

# Geger Sikep: Environmental (Re)Interpretation among the Contemporary Anti-Cement Movement in Kendeng, Central Java

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## Abstract

Over the past decade, a shift has occurred in the Sedulur Sikep community's attitude since the increase in its popularity and coverage in the mass media following its involvement in the anti-cement movement in Central Java. However, not all members of Sedulur Sikep participate in or even approve of this movement. This anthropological study attempts to illustrate how this situation has pushed the Sikep community members to (re)recognize their values, the influence of these values on environmental discourse, and how the relations between them are understood and practiced by Sedulur Sikep and the movement fighting in its name. By examining the adaptability of ecological knowledge and the ordering of visible space as a result of complex interactions between nature and nurture, it is possible to examine the shifts in their understanding of environmental dynamics and their cultural identity. The 'fragmentation' that has occurred is rooted in different understandings of the reciprocal bonds between the Sedulur Sikep's tani mligi identity and natural resources. The dynamics and stagnation seen in how Sedulur Sikep positions itself in relation to cement production is also apparent in various methods of (re)interpretation, particularly regarding the relevance of Sedulur Sikep's beliefs to its ecological contestation and struggle for living space.

## Keywords

environmental movements; recognition; contradiction; gegeran; reinterpretation

## INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of 2007, the Sedulur Sikep community showed an increased popularity in the Indonesian mass media, promoted by its involvement/being involved in a movement against the largest cement companies in Indonesia, namely PT. Semen Gresik and PT. Indocement, Tbk. Both of these companies intended to open factories and mining efforts to the north of the Kendeng Mountain Range. The first project, initiated by PT. Semen Gresik in Sukolilo District in 2006, stopped in 2009 in the face of community

backlash. A follow-up project was initiated by PT. Indocement, Tbk, through its subsidiary, PT. Sahabat Mulia Sakti (PT. SMS), in Kayen and Tambakromo Districts in 2010; this project remains ongoing, as of writing.

In the past ten years, the media has frequently positioned the Sedulur Sikep community as the main actor in the social movement against the company. Many acti-

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vists have also been involved in and contributed to the construction of a narrative that positions the Sedulur Sikep community as environmental agents that maintain “local wisdom” (Mojo, Hadi & Purnaweni 2015) and as promoting social justice (Crosby 2009; 2013). Several researchers, meanwhile, have viewed them as culturally maintaining an environmentally conscious lifestyle, for example using subsistence farming to manage water in the face of drought (Wibowo 2011; Mardikantoro 2013; Subarkah & Wicaksono 2014). In March 2015, a short film titled *Samin vs Semen* was released, further contributed to the construction of the narrative of an environmental movement<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, not all members of the Sedulur Sikep community approve of the struggle. Some remain silent, while others explicitly voice their disapproval of Sedulur Sikep’s anti-cement activities. Those who voice their disapproval attempt to clarify the need for obedience and rejection of demonstrations and protests, all of which they consider to erode their Sedulur Sikep identity. Another film, *Sikep Samin Semen*, was made in response to and as clarification of Sedulur Sikep’s position on the environment and on the film *Samin vs Semen*<sup>2</sup>.

On 20 April 2016, the regional government of Pati and the Governor of Central Java sent twenty-five members of the Sedulur Sikep community to Parliament, the offices of the daily newspaper *Kompas*, and the offices of the Faction of National Awakening Parties (Fraksi Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa, FPKB) in Jakarta. This was intended to “bring back” the good name of Sedulur Sikep, to show that the “real” community has not involved itself in the anti-cement movement because such involvement is forbidden by their values. These delegates argued

that the use of Sedulur Sikep’s name in covering the movement was a media misunderstanding.

This trip was planned following a 14 April 2015 meeting between twenty Sedulur Sikep community members from Bombong, Sukolilo, and the Governor of Central Java at his residence. One person who rejected the anti-cement activities was called as witness during a court case in Semarang on 8 September 2015. Strangely, however, it was Sumadi—a resident of Bombong who was not a member of Sedulur Sikep—who represented the community. During his testimony, he dressed entirely in black, as expected of Sedulur Sikep members. In his testimony, he highlighted the different values held by Sedulur Sikep and argued that, far from the media’s depiction, the community’s values were unrelated to the anti-cement movement. Sumadi’s involvement in the trial was claimed as an attempt to clear Sedulur Sikep’s good name and extricate the community from the anti-cement movement and the problematic discourse over cement.

The attempt to “clear” Sedulur Sikep’s name of members’ involvement in the anti-cement movement was supported by the government of Central Java when Governor Ganjar Pranowo invited members from Pati, Kudus, Blora, and Bojonegoro, to attend an audience at the Governor’s Office Complex in Semarang on 15 December 2016. In this meeting, the governor wanted to confirm Sedulur Sikep’s involvement in local anti-cement movements. The Sedulur Sikep community members in attendance, some twenty in total, stated that the majority of their community was not involved, and that only the family of Gunretno—approximately ten people—was active in voicing its rejection of the cement industries. At the conclusion of the meeting, the governor promised to ease administration for the Sedulur Sikep community and address questions of discrimination in education. This meeting was held following protests from JM-PPK (Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan Kendeng, Network of Persons with a Concern for the Kendeng Mountain Range) demanding that the governor follow through on the Supreme

1 The full video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWaRhg2i9AU>. This film was produced and released by Dandhy D Laksono and Ucok Suparta Film as part of the film and photojournalistic project titled Ekspedisi Biru (‘Blue Exhibition’).

2 *Sikep Samin Semen* was produced by Mzk Pictures in response to *Samin vs Semen*. It can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jWaRhg2i9AU>.

Court's decision to rescind permission for the Semen Indonesia factory in Rembang.

This situation led to suspicion and prejudices within the Sedulur Sikep community. On the one hand, members of the community who rejected any involvement in the anti-cement movement have been branded as siding with and being manipulated by the government and the cement industry to dismiss members of the anti-cement movement as not being "real" members of the Sedulur Sikep. Conversely, members of the Sedulur Sikep who are against the cement industry have been considered the "tools" of groups with vested interests against the establishment of cement factories, with their Sedulur Sikep identity being used to portray them as fragile and easily influenced. In discourse, this has led an argument that cement factories do not only "pollute" the environment, but also local society and culture. These mutual suspicions are exacerbated by both sides' conviction that the other side has been "bought", a belief that has further fragmented the community.

This has led to questions about the internal values of the community and the interpretations of environmental discourse that underlies the issues of identity. Does this difference of opinion also signal the erosion of homogeneity in the traditional community and its reflection on communal rules? Or is the concept of homogeneity itself, frequently identified with traditional communities, no longer relevant for social patterns in modern-day traditional communities? These questions, which are frequently treated as rhetorical within academic discourse on *adat* communities in Indonesia, leads us to two further questions. First, is it necessary to reconsider whether ethnic/traditional communities are free of internal contradictions and continue to live simply no matter the dynamics they face? Second, if there are internal contradictions, how does the agency and values of the Sedulur Sikep community guide, open, and limit (re) interpretation in their relations with their environment, ecology, and livelihoods?

Before discussing these issues further, it is important to emphasize that this article

focuses solely on the Sedulur Sikep in Pati Regency, more specifically in Bombong and Bowong villages, Sukolilo District, where the pro-, neutral-, and anti-cement debate is centered. These locations have been selected because many of the Sedulur Sikep figures involved, both in the anti-cement movement (i.e. in the struggle against the establishment of the cement factory) and in the movement against anti-cement activities, live in this area. Meetings and planning sessions are often held at these people's homes. As such, by focusing on these two villages the researchers are able to better understand the situation.

This focus upon traditional community, I hope, can give a new addition to the existing literatures on environmental movements which are largely non-traditional, non-organic and transnational (Císař 2010; Chen 2010).

For this research, in-depth interviews and participatory observation has been used. This has involved various groups, including members of the Sedulur Sikep community as well as non-members of the community (i.e. village administration and anti-cement movements). It should be noted that this article has no relevance to areas such as Blora and Kudus, whose geographic situation precludes them from being affected by the cement factory.

The Sedulur Sikep communities in Bombong and Bowong are not directly affected by the planned PT. Indocement Tbk. factory in Kayen and Tambakromo Districts. Rather, these communities have become central to the anti-cement movement because of their involvement in the struggle against the planned cement factory in Gresik between 2006 and 2009. At the time, these areas were affected by the planned factory. As such, this community's continued consistency in opposing the cement industries is also interesting for discussion, particularly given the fact that the communities are no longer directly threatened.

## PERSPECTIVES

We understand that the mutual labeling

and the maneuvering used to justify perceptions of each “side”, as discussed above, has undoubtedly led to suspicion and high emotions that have weakened the connections between different members of Sedulur Sikep. The Sedulur Sikep community is in a state of *geger*, trapped in a destructive emotional cycle rooted in the prejudices, rumors, media broadcasts, and negative perceptions that have emerged. The *geger* concept was previously used by Nurkhoiron (2002) to describe the peak of the Samin community’s resistance to colonialism in 1914, what he terms *Geger Samin*. However, unlike Nurkhoiron’s use of the concept, *geger* is used here to explain a situation of uncertainty in which greater emphasis is given to the process of negotiating and reinterpreting the Samin’s history and struggle to better understand present-day situations.

In examining social, economic, and political tensions, particularly within “minority” groups, researchers are often trapped by their own partiality. To avoid this partiality, the root of the issue causing tensions must be traced in an attempt to better understand their lives .

One interesting issue for examination in the context of the intersections between industry and this traditional community is the management of the group’s space and visibility in constructing the discourse that the Sedulur Sikep need to voice dominance against the long-standing narrative constructed by the New Order. An awareness has emerged of the need to question the New Order’s singular control of history (Conroy 2007, p. 264; Chen 2010; Bailey 2010; Bell 2010). As shown by Ariel Heryanto (1999 p.153), efforts to give a voice to the “marginalized” have been intended to resist the New Order’s master narrative and its implications for a homogenic cultural identity in Indonesia. Santoso (2004) has shown that the rise of environmental movements along the northern coast of Java has been initiated mostly by outsiders and urban activists, who seek alternative sources of income as well as renewed models of interactions between local communities and the forest around them (Peluso 1991; 1992; Cisañ

2010; Sima 2011; Ackland 2011).

These efforts, according to Douglas Fry (2005, p. 516), are linked to complex interactions between nature and nurture. The relations between the Sedulur Sikep and nature are framed not only around environmental issues and values, but also around an understanding of nature as a system of meaning. As such, various interactions with and penetrations into the environment have significant influence, both through human factors and through the environment itself. This influence is quite strong in discussions regarding struggles for “minority rights” and is readily apparent in discussions of traditional communities in Indonesia (Feola 2014; ).

This has been identified as one cause of fragmentation within various groups, in which diverse interests attempt to adapt practices considered the most appropriate for addressing specific changes. In such cases, Mary Catherine Bateson (1994 in Kyrou & Rubenstein 2008, p. 517) identifies two forms of normative decision making, namely (1) pragmatic, in which conditions are addressed by compromising the necessary values, and (2) value preservation, in which values are preserved without any concern for future effects. As such, it is important for us to position locality within the context of historical life conditions and specific actions in the affected area (Sutherland 2014; Ho 2011; Johnson 2010).

## HISTORY OF THE SAMIN

To examine how nature is understood within the Sedulur Sikep community, it is important to first understand the history of the group’s establishment and its influence on the construction of values that now guide the Sedulur Sikep. This is important to recognize cultural practices and shifts in northern Central Java, including the use of varied names to refer to the community: “Samin”, “Sedulur Sikep”, and “Samin/Sedulur Sikep”, as well as the descriptors “traditional community”, “traditional society”, “believers”, and “faithful”.

Anthropological research into the issue of identity is quite complicated, because

it is not only linked to the identification of the research subject, but also the reinforcement of certain boundaries and weakening of other boundaries that are directly and indirectly linked the imagining of other communities. Fauzanafi et al. (2014, p. 4-5) emphasize the importance of using caution and a non-essentialist perspective regarding questions of ethnicity, identity construction, and “tradition”, because the construction of identity is political and associated with specific interests. Within this framework, this study examines how researchers have framed the Sedulur Sikep community in their specific discourses as well as the continuities and changes in the community’s lifestyle.

Most researchers have tended to use one of two specific terms in writing about the Sedulur Sikep community: the term “Samin community”, which has been more commonly used by previous writers, while the term “Sedulur Sikep”, which is considered more reflective. The term “Samin” is taken from the name of the group’s founder, Samin Surosentiko. In the Ministry of Education and Culture’s *Ensiklopedia Suku-Bangsa* (2015, p. 542), this community is considered a sub-group of the Javanese people and is named “Samin” or “*Wong Samin*”. The community, however, uses the term “Sedulur Sikep” to refer to itself.

Understanding the term “Sedulur Sikep” itself is not simple. In the Javanese language, “sedulur” means *brother* or *sibling*, while “sikep” is understood as meaning *those who are ready, those who embrace, or those responsible for the nation*. However, owing to extensive subjugation and exploitation of the community through the colonial forced planting program, the term “sikep” ceased to be understood as *those responsible for the nation*. It was replaced by a more sexual meaning: *those who embrace* (Widodo 1997, p. 265).

As “Sedulur Sikep” is used by the community to describe itself, the term has been used in the majority of this article. However, to better match the language of previous research into the community, the term “Samin” is used in this section.

Samin Surosentiko, originally named

Raden Kohar, was the second child of Raden Surowijoyo, a *bromocorah* from Bojonegoro. He was raised in the forced planting system, and as a result of working as a coolie (*kuli kencang*) he grew up lean and malnourished (Hutomo 1996). Such coolie labor was part of the force planting system (*Cultuurstel*) implemented by Governor General Johannes van den Bosch to exploit indigenous labor. For the duration of this system’s implementation, tax obligations became an obligation to provide labor for working government land, which was itself taken from local residents (van Niel, 2003: 4). This system was marked by widespread poverty and famine, with the mostly agrarian population suffering greatly (see Benda & Castles 1959; Ricklefs 2011).

In 1890, driven by his concern for his village’s suffering, Raden Kohar conducted a *laku tapabrata* (meditation) which ended with his first revelation, the “seeds” of the “Religion of Adam”. It was at this time that he changed his name to Samin Surosentiko. It must be emphasized here that the term “religion of Adam” here should not be understood based on its religious connotations, but rather a local understanding best translated as ‘armed with speech’. The community increased in number and in influence, reaching Rembang in 1906. It was spread by Surokidin and Karsiyah, the sons-in-law of Samin Surosentiko (Benda & Castles 1959, p. 211).

Most followers of Samin’s teachings were Javanese who worked as *tani mligi*, as farmers who independently and with their own authority supported themselves and their families. Their opposition was motivated by their dissatisfaction and suffering, by their sense of being pawns in the forced planting system. The Religion of Adam gave them the opportunity to resist colonialism through a relatively safe approach, the “language of Samin” or *nyamin*. Plainness in language use has been identified by several researchers as the community’s unique form of resistance to colonial authority and power (King 1973, 1977; Korver 1976; Siraishi 1990; Widodo 1977; Sujayanto & Laksana 2001; Suhandano 2015) as well as institutionalized

religion and the nobility (*priyayi*) (Benda & Castle 1969; Fukushima 1987).

It should be emphasized here that the Samin did not use a new form of language. Rather, they used their own interpretations and freely spoke the *ngoko* register of Javanese, with some forms that were unusual. Lestari (2013) has shown how this different approach to communication frequently became hindered their interactions with surrounding communities. For instance, when the researchers asked a husband and wife from Kaliyoso whether there was something or someone worshipped (*di-sembah*) by the Sedulur Sikep community, the concept of “God” frequently led to difficulty. The interviewees answered firmly, “The Prophet Adam (*Nabi Adam*) for women and the Representative of Adam (*Wali Adam*) for women”. Adam here was not understood as the first human, nor was he understood as the first prophet in Islamic history, but rather as a symbol of Adam as speech. *Nabi* was not meant as prophet, but rather the hem (*tapijan*) of a sarong, with *bi* meaning ‘vagina’. Meanwhile, the word *wali* was not used to refer to a representative, but rather *suwali*, meaning penis. In this manner, these two members of Sedulur Sikep explained that their devotion was to none other than sexual intercourse, which was implied through reference to the genitalia of the opposite sex. However, the spiritual meaning of the term *sesembahan* was, over the course of the interview, also understood as an abbreviation of *mesam-mesem karo nggroyang nggrayang* (“smile while grabbing”).

Takashi Siraishi (1990), in “Dangir’s Testimony”, expands upon the Samin community’s interpretation and understanding of language, which emphasizes plainness in language use. Siraishi explains that the Dutch colonial authorities viewed the Samin as using different ways of speaking than the ‘general’ Javanese community and the Dutch colonial government. Members of community would only use the lowest register of Javanese, *ngoko*, and frequently twisted questions or answer them in unexpected ways. They would frequently use words with different understandings and

speak both critically and frankly, and as such they were frequently considered insane or crazy.

This language use is argued by Jeanne Mintz in *Mohammed, Marx, and Marhaen* (1965) to be a reactionary form of resistance, meaning that the farmers’ protest was a reaction to their extended poverty and their frustration with the elites who were mortoring the uprising. Fauzanafi (2012), meanwhile, views the community’s plain and unusual language use as being nothing but playing with words during its political interactions with colonial powers.

Meanwhile, Victor King (1973), in his “Some Observations on the Samin Movement of North-Central Java”, typifies the Samin’s resistance as a manifestation of the poor synergy between the colonial government’s policies and the farmers’ desires. Because of this incompatibility, dissatisfaction influenced the farmers’ status, self-worth, behavior, etc. Victor King formulated this in his theory of relative deprivation.

Benda and Castles (1969) explain that the difficult situation and pressure from the colonial system led to members of the Sedulur Sikep community “choosing” to live in “isolated” areas. Through this life of self-isolation from colonial authority through taxation, religious authority through the muezzin, and administrative authority through the nobility (*priyayi*), they avoided direct and explicit confrontation while improving their own fortunes, particularly by avoiding severe risks by considering their every move (Santoso 2004).

This self-isolation in areas with limited resources is conceptualized by Amrih Widodo (1997) as a “leave me alone” strategy for avoiding confrontation with colonial authorities. This goal is reflected in one guideline for living as a member of the Samin community, “*Aja drengki, sre, dahwen, kemeren, tukar padu, bedhog colong, begal kecu aja dilakoni, apa maneh kutil jupuk, nemu wae emoh.*” (Do no evil. Feel no jealousy. Do not argue, steal, rob, or fight. Do not even take things you find lost on the street)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted from “Kearifan Lokal di Lingkungan Masyarakat Samin Kabupaten Blora, Jawa Tengah”

Conversely, Uzair Fauzan (2005) describes this phenomenon as being intended to promote an avoidance of desire for others' possessions. He explains that, conceptually, this teaching positions the desires of the Samin community within the members of themselves. Farming, or *gebyah macul*, is considered an appropriate source of livelihood, one that does not violate this ethic, particularly since the history of the Sedulur Sikep community is rooted in reflection of their ancestors and their positions as farmers. It may also be said that these rules and values were formulated to emphasize the Sedulur Sikep community's involvement in agriculture. Meanwhile, these principles are understood by Fauzanafi (2012) as a way of life that values individual autonomy, even as members are involved in complex exchanges and recognize the authority of their elders' knowledge (*parang pitakon*). This individual autonomy is also linked to their economic system, in which agriculture is idealized in the Religion of Adam (2012)<sup>4</sup>. How, then, are the relations between their understanding of their environment and movements to (re)recognize the above-discussed cultural identity?

## BECOMING TANI MLIGI: A SOURCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL (IN)SECURITY

This section attempts to examine why farming and agriculture are (considered) ideal by the Sedulur Sikep community, as realized by the contemporary environmental movement.

"Life must be *nyandang, pangan, tata gawuta sig dumunung, aja nganti susah lan bungah* meaning wearing clothes, eating,

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by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism (2004), p. 25. It should be noted that the government has expressed interest in revitalizing the life values implicit in these linguistic principles, as manifested first in its encyclopedia project and later in an article that narrated the community's simplicity in the face of economic and political change.

4 Further discussion of the Religion of Adam can be found in Djokosoewardi (1969), van der Kroef (1959) Muhaimin (2009), Suhanah (2011), Rosyid (2012, 2014), Asiah (2013), and Octaviani (2015).

and providing useful work (for oneself), without facing hardship or *bungah* (too much happiness)" said Warugono (not his real name), one elder active in the anti-cement movement. This statement reflects a common view among the Sedulur Sikep community regarding ideal life. "*Tata gawuta sig dumunung*" is understood as meaning a livelihood that "provides", that is rooted in and produces for oneself, and that does not disturb the livelihoods or possessions of others. This view guides believers to think relationally, to separate the economic aspects, philosophical aspects, and ideological aspects of community living and community dynamics.

It should be recognized that, though the Sedulur Sikep community was established as a form of resistance, present construction of the community's identity has become depoliticized. According to Amrih Widodo (1997), this has meant a transformation from a socio-political movement into a cultural-philosophical one. The Sedulur Sikep community, at first constructed around a farmer's movement, has been internalized as a way of life. This transformation has "repackaged" the Sedulur Sikep as a "traditional community", an indigenous people that pose no political threat. As written by M. Uzair (2005), the term "traditional community" was first used in Indonesia in the second half of the 1970s for the Isolated Traditional Community program formulated by Social Department of the Indonesian Republic. This program was intended to help "develop" isolated communities such as the Sedulur Sikep and implemented as part of President Soeharto's efforts to modernize all fields and aspects of life. In Java, the first organization for traditional communities was established in March 2003, the Paguyuban Masyarakat Adat Pulau Jawa (PAMA-PUJA; the Association of Traditional Communities of Java); the Samin community was one of the eighteen members of this association (Kurniawan 2003). Kurniawan writes that PAMA-PUJA was established as an umbrella organization for traditional communities that were struggling to promote their rights over their ancestral lands in the face of the

teak and other plantations throughout Java.

This historical situation has promoted the articulation of an identity rooted in close ties to the environment, as voiced by the anti-cement movements as well as the film *Samin vs Semen*. Over the course of field research into the community's system of agricultural production, it appeared that the Sedulur Sikep depend on two main aspects: the earth and the water. This dependence has shaped the mutualistic relation between the Sedulur Sikep community and its production space: its rice fields and natural irrigation. Reciprocal ties with the environment have been established because of the relations between the *tani mligi* and the natural resources supporting them. This reciprocity is realized in the communal perspectives and daily lives of the community, such as drinking. Before drinking water from a jug, members of the Sedulur Sikep community will always spill one or two drops of water onto the ground. Gugoh (not his real name), a local resident, explained that this is an expression of gratitude to the Earth, because they consider everything they use—shelter, water, food—to be a “gift of the earth”. This sense of gratitude and concern for the Earth is further manifested in their belief that they must live in harmony with the environment. The term “gift of the earth” itself shows the Sedulur Sikep community's perspective of the environment, one in which the Sedulur Sikep community “personify” nature by viewing it as more than a resource.

Members of the Sedulur Sikep community frequently drink water directly from earthenware jugs. This, too, illustrates an aspect of their social life, specifically their use of *srawung* to build a sense of togetherness. When speaking together, members of the Sedulur Sikep community will drink from the same jug, without pouring the water into glasses for each drinker. This reflects their egalitarian position with their fellow humans and with the environment.

Aside from establishing relations between the Sedulur Sikep and their environment, the *tani mligi* concept is also used to ensure stability within the family. The traditional agrarian lifestyle that has been

maintained by the Sedulur Sikep community has optimized productivity within the family unit. In the family, the father's role is preparing the land, including hoeing land for planting. The mother, meanwhile, takes care of the rice fields, albeit at a simpler level—weeding fields and planting seeds—because she is also required to handle domestic affairs such as housework, the children, and her husband. At a certain age, children are also expected to help their parents, with their roles divided based on their gender. Sons are expected to do manual labor such as gathering feed for their cattle, while daughters are expected to help their mothers with domestic work such as cleaning and cooking. Usually, all members of the family will focus on agricultural work during the harvest, because the harvest is very labor-intensive.

This clear division of roles within the family structure influences children's awareness of their responsibilities. This, in turn, increases their own cognitive abilities and promotes the maturity their parents expect of them. For instance, when playing, Sedulur Sikep children will keep track of time and recognize when they must return home, even without being reminded by their parents. This stems from their awareness of their own responsibilities, such as taking care of their younger siblings or drying rice. Margaret Mead explains this phenomenon as part of *learning culture* or *teaching culture*, in which education is realized through practice. Within the community, education is not a practice separate from culture. Rather, it is the very process of observing, understanding, and practicing culture (in Koenjaraningrat 1990, p. 230).

It can be seen here that the family serves to pass ancestral values and ideals from generation to generation. The Sedulur Sikep community being rooted in and oriented towards the ideal of *tani mligi* has shaped the local farming practices, which still exhibit a continuity with those of the community's ancestors. This can be seen, for example, in the basic rules followed, such as the Sedulur Sikep being forbidden from attending school or selling goods. School and trade

are both thought to have the potential to mislead them, to make them desire things that are beyond their abilities, seek material wealth, and abandon their ancestral teachings. There is thus a constellation of interlinked cultural aspects such as politics and religion. It has produced a substantive body of rules, including those linked to the community's economic activities. Farming, particularly self-sufficient farming, is considered to better fit the community's values.

## SEDULUR SIKEP AND INDUSTRIAL CHALLENGES

Aside from facing the influences of modern lifestyles, Sedulur Sikep has also worked to face the challenges of the industrial economy represented by the cement factory in the Kendeng Mountain Range, where the Sedulur Sikep community of Pati resides. The Kendeng Mountain Range is a karst mountain range that stretches from Taban in Kudus to Tuban. Here, the beliefs of the Sedulur Sikep and their environment have faced a new situation. The presence of the cement industry has forced the community to reflect on its teachings and how the community should position itself in the face of real-world problems. For some of the Sedulur Sikep in Pati, the struggle against karst exploitation is one of life or death. They equate the cement industry with *londo ireng*, with "black colonialists", a new form of imperialism in which they are subjugated by fellow Indonesian citizens who exploit the capitalist system for their own benefit. Interestingly, their use of the term *londo ireng* seems to be used to justify their movement by framing it as a struggle against colonialism. This equation of the cement industry with local colonialism has not, however, been sufficient to protect the movement against charges of misusing the teachings of Sedulur Sikep.

Historically, the Sedulur Sikep resisted Dutch colonialism by acting passive, apathetic, and uncooperative. Meanwhile, the opposition 'led' by the siblings from Sukolilo is embodied in the civil society organization Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan

Kendeng (Network of Persons with a Concern for the Kendeng Mountain Range, JM-PPK). Established in 2008, JM-PPK consists of persons from Sukolilo, Kayen, Tambakromo, and the surrounding area, all of whom have rejected the cement industry's presence at the foot of the Kendeng Mountain Range. Since 2015, JM-PPK has expanded its network into Rembang. This can be attributed to the shared fates of the anti-cement movement in Pati and in Rembang, where residents were demanding that permit for a Semen Indonesia factory in South Kendeng be revoked. As such, JM-PPK has integrated groups from various areas that promote ecological responsibility.

## Agency and Authoritative Movement

It should be understood that JM-PPK's establishment was not solely initiated by residents owning anti-cement position. Gunretno explained that the idea to establish a civil society organization was initiated by several non-profit organizations that had been involved with the movement since 2007, including SHEEP Pati, the Legal Aid Center of Semarang, WALHI, and Desantara. This was hoped to provide more formal and structural guidance in their resistance, as well as more actions that were more diplomatic and conflict resolution approaches that follow legal procedures. As such, in this case (and in similar other ones) non-profit organizations have taken a role in advocacy and citizen education, promoting a greater understanding of the law and legislation than previously found in the villages. In the ten years of the residents' struggle, they have interacted and established networks with activists, academics, researchers, and societal leaders who have voiced their opposition to the cement factory. This has indirectly influenced and colored members' opposition. One example is the *wayang kulit* (shadow puppet) show by the nationally renowned *dalang* (puppet master) Ki Manteb Sudarsono, who performed *Semar Gugat* in 2007<sup>5</sup>.

5 This story tells of the mythical figures Semar, Kresno, and Wisanggeni, who protest the near-destruction of the natural world in the conflict between the gods and dosomuka who possessed

The process of interactions with and distribution of knowledge by institutions, activists, and academics provided the agency necessary to promote the establishment of a meaningful and prestigious movement. For example, members' opposition is frequently voiced through demonstrations. These actions, however, do not include orations, tire burning, or expressions of outrage. Within the movement, the term *demonstration* itself is not used; they instead use the term *action*. First and foremost, they seek discussion with an audience. They carry with them crops from the Kendeng area, as well as the bamboo hats, symbolic of farmers. They also carry jugs, which are used to represent the Kendeng Mountain Range. As Gunarti explains, "*Ibarate Kendeng iku kendi, isine banyu. Neg kendine pecah, banyune kan yo tumpah.*" (Kendeng is like a jug, filled with water. If the jug shatters, the water will spill.)

In several actions, some members of the Sedulur Sikep community did not recite *laillahailallah* (the Shahada) with members of the anti-cement movement, who are mostly Muslim. Gunretno explained that, for them, reciting *laillahailallah* is no longer about affirming their identities as Muslims, but rather intended to build community integration and solemnity. Here, it can be seen that members of the Sedulur Sikep community who think of themselves as fighting against the planned cement factory in Kendeng are unhesitant in "re-shaping" their community values and teachings to promote a "greater good" (i.e. unity within the anti-cement movement). Although JM-PPK and Sedulur Sikep cannot be considered the same, the culturally based and moderate resistance of JM-PPK has been widely recognized as being influenced by the philosophy of the Sedulur Sikep members involved. JM-PPK itself can be a 'fresh wind' for movements in Indonesia that resist the dominance of extractive industries. The struggle of the Sedulur Sikep community is considered a manifestation of a local idiom, "*Aja bobog-*

human bodies. This story was adapted to frame the conflict as being about the building of a cement factory.

*bobog neg wis kadung babag, nanging siyap bobok sakdurunge babag.*" (Don't use *bobog* (cold power) if it's damaged. Use it when it's good.)

### Frictions within the Movement

In the almost nine years since JM-PPK's establishment, it has not only faced challenges from the cement industry. Internal challenges within JM-PPK have been no less difficult. The role of different agencies in the development of the anti-cement movement has been discussed. Non-profit agencies and NGOs have played a particularly important role in uniting residents, though some have also sowed discord and fragmented this unity.

The "fuse" of this fragmentation was first lit by an activist with NGO A through comments at a meeting meant to formulate a work program and provide guidance to JM-PPK.<sup>6</sup> According to Gunretno, these comments seemed to imply that JM-PPK was "selling" its programs to the NGOs. Gunretno, who was then serving as chair, was unwilling to accept this statement, and began limiting JM-PPK's relations with NGOs to reduce the potential for conflicts of interest. Likewise, NGO A reduced the intensity of its guidance and assistance.

In 2012, the unity of JM-PPK was again tested by some members who disapproved of the dominance of Sedulur Sikep in media coverage of the movement. At the time, JM-PPK was in the midst of shifting its focus to the planned construction of the Indocement Factory in Kayen and Tambakromo, and some residents of these villages disapproved of the popularity of Sedulur Sikep in the media despite the community not being affected by the planned PT Indocement factory. Furthermore, the form of resistance used by JM-PPK was considered by some to be "too polite" and too ineffective in voicing their objections. As such, that year eighteen of the twenty-two administrators decided to leave JM-PPK and establish their own or-

<sup>6</sup> The names of the activist and NGO in question have been anonymized to protect the good names of the involved parties, as well as to reduce the potential for conflict between both sides.

ganization, the Lingkar Kendeng Sejahtera (LIKRA; Circle for a Prosperous Kendeng). After its establishment, LIKRA was guided by NGO A, which had long withdrawn from JM-PPK. LIKRA became known for being louder and stronger in its anti-cement actions, which included the forced closure of the Northern Coastal Road for seven hours following the 2016 Eid al-Fitr holiday.<sup>7</sup>

Gunretno views NGOs' influences and structural penetration as making the movement more vulnerable to conflicts of interest. As such, presently JM-PPK has reformed its organizational structure. The positions of chair and administrator have been eliminated. Likewise, contracts with NGOs have been severed to remove the potential for the sale and purchase of proposals. Not all NGOs have left JM-PPK. Several organizations, such as the Semarang Legal Aid Center, continue to provide the organization with guidance during court trials and the preparation of depositions. Likewise, JM-PPK continues to function as a vessel for aspirations, discussions, and anti-cement actions. However, the previously constructed structural and political attributes have been abandoned. Nonetheless, the dominance of Gunretno and Gunarti is still apparent within the JM-PPK movement. This is inevitable, as both (particularly Gunretno) served as initiators of the movement and as mediators between members and the government. Consequently, their identity as members of Sedulur Sikep will remain part of the media coverage of residents' conflict with the cement industry, and this coverage will continue to cause friction both within JM-PPK and within the Sedulur Sikep community.

### Internal Contradictions

The rise of the Sedulur Sikep discourse in the opposition to the cement industry (as

a form of modern colonialism) cannot be separated from the broader emergence of a discourse on indigeneity and indigenous movements. As explained by Colechester and Lohmann, the rise of these movements can be considered part of the revitalization of an "indigenous" spirit as part of a long tradition of sub-national anti-imperialist struggles (Colechester 1985). It can be said that, by referring to past struggles, members of the Sedulur Sikep community have tried to improvise and realize the same goals as their ancestors: freedom for living. Unfortunately, this approach has not been accepted by all members of the community.

Some members of the Sedulur Sikep community have considered their fellow community members' opposition to be a violation of their ancestral teachings. As said by *Mbah Sundoyo*, *Jrengki, srei, lan ngganggu tata gawutane wong liyo* ([they] take what is not theirs and disturb the work of others). They consider it inappropriate for Sedulur Sikep members to interfere with the planned cement factory or to intervene in the affairs of Kayen and Tambakromo villages. The very voicing of opposition to the factory and of the importance of conserving Kendeng is considered *jrengki* (the most severe negative act), because the Kendeng Mountain Range does not belong to any individual member of the community.

*Mbah Sundoyo*, one member of the puritan group, explained that he considered demonstrations and other forms of protest to be nothing but *mbenerke ukara*, or justifying the issue. As such, he questions the function of these protests: "*luru bener apa nggo entuk bener?*" (Seeking the truth, or seeking recognition of their truth?). As such, for him and some other members of the Sedulur Sikep community, the anti-cement group cannot be considered *sikep asli* (original or true), as shown more clearly below:

*"Sikep asli atau sikep lugu akan senantiasa gladyan karo sanak kadang, karo Mbah-Mbah, putra-putrane, dipenging nglakoni jrengki, dipenging ngumbar tumindhak, ngumbar suwara, ora sekolah,*

7 At the end of 2012, LIKRA formed an alliance with several other organizations, including Gerakan Masyarakat Ngerang (Gamorang, the Ngerang People's Movement) and Keben Village. This alliance was called Ahli Waris Kendeng (the Heirs of Kendeng). JM-PPK was also asked to join, but refused to do so owing to its disapproval of the tactics used (JM-PPK rejects the blocking of traffic and damaging of property during protests).

*ora demo.*" (*Sikep asli* or *sikep lugu* will lead to harmony with all kin, our elders, children. We may not be *jrengki*, call and shout out... even if we don't go to school, we mustn't demonstrate.) – Parwadi (not his real name)

This underscores the view that voicing the potential risks and pollution of the cement factories is inappropriate, as it is considered taboo to speak of things that have not occurred yet. As such, the anti-cement movement is viewed as "overstepping" the bounds of truth by speaking of things that have yet to pass (*umbar suwara*).

However, it must be understood that the Sedulur Sikep in Pati are not simply divided into two groups based on their views of the economy and the cement industry. These categories are only the dominant ones prominent in the current situation with the cement industry. There are still many members of the community who prefer to remain silent, be it regarding the cement industry or regarding popular perceptions of the group. Many of them reject the cement factory for ecological reasons, citing pollution, but they do not voice this opposition during demonstrations or other activities. Because the factory will not be built on their land, they feel as though they have no right to become involved. They consider this approach to be the most suited to the teachings of their ancestors: remaining silent and indifferent.

The crisis regarding how members of the Sedulur Sikep community should act can be traced to the death of a senior figure in the Pati, *Mbah Tarno*, in 2009. After his death, the Sedulur Sikep community lacked a figure who could guide them in facing new situations. The various strategies used by the Sedulur Sikep community are a consequence of their attempts to interpret and continue their ancestral teachings (*nutukake babate mbah sepuh*), which are constructed within a loose framework.

## WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

In many cases of environmental exploitati-

on, women have been considered to take a special role in holistic approaches (Candib 1995). In *Gender and the Environment: A Feminist Political Ecology Perspective* by Dianne Rocheleau et al. (1996), it is explained that different gendered experiences, interests, and responsibilities in the face of nature are not biological myth, but rather produced by social interpretations of biological relations and social constructions of gender issues. These differences are consequences of cultural constructions and the spatial conditions of the community. As such, this discussion will examine the experience of 'becoming a woman' and its relation with the current ecological contestation in Kendeng.

Within the family structure, women's responsibilities are centered around the fulfillment of fundamental needs such as food, clothing, and healthcare, all of which are closely linked to water and other natural resources (Moser 1989). This has promoted greater dependency on nature among women as well as more personal relations between women and nature.

Gunarti, one woman member of Sedulur Sikep, has become a central figure in the anti-cement movement. Using the threat of damage to the biota and water in Kendeng, Gunarti has drawn residents' involvement in promoting the reexamination of the environmental impact of karst mining. Furthermore, to ensure unity among anti-mining groups, Gunarti has established a women's group called Simbar Wareh. Based on environmental concerns, Simbar Wareh has offered space for women in JM-PPK. Gunarti has also established an *arisan* group in her village to support the spread of information on cement production as well as the dissemination of finances for action, including in Curug and Kedumulyo villages, Sukolilo Subdistrict, Pati.

Unconsciously, Gunarti has established an identity for herself, one rooted in what Seager (1993) terms feminist environmentalism. This concern for the environment, based on her reflections on everyday experiences and responsibilities, has been shared among younger generations and re-

sulted in an alternative education system based on the principles of Sedulur Sikep, Javanese culture, and sustainability. This system has been implemented through a study group known as Wiji Kendeng, where students are taught the Javanese script and the Indonesian language, as well as mathematics and *gamelan*, by an ally from Purwodadi. This is part of an effort to ensure that children internalize ancestral values and local wisdom, infused with a spirit of conservation to ensure the sustainability of Samin Surosentiko's teachings and the Kendeng Mountain Range, the source of their livelihood.

Gunarti and her take on Sedulur Sikep's teachings has also been fundamental in the image development of the nine "Kartini Kendeng" (Kartinis of Kendeng), women farmers who have become icons of Pati and Rembang residents' resistance to the cement industries in the Kendeng Mountain Range. The nine Kartini Kendeng, who come from Pati, Rembang, and Grobogan, voiced their opposition to cement production on 18 April 2016 by encasing their feet in cement and sitting in front of the Presidential Palace in Jakarta. Although these nine women are not part of Sedulur Sikep, they wore the black kebayas expected of women members. One of the women from Rembang, Sukinah, explained that they wanted to present themselves as Gunarti, simple yet strong, easily recognized by her black kebaya. Gunarti and Hartati (the wife of Gunretno) explained that the Kartini Kendeng were inspired by the women's emancipation figure, Kartini. The Kartini Kendeng have likewise been identified with the rise of women's involvement in promoting conservation in Kendeng.

Aside from Gunarti, women in general occupy a special position in the anti-cement movement. This can be seen in one of the songs frequently used by JM-PPK in its actions, a song inspired by Sedulur Sikep's local wisdom and personification of the land as a mother who creates new life through reproduction. This is particularly marked in the line "*Ibu Bumi wis maringi, Ibu Bumi dilarani, Ibu Bumi kang ngadili.*" (Mother

Earth has given, Mother Earth has been hurt, Mother Earth will pass judgment).

This concept of nature, as represented by the Kendeng Mountain Range, has been symbolized through the *Ibu Pertiwi* (Motherland) icon always voiced in each action. Anti-cement actions, which tend to involve prayers and theatrical acts, have been mostly perpetrated by women, as symbols of mother earth. However, it should be understood that women's involvement in these struggles should be understood not in terms of Sedulur Sikep's teachings, but rather as a feminist breakthrough that has developed organically.

The above overview indicates how specific understandings of "fragility" and "threat" have been elaborated upon in addressing issues related to cement. This discourse of "threat" also includes threats to the livelihoods and activities of women. This discourse has been enriched and promoted by the contributions of various actors in the Indonesian feminist movement, as spearheaded by *Jurnal Perempuan* and various artists.

These women have used their prominence in academic and media narratives to continue the struggle after the Sedulur Sikep discourse, so long dominant in the anti-cement movement, lost its effectiveness in drawing public support. The context of local vulnerability, once highly prominent now weakens the anti-cement movement, particularly owing to puritan groups' hesitance to use Sedulur Sikep in their anti-cement activities. The women's discourse, manifested in theatrical actions—particularly the use of cement "stocks"—has allowed the Kartini Kendeng to become new icons of the anti-cement movement.

This shift from Sedulur Sikep to the ideas of the Kartini Kendeng has been realized in efforts to increase community awareness of the potential for environmental degradation in Kendeng. On the one hand, Sedulur Sikep has represented locality as well as threats to the socio-cultural aspects of the indigenous community. On the other hand, the Kartini Kendeng, who originate from the foothills of Kendeng (i.e. Pati, Rembang, and Grobogan), have shown a

more united concern, one centered around the environmental degradation that may be caused by the two large cement factories at the foot of the Kendeng Mountain Range.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of *tani mligi* (self-empowered agriculture) is part of the communal identity behind the socio-economic movement against cement in northern Central Java. This has led to different understandings emerging organically regarding their identity as farmers and reflecting various changes that have occurred, including in the political, social, and economic spheres. This process has been important in guiding Sedulur Sikep in positioning itself in regards to the issues developing around it, particularly as related to cement. However, in this case, the reflection process has not been communal, but atomic. This is supported by interactions and exchanges of knowledge between Sedulur Sikep and other agencies, including NGOs, activists, academics, and societal leaders. Gunretno and Gunarti, prominent figureheads of the citizen movement, have established environmental perspectives based not only on fundamental community values, but also on the overlapping of those values with the perspectives of the agencies interacting with them, most of which have emphasized potential environmental degradation and damage to the land and water.

For Sedulur Sikep, as farmers, the land and water function not only as sources of production, but also as spaces for constructing their historical identities. The specific identity attributes of “farmer” and “follower of the *Sikep* local wisdom” that have been voiced by the movement have implications for internal contradictions among the Sedulur Sikep themselves. Sedulur Sikep has been split into two major groups based on the strategies used: groups may become puritan and ‘traditional’ by preserving the purity of their teachings and their ancestral values, or they may show a *sikep tolak* by gracefully using their customs to promote broader interests—in this case, the discourse on preserving the Kendeng area. These

differences in strategy can be understood as a manifestation of multi-interpretability in efforts to realize an ancestral wisdom (*nutu-kake babate mbah sepuh*) that has not been codified through clear rules.

Furthermore, cement production has been considered by environmental and feminist activists to have the potential to damage the Kendeng Mountain Range, a constructed narrative that frames the area as lacking security and certainty in the face of industrial activity. Through their relations with these various agencies, Gunretno and Gunarti have constructed various spaces to facilitate residents’ struggles, including JM-PPK and *Simbar Wareh*. An alternative education system, based on local wisdom and rooted in sustainability and environmentalism, has been developed using a feminine identity when the social movement’s original “Sedulur Sikep identity” became too problematic. These are several interesting points for further consideration, particularly within the context of the ethnicity-based movements that have a long history of involvement in issues facing society.

This momentum may become a turning point in the process through which community values and teachings are incubated to create a new identity for Sedulur Sikep, one that may be rooted more in efforts to support environmental sustainability or may be rooted in stagnation caused by puritan dominance maintained through customary wisdom. This process would be interesting for further research as an example of conflict in a customary Indonesian community, as well as an example of regional social movements’ use of identity—as voiced, addressed, supported, assisted, and used by agencies—in regards to resource redistribution.

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