

One Mountain – One Struggle: A Story About Zombies, Dragons, Punks, and Farmers in Their Fight Against Giants

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The exploitation of natural resources in Indonesia is not a new phenomenon. Ever since the Dutch colonial period, there has been massive cultivation, excavation, and cheap production for export to the global North. The history of exploitation is as old and diverse as the history of resistance against it.

Within the scope of this photo reportage, I wish to illustrate a social movement which is not well known even inside Indonesia, and yet is definitely worth the discussion for its uniqueness and plurality: the *Sedulur Sikep* (siblings ‘Sikep’) and the surrounding solidarity movement. Its focus, such as mine, is on a current topic: the resistance against the construction of large cement factories in the regions of Blora, Pati, Rembang, Grobongan, and Kudus in Central Java, Indonesia. *Semen Indonesia* (SI) (previously: *Semen Gresik*, SG) and *Indosemen*² are the main counterparts in this conflict.

In 2006, the largest Indonesian cement company, SI, published plans for a factory building in Pati for the first time. In the name of economic growth and regional development, this project would bring only good to local residents. However, these alleged ‘local profiteers’ could not get anything out of this idea. In their opinion, the project would only benefit private stakeholders. In their experience, only destroyed nature, contaminated water, and high pollution as well as their long-term effects would be left over for them.

A big part of the population living in the region belongs to the movement of *Saminists*; they call themselves *Sedulur Sikep* (term for siblings) or *Wong Sikep* (term for

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2 Indosemen collaborates with the cement giant Heidelberg Cement also known for its human rights violations.

an individual). The illiterate farmer Samin Surosentiko (1859-1914) from Randublatung is the founding father of this movement. His doctrines were spread towards the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. He and his followers resisted non-violently against the Dutch colonial empire and especially against the taxation of their fields and the closure of teak forests for locals.

The new enemy is national and multinational corporations and the state, which especially threaten teak forests and karst mountains. Despite pressure from paramilitary units and *Preman* (gangsters), the *Sedulur Sikep* refuse to sell their land, resist generous corruption offers, and react with peaceful campaigns to constantly recurring attempts to construct factories. It is due to them and the surrounding solidarity movement that, until today, it has not come to more than the plans to construct these factories.

In the early 2000s, a young solidary movement (today: *Gerakan Rakyat Menggugat*, GERAM – Popular Movement of Resistance) was founded. The different grassroots organizations call themselves *Saminista Anarkista*³, *Supersamin*, *Samijoyo Allstars*, or *Anak Seribu Pulau*. Their main objective is the fight against exploitation through large-scale enterprises like *Exxon Mobile* or *SI*. The activists mainly come from rural regions, mostly without access to higher education. They independently upgrade their education outside of state institutions via self-organized projects and workshops as well as the Internet and various social networks. What makes the movement, borne by traditional *Sedulur Sikep* and the young generation, so successful, is the efficient communication and cooperation with the local population as well as among the generations. They manage to accommodate punk concerts, zombie costumes, and traditional Javanese music and theater.⁴

³ The term *Saminista* is reminiscent of the *Zapatistas* in Chiapas/ Mexico, whom they sympathize with.

⁴ What is interesting here is that especially the punk movement, in all its facets and anarchism, has become very popular.



**PABRIK SEMEN
PENJAJAH KENDENG**

**JANGAN KORBAKAN RAKYATMU
HANYA UNTUK PABRIK SEMEN!**

BOTH PAGES: “Jangan korbakan rakyatmu hanya untuk pabrik semen!”, meaning “Stop victimizing your people just for a cement factory!” On 29 April 2013, the JM-PPK organized a protest campaign in front of the government building in Pati. The decisive factor was the new phenomenon of annual floods in the region of North Kendeng. The massive karst depletion and deforestation of the coveted teak forests are to blame for the floods. The residents demand the forest be preserved as protection against floods and the government’s campaign pledge to protect Kendeng honored. Farmers from the whole region traveled to Pati with 30 trucks to bring their claims before the local government. “Pabrik Semen penjajah Kendeng” means the cement factories are colonizing/occupying Kendeng. The dragon in the background is Nagaraja, one of the guards of the Kendeng mountains.





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Mbak Guarti (LEFT) and Pak Gunretno (RIGHT), Wong Sikep from Sukolilo, Pati, and members of the SPP and JM-PPK, co-organized the following campaign. An alliance of several organizations, farmers, and young rural residents managed to delay the factory construction until now and prevent further projects. "One fight may have been won, but the real war is imminent, so it is not yet time for jubilation", Mbak Gunarti said (personal communication, April 29, 2013, in Sukolilo, Pati).





Sedulur Sikep and young activists in Desa Sumber, Kradenan, Blora. The Sedulur Sikep refuse to defer to state structures and institutions, they have their own religion *Agama Adam* (not one of the five recognized religions in Indonesia), do not speak Bahasa Indonesia, but only *Ngoko* (low-level Javanese), and homeschool their children. They are also known for shrewdly circumventing questions and answering in their own, often seemingly cynical, way.



The Sedulur Sikep live on subsistence farming and reject any kind of trade. As far as possible, they also try to subsist without the use of money. They are not only proud of being farmers, but also of their knowledge of organic farming. The planned construction of factories would contaminate the water and enhance the risk of natural catastrophes, they say.



There is not yet any large-scale mechanical karst exploitation in the region, but there are small mines everywhere, in which underpaid laborers remove karst themselves in the midday heat using simple tools. On average, a laborer earns IDR 10,000 per day; that is about USD 1.



The mined karst is sold to small-scale entrepreneurs, who subsequently supply to large-scale companies. Even if only comparatively small amounts are mined here, the negative consequences are already noticeable.



BOTH PAGES: Blora on 27 April 2013: A demonstration at the home of the well-known sociocritical writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer (1925-2006). On the occasion of the third anniversary of his death on 30 April, Soesilo Toer presented a book on the life of his brother. Activists and artists were invited to participate at the event. “The masks serve the traditional theater Barongan. Barongan is the embodiment of Singa Barong – the guard of the forest. Zombies portray the living dead – the ghosts of the ancestors. Together with the ghosts of the forest and the powers of the ancestors, they fight against the danger of mining companies.

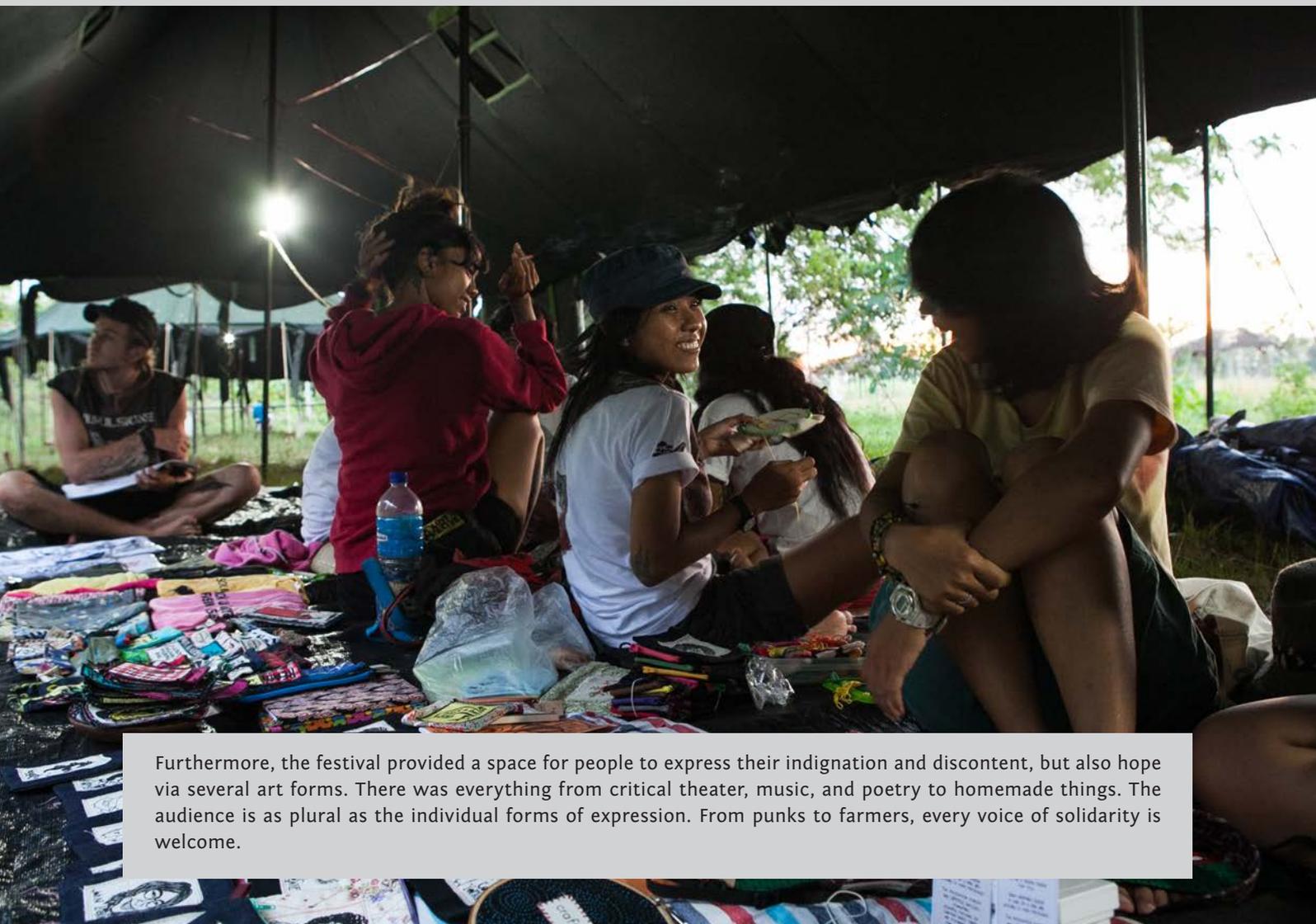


BOTH PAGES: The combination of Barongan and zombie costumes is a combination of two cultures – a traditional and a modern one,” explains Eko Arifianto, alias Koko . He further explicates, “Over time, art forms of the own culture often disappeared and thus must be maintained. Java has a whole lot of potential, traditions, historical sites, culture, and natural resources, which must not be destroyed by globalization and capital; because it is these systems that make us zombies of consumption” (personal communication, April 27, 2013, in Blora).

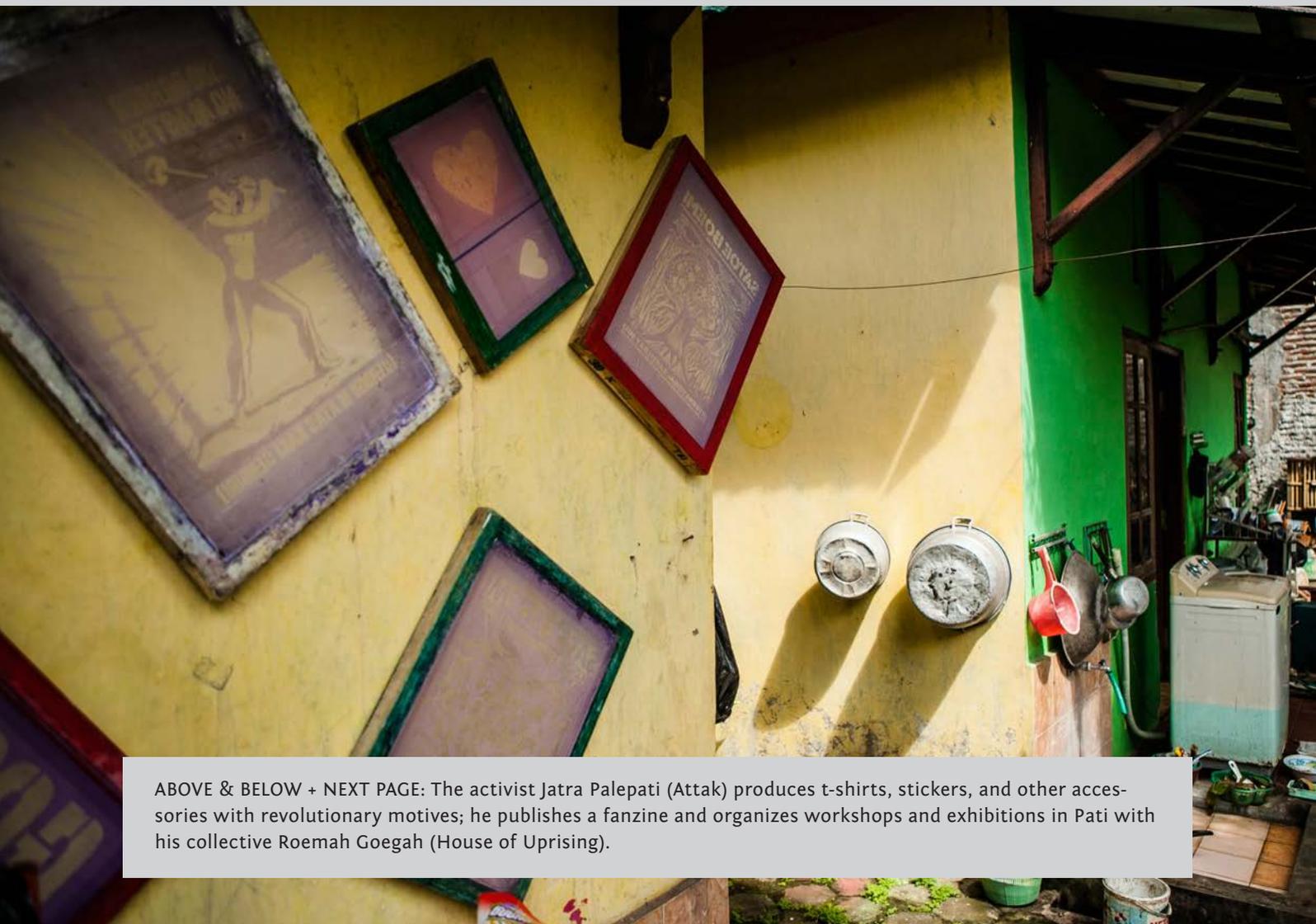




Festival Goa Dan Air (Cave and Water Festival) on 15-17 April 2013, Pati: On the occasion of the upcoming international day of the earth, activists from all over Indonesia, especially Java, met to celebrate “our one, collective earth” and to network and exchange ideas for its protection and the resistance against the destruction of large-scale enterprises.



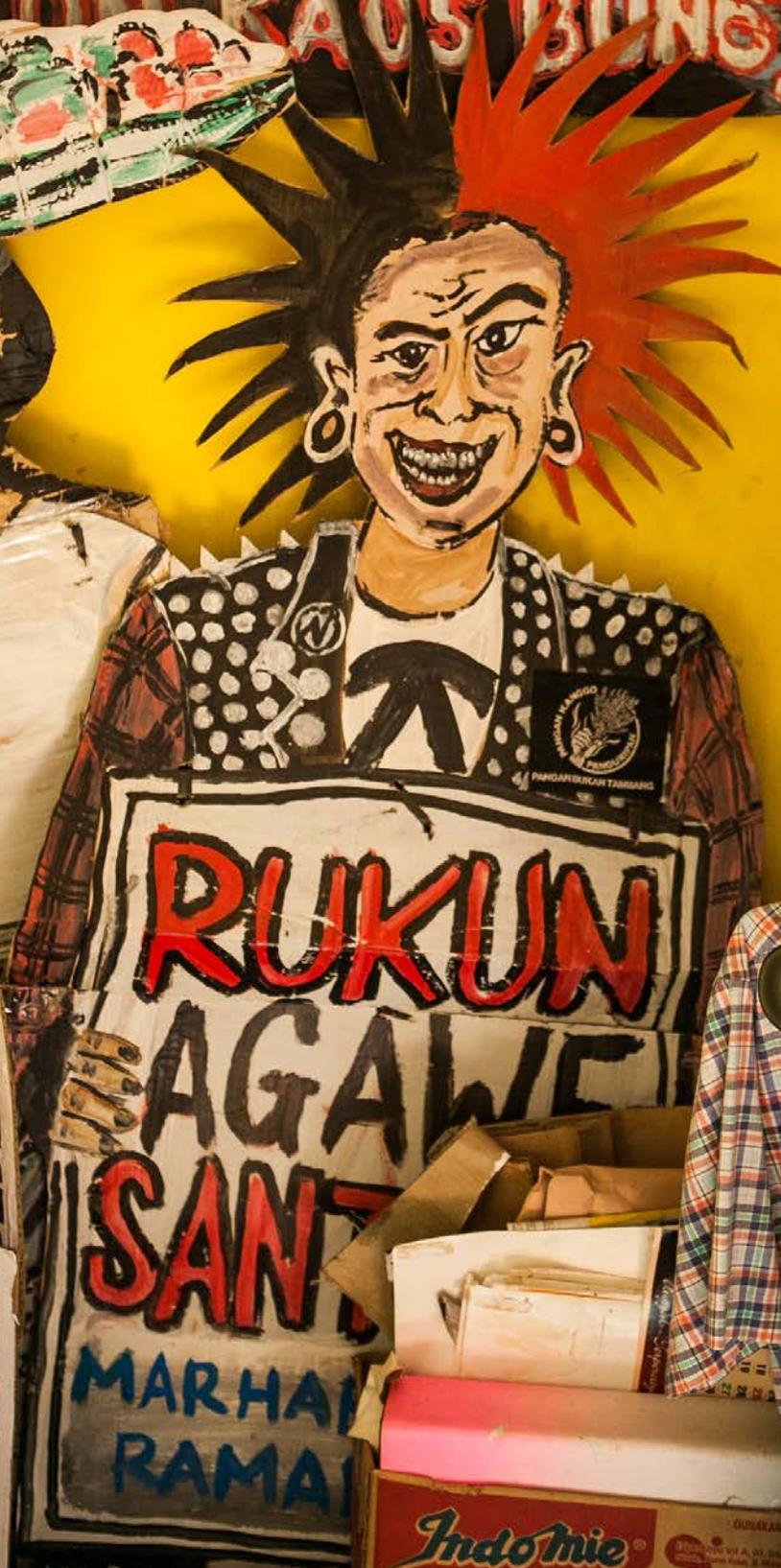
Furthermore, the festival provided a space for people to express their indignation and discontent, but also hope via several art forms. There was everything from critical theater, music, and poetry to homemade things. The audience is as plural as the individual forms of expression. From punks to farmers, every voice of solidarity is welcome.



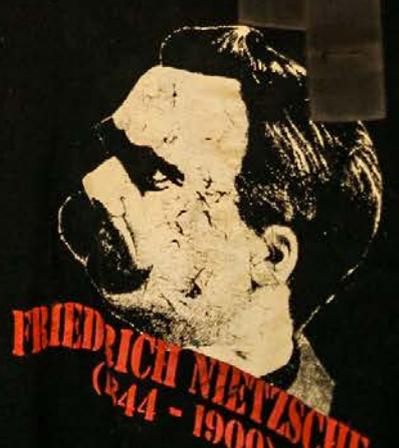
ABOVE & BELOW + NEXT PAGE: The activist Jatra Palepati (Attak) produces t-shirts, stickers, and other accessories with revolutionary motives; he publishes a fanzine and organizes workshops and exhibitions in Pati with his collective Roemah Goegah (House of Uprising).

**BOSEK
PEJUANG
DI JAMAN
Merdeka**

SAPITOM KAOS BUNG!

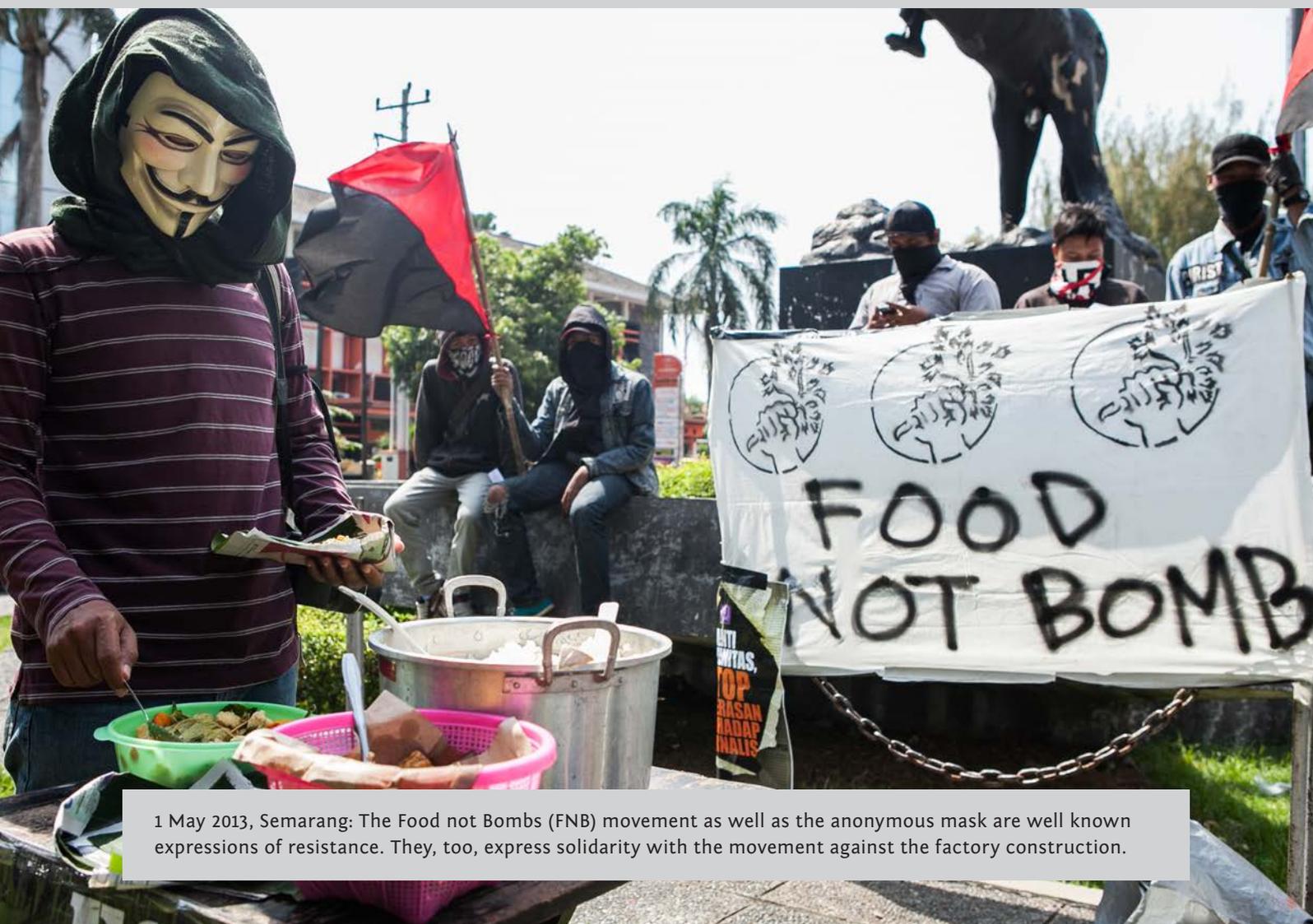


**& HENTIKAN
NJUKAN
ING
NTIKAN
KAN
LING
LUMBA
YA LIAR!**





Underneath the huge billboards for SG on the one hand and the governor Bibit Waluyo (Central Java, 2008-2013) on the other, workers demonstrated on 1 May 2013, in Semarang for better working conditions. *Bali Deso - Mbangun Deso* (Return to the village and reconstruct it) – the slogan of the governor – is directed against urbanization and promotes return to rural hometowns. The knowledge acquired in the city or outside of Central Java should be used for the development of the local regions. The fact that SG has adopted this slogan for advertising purposes also demonstrates the close collaboration between the state and the major enterprise. Incidentally, the home of Bibit Waluyo is right behind SG's billboard.



1 May 2013, Semarang: The Food not Bombs (FNB) movement as well as the anonymous mask are well known expressions of resistance. They, too, express solidarity with the movement against the factory construction.

Digie Sigit is a well-known street artist, political activist, and musician from Yogyakarta. His work *Terimah Kasih Untuk Petani* (Many thanks to the farmers) is directed against the marginalization of the peasantry through the capitalistic, consumerist society, and is also supposed to demonstrate the cohesion between the rural and urban population.



“The Indonesian society has to develop a consciousness for its history and its cultural roots, in order not to mutate into self-destructive consumerist zombies”, explains Digie Sigit (personal communication, Mai 2, 2013, in Yogyakarta).

