed down by the Kemusu subdistrict authorities on February 23, 1991, did the mainstream and non-mainstream focus some attention on the Kedungpring children, who then had no choice other than join the nearby public school.

In a nutshell, the "save the children" strategy actually did very little in the way of informing the readers how the reservoir's impoundment affected the daily lives of the majority of the Kedungombo victims, namely the children.

Kedungombo as a Symbol of the political consciousness of the Christian minority

The media's coverage of the critics of Kedungombo framed Kedungombo as a symbol of the political consciousness of a numerically small but politically important Christian minority. Since 1984, several Protestant social activists had already worked among the displaced villagers without attracting any publicity. But since March 1989, the role of Christians in supporting the displaced villagers suddenly attracted some media attention. The media's spotlight, however, was most often directed at Mangunwijaya, whom an author in a Catholic biweekly lauded as the "the Liberator," or *sang Pembebas* (Goram, 1991).

...ctic between three factors was instrumental in creating and publicizing this image. First, prior to the Kedungombo controversy, I

^gunwijaya was already a well-known public figure in Indonesia because of his activities as a novelist, an educator, a knowledgeable person about Javanese culture/ and a critic of various mainstream development projects in the Yogyakarta region. In the latter position, Mangunwijaya was a role model for many student activists in Java.

...factor was the dominance of Catholic media and publishing houses in the country. The *Kompas Gramedia* group of companies published its fully-owned newspaper *Kompas*, the largest Indonesian newspaper, and a chain of partially-owned newspapers, from *Serambi Aceh* in Banda Aceh, on the northern tip of Sumatra, to *Tifa Irian* in Jayapura, the northeasternmost town of Irian Jaya. Therefore, any political figure who received extensive coverage from *Kompas* and its sister publications for

more than a year might indeed have had influence on a nationwide audience.

ence of urban, middle class, university educated readers. The third factor which catapulted Mangunwijaya into the political discourse on Kedungombo, however, was external to the Catholic community. It was the Central Java governor's refusal to allow Mangunwijaya's team to enter the reservoir area.

Eventually, Mangunwijaya became the most often interviewed person for dissenting views on Kedungombo, at different points during the controversy. The Identification of Mangunwijaya with Kedungombo was obviously the strongest in Christian media, which enthusiastically appropriated Mangunwijaya as a Symbol of the solidarity of Indonesian Catholics with the oppressed rural population in Indonesia (*Hidup* , 2 April 1989 and 16 April 1989; *Peraba* , Second Half of April 1989; *Busos* , April 1989).

This image of Mangunwijaya as one of the main defenders of the Kedungombo people's rights created several misconceptions about the social and political consciousness of the Indonesian Christians, and especially Catholics. First, as will be elaborated elsewhere in the next chapter, actually many more Islamic rather than Christian activists were involved in defending the Kedungombo people's rights. Second, Mangunwijaya was actually only one among a few other Catholics who were involved in the Kedungombo people's struggle, while the official Catholic Church, and especially the Archbishop of Semarang, never publicly supported the displaced villagers.

The overall conservative views of the Indonesian Catholic clergy can also be shown from the following facts. In January 1974, forty priests in the Special Territory of Yogyakarta publicly criticized the government's development practice. Fifteen years later, only one among them, Mangunwijaya,

was still persistently criticizing the government in public. It indicated a regression in the political consciousness of the clergy in Yogyakarta, one of the most important Catholic centers in Indonesia. More importantly, in matters of ultimate national sensitivity, such as during the annihilation of 500,000 to 1,000,000 Indonesians in 1965-1966, during the invasion and annexation of East Timor, or even during less violent counter-insurgency operations in Indonesia, the Indonesian clergy always kept their golden silence. In the case of East Timor, the Indonesian Conference of Bishops even campaigned consistently to persuade the Diocese of Dili into becoming a member of the Indonesian Conference of Bishops, against the wishes of many East Timorese Catholics.

Through the symbolic role of Mangunwijaya in minor human rights issues, the Indonesian Catholic Church could feel good about itself. It could even be regarded as "progressive" in the eyes of other factions within the Indonesian society, especially the much more numerous Muslims.

Kedungombo as an issue to refrain from voting in
the Corning general election

As discussed in Chapter Four, some displaced villagers had threatened to refrain from voting in the upcoming election, if their request for an increase in their compensation was not respected by the government. These residents from Gilirejo, Pendem, and Soko villages in Sragen district, expressed their threat to a team of national parliamentarians, who visited them for two days in mid-March 1991 (*Suara Merdeka* , 20 March 1991).

The local government authorities in Sragen responded negatively to that threat, which was regarded as a "dramatization" and "politization" of the situation, which tended to be "provocative." According to a Public

Relations officer of the Sragen district government, the villagers intention not to use their voting rights in the 1992 election, was already out of context.” He added that compensation for those villagers had already been paid in 1987, during which time the district government had already given villagers three months time to file their complaints. Hence, demanding extra compensation by complaining to parliamentarians of Golongan Karya, was not relevant any more (*Suara. Merdeka* , 23 March 1991). ,

In the following year, practically no news appeared in the media about the villagers threat to refrain from voting in the coming election. However, the authorities in Sragen as well as its neighboring district, Boyolali, that the villagers’ dissatisfaction might indeed be translated into declining vote for the ruling party, Golongan Karya, and increasing votes for the two other political parties, PDI and PPP. This concern was expressed by the headline of a news report on the election day: "The Concern that Kedungombo Citizens Will Not Vote, Has Ended" (*Jawa Pos* , 7 June 1972).

So, in hindsight it appears that the villagers’ threat to refrain from voting in the upcoming election, was a good media strategy for the villagers. Contrary to the American political culture, probably, in Indonesia refraining from voting in the general election was a big issue. Its high media profile

was caused by a movement of students and young intellectuals in early 1971, who formed the "White Group" (*Golongan Putih*) as a protest to forceful election campaigns that were carried out by military and civilian authorities at that time, under command by the Minister of the Interior at that time, Amirmachmud. Since that time on, the specter of *Golput*, as the election boycotters came to be known, resurfaced once every five years.

The dissenting villagers in Sragen district, had quite ingeniously capitalized on that specter, to bargain for improvements in their new villages. But when the time came to go to the booths, it appeared that they decided to vote anyway. As Marsudi, one of the Sragen resistance leaders reportedly stated, "we will use our voting rights" (*Akcaya* , 7 June 1992).

Summary

In this chapter I have described six media strategies which were applied by the dam critics. Those strategies included the framing of Kedungombo: first, as an unfair land appropriation issue; second, as a human rights' violation issue; third, as a Symbol of the revival of the Indonesian student movement; fourth, a "save the children" issue; fifth, as a symbol of the political awareness of a politically important Christian minority; and sixth, as a worthwhile issue to refrain from voting in the upcoming general election.