Politicised Space and Contentious Youth in Urban Environmentalism in Indonesia

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Abstract

The paper concerns a youth environmental movement in Bandung to reclaim the urban forest Babakan Silawangi. It is proposed that space for protest plays a significant role in social movements such as environmentalism. Public assembly allows activists to voice their political objections and make their discontent known to the citizenry. Yet political space is different to physical place. Political space is an assemblage of co-creation by individuals who occupy the space and demonstrate their subjective meanings for it in expression and lived experience. Since the subjective/collective meanings perceived and experienced by the activists are powerfully enacted, the space itself may shape their identity and this study explores those meanings, which are relational, contextual, and spatial.

Keywords: *urban forest; space; meanings*

INTRODUCTION

Many cities in the 'global South' have become capitalistic and contributing to this growth means that many physical and natural spaces are demolished and exploited so as to attract more investors, allowing the government to maintain economic growth. However, such developments compromise the liveability of the city itself and in turn create pressure on green spaces which become the centre of cultural interaction. My research is drawn upon an environmental movement against those urban forest commercialisation projects in Indonesia, which result in the destruction of entire areas of forest. In social movement studies, activists are viewed to be the primary actors who determine the level of the protest (Staggenborg, 2011) but the majority of research in this area barely investigates the ways in which protest sites are perceived by them. In light of their engagement in the protest site, this paper takes the Babakan Siliwangi pro-test as a case in point. First, the significance of the socio-ecological system of Babakan Siliwangi urban forest is presented in order to allow the reader an understanding of the nature of this forest, its political trajectory, and the emergence of the movement. In the second part of the paper the author presents an analysis of the meaning of the protest site made by the young activists.

Babakan Siliwangi forest is ecologically pivotal for the preservation of various flora and fauna. It contains 1,661 tree species (Edriani, 2013), and all of it helps neutralise carbon-dioxide and absorb heat from the urban area (Edriani, 2013). The trees also stabilise the soil preventing potential landslides caused by the annual heavy rain in Bandung (Edriani, 2013). Babakan Siliwangi is also home to 14 bird species and 3 kinds of endemic primate (Fitriawan et al, 2011). Sundanese culture is also at the heart of Babakan Siliwangi, as the downhill goat racing competition takes place every week,

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organised by the Goat and Lamb Breeders Association since 1977. As for the traditional arts, a painting workshop centre also exists in the area and acts as an integrated hub for local Bandung painters who are structurally coordinated by two different boards, *Sanggar Olah Seni* (Fine Arts Workshop Centre) and Mitra Art Space (Mitra). Apart from that, local young people regularly go jogging every afternoon and hang out with friends over a cup of coffee to enjoy the evening mist. The young visitors to Babakan Siliwangi are diverse, but the majority are from the adjacent universities, such as Institute Technology Bandung, and Education University Indonesia (Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia-UPI Bandung). Since the forested area is fantastically rich in tree species, students of Biology from Institute Technology Bandung often hold scientific events in the forest to apply their knowledge so Babakan Siliwangi has become a nature laboratory for this group of students. Babakan Siliwangi is also the best spot for youth, inspired art performance. Culindra, a local youth organisation is one of the organisers of the event. Since early 2010, in collaboration with the local youth community, such as Girl Bikers, Geulis Bandung Club, Hejo Club, Akang Hip-hop, Bandung Skateboarders and Cantique but Sporty, it has been enthusiastic organiser of music concerts involving domestic and international musicians (Suharko et al, 2014). Other art communities, Gerbong Bawang Tanah and Street Musician, also draw the rapt attention of 150 spectators every year in their instrumental music performance, involving some Sundanese musicians (Anggarahita, 2013).

The people of Bandung have great respect for the Babakan Siliwangi urban forest because it is one of few remaining sites in the city where there green space. The forest is strategically located in Siliwangi Road, which was called Grootweg Street during Dutch colonial times. With rapid urban development, the total acreage of Babakan Siliwangi waned. According to the Bandung Environmental Board, by 2007 only 8.76 per cent of the original green space was still available in Bandung. This is contrary to what was stipulated in Act No. 26, 2007, that at least 30 per cent of the total city acreage is mandated for conservation as green space. The remaining three-hectare forested area of Babakan Siliwangi was originally targeted by the Bandung local government in 2002—during the time of Mayor Dada Rosada—to become a commercial zone for a restaurant complex and luxury hotel. The new commercial development plan threatened local endangered species and would have devastated the water reservoir in the area. Moreover, Bandung would have lost its natural air purifier. Local environmentalists initiated action to block the government's zoning. Subsequently, a community meeting was held on 14 May, 2013 in the Pasundan Community Hall on Sumatra Street. Community figures and leaders of organisations came together to oppose the development plan of PT Esa Gemilang Indah.

On 20 May, 2013, the Babakan Siliwangi Care Forum (BSCF) took responsibility for representing like-minded people, community groups, green groups and local groups who had common concerns about the urban forest. BSCF organised rallies and marches along the streets approaching the Babakan Siliwangi urban forest. Cultural carnivals with arts performances were also widely held in the city to symbolically express the view that Babakan Siliwangi was not merely associated with city ecology but also imbued with cultural meaning. For example, one of the prominent local leaders slaughtered a black-feathered cock on site and then wrapped a cloth around its bloodied corpse. This wrapping cloth was formally presented to the local government official who had attended the protest. In traditional cultural rites the black-feathered cock is construed as spiritually sacred, whilst the bloodshed symbolises that local people take this critical situation seriously. It meant that they were ready for a war against the government and any stakeholders deemed to be in opposition to their cultural values. It should be noted that the Save Babakan Siliwangi Movement was not only environmental, but cultural, and also involved local organisations and clubs concerned with Sundanese cultural preser-

vation. These organisations included the Alliance of Nusantara Sundanese Families (ANSF), the Council of Forestry and Sundanese Environmental Care, the Sundanese Cooperative Board, the Bandung Legal Discussion Forum, the Jatinangor Logics Institute, the Pasundan Community, the Sundawani Wirabuana Community, the Bandung Legal Assistance Office, Cipageran Historical Council, West Java Environmental Forum, the 'Underground Train' Community, the Fine Arts Club, the Common Room Networks Foundation, the Mural Artist Community, the Bandung Creative City Forum, the City Friends Foundation, as well as many green clubs and nature-lover organisations.

The rally began from Babakan Siliwangi Forest leading to Bandung City Hall, and another group, Backsilmove, set up a protest at the entrance of the Gedung Sate Parliamentary building. The following section is dedicated to revealing the experiences of young activists affiliated to Backsilmove and how they reckon these experiences are meaningful to them as environmental activists. Through narrative interviews, the research found that the meanings they attach to the space they use for the protest are relational and contextual. Here, relational means that they associate the ways of becoming activists with the ongoing political treatment by the Indonesian government of young people as 'second-class' citizens whose ideation and aspirations are rarely accounted for by the political decision-making processes and everyday encounters with local human-rights activists. Meanwhile, contextual is relative to how their activist identity is perceived according to the given situation in which they find themselves. When they are in a protest arranged by a movement organisation they declare themselves as activists but in everyday socialisation with peers they attempt to hide this identity in order to maintain an equal position with their friends.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a semi-structured interview with nine selected young activists who actively engaged in a youth-driven en-

vironmental organisation, called 'Backsilmove", which organised a set of youth activities and symbolic political struggle to reclaim Babakan Siliwangi city forest. A semi-structured interview is the typical sociological method used to explore the agency of social actors. For uncovering the experience of participants and their interpretations of reality, a semi-structured interview is able to give 'access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words' (Blee & Taylor, 2002:93). From this viewpoint, the semi-structured interview is apt for research which seeks a deeper comprehension of individual experiences. It has significance in social movement research as it is capable of scrutinising the way '...an activist regards their participation and how they understand their social worlds' (Blee & Taylor, 2002: 95). Beyond that, Blee and Taylor (2002:93) argue for the centrality of the semi-structured interview for social movement investigations because of its efficacy in 'generating data about the motives of people who participate in the protest'. In guiding the researcher to collect deeper data, all respondents were asked to response specific questions about their aspirations, experiences, and thoughts about their involvement in the Backsilmove peaceful protest, commencing from Babakan Siliwangi urban forest to Gedung Sate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 'Meaning" of Space

As Backsilmove activists walk along Dago Street and conclude their march at the entrance of the Gedung Sate parliament building, they become cognisant of the site which they *occupy* during the movement. Their revelations attest to how this movement space is embodied with meaning that is associated with young people's political aspiration to engage in a deliberate way in the politics of Indonesia. This aspiration is seemingly undermined by the government, and it is a need for the activists, through their appearance at the protest site, to provide the public with evidence about their disgruntlement with a democratic system

which neglects their right to speak in a public space.

Viewing the rally and protest at the Gedung Sate parliament building as a politically critical stance that reflects young people's opposition to the government and private business coalition for the conversion of the Babakan Siliwangi urban forest into an investment opportunity, their presence could lead to vulnerabilities that may take the form of being questioned and intimidated by the authorities and the police. Another excess that they may experience is a terror due to their politically sensitive statements, which put great pressure on the government. This situation may turn out to be a feasible risk for young activists to face. Such a situation seems not to happen to them, however. There are some particular conditions related to collectivism that emerge as a powerful force for them to counter their fears on the rally. An activist describes her experience of walking together with her fellows as the collective anticipation of insecurity. Having been asked about the probability of being questioned by authorities, Ratu said,

> No, because we acted together, and I was not alone so there was no reason to be worried. What compelled me to join Backsilmove in the first place was that we all would walk together for the long march. If I were simply on my own in this movement I wouldn't grab any public attention and the public would ignore us on the street. Being together with friends on a long march taught me that there is an opportunity to deliver the protest to the government. (Ratu (Female, 23), Interview, January 2015)

As Ratu states above, she discovers herself to be a fearless person while on the street enacting protests because she gets energy from solidarity by staying in close contact with Backsilmove activists during the rally. Since it is the first occasion of her joining the protest, her reflection suggests that solidarity is a key to reinforcing a sense of collectiveness in order to enable individual oppositional voices to be heard by the

government. This aspiration refers to the argumentative views of Lefebvre; that the protest site is transformed into a space for the expression of freedom of speech as a human right whenever the activists work together in the protest (Lefebvre, 1991). Besides that, it indicates a space that allows locally bounded grievances to be articulated into a wider collective. Assembling different young people in a protest is not an easy task and to aid young activists in developing a spirit of collectiveness, Backsilmove undertakes several assessments a week in advance in order to ensure that all activists are readily prepared for the protest. It also involves posing self-critical questions about their intrinsic motivation for joining the movement and asking their consent for the risk they might bear during the protest. This mechanism is thought to be effective in identifying those who are serious, have a deep passion for the protest and are keen to not simply have fun during the engagement. In addition, it is pivotal that participating activists are conscious of their self-driving force so that they can occupy their own moral ground. This moral ground, in social movement studies, is a key to sustaining committed participation and could prevent the protest from 'free riders' who could undermine the purpose (Staggenborg, 2011).

The protest site, the entrance of Gedung Sate parliament building, was chosen in 2013 as it is a symbol of political power in Bandung. Even though this building represents the political elite in the country and despite entry to the premises for commoners with no clearance being notoriously difficult, the Backsilmove activists' narratives attach significance to it for public disclosure on how the contemporary politics of the city has undermined the presence of the Babakan Siliwangi urban forest as a public space and space of engagement. During the rally Wildan, who is the protest coordinator, believe that by walking along Dago Street to Gedung Sate and yelling out on the street while circulating brochures and leaflets about the urgency of protecting the urban forest he was able to educate the public about urban politicians' denial

of the environmental crisis (Wildan (Male, 23), Interview, February 2015). Another activist claims that coming down the street for a protest would leverage the probability for the public to recognise the ecological function of Babakan Siliwangi forest (Raja (Male, 21), Interview, January 2015). In this respect, direct action on the street and protest in front of Gedung Sate is viewed as having a mediating effect that connects the emotion between the public and the environmental issue of concern.

> I think it would be better to enact a real protest like Backsilmove did. Direct action is important because the interaction between protesters and the public as audience is clearly showcased, and it is most important that we can do it in a more creative way, like adding more songs and artistic performance to create fun and enjoyment for people. A creative protest will engage more of the public and is kind of thought-provoking. (Wildan (Male, 23), Interview, February, 2015)

The mediating power present in the protest site lies in the interaction between the protesters and the spectators. In the Backsilmove movement the young activists did not merely spend the whole time shouting in protest, but they also engaged with the public, passing by on the street by circulating brochures and leaflets. This act is viewed as having an emotional connection that allows the public to grasp the political nuances of the protest. More importantly, the contemporariness of this protest involving theatrical performance or pantomime is demonstrated in order to provide the public with the innovative side of the protest that cannot be apparent in any left-wing traditional protests, which tend to be anarchic.

Furthermore, the young activist has showcased an alternative way of engaging the public by connecting with the sensual cognition of the audience through artistic performance. Furthermore, enacting a rally is a symbolic mark for critical insurgency in the city. The following is what a sense of insurgency meant to them

> If we go into Gedung Sate to get our message across, maybe no parliament members would hear us and pay attention to us because we are still young. But through a long march we open the eyes of people on the street and let them know that Babakan Siliwangi is now in a critical condition. The message I want to deliver is that Babakan Siliwangi should not be handed to the wrong person like it was and the Bandung City government, which is incapable of maintaining green spaces in Bandung, cannot continue the management of this urban forest. At least those passing in the street had seen us and reflected in their minds 'Oh yea, that young people are doing something, and have energy. (Ratu (Female, 22), Interview, January, 2015)

She commented further,

> If the event is designed and organised in a more interesting 'package' like in Backsilmove I am sure that more and more young people will engage in it. There should be a creative leadership in a social movement who are able to align the concepts with the contemporary spirit of young people. In my observation, young people join a movement because they like a lot of new things. (Ratu (Female, 22), Interview, January 2015)

Ratu's statement serves to explain that this collective protest is a political breakthrough by young people who demand an immediate response from the government to resolve the problem because the utility of the urban forest as public space is under severe threat from capitalism. The appearance of young people in the long march is a literal sign pointing to who is being victimised by the urban forest loss in Bandung. The protest site is viewed as integral to the struggle for the political opportunities that young people cannot otherwise get. Situating themselves in the protest is a tactical act intended to regain their rights in political participation (Martin & Miller, 2003).

> Traditional forms of demonstration, like hanging banners and shouting at the government, is too old fashioned. We need new packaging. Backsilmove is one

example. It displays the creativity of young people, particularly in their performance of pantomime. Backsilmove activism is not about vandalising and placing others at risk. The message of the movement is clear and easy to absorb for the public on the street. Despite not targeting the core issues, Backsilmove has integrated the message of urban forest issues into arts and performances, and very well-planned. Their work is very well designed, planned, and prepared. (Ratu (Female, 22), Interview, January 2015)

Through the interpretation of the narrative above the study suggests that there is an effort by young people to distance themselves from traditional modes of political behaviour, and arts performance is likened to experimenting into different ways of doing politics. Such a creative repertoire is an actual manifestation of freedom and autonomy of action (Silva and de Castro, 2014). In this narrative, it appears that pantomime performance is an option for 'styling revolution'. A 'styling revolution' points to an artsy Indonesian youth politics which arguably symbolises an inclusivity and creative materiality performed by a group of young people who utilise the public space of the street (Lee, 2011). With that appearance, the mass movement enacted by Indonesians becomes the proper reflection of a people's struggle in the country (Lee, 2011).

Protest sites embody young people's desires to be taken account of in the politics of the country. Young activists benefit from their participation in the protest by being recognised by the public. The following narrative depicts an affirmation about the protest site as one of the keys to becoming acknowledged in their everyday politics in Indonesia,

> In my opinion, to introduce and to defend our ideas is crucial. If we only deploy social media to publish our ideas, people will question us; 'where is the real activity here'? So with a long march people will become aware of the young people's movement, and our organisation is just real. People may get to know our activities in real life, and what we attempt to protest

against (Wildan (Male, 23), Interview, February 2015)

Pipin, in a separate focus group discussion, made a further statement, declaring that a protest allows the dissemination of unheard objections. They view protest as a culmination of pre-conceived ideas and unexpressed thinking.

> Backsilmove's action reinvigorated me and provided strong motivation because such action is a part of communicative persuasion, which is unlike a demonstration that damages public infrastructure. A protest is a way to voice our ideas, concerns, and untold thoughts to the people. (Pipin (Female, 20), Focus Group Discussion, January 2015)

Wildan's and Pipin's narrative points to an urgent demand for the public and government to witness the fact that young people's struggle within a movement organisation is represented in urban space and it is a form of performative identity in order to showcase their real engagement with everyday politics in their own way. Similarly, it underscores that by occupying major streets, activists attempt to establish an image of political power as marginalised individuals in society, demonstrating themselves as agents of change who carry political force (Juliawan, 2011). Furthermore, by enacting active protest on a site, an organisation may obtain visibility and create a mobilising emotional bond with the public who have witnessed it on the street (Gans, 2002). The protest also becomes a space that could transmit ideas to the public and government about the causal power of transformative change (Gans, 2002). Additionally, one young activist, Gerry, describes his participation in the protest site as a precious chance for his personal concerns to be heard. There is a moment where local news journalists came along during the protest at the entrance of Gedung Sate for interviews with the movement coordinators. He reflected on this moment as the start of getting their message across in the country and receiving wider acknowledgement from the media.

I really enjoy it, because it was my last chance to get our 'voice' heard. It is also a lesson learned for the people there; that we were a young people who banded together. When other journalists came over while we were active, I felt like 'hey our protest is finally going viral and will be spread nationally in Indonesia. (Gerry (Male, 23), Interview, April 2015)

In the aftermath of event this young activist emphasised that young people's roles in everyday politics are visibly undermined and his participation in the protest site shows demonstrable evidence to the public about their rights in Indonesian politics. This finding is in keeping with Rizzini and Thapliyal's study of the participation of activists for the right to education in that, by being an active participant in the protests, young people become more aware of their overlooked and violated rights in the city because the protest site was occupied predominantly by political activists who are affiliated to the parliamentary elites (Rizzini & Thapliyal, 2007).

Demanding political changes to the government might be an unrealistic goal for this Backsilmove movement. However, for young activists their presence at the protest site awakens a critical examination of the urban government. Being asked about how the demonstration could bring about transformation, Hadi replied

Absolutely yes, because it will send a signal to the government that they must take over the urban forest as soon as possible. Then, the government will include it in the international forum for getting recognition from the United Nations. We also want to get an international party on board in order to put the government under political pressure. So actually this is the effect of the demonstration that we want.(Hadi (Male, 23), Interview, February 2015)

Having long-term engagement with Greenpeace and its actions gives Hadi international exposure to other international movements, such as the Sierra Club and other environmental organisations. In his view the government would rather comply with international interventions which instruct them to hand over the governance of the urban forest to the public. In terms of international intervention, during the interview he provided the example of how Babakan Siliwangi urban forest was officially recognised as a world forest at the Tunza Environmental Conference 2011 in Bandung. This declaration was then used by Forum Warga Babakan Siliwangi as an underlying political claim to push the government. Hadi is one of the young activists who adopted cosmopolitan views about intervention in forest governance and the above narrative demonstrates the cognitive practices of his cosmopolitan view. Yet, enacting protest in Gedung Sate has activated this cosmopolitan view and integrated it as a protest repertoire in the public sphere.

The protest site also informs the spiritual engagement of activists. Canny views her participation in the rally and protest as a spiritual journey that allows her to practice the highest devotion to God. In the following narrative she integrates her self-conception of knowledge as transcendent values for conserving the environment.

I am assured of one thing in this world; that there are no religions that instruct us to destroy Nature. The reality of the teachings of all religions is that we must protect and conserve Nature. I feel I have a responsibility to take care of Nature by utilising my experiences, especially those related to the environment. Not many people are aware of how to put their knowledge into practice. I use all the knowledge and experience as my *Dakwah* journey for Allah so that we are able to control our behaviour in order to avoid disaster for Nature and the environment. The benefits are not merely for me but for the future of our grandchildren(Canny (Female, 23), Interview, April 2015)

Compared to the other young activists I interviewed Canny is more religious and it is obvious that her narrative is quite transcendental, meaning that there is always an embodiment between God, nature, and hu-

man devotion. During interviews she talked a lot about her engagement with an Islamic collective whose members are young females aged between 23 and 29 years old and their talking points are related to becoming whole, good, productive religious women.. The drama project "Move-On" is a story about five Islamic women who experienced hard times in life and embraced Islam in the end. Her experience of religious living seemingly affects the narratives about the meaning of protest after Backsilmove finished a year ago. This argument affirms Watkin's study in 1998 that a space where protest took place can contribute to the spiritual formation in the activist's self and thinking as it has become an internalised belief-system and worldview which emerges after several religious experiences (Gulbrandsen & Walsh, 2015).

To some extent, a protest site acts as an emotional channel for the activist. Gerry's revelation about the protest site is seemingly extraordinary as he reckons it was a place for re-shaping his 'militant sociability' group. In the family he experiences conflict with his father about his future dreamt job. The conflict never ends and always involves a heated yet prolonged debate which always assigns to him the role of passive listener within the family. Once he faced an extended period of depression due to this, with no-way out. Being part of a protest seems to have been a moment where his internal voice and emotional burdens are heard and exposed to the public.

> I am just nothing in my family. My father has never even heard what I am thinking for my future and what I wanna go for. He just pushes me to be a civil servant, a job I don't really like. When I was in the protest, it felt like my voice is heard by everybody and I want all of my parents to hear what is inside my brain and my heart. Now, I finally find that the street is my second home for my thoughts. (Gerry (Male, 23), Interview, April 2015)

The interview account above notes that Gerry has found his 'militant sociability' group to channel the fierce intergenerational conflict with his father. A 'new militant sociability' is a group in which the member is provided with an autonomous, democratic, and horizontal sphere in which to develop but at the same time given opportunities for the individual to oppose normative social practices that reproduce the indoctrination in the everyday life of the family sphere (Mesquita, 2003).

Although there is scepticism that direct action such as protest is a symbolic expression of contention and that digital media e.g. Twitter and Facebook have recently overtaken its efficacy in mobilising more constituents to engage in the protest (Lim, 2008), young activists in this study remain less optimistic about the effect of social media on the movement they conducted in 2013. One young activist theorised about the shortcomings of the online pledges created by another group of activists for raising money to fund their movement.

> Actually I do not know how the result was utilised in that online petition. It is simply a number, but I am not quite sure whether the government would pay much attention to such numerical data. As young people who prefer direct action I don't care about it. Again, it is just showing a number. That's it! But if people shout out loud to voice their disagreement and deliver what they want in different way, it will surprise the government or at least the government employees who work in the field. If they are concerned they would think further 'Umm, what the hell do these people want from me? Or, the government would reckon 'there might be something wrong with our policy'. Hence, this is the expectation of activists who come down to the street for a long march. Speaking of the petition, I am sure the government knows about it and reads it, but they will never find who actually set up the petition. If nobody appears in the public space to have a say, the government will not respond to them. (Wildan (Male, 23), Interview, February 2015)

In the above narrative Wildan emphasises the visibility of the agent in a protest in realising the political functionality of space.

In his emphasis it is obvious that signing a petition is merely a symbol that does not lead to any political transformation on the part of the government, which is not persuaded through such means that the primary function for Babakan Siliwangi urban forest is to act as a green space in the city. Secondly, the activists also point to the invalidity of online pledges because there is a physical absence of actors or protest groups at the protest site who would literally condemn and fight against the government's decision to commercialise this urban forest. In other words, in the eyes of the activist an online petition can erode 'the space-time-bound power relation' (Castells, 2004). That aside, the viral effects of the protest are viewed as a key achievement for the young activists in heralding the rally to, and protest at, the Gedung Sate. Hadi, who proclaims himself the mastermind of Backsilmove admits, that *Aksi Kamisan*[1] regularly organised by the young pantomime artist, Wanggi Hudoyo, is thought to be a successful example of how protest can bring transformation by changing the perceptions of the people who witness it.

> Demonstration is way better and effective in showing our discontent. For example, every Thursday there is Aksi Kamisan waged by activists and every May a Labour Day celebration is held to commemorate the struggle against labour inequality in the country. With that long march or real activism, our president would come to the realisation that there is something wrong in society and would be expected to concede that 'in this democratic state the people's struggle is not restricted' (Wanggi. (Male, 25), Interview, February 2015)

In this narrative account Hadi associates his understanding of protest with the class struggle undertaken by labour groups in Indonesia. For him, protest is a space that can speak about the unresolved issues in the country and constitute a view that individual rights and freedom of speech are reinforced as an inclusive part of the demo-

cratic practices in Indonesian politics. 'Aksi Kamisan', for Hadi, is perceived as a contemporary event that serves as a space to allow authoritarian dominant political orders to be challenged by subversive power (Lefebvre, 1991: 26).

Despite the massive use of digital media in youth society, Backsilmove activists' presence at protest sites develops in them self-transformation, especially having empirical experiences of creating political change in the city from their own initiatives through a real space rather than a digital space. Activists' attitudes to digital media are sceptical rather than supportive.

> I am so proud to be on the street when other young people are busy with their Facebook account, and updating their status on it. I was so excited seeing when they were preparing the event in the morning, and we were successful in welcoming the movement. (Melodi (Female, 20), Interview, April 2015)

Preparing a protest, to Melodi, is the performance of hardship and this achievement leads her to greater satisfaction in terms of successful event organising. It is obvious in the above narrative that she saw herself as superior to other young people who utilise digital media in support of the movement. The sense of superiority in this context can be viewed as 'deteriorialisation' (Deleuze & Guitari, 1987) where a distinction is established in order to reinforce an identity as an exceptional activist compared to a 'click-activist'. Since the emergence of social media in a big way, young people tend to bury themselves in Facebook and Twitter and keep everyday life as a virtual interaction. They perceive protest as an old-fashioned way of doing things. Nevertheless, Hadi does not lament this, but views protest as a manifestation of individual contention against the ruling government. He said "becoming an activist is, like a Darwinian term, is natural evolution. Those who have strong intrinsic motivation will survive in a movement, and those who don't will bury themselves in Facebook or Twitter" (Interview, February 2015). A social movement, in his

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1 *Thursday Action to Commemorate Human Rights Violation in Indonesia*

eyes, is a 'self-transformation' from passive political constituent to active change maker. In this case, experiencing protest renders young people more agentic (Blackwood & Louis, 2012).

In general the young activists' view of social media use for protest or direct action is not oppositional, but they think of it as a vehicle that will not bring about any social changes. Melodi said "Twitter and Facebook can change your mind about an issue but it does not change anything in society". To her, social transformation can be made through a direct protest, in which the public can observe the lively presence of the protest repertoire. As an onlooker I would rather see Melodi as an individual with 'partial scepticism' in the use of digital media in protest because she neither endorses social media nor dislikes them. Her partial scepticism is exemplified by providing a rationalisation of how Facebook Fanpage campaigning about the issues involved in the extinction of the Sumatran tiger due to habitat destruction was utilised unsuccessfully by Greenpeace

> Involvement in activism over a smartphone is not enough, and it never has any impact. For example, if one clicks "like" on Greenpeace's Facebook Fanpage, would the fire-ravaged Sumatran forest be green again in seconds?! And then would the number of Sumatran Tigers increase?! So Facebook brings no actual changes and it just gives a glimpse into the problems for the public but does not mobilise the public to engage in tiger conservation. Hey what can we expect from that story apart from getting emotional about the death toll of the tiger?! It is far too precious to present social media as a successful measure for the movement. People love Twitter but it is just deceptive. What would you get by writing less than a hundred characters?!. (Melodi (Female, 20), Interview, April 2015)

Melodi's criticism of digital media is compelling. Compared to the other young activists I interviewed, it seems that she has a deeper understanding of the different limitations of social media use. Her capability in elaborating the shortcomings of di-

gital media developed because previously she held a social media assistant position in Greenpeace's youth division. Through her analytical eyes, the fact that social media, especially Twitter, have particular deficit characteristics resonates with Lim's findings. Even though social media frequently showcase an oversimplified and sensationalised story and content that can be enjoyed without spending too much time, social media cannot present the whole story of the social movement or campaign (Lim, 2013:638). Her partial scepticism of digital media is demonstrated in her view on the use of Twitter by Backsilmove in disseminating their assessment report on public awareness about the presence of Babakan Siliwangi urban forest.

> Backsilmove spread the assessment report via Twitter. One of the activists did it by posting the link on Twitter. But, we actually cannot have much to say about this report via Twitter because it does not allow us to persuade people out there convincingly with no more than one hundred characters, right?! So it seems like our expression is limited via Twitter even though the assessment report is thought-provoking because there are many hidden facts that people would never find elsewhere. (Melodi (Female, 20), Interview, April 2015)

Further Melodi's narrative endorses Lim's thought that social media should not be perceived as a causal agent that performs crucial roles in advancing democracy (Lim, 2013). She argued,

> Recently Facebook, Twitter and Instagram are the most-used social media by the vast majority of Indonesian young people for passive participation in a movement without joining the rallies. But they are moving backward. Digital media matters but is not sufficient to make any transformations. When we join a long march in a protest, our concerns about environmental problems are actually being heard by the public and broadcast over regional mass media. It is literally a "voice", not one that is silent. (Melodi (Female, 20), Interview, April 2015)

Even though social media have been deemed largely to have accelerating effects on the messages that are spread across the city, Melodi's contradictory preference to this mainstream view provides validation for the earlier study about the shortcomings of online campaigns as demonstrated by Lim (2013). She argues that despite being fast and seamlessly engaging, at the same time an online campaign that appears on social media can rapidly disappear without a trace (Lim, 2013). Moreover, her staunch response to the deficits of social media is meant to be understood, that social media has made people hide their real identity as they are only open to speaking critically in the virtual space. "It is because people can camouflage their identity by creating a fake profile on Twitter and Facebook", added Melodi during interview. To this extent, Melodi's criticism is confirmed by Petray's study on the use of Web 2.0 for the defence of Aboriginal Rights. Her study concludes that multicomplex identities are easily constructed in Facebook and Twitter as there is no rigid regulation that constrains anyone from having no more than one identity (Petray, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The narrative above offers an opportunity to understand the presence of young activists in a protest site as not only an act of occupying a physical space, but also eliciting young people's demands for being recognised as active citizens. After young people engaged in the Backsilmove movement, they reached the point where it encouraged personal transformation and self-consciousness about their rights in relation to the city's development. 'Place' represents political engagement for young people in freely expressing their discontent against the status quo and simultaneous engenders reflection on performative identity as politically active young people. In this manner, even where social media are prevalent it is not sufficient to give young people space to 'animate' their emotionality and contentions in a radical way. By participating in the long march to the Gedung Sate parliamentary building they regained their political

identity, which has been under-represented in the praxis politics of Indonesia. Since waging social protest in democratic Indonesia is still thought to be a subversive activity, remaining together in collective engagement can eliminate fears about being questioned by the authorities.

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