



Agrarian Folklore as Local Wisdom and Ecological Resilience: An Ethnoliterary Investigation of the Sedulur Sikep Community of Central Java, Indonesia

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Abstract

Folklore is the soul of Indigenous communities. Indonesia as a third-world country consisting of 17,504 islands has diverse ethnic communities and ancestral teachings in the form of folklore. The *Sedulur Sikep* or Samin community, for instance, is the very epitome of Indigenous groups in the Blora and Pati regencies, Central Java, Indonesia. The name derives from the founder, a native Javanese figure named Samin Surosentika who lived in the 1800s in the era of Dutch colonialism in Java. Samin people are famous for their honesty and unpretentiousness in dealing with material affairs. In the modern age, the communities still implement these values in their daily life in the midst of overwhelming global cultural impacts of consumerism and materialism. Considering the importance of agrarian life for ecological resilience, this article briefly discusses the community's inherited teachings as local wisdom and its impacts on raising ecological resilience. The moral ethics practiced by the Sedulur Sikep community reflect their ecological awareness. They, for instance, express this legacy through their sustainable practices in tilling ricefields and consuming material goods judiciously rather than excessively.

Keywords

agrarian life, consumerism, ecological resilience, folklore, Indonesia, Java, local wisdom, Sedulur Sikep community

Introduction

Local tradition is the epitome of ecological resilience. As an archipelago that has thousands of islands, Indonesia consists of diverse ethnic groups. The number of islands in Indonesia is at least 17,000. All islands and regions have their own cultural traits. For instance, in Madura, East Java, local villagers annually conduct “a cow race.” It turns out that other regions in Indonesia such as West Sumatra also have the same event called *Pacu Jawi* (Javanese Racing). This race also uses water buffaloes, which Kangean Maduranese call *mamajir*; furthermore, Balinese people call this *makepung*. Moreover, local people in West Sumbawa similarly conduct this race with water buffalo (Sumintarsih, et. al. 3–4). Another local tradition that becomes local wisdom as well as folklore of a local region is called *tradisi keduk beji* (Keduk Beji tradition) in Tawun Village, Ngawi Regency, East Java province. Local villagers have celebrated this tradition for generations. This tradition principally aims to keep and protect Rile/Jile – An International Peer

natural water in *Sendang Tawun* (Tawun Small Pond) in order that the pond and water remain sustainable for next generations. The villagers conduct a ritual in keeping and protecting the pond by, for instance, draining off the water every year to make it always clean. They usually take water from the pond for their daily necessities. In observing this tradition, they practice several values including respect for water and the natural environment, loyalty, sense of togetherness and sense of care about their natural environment (Sumintarsih et. al. 137–145). The local community's care for the water source of the region also corresponds with that of Sedulur Sikep community in Sukolilo Village, Pati Regency, Central Java. In this region, the villagers devoutly cherish the Kendeng Mountain ranges that contain karst mineral as repositories of ground water (Adji 1–15; Pratiwi 42–49). For the villagers, the ground water from the mountain is the fundamental source for irrigating their ricefields and farms (Gunretno). Another value and a kind of traditional folklore of most villagers in Java is the spirit of *gotong royong* (cooperative work) in working together for any event in their villages and in cultivating the ricefields. This value is based on the fact that humans are social beings who live with each other and with the natural environment. One example of this activity is called *ruweg* or “common interests” (for group or community) and also village clean-up (Sumintarsih et. al. 267–270). But in today's time when digital technology via smartphones has prevailed among villagers, this value of *gotong royong* seems to be declining. This means that each individual should be aware that traditional and ancestral values such as *gotong royong* and simplicity somehow are irreplaceable and inseparable from their daily lives even with the prevailing influences of advanced technology.

Oral literature is a local tradition that cherishes ecological values. Oral tradition as cultural heritage belongs to Indigenous communities globally (Dundes 1–3; Endraswara 2–3). One notable example of this oral literature is folklore, which includes myths, legends, folktales, jokes, proverbs, riddles, chants, charms, blessings, curses, oaths, retorts, taunts and other folk aspects (Dundes 3). Referring to the folklore theory of the American folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand, Danandjaja divided folklore in Indonesia into three major groups: verbal folklore, partly verbal folklore and non-verbal folklore. Verbal folklore is purely verbal (oral) including folk speech such as dialects, traditional and aristocratic appellations, proverbs, maxims, riddles, folk poems, myths, legends, folktales and folk songs. Partly verbal folklore consists a mix of verbal and non-verbal expressions. For instance, folk beliefs that modern people call superstitions consist of verbal statements and bodily gestures that villagers believe to have supernatural meanings. Other forms include folk games, folk theatrical performances, folk

dances, customs, ceremonies and feasts. Non-verbal folklore contains two kinds: material and non-material works. The material works include folk architecture (the shape of houses, paddy mills, handicrafts, traditional jewellery, folk foods and beverages, traditional medicine). The non-material works incorporate traditional gestures, alarm signals and folk music (Danandjaja 21–22). The Samin or Sedulur Sikep community as the only living and enduring Indigenous communities in the Blora and Pati regencies of Central Java live by believing in these verbal proverbs and teachings inherited from their ancestors (Setiono 50, 58; Wirya 87–91).

This article discusses the agrarian life of the Sedulur Sikep communities in Blora and Pati and their ancestral beliefs as oral tradition. The title uses the term *ethnoliterary* since this brief research is focused on the eco-friendly behavior and manner of Sedulur Sikep as an Indigenous community in cultivating and tilling their ricefields. Their eco-consciousness manner is derived from the oral tradition they learned from their ancestors. This oral tradition consists of moral ethics and teachings that the communities observe and live with in their daily activities. This verbal tradition then serves as “unwritten literature” that gives them values to live in the material world. The two aspects this article addresses are, first, the inherited folkloric aspects of Sedulur Sikep communities that they believe in and practice in their daily lives as members of the Indigenous community in Blora and Pati; second, the Saminist ancestral teachings and agrarian way of life as folk traditions that forge ecological resilience. The discussion of Saminist folkloric aspects is focused on their farming, its local wisdom and its impacts on building ecological resilience.

Ethnography

The term *ethnography* comes from the Greek words *ethnos* that means ‘nation’ and *graphia* or ‘writing’. So the word denotes writing about nation. This also suggests a descriptive science and account of a community or culture (Hammersley and Atkinson 1). Ethnography often serves as a field of research and a research method, specifically ethnographic research and ethnographic methods. Ethnography cannot function by itself but in collaboration with other theoretical ideas including “anthropological and sociological functionalism, philosophical pragmatism, Marxism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, structuralism, feminism, post-structuralism and postmodernism” (ibid. 2). As a research method, ethnography requires a researcher to participate in people’s daily lives for an extended time, to observe them and listen to what they say about their lives. The researcher then asks questions in formal interviews, and collects documents and artifacts that are related to the issues focused on (ibid. 3). Ethnographic

research in general studies people's actions and accounts on a daily basis. Furthermore, an ethnographic researcher collects data from various sources, including documentary evidence such as observation and interviews. This ethnographic research is usually focused on a small-scale setting or group of people, and the analysis will consider the interpretation of the meanings, functions and consequences of human actions upon local and wider contexts (ibid. 3). The significance of the term *ethnography* in this article is that the discussion will deal with the oral literature of the community as a folkloric aspect and its ecological values.

Folklore

The term *folklore* consists of two words: *folk* denoting 'people' and *lore* or 'story' (Dundes 1). The term *folk* refers to any group of people who share at least one common characteristic (ibid. 2). The term denotes a collection of works that people pass from one generation to another in a verbal rather than written form, and is often called oral tradition (ibid. 1). But certainly not all orally transmitted information and knowledge of human daily life exemplifies folklore. For instance, instructions about how to drive a car or how to cook a pancake do not represent folklore. Therefore, in some cases there is no clear-cut distinction between which work is folklore and which is not. Even more so, some forms of folklore exist in a written rather than oral form, such as autograph-book verse, book marginalia, epitaphs and traditional letters (e.g., chain letters) (ibid. 1). Another form of folklore expressed in body movements such as dances, games and gestures also poses a more flexible concept that falls between the categories of folklore and non-folklore (ibid. 2). Therefore, this term suggests a body of work that an individual transmits to another by word or act or by indirect ways when an artist copies a certain traditional design from other artists with whom he or she has personal contact (ibid. 2). Folklore is associated with the work of oppressed people, farmers and working class people rather than the aristocracy (Propp 5). Folklore also corresponds to a body of work by people in a certain area. For instance, when a French scholar studies French songs, it is called folklore; but, when he or she studies Japanese songs, it is called ethnography (ibid. 5). Folklore then is associated with verbal and poetic products since poetry also corresponds with music (ibid. 4). Folklore has an affinity with literature (such as novels and poetry) in that both are products of verbal art. But they, at the same time, differ in morphologies and structures (ibid. 6). Folklore is the first and original form of literature in which it is rendered in an oral form, such as the epic of *Beowulf* and some popular songs and ballads of the Middle Ages (Guth). As time passed and people developed their cultures, they transcribed their oral expressions into a written form that

was then known as literature. One major difference between both is that a work of folklore does not typically have an author, but a work of literature does (Propp 6). Another difference is that a literary work tends to be immutable, while a work of folklore keeps changing. It is because the former uses a written medium, while the latter an oral or spoken one. A work of folklore has two agents, performer and listener. What makes it always change over time is that the performers “do not repeat their texts literally but introduce changes into them” (ibid. 7–8). Meanwhile, a literary work once it arises, does not change. The readers change in terms of reading and interpreting the work differently throughout the historical periods (ibid. 7). Folklore also correlates with ethnography since the former attempts to reveal the economic and social life of a certain community (ibid. 9). Folklore is the originator and prehistory of literature; the latter is born of the former (ibid. 14). Ethnography encompasses folklore as well as literature since both depict the social and cultural lives of a community in a certain era.

Sedulur Sikep Community

The name “Sedulur Sikep” is an euphemism for the word “Samin” in which the latter refers to a name of a local villager, Samin Surosentika who was born in 1859 in Plosok village, Kedirene, Blora Regency, Central Java. His real name was Raden Kohar but he then took the name Samin since the name suggested egalitarianism. He was the second of five sons. In his village, Samin was equated to Bimasena (Werkudoro), the second son of five sons known as Pandawa in Javanese puppet mythology. In about 1890 when he was 31 years old, Samin began to spread his teachings; his followers were local villagers. Through his practice of *tapabrata* (meditation), he received the spiritual enlightenment of Kalimosodo Scripture. Since then, his followers increased, even from other villages (Setiono 50). In the early 19th century, Samin and his followers were known as people who bravely resisted Dutch colonizers in Java. The Saminists did not express their resistance through physical violence, but through their refusal to donate their rice harvest, to pay taxes and to follow other Dutch-originated social orders. Therefore, they made their own orders and customs such as those in marriage and death. They conducted marriages in a mosque, but they refused to pay dowries since they observe “adam religion” (non-Muslim). This spiritual faith respects any religion as good. Their philosophy for instance says “Inside any religion there is a sense and this sense is manifest in holy water. This water is the genuine sense” (ibid. 52–53). Yet, the Samin people do not like being called *Samin* since the name connotes stigmas of those who refuse to pay taxes, who often resist and deny social rules, who often steal teak wood, and whose marriages do not follow Islamic strictures.

They prefer being called *Wong Sikep* (*Sikep* Fellows) or *Sedulur Sikep* (*Sikep* Kinfolks). The Javanese word *sikep* in general means “to embrace,” but for the Samin community, the word has different meanings. First, it means the origin of humans; second, it refers to Javanese spiritual learning; third, it means to forage (ibid. 51). Several typical forms of identity that characterize the community are their language, clothing and family kinship. The people speak simple and straightforward Javanese in their daily talk. They do not divide their Javanese into three levels such as refined/high-level Javanese, middle Javanese and colloquial Javanese. The male Samin people wear black garments and a head-dress called a *sikep*, while the female members wear a Javanese outfit called a *kebaya*. In their household, they used a snack container called a *kreng*, a rice container made of bamboo called a *wakul*, a wooden rice scoop called an *entong*, a drinking water pitcher called a *kendhi*, and earthenware cup and saucer called a *cangkir* and *lepek*, and wooden and bamboo furniture. In terms of family kinship, they consist of a nuclear family that they call a *somah* (household). Relatives of father and mother called *kindred* will gather when one member has events. Deriving from ancestral values, each individual regards another as his or her kin. The household functions as the agent that binds each activity performed by an individual. Their kinship is bilateral and takes male and female descendants into account. Thus, a kinship of a father does not differ from that of a mother but indicates the non-hierarchical family relation of the community (Setiono 54–55).

Ancestral Teachings as the Ethnic Folklore of the Sedulur Sikep Community

Being a folkloristic community means to rely on ancestral traditions. The Sedulur Sikep community has lived from ricefield farming for generations. Since the era of the ancestor, Samin Surosentiko, to the present generation of Sedulur Sikep, the community has recognized the significance of ricefields so that they continuously take care of them. They express this farming ethos in life principles they inherit from their ancestor. For instance, they believe that one can survive in life only by hardwork; and one of these works is farming—“*tiyang pengin urip, gesang kedah toto nggrantah, macul tandur kangge nyekapi keluargane*” (Setiono 58) (“whoever wants to live has to work hard by hoeing the soil to fulfill his family necessities”). This paddy-based livelihood correlates with their care for the Earth as the place to protect and respect since the Earth is nothing else but mother—“*Yen ono anak sing ora hormat karo bumi niku, teng riki mboten onten manut paham kulo, sebab kalih biyunge kedah sae lan kedah ngajeni*” (Setiono 58) (“If there is someone who does not cherish the earth or land, there is nobody like this in our community since we are aware that we have to respect our mother”). In

my interviews with three leading figures of the community in three different areas of Blora and Pati, they said that growing rice and cultivating the land have supplied the livelihood of the communities for generations. The leading figures named Mbah Lasiyo (the word *mbah* means *grandfather* but it also suggests a senior person in the community) in Klopodhuwur Village, Blora; Mbah Pramugi Prawiro Widjojo in Dukuh Blimbings, Sambongrejo Village in Blora; Gunretno (a middle-aged figure and an environmental activist of the Sedulur Sikep community in Kendeng Mountain ranges) in Sukolilo Village, Pati epitomize the Indigenous people who still preserve the ecocentric and folkloristic way of life amidst burgeoning global consumerist influences (Noertjahyo; Wirya; interviews with the researcher on March 15 and 22, 2019; and on July 31, 2020) (Figures 1–4).



Figure 1. Mbah Lasiyo, Sedulur Sikep Klopodhuwur Village, Blora Regency, doc. by Bambang Iss Wirya.



Figure 2. Mbah Pramugi (center) and His Kin, Sedulur Sikep, Sambongrejo Village, Blora Regency, doc. by Bambang Iss Wirya.



Figure 3. Gunretno, His Wife, and Their Grandson. Sedulur Sikep, Sukolilo Village, Pati Regency, doc. by Bambang Iss Wirya.



Figure 4. A Gathering of Sedulur Sikep Villagers, Sambongrejo Village, Blora Regency, doc. by Bambang Iss Wirya.

Natural objects are spiritual teachers for the community. They sustain values they inherit from their ancestor in keeping a living harmony with the natural environment. One example of the Sedulur Sikep value on farming as their livelihood is—“whoever wants to live has to work

hard by hoeing to fulfill his family necessities" (Setiono 58). This natural-based livelihood also tallies with a sufficiency principle in consuming food and other daily goods—"Nedha niku nggih sacekape kanggene kula ngoten, wong ngge nedha salawase nggih kedah di atos-atos kersane cekap" (ibid. 58) ("Eating should be sufficient in order that we can eat for later periods"). They are aware of protecting their natural environment since they believe that natural resources will exist or decline depending on human deeds toward the environment (ibid. 58). The ways they perceive and interact with the natural environment further exemplify another traditional form of ecological awareness since this belief was derived from their ancestor, Samin Surosentika. These verbal teachings consist of eight items called in Sanskrit *Hasta Brata*. The word *hasta* means eight and includes eight elements of the natural environment, namely *surya* (the sun), *candra* (the moon), *himando* (clouds), *bumi* (the earth), *kartika* (stars), *geni* (fire), *angin* (wind) and *banyu* (water). Moreover, the word *brata* means manner or self-control (Ardiansyah). *Surya* or the sun means to be able to give light to all phenomena in the world. This proverb means that whoever becomes a village or country leader, he or she has to act like the sun in terms of not discriminating against ethnic groups, customs or religion since all these have the same rights and duties. *Candra* or the moon means to have abilities to see, to show dignity, to soothe and to give light in the dark. *Kartika* or stars are metaphors for one's sincere intention to help others physically and morally. *Himando* or "cloudy" means that a leader should act justly without differentiating one individual's social and educational background from another's. *Bumi* or the earth means the soil that has qualities of burdening and being burdened. The latter means that a mountain or the ground never complains. Although corn seeds fall on the ground, corn plants will grow. This means that we have to act and behave honestly without any fraudulent acts. Therefore, whoever acts as a leader must be free of corruption. *Geni* or fire literally has destroying traits. But it could also suggest constructive qualities. A leader should have this quality, which means to have spirit and enthusiasm like fire. *Banyu* or water connotes life. This gives living beings prosperity and happiness. A leader should act and behave like water that gives life to others. *Angin* or "wind" means that a leader should be able to live in any circumstances with his people (Wirya 114–118). Inheriting the values of their ancestor, Samin Surosentika, who once rejected education during the Dutch colonial period, the recent descendants of Sedulur Sikep community especially those who live in Sukolilo Village, Pati Regency do not have an interest in formal education either (Gunarti; Gunretno). Most of the families do not send their children to formal schools. The parents teach their children to read and to write at home. They have a belief that formal education does not always bring

goodness since many educated people often abuse their intellectual abilities to commit crimes and deceive (Mardikantoro 244–245; Wirya 70–71). These natural objects and the ancestor's teachings become the social and moral pillars of the community to fortify them from the present burgeoning consumerism and globalization through, for example, the digital devices that the members own.

Folkloric Traditional Values as Ecological Praxis

Sedulur Sikep communities in Blora and Pati are eco-oriented people. They believe in the need for caring and conserving the natural environment including nonhuman animals and vegetation. The natural resources are the source of life that give them food, clothing and livelihood so that they have to take care of them. They tend and till their ricefields thoroughly, so that they can harvest more crops—“*kersane asile kathah sing nengga bumi kelairan niku nggih kedah sae*” (“in order that the ricefields will give more crops, those who tend to them should be good people, too”). They view the natural environment and the Earth as a mother whom humans have to cherish just as we respect and love our human mothers. This begins from the time we live in our mother’s womb for nine months and ten days until she gives birth to us; then, she breastfeeds and nourishes us until we grow up—“*Biung niku sing nurunke kulo, mulang, ngurip-uprip, mila kedah diajeni*” (“Mother is the one who gives birth to us, brings us up, educates and nurtures us, so we must respect her”). Their communal practices in conserving the natural environment concur with their awareness of the sustainable merits of their activities for the next generation—“*supados saged migunani tumrap kulo sak keturunan kulo mangke*” (“in order that this brings benefits to me and my successors in the future”).

Sedulur Sikep communities are also savvy people. They believe that they must consume natural resources sufficiently so that their future descendants will enjoy them, too (Wibowo 37). Humans themselves have a duty to take care of them—“*Sedaya wau namung tergantung pripun le ngapik-apik taneman lan bumine niki*” (“All depend upon how humans tend to plants and the land”) (Setiono 58). The communities practice several ways of cultivating and growing rice in their fields. Among them include: (a) *sawah bencah* (*bencah* ricefield), a field that is irrigated from ditches, and is often called *oncoran* ricefield; (b) *sawah bero* (*bero* ricefield), an unproductive field since its irrigation is intermittent; (c) *sawah berbandar hidup* (life-based ricefield), a field that gets irrigation from rivers; (d) *sawah berbandar langit* (sky-based ricefield), a field that gets water from rains. It is also known as *sawah jajaran* (juxtaposed ricefield), *sawah air* (water ricefield) and *sawah tada hujan* (water receptacle ricefield); (e)

sawah kajaroan (*kajaroan* ricefield), a field that is set aside for a village chief. This is similar to *sawah kelunguhan* (occupational ricefield); (f) *sawah kesugihan* (*kesugihan* ricefield), a private ricefield belonging to individuals; (g) *sawah kitri* (*kitri* ricefield), a private ricefield that can be bequeathed; (h) *sawah tawang* (*tawang* ricefield), a swampy ricefield. Besides, they also use other lands for farming called *tegal* and *pekarangan* (garden). They grow several plants such as *palawija* on *tegal*; and the field uses rain for irrigation. The word *pekarangan* refers to “karang” that means the ground around one’s house such as a garden. They grow vegetables and fruits in their gardens including herbal plants. Then, the parts of the ricefield include *galengan* (the border between one ricefield and another as well as a foot path); *parit (ilen-ilen)* (a kind of water trench to irrigate ricefields); *buangan banyu* (water drainage); and *kedhokan* (a lower part of ricefield) (Setiono 59). In their paddy harvest time, the Sedulur Sikep people will divide their harvest into four parts, namely *wineh* (seeds), *sandhang* (clothing), *panen* (harvest), and *bawon*. The word *sandhang* refers to their use of revenue from selling rice to buy daily necessities. The word *pangan* means that they can use their crop yield to fulfill their own daily food necessities. Then, the word *bawon* refers to labor conducted by someone to till the rice paddies (Setiono 59).

Simplicity is another trait of the community. One prominent quality of the communities is their modesty, non-materialistic traits, and moral and spiritual qualities that they derive from their ancestor’s principles. These qualities correlate with their farming livelihood. These also describe their particular ethnic identity that differentiates them from the common Javanese ethnic community especially those who live in Central Java. The name *Sikep* as their ethnic identity that denominates them is based upon three principles, namely *ucap* (verbal expressions), *pertikel* (inner thoughts) and *kelakuan* (behaviors and manners). The first principle means that one must speak sensibly to avoid disappointing others’ feelings. The second means that one should be able to control his or her mind to always think positively of others and things in his or her life. The third means the need to mind one’s behavior and manner and to control one’s senses in interacting with each other and things in the natural environment (Wijoyo 6). Furthermore, the other three moral ethics that regulate their behavior and outlook are *ruh* (conscience), *eling* (cognizance) and *sabar* (forbearance) (ibid. 8–9). In cultivating their ricefields, the community privileges the need for *gotong royong* (cooperative work) as a work ethic to reap better harvests (Mardikantoro 107–109). The spirit of collectivity rather than individuality in tilling the fields turns out to result in more and better harvests. They can also share the harvest with each other. This cooperative work called *sambatan* derives from their

ancestors and continues into the present (Mardikantoro 107–109; 263). This communal cooperative work then is not similar to profit-oriented global ‘free market’ economy as practiced by corporations. This latter system is analogous with industrial capitalism that frees “those who have the most money” and restricts “those with little or no money.” The big corporations will freely compete with each other “for raw materials, labor, and market share.” They will demand the raw materials and labor at lower prices and sell the processed products at higher ones (Berry 322–323). This self-governing farming of the community through the tradition of *gotong royong* (cooperative work) underscores the ecological resilience of the community. These moral qualities help to shape the unassuming character of the community that they implement in daily activities including in their care for their ricefields and the natural environment in general.

Folkloric tradition correlates with moral principles. The moral teachings of Samin Surasentika toward his descendants are expressed in codes of ethics as follows: (1) *Agama iku gaman, Adam pangucape, man gaman lanang* (“Religion is a weapon or life principle”); (2) *Ojo drengki srei, tukar padu, dahpen. Kemeren. Ojo kutil jumput, bedhog nyolong* (“Do not disturb others, do not quarrel. Do not be envious of others. Do not take away others’ belongings”); (3) *Sabar lan trokal empun ngantos drengki srei, empun ngantos riyo sapada, empun nganti pek-pinepek, kutil jumput bedhog nyolong. Napa malih bedhog colong, napa milik barang, nemu barang teng dalan mawon kulo simpangi* (“Act patiently and do not be arrogant, do not bother others, do not be conceited, do not take away others’ belongings. Do not steal, loot, and even do not take away others’ goods that are scattered on the street”) (Wibowo 36); (4) *Wong urip kudu ngerti uripe, sebab urip siji digawa salawase* (“One must understand his or her life because living and soul are only ones that each individual bring for a lifetime”); (5) *Wong enom mati uripe titip sing urip. Bayi uda nangis nger niku sukma ketemu raga. Dadi mulane wong niku boten mati. Nek ninggal sandhangan niku nggih. Kedah sabar lan trokal sing diarah turune. Dadi ora mati nanging kumpul sing urip. Apik wong salawase sepisan dadi wong, salawase dadi wong* (“If a young person dies, his or her soul is entrusted to those who are living. A crying baby is a sign of the meeting between body and soul. Therefore, one dead person’s soul is not gone, but only leaving his or her corporeal body. One should be patient and persevering for the sake of his or her descendants. Therefore, the soul is not dead, but gathers with the living souls. Once he or she does good deeds, he or she forever will be a good person”); (6) *Pangucap saka lima bundhelane ana pitu lan pangucap saka sanga bundhelane ana pitu* (“Analogously one speaks from number five and stops at number seven,

from number nine to number seven again = this is a sign that one should mind the ways he or she speaks") (Setiono 50).

Folkloric agrarian spirit embodies ecological values. The agrarian ethics that the communities practice in their daily life bring benefits to the environment as well. Their allegiance to farming and ancestral moral principles restrains them from being engrossed in material goods and from overconsuming them. Most Sedulur Sikep families live mostly self-sufficiently by only cultivating and harvesting rice and other commodity plants from their fields and *ladang*. Most of them feel content with what they have without having any desires to pursue more material gains. They do not have luxurious properties such as big houses, cars and high-tech electronic devices. Most of them live in traditional houses of *limasan*, *kampung*, and *joglo* in which their walls are made of *gebyog* (*kayu jati* or teak wood) or *gedheg* (plaited bamboo) (Setiono 57) (Figures 5–8).



Figure 5. The porch of the house of the village chief of *Sedulur Sikep* Community in Sambongrejo Village, Blora, Central Java, personal doc.



Figure 6. The porch of another *Sedulur Sikep* resident's house, next to the village chief's house, personal doc.

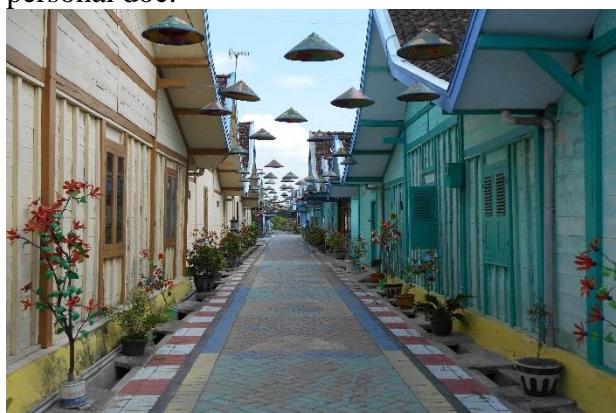


Figure 7. The side view of the village chief and the neighbor's houses. The alley is well-cared for, clean, and colorful, personal doc.



Figure 8. The porch of the neighbor's house and rice that should be dried for consumption, personal doc.

Their daily social behaviors and practices are also based upon the eight cosmic and ecological principles, *Hasta Brata* consisting of *surya* (the sun), *condro* (the moon), *kartika* (stars), Rile/Jile – An International Peer

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himandha (clouds), *bumi* (the earth), *geni* (fire), *banyu* (water) and *angin* (wind) (Wijoyo 10–12). Their life principles based on these natural and cosmic objects signify their ecological awareness of the need for keeping the harmony between their ways of cultivating the field and the acts of conserving the soil and the natural environment in general. Since most Sedulur Sikep people feel happy with their ricefields and livelihood as farmers, they do not excessively pursue material goods. They have cars, motorcycles, smart phones and other electronic appliances in their houses but they use them only if they need them. They do not have goods even if they are simple ones unless they need them (Mardikantoro 248).

The Sedulur Sikep communities are eco-oriented people. They cherish their fields, their paddy and animals in their houses. They consume fewer material goods, using them only as necessary. Their respect for the Earth and their care in cultivating ricefields and sufficiently consuming material goods help to create environmentally sustainable villages. The images above (Figures 5–8) show that the neighborhood of Sedulur Sikep community in Sambongrejo Village, Blora is clean and so is the weather. Since the areas of the communities are surrounded by teak woods and fields, the environment has no pollution. Furthermore, since most of them earn their living by farming in their ricefields and fulfilling their daily food needs from their own fields and gardens, they consume relatively fewer food products from nearby public markets or grocery stores. The lower consumption of commercial products reduces the ecological footprint that comes from, for instance, food products with plastic containers. This also means to minimize plastic trash and domestic waste from, for instance, the overconsumption of the products with plastic wraps or containers (Leonard 152). The minimum consumption of these products then also produces less carbon dioxide in the atmosphere as one major factor of the greenhouse effect that further leads to global warming (Wilson 65–69). Furthermore, the traditional ways of cultivating their ricefields by using more manure rather than pesticides, natural irrigation rather than mechanical forms, likewise exemplify the local wisdom of the community (Mardikantoro 262).

The community's folkloric agrarian aspect is against ecological violence. This especially deals with the struggle of the community in Sukolilo Village to save the Kendeng mountain range as the habitat that gives them life and peace. Even more so, they vigorously have defended the Kendeng mountains from the threat of illegal miners who extract the karst clandestinely and from some multinational investors who planned to build cement factories on the mountain and overextract the karst for making cement (Gunretno; Novianto 243–253; Wirya 64–66). Gunretno and his people realize that the destruction of the karst mountains by the

investors for this cement industry would only wreak havoc on the natural environment of the village. They will not only run out of ground water for their crops irrigation since the karst store ground water and carbon, but the blasting of the karst also emits carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. Consequently, this emission will heat up the local weather in particular and contribute to global warming in general (Gunretno; Wirya 64–66). To defend the future of Kendeng mountain from the investors' threat, they made some protests against the foreign investors and Indonesian government in Jakarta by cementing their feet. They demanded that the investor and the Indonesian government repeal the karst mining permit in the mountains and issue a moratorium to stop any mining activities there (Gunretno; Kurniawan 506–515; Novianto 231–257) (Figures 9–10).



Figure 9. Kendeng Mountain Ranges. Image credit: Wikipedia.



Figure 10. Karst extraction in Kendeng Mountain Ranges. Image credit: Wikipedia.

To solidify their struggle to save the mountain ranges from the threat of the investors, the community members who live around the Kendeng mountains have become affiliated with an organization called Jaringan Masyarakat Peduli Pegunungan Kendeng (JMPPK) (Community Network Which Cares For the Kendeng Mountain Ranges). They have used various forms of activism; one of them is to assert their *saminism* identity to sue for exemption from any mining and factory building practice from the government (Novianto 234). Their effort to foreground their ethnic identity and their rejection of the investors' offer reflects their ancestor's resistance to any rule including paying tax imposed by the Dutch settlers. Their struggle epitomizes their demand to protect the mountain ranges for the community's life in particular and the environmental wellness of the Central Java region and Indonesia in general.

Conclusion

Indigenous communities are the bedrock of ecologically resilient traditional cultures. They exist and evolve as organic and natural populace in one region compared to urbanized inhabitants in other regions. They mainly observe ecological ethics in the ways they interact with and make

use of land and natural resources to fulfill their daily necessities. They survive and prosper through their adherence to ancestral principles and teachings as inherited values which constitute Indigenous folklore. The Sedulur Sikep or Samin communities in Sambongrejo and Klopodhuwur Villages, Blora and in Sukolilo Village, Pati are agrarian people who still observe their ancestral moral and ecological codes. The communities represent what Aldo Leopold called “biotic community” and Gary Snyder called “the commons,” an interconnected symbiosis between human and nonhuman beings and the natural environment. In today’s world with its surging global trends and consumerism through various anthropogenic material products, the folkloric ethics that the communities have inherited from their ancestors and observe in their daily life (*laku sikep*) serve as a model of a folkloric society functioning and resisting in the Anthropocene. Another folkloric aspect is the spirit of gotong royong (cooperative work) in performing work for the sake of collective interest. This aspect actually belongs to communities in Java island and probably also to those in other islands of Indonesia. Not only the village community but also even the urban community need to habituate to this gotong royong value in living their lives in accordance with the natural environment.

Furthermore, the Sedulur Sikep communities recognize their values as farmers not just in terms of social and political agency but also as Indigenous and regional practices. Their concern for protecting the ecosystem against exploitative activities epitomizes Indigenous folkloric values to save the environment and biodiversity of natural habitats. Their ecocentric practices in managing the land evoke an ecological awareness of the importance of stewarding the natural environment and practicing judiciousness in material consumption.

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End Notes

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