CHAPTER 3

Relocating Kampung, Rethinking Community

Salatiga's 'Festival Mata Air'

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As part of the collective effort of this volume to understand the cultural spaces in Indonesia after the end of the New Order, this chapter argues that small-scale arts festivals are key sites generating changing notions of place and community in contemporary Java. I take as my subject an annual activist festival that began in 2007, 'Festival Mata Air' (FMA, Festival of Water) and its interactions with three Salatiga kampung neighbourhoods. Along with other festivals that emerged around the same time, such as the Forest Art Festival in Randublatung, FMA generates a fresh culture of protest, opens up the kampung as a space of public engagement and provides artists and performers with a viable alternative to curator-driven exhibitions and events.

My analysis shows the potential that exists for dynamic local identities to interact meaningfully with the global, expanding the social imaginary of the kampung. During a festival, activists deconstruct the very idea of the kampung, by working with the community within the kampung rather than the kampung as an official entity, and by creating an 'affinity space', which can also be thought of as an activist kampung.

Tapping the Springs of Salatiga

If a city can be said to have an identity, Salatiga's is undeniably linked to water. It is dotted with hundreds of fresh water springs connected by canals, rivers and creeks that provide water for much of the lower altitude regions of Central Java. The Dutch-built Jelok power station has long been the main provider of electrical power for Salatiga. Jelok gets its water from the Tuntang river, which flows out of Rawa Pening lake, which in turn receives its water from Telemoyo Mountain. Salatiga residents, until recently, have prided themselves on excellent tap water that runs down from the mountains behind it throughout the year.1 But battles to exploit or protect water sources have also become part of the shifting identities

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1 Tap water in cities in Indonesia is rarely potable. See Kurniasih (2008).
of many Salatiga communities. The most recent of these communities, and the one examined in this paper, is Tanam Untuk Kehidupan (TUK). TUK formed in 2005 when the artist Rudy Ardianto and his family returned to Salatiga after living in Australia for ten years. The word tuk means ‘water source’ in Javanese, and the phrase tanam untuk kehidupan in Indonesian translates as ‘planting for life’. By early 2007, when Festival Mata Air began, there were about twenty artists, activists and scientists from all over Salatiga who were active in TUK.

Festival Mata Air began in July 2006 when TUK negotiated to borrow a disused council building in the centre of Salatiga to use as their headquarters for an ambitious program of events over the next few months, culminating in a three-day art, music and education event themed around water. TUK secured sponsorship from the cigarette company Djarum and funding from local government. The festival has since become an annual event in Salatiga, growing steadily in size and adapting in form.

Senjoyo was the site of the first (2006) and fourth (2009) festivals. The spring at Senjoyo is the main source for the municipal water supply and the two textile factories in the city. It is also used for irrigation downstream of Senjoyo river. There is a public pool at the spring, which is crowded every day, both with locals, who use it for bathing, laundry and washing dishes, as well as tourists, who enjoy its beautiful forest setting, spiritual significance and lack of admission fee. Although largely regulars, the people who use Senjoyo do not for the most part reside there. Like the activists, they are transient, guests who share and activate a common locality. During the first festival, the spring played an important role, as a gathering point and performance site. It was repeatedly referenced in artworks and performances, for example Indra Yanti’s Menjahit Sampah, ‘Sewing Rubbish’, Senjoyo, 2006, and the performance Plastic Man (Figure 3.1).

The second Festival Mata Air was staged at a kampung in Salatiga’s CBD called Kalitaman (‘river park’ in Javanese). Kalitaman is located below both a large shopping centre and the ‘main drag’ of Salatiga, where many residents work, and from which a large quantity of waste makes its way through the kampung waterways (See Figure 3.2 for performance highlighting rubbish issue). One of Kalitaman’s springs, traditionally used as a public bath for men only, has dried up completely. Two springs remain, one of which has been converted to a public swimming pool with an entrance fee, owned and run by the city council. As at Senjoyo, the other spring is used for bathing, laundry, washing dishes, and relaxation. Kalitaman was chosen by TUK not only because of the environmental problems it faces, but also because the kampung had

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2 Although the pool was built in colonial times, the spring itself is ancient, and bathing in it was believed to secure long life.