

## WATER FESTIVAL AS A CULTURAL POLITICS OF COMMUNITY MOVEMENT IN RESISTENCE TO HOTEL CORPORATION AND CITY GOVERNMENT IN BATU CITY, INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

*Using a political ecological perspective, this article explores the water festival as a cultural politics of social movements conducted by a community social organization against the political economy power of city government and hotel corporations in Batu, Indonesia. The research was conducted in the village of Bulukerto for one year. The data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews of social movement actors, scientific discussions, documentation, literature studies, references and information contained on the internet. The research findings show that the water festival is created by collaboration between NGO and local activists as a cultural politics by remaking ritual slametan sumber (the springs preservation ritual) that has been a local tradition for centuries. The forms of cultural politics constructed by the community movement includes: 1) creating of new meaning in slametan sumber, 2) extending the time duration of ritual implementation, 3) inclusiveness of ritual actors, and 4) packaging rituals more varied and populist. By remaking ritual of slametan sumber, the community movement try to explode the local issue to national and global levels as resistance to the increasingly political economics power of city government and corporate co-optation in the current era of decentralization and globalization. Based on the research findings, this study formulates a theoretical argument that the cultural politics of community movement reflects the interaction between the local, national and global with the dialectic of the real world and the virtual world in the contemporary social movement. The grass root actors in the community movement politicize the environment by using and redefining the cultural capital of local ritual.*

Key Words: water festival, cultural politics, water conflict, political ecology, political economy

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### INTRODUCTION

This article explores water festival as a cultural politics in arena water conflict involving three parties, namely community movement<sup>1</sup>, government of Batu City and The Rayja Hotel Corporation in Batu, Indonesia. The water festival is created by FMPMA as a articulation of social movement to stop construction of a hotel and to save *Umbul Gemulo*, the only one water resource for thousands rural people who live around this springs. Social movement done by FMPMA in case of Umbul Gemulo is the biggest<sup>2</sup> and longest<sup>3</sup> conflict happened in Batu City, one of famous tourism destinations in Indonesia.

Development policies, especially tourism, in many countries have created water conflict involving multiple stakeholders (Stonich, 1998; Strauß, 2011; Kaplan, 2007; Aiyer, 2007). One form of conflict water involving various stakeholders in Indonesia is a triangular conflict between community, local government and hotel corporations. The main reason behind this frightening threat is as seen from studies that the hotel is a highly voracious tourism business infrastructure, where the consumption of water by a hotel far exceeds the consumption of households around the hotel (Tortella and Tirado, 2011; Becken, 2014; Cole, 2012).

Although the phenomenon of water conflict escalation is increasing in many regions of the world, the study of social movements that examine the water conflict that involves the community, corporations and local governments in decentralization and globalization eras is relatively rare. The study of the corporations associated with existing water hotels in the anthropology or other social sciences of humanities has not yet specifically addressed the social movements of the community. Recent studies only have highlighted the consumption of water by hotels (Tortella and Tirado, 2011), and inequality in the use of water for tourism in general and hotels in particular compared to the consumption of water for local household needs (Becken, 2014), conflict between hotel corporations and local communities unrelated to water issues but rooted in the problem of limited access to local community employment in hotel corporations and racism (Geron, 1997). Based on previous studies of the hotel, this research aims to fill gaps in those empirical

The objectives of this study are:

- to explores the form of water festival as a cultural politics of movement community for a resistance strategy in facing political economy power of relation between hotel corporation and government city.
- to investigates the meaning of water festival as exploding local case by movement community in context of decentralization and globalization era.

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<sup>1</sup> The name of CSO is Forum Masyarakat Peduli Mata Air /FMPMA (Society Forum of Springs Care). Members of FMPMA are rural people who live around springs of Umbul Gemulo, some local organizations of water management, severals NGOs, campus activists, and activists who care this springs.

<sup>2</sup> Almost 10.000 people involved social movement in this water conflict.

<sup>3</sup> The case of Umbul Gemulo lasts for 5 years, from the end of 2011 until 2016.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research took place in the Bulukerto village. This village located at District of Bumiaji, Batu City, East Java, Indonesia. There are two reasons underlying Bulukerto village as a site of the research. First, the main actors involved in this social movement mostly come from this village. Secondly, springs of Umbul Gemulo which are the object of social conflict among the community and The Rayja Hotel Corporation and The City Government of Batu is located at Bulukerto village.

The subjects of research in this case are the community involved in social movements, namely: individuals with various backgrounds of age, occupation, gender as well as various organizations involved in social movements. The selection of research subjects is purposive, namely: a) Five villagers of Bulukerto involved (both men and women of all ages) in social movements in water conflict Umbul Gemulo; b) a leader of the social movement, c). Two NGO activists, d) Local Lawyer who advocates villagers, e) two young figures who initiate and implement water festival, f) Campus activists involved in this social movements. The data collection in this research is done through participant observation (to understand the socio-cultural reality related to some important things included the interpretation of Umbul Gemulo in the cultural life of local people and the stories of various articulation and background of social movement by movement community); In-depth interviews (to capture qualitative data from various parties involved and / or directly experience the Umbul Gemulo conflict; documentation (done through primary and secondary data collection).

Data analysis in this study refers to the political ecology perspective as stated by Little (2007: 6): first, researchers identify and analyze the main actors involved in social movements in water conflict in Batu. Second, the researcher identifies various claims and interests related to the natural resources that are the object of seizure in a conflict which is followed by the depiction of the interaction between actors in certain political spheres. Third, the researcher also identifies the various discourses that arise in conflict and the retrospective basis in the political and cultural legitimacy of each party whether expressed explicitly or not. The next step is to analyze the different power capacities of the various social actors involved in the conflict. The relation of all phases of the above analysis will lead to the development of political ecological theory in anthropology of water conflict between community, corporate corporations and local governments in the era of globalization and decentralization.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study combines the political ecology and social movements that interpret the water festival as a cultural politics created by movement community in Batu City. The globalization of capital and information technology, the system of decentralized government, and the ecological crisis in the Batu Tourism City are the context for understanding the complexity of the problems that lie behind the peak phenomenon of water conflict among the local community, The Rayja hotel corporation and the City Government of Batu. In addition, the context is also seen as having an effect on articulation of the social movements that the community generates through cultural politics and remaking of local traditions.

A framework that combines political ecology with social movements has been done by Escobar in his studies on biodiversity and conservation (1998: 62-63):

“These questions are being actively explored in two separate but increasingly interrelated domains: political ecology theory, particularly through the attempt at articulating an alternative ecological rationality (E. Leff 1995a); and social movements in biodiversity-rich regions. Whereas the former aims at developing a new paradigm of production that incorporates, for any given ecosystem and social group, cultural, ecological, and technoeconomic factors into a strategy that is ecologically and culturally sustainable, the latter attempt to construct an alternative view of development and Social practice through a self-conscious and localized political strategy.

Yet this study has a difference in two ways with Escobar has done. First, the framework in this research elaborates the idea of Escobar through the use of the context of globalization of capital and information technology, especially the internet (van de Donk et. al., 2004), the danger of a decentralized government system (Prud'homme, 1995) and the ecological crisis hit the Batu City. Secondly, this study developed the idea of water festival as the cultural politics of community culture in expanding the claims of its social movements. Claims or demands or so-called conflict issues by dela Porta and Diani are one of the main characteristics of the social movement (Tilly, 2005, dela Porta and Diani, 2006). The concept of expanding this claim was developed in this study because the phenomenon of social movements that have been happening has a tendency that the claims posted by a social movement are fixed or final. This study explores the claims proposed by the community is not fixed and final but continues to evolve with the problems and awareness experienced by the community.

Political ecology has emerged as an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing human and environmental interactions especially associated with economic development in the third world since the early 1980s (Bryant 1992; Peet and Watts 1993, cited in Stonich, 1998: 28). Anthropologist Eric Wolf is one of the first experts to use the term "political ecology" in his critique of ecological anthropology and the necessity of proposing theoretical ideas integrating local ecological contexts within the broader framework of political economy (Bryant, 1998, Stonich, 1998). The integration of deep anthropological studies that analyze the interaction between humans and the environment with the broader context of economic and political structures is referred to as 'progressive contextualization' (Vayda 1983, cited in Bryan 1998: 68). The notion of political ecology according to Karlsson (2015: 350) is a field of trans disciplinary research that places his studies into the nature-community interrelation, often with a focus on conflict and struggle in natural resources. While Alier (2002) argues that political ecology is "the study of the conflict of ecological distribution, namely the conflict concerning access and control of natural resources, especially as a source of life, including the cost of environmental degradation (cited in Escobar, 2006: 8).

According to Della Porta and Diani (2006: 11) studies of social movements began to exist in the era of 1940 continued to expand in the 1970s into the domain of research that dominates the social sciences of humanities. This indicates the existence of special journals, series books and professional associations. The various paradigms or schools of thought that developed in the study of social movements by experts until the 1980s have resulted in various paradigm shifts (della Porta and Diani, 2006), namely: 1) Collective Action (Collective Behavior), 2) New Social Movement, 3) Resource Mobilization and 4) Political Process. Today there is a growing awareness among academics and social movement researchers that every theoretical perspective can be viewed as two different sides of the same coin, which can cover each other's weaknesses and take advantage of other paradigms. Gibb (2001: 235) holds that there is an awareness of social movement experts to integrate these perspectives so that "reaching agreement" that the phenomenon referred to as social movements is as della Porta and Diani (2006), a phenomenon that has characteristics as 1) an informal network, based on (2) on mutual trust and solidarity, mobilizing about (3) conflict issues, through (4) the use of various forms of protest in high frequency.

Today's social movement experts are becoming interested in using the notion of cultural politics. Escobar (1998: 63) states:

"Cultural politics is the process of enacted when sets of social actors shaped by, and embodying, different cultural meanings and practices come into conflict with each other. This definition of cultural politics assumes that it should be accepted as political. This is rarely seen as such because of the entrenched definitions of the political. This is especially the case with those practices. Theorized as a marginal, oppositional, residual, emergent, alternative, dissident, and the like, all of them are conceived in relation to a given dominant cultural order. Culture is political because meanings are constitutive of processes that, implicitly or explicitly, seek to redefine social power. When movements deploy alternative conceptions of woman, nature, development, economy, democracy, or citizenship that unsettle dominant cultural meanings, they enact a cultural politics.

The view expressed by Escobar basically reflects that the actors of grassroots are actors who are always active and creative in producing and reproducing various articulations of social movements. Various local wisdom, traditional practices that last for generations can be a resource for the construction of a cultural politics that is articulated contextually by the social movement community.

#### **WATER CONFLICT CASE IN BATU**

Water conflict in Batu involves three main parties, namely the social movement community which calls itself as the Forum Masyarakat Peduli Mata Air/ FMPMA (Society Forum of Springs Care), Batu City Government and The Rayja Hotel Corporations. The emergence of the conflict was triggered by the construction of the hotel The Rayja which is only 150 meters from the springs of Umbul Gemulo. For the local people, it can be a threat to pollution, damage and even the death of a springs that became the only one source of life of villagers. The Rayja Corporation built the hotel after obtaining *Surat Ijin Mendirikan Bangunan/IMB* (permit letter of bulding counstruction) from the Batu City Government. The movement community assessed the hotel IMB making process is loaded with maladministration practice by Government of Batu City. Water conflict is lasted long enough that since 2011 until 2016.

The trigger of water conflict in Batu is the mayor who is suspected of doing maladministration of *Ijin Mendirikan Bangunan/IMB* (Permit of Building Construction). The practice of granting IMB by local authorities illustrates that what Prud'homme (1995) has said that decentralization has many problems when applied in developing countries shows the truth. The policy made by the Batu City Government shows that the Mayor of Batu still uses instrumentalist views. The policy in instrumentalist view is "as a tool to regulate a population from the top down, through rewards and sanctions. ... policy is an intrinsically technical, rational, action-oriented instrument that decision makers use to solve problems and affect change "(Shore and Wright, 1997: 5).

The construction of the hotel which was done without socialization gave rise to violent protests and reactions among the people living around Umbul Gemulo. The local community around the springs that come from three villages namely Bulukerto, Bumiaji and Sidomulyo which establish relationships with NGOs and campus activists formed FMPMA as Community Social Organization (CSO). The community of social movements incorporated in the FMPMA undertook a series of tactics to fight for stopping the construction of the hotel so that the springs can be maintained and the people can meet their water needs. The conflict that lasted for more than 5 years has given rise to various forms of cultural politics of social movement articulation. One form of articulation of the social movements of this community is what local activists say as a struggle through a cultural movement called the water festival.

#### **WATER FESTIVAL AS A CULTURAL POLITICS**

Water festival initiated by young people from FMPMA is the socio-cultural creativity of the community that utilizes local tradition ritual that has been done for hundreds of years by villagers around Umbul Gemulo called *slametan sumber*. The ritual is a tradition of local beliefs that interpret the springs of Umbul Gemulo not only as a natural resource, but rather position the springs in a sacred position. The Sacred position of this spring is manifested in the form of a *slametan sumber* routinely held every month of *Suro* (one name of month in traditional Javanese calendar). The tradition of *slametan sumber* of Umbul Gemulo has been done by villagers who live around the springs either together or individually. Ritual *slametan sumber* conducted together by villagers led by a religious figure done in the month of *Suro* with a *tumpeng* ( a kind of rice and agricultural production (vegetbles and fruits). After praying together led by religious figures, rice cone and crops then enjoyed together by all villagers. While *slametan sumber* are done individually do not use rice cone and crops, but only bring flowers and incense. Individual villagers can perform rituals anytime by praying near the springs and laying flowers and incense on the altar contained in front of three statues in the springs location of Umbul Gemulo.

The *slametan* tradition of the springs is a symbolic ritual act as an expression of gratitude to the God as a Creator of the universe that has provided water to meet the needs of the villagers' life and agriculture. *Slametan sumber* also meaningful as a ritual that expects the spring to stay awake from the damage and drought so that villagers can fulfill their water needs. Through the tradition of *slametan sumber*, the community around the springs interpret the existence of a relationship between humans with the Creator, human relations with the other people, and human relations with nature. The harmonious relationship between man, the Creator and nature is believed in the belief system of the local people to keep the springs able to drain water all of the time, even during the dry season. Umbul Gemulo, thus, is not interpreted as inanimate, but as a natural resource that also has its own life. If the community preserve (through the *slametan sumber*) and maintain (not damage the source) springs then Umbul Gemulo will remain alive and awake now and in the next time.

The case of water conflict for the water erupted since 2012 in Batu has inspired FMPMA to remake the *slametan sumber* ritual as a local wisdom and socio-cultural capital that can be used as one of the media to articulate their social movements. *Slametan sumber* ritual is then transformed through cultural politics created by grass roots actors as water festival by FMPMA from 2012 until 2016. Cultural politics through local tradition becomes a new form of contemporary tradition accommodating broader purposes, or in other words to expand the claims of the FMPMA social movements. Aris, a young local activist who joined in FMPMA states: "these two rituals are essentially the same, namely *memetri* (preserve and maintain) springs so it will not to suffer damage or drought all of the time. By remaking *slametan sumber* as water festival we hope it will more acceptable by young people". According to the other young activist, Bowo, the use of term water festival was originally introduced by the environment activists NGO of East Java Walhi, the one of main creators behind the emergence of cultural politics in this ritual.

The water festival is not only as a symbolic ritual action as *slametan sumber* ritual, but some additional activity in it also reproduce new meanings too. The reproduction of new meanings arising from the process of transforming *slametan sumber* into the water festival is the enrichment of local traditions both in terms of substance, actors, time, place and form of ritual activities. The enrichment of tradition in terms of ritual substance is from the aspect of belief in this ritual. Ritual *slametan sumber* as mentioned above is a symbolic act that initially only as an expression of worship to ask the Creator for the springs of Umbul Gemulo remain alive all of the time. The water festival, according to FMPMA activists has same meaning with *slametan sumber* but this festival has meaning too as a media to wake up awareness of the younger generation not only living around the springs of Gemulo Umbul but also in the entire city of Batu to be involved together with the older generation and various other elements of society in efforts to conserve the springs. According to Bowo, the young figures of FMPMA member, "the naming of water festival is to attract the younger generation, because if using the name *slametan sumber* will cause the youth is not interested, the name of the water festival seems more popular because its name more acceptable among the young generation ". The symbols reproduced by the FMPMA actors to attract the young generation in the water festival are close to the lifestyle of young people such as introduce music concerts and marching band carnival.

The second substance of meaning of the water festival is a strategy of resistance of the social movements of the community through symbolic action against the political economy power of Batu City Government and The Rayja Hotel Corporations. The symbolic message conveyed by the community of this social movement through the use of *ogoh-ogoh* (giant puppet) in the form of a giant creature with human body but has a buffalo head. The giant creature is a symbol of greed, while the human body and a buffalo head is a symbol as a human being who does not want to use his reasons and consciousness for mayor of Batu City and the owner of hotel corporation.

The actors and participants involved in water festival are more heterogeneous when compared to the actors who have been performing *slametan sumber* ritual. Water festival involves thousands of people from both the village and outsider. It is different from the *slametan sumber* which has only involved residents from the village who live around the Umbul Gemulo and generally from the older generation so that the number of ritual actors only tens to hundreds person. Water festival in addition to being followed by various circles (NGOs, students, activists of university and environment artists). The majority of initiators of ideas and actors of water festival are from local young people. The involvement of thousands people from various parties in the water festival has a symbolic meaning to give warning to the city government and hotel corporation in order to do not give permission and build hotel near Umbul Gemulo because this springs has now been supervised and guarded by many parties.

Unlike the case with *slametan sumber* which conducted only one day in month of Suro, the water festival is also held in Suro month but the time of execution is not just one day but for three days. According to Aris, the three days implementation time of water festival is divided for the first day for *slametan sumber* and the other two days are used for events that appeal to young people and the public. Movement activists believe that with other activities in water festival, it will attract young people to follow the *slametan sumber* ritual, because if it only conduct a *slametan sumber* then many young people are not interested in following the ritual that are considered traditional, ancient and even out of date.

Implementation of the water festival time for three days is designed creatively and self-help by young people who are members of FMPMA. Various forms of activities constructed by FMPMA in the water festival are included touring of a *tumpang* rice (a miniature of mount made by rice, vegetables and fruit), and the *ogoh-ogoh* puppet processions in three villages around Umbul Gemulo, marching band, traditional performance arts, many genre of music concert (rock, pop and local musics), reading poem, a water conservation discussion by inviting speakers from practitioners from outside the region as well as academics. Through the enrichment of various forms of activities constructed by the FMPMA then the *slametan sumber* which was originally more meaningful sacred then transformed through the cultural politics created by grassroot actors into a water festival that dialogue between the sacred and the profane.

The transformation of *slametan sumber* to water festival as a cultural politics created by FMPMA is “the result of discursive articulations of originating in existing cultural practices These are still signs of contrast in relation to dominant cultures” (Escobar,1997). By adding many activities and new meanings in water festival, community movement challenge tourism development as dominant culture constructed by political economy power of Batu City Government and corporation.

### EXPLODING LOCAL CASE

The empirical facts about the forms of cultural politics through the enrichment of the *slametan sumber* tradition into the water festival suggest that it is a process of reconstructing local traditions as symbolic resources that can be used to support on the resistance the FMPMA movement againsts corporation and city government in Batu City. The various enrichments contained in wate festival reproduce new meanings whose purpose is no longer solely demanding that the city government of Batu through the mayor want to revoke IMB of The Rayja hotel and buy the hotel land for conservation area. The movement community want to all of the people in Batu City, the Indonesia country and all of the world understand the danger of tourism development for environment and society because it is easy to be manipulated by political economy relationship between government city and corporations in decentralization and globalization era.

The exploding of Umbul Gemulo case by FMPMA to national level is done through instituional mechanism. FMPMA reported this case to several national institutions, namely KOMNAS HAM (National Committee of Human Right), KOMISI OMBUDSMAN (Ombudsman Committee, Kementerian Lingkungan Hidup (Ministry of Environment) and DPR RI (Board of Representative’s People). The recommendations from those institutions are succes strategy of exploding Umbul Gemulo as local case to national level by FMPMA.

Claims or demands of the FMPMA exploded not only to national level but also to all of the people on the world by mediating on line media mass and internet. There are various sites created by community such as [gemulokotabatu.blogspot.com](http://gemulokotabatu.blogspot.com), <https://twitter.com/savegemulo> <https://mbatupulih.wordpress.com>. There are many sites too from NGOs such as Walhi Jatim, Mongabay ([walhijatim.or.id](http://walhijatim.or.id), [www.mongabay.co.id/](http://www.mongabay.co.id/)). The movement community through this virtual world has also made a petition on [www.change.org](http://www.change.org). This fact shows that contemporary social movements can not be separated from the development of information technology to expand of their claims (van de Donk, 2004). The social world or often called as off line society in the digital age can no longer be separated by the virtual world (on line society). Both of the worlds dialectic allow grassroots community movement actors to explode the local case of Umbul Gemulo to national and the global level.

The local case exploding of Umbul Gemulo in Batu is influenced by dissatisfaction of the movement community because of their distrust to reality of local political economy. Relationship between city government and hotel corporation in decentralization and globalization era tends to make distance for local community in Batu. The assumption in decentralization theory will that bringing governments “closer to the people” is desirable on economic, political, and administrative grounds rarely supported by empirical facts (Ramesh, 2013).

### CONCLUSIONS

Social conflict among three parties in Umbul Gemulo case is resulted of tourism development in Batu City. The similar cases were happened in many region in the world (Stonich, 1998; Strauß, 2011). The case of water conflict involved movement community, the hotel corporation and the city government in Batu confirmed that there was a paradigm contest among the stake holders of water rights. The community has a paradigm that springs are collective resources that have economic, social, cultural, political and ecological dimensions (Kley & Reijerkerk, 2009; van Koppen, et.al., 2007). On the other hand, city governments interpret water as a source of political economy and corporations view the spring as an economic resource. Contestation in the water conflict arena further confirms that "water rights refer not only to access and use rights, but should be understood as overlapping 'bundles of rights' to water resources, by which the interrelations between rightholders can be considered as" Web of interests "(Meinzen-Dick and Mwangi 2008: 36, quoted in Seemann 2016, p.36).

The water festival as a cultural politics in the context of social movement is a negotiation space constructed by grassroots actors as a discourse of springs and ecological preservation in Batu City. Cultural resistance by movement community through water festival in the case of water conflict in Batu reflects the dialectic between historical factors and the present time, interaction between local, national and global, as well as interrelations between the real social world and the virtual world. Grass root actors of both local activists and NGOs today have a tendency to generate local conflicts to national and global level.

The case of water conflict and the water festival in Batu City, although is occured at the local level and developed into a national issue, may reflect the tendencies of similar cases occurring in third world countries (ramesh. The abuse of “surplus power” by city government in decentralization era to collude with business actors in globalization era to meet their economical interests without considering the negative impacts of socio-cultural, ecological, and economics aspects not only for the community and the local environment but also for the larger area in various region in Indonesia. To eliminate this negative effect, it is important to make bureaucracy system more transparan so public can supervise every policy made by city government.

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