

Food and the Concept of Salvation: Questioning Javanese Ethics in Environmental Issues

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Abstract

Most studies refer to food as a symbol of salvation in Javanese beliefs. However, only some of these studies linked the interpretation of Javanese beliefs about the concept of salvation with values of environmental ethics. This research aims to uncover other interpretations of Javanese life ethics about environmental issues embedded in cultural rituals' food symbols. The objects of this research are two traditions in Javanese society. First, *Takir Plontang*, ritual which is held by people of Junjung Village, Tulungagung Regency. Second, *Grebeg Pancasila* in Blitar City. The Javanese community organizes *Takir Plontang* Ritual at the beginning of the new year, *Suro*, by eating together at the village crossroads. As for *Grebeg Pancasila*, it is an annual activity of Blitar City to celebrate the birth of Pancasila every June 1 and this activity has five *gunungan kirab* festival as an expression of gratitude for the crops. The research used participant observation and interview methods to collect data. Unlike other Javanese ritual studies focusing on spiritual values in Javanese ceremonies which emphasize social cohesion, this study wishes to connect how far the concept of salvation symbolized through food in Javanese celebration ceremonies is linked to environmental ethics by balancing human and non-human relationships. The results showed that, in general, Javanese people connect *Takir Plontang* ritual as a gathering to pray for the salvation of their families and descendants. They believe that this ritual is a means to connect them with their ancestors and strengthen human inner power as a source of life balance. The imbalance between human inner power and the environment will cause disasters. As for the other ritual, people believe in seeking blessings from the crops in the five *gunungan* which have been prayed for in Bung Karno's grave, has power beyond the world. People enthusiastically compete for part of the five *gunungan* as a form of gratitude for crops, respect, and blessings from God. Food symbolizes balance and salvation in rituals and festivals, highlighting nature as part of their lives and contributing to human welfare. However, nature is not valued as a subject/agency as the subject of ethics but as a medium and consequence in the relationship between people and their ancestors and spirits.

Keywords: food; Javanese ethics; salvation; environmental ethics

Introduction

Religion and Environmental Issues

The relationship between religion/culture and environmental issues has been discussed since Lynn White's critique that religion significantly changes how humans view the natural world (White, 1967). Abrahamic religions, for example, have negated people's belief that nature has a soul like humans. With the push of rationality and modernism, which emerged in the development of modern agriculture at that time, humans no longer have second thoughts about converting forests into agricultural land. White argues that since religion is partly the source of ecological problems, religion is also required to solve the problems it creates. Sayyid Nasr, however, has a different perspective. He argues that the problem is not as simple as White's critique. According to Nasr, religion has "never lost sight of the sacred quality of nature". The problem is that science, philosophy, and religion no longer have common ground. Then, Nasr offers 'metaphysical doctrine' as a meeting point to foster spiritual feelings that prevent humans from acting exploitatively and excessively (Nasr, 1968). The dilemma over the relationship between religion and environmental issues is the main Javanese tradition.

In Javanese conception, the Earth and all of nature are inhabited by various spirits who constantly interact with humans, necessitating the maintenance of relationships, particularly with the spirits upon whom humans depend for the fertility of their fields and the success of their harvests (Wessing, 2006). According to Endicott (1970: 106), these spirits can be classified into Earth and forest spirits. While they are related, they also differ in significant ways. Earth spirits, which reside in and own the land beneath the village and in the fields, are a daily concern, particularly when the land is disturbed for farming, construction, or

other purposes. In contrast, forest spirits are of lesser concern to farmers and typically prefer to remain undisturbed.

Wilken (1912: 232) asserts that Javanese people do not worship trees, rivers, or mountains but rather the spirits of these places (cf. Poensen 1882: 107). These spirits can be disembodied human souls, water spirits, tree spirits, and forest spirits who haunt or guard roads, rivers, and other places. However, belief in their presence is only one aspect of this belief system. The other side is that it is possible to summon, reconcile, or drive them away with the proper means. These two aspects go together; the spirits embody something people desire or fear and are not seen in isolation but always in a relationship with people.

However, Woodward (1989) has shown that although the Javanese have been quite Islamic for a long time, it has not significantly reduced Javanese beliefs in these spirits. In contrast, Horton (1967) argues differently. According to him, when Javanese people interacted with modernity outside the village, the belief in spirits was a concern which was not shown openly and became irrelevant. Such choices lead them to turn to broader, more open, universal, yet less personal explanations, such as the shift from Earth and forest spirits to ancestor spirits (Hefner, 1987). Spirits which are deemed necessary by village communities then tend to be integrated into broader belief systems, for example, merging with Islamic traditions (Wessing, 1997).

Belief in spirits and supernatural beings is still believed in the tradition of *kenduri*, *baritan*, *takiran*, or eating together in the village, which being put in places, such as road intersections, market intersections, springs, and forests. There is research which argues that *baritan* ritual are a symbol of humanity's obligation to protect nature (Hanik, et.al., 2022). However, most studies focus on the social function of eating and praying together (Wardana & Fauzi, 2022) and expressing gratitude to God (Griyanti, et.al., 2018; Syariffudin, 2013).

Javanese traditions that incorporate food into cultural festivals are prominently represented by the Gunungan symbol. Gunungan refers to a collection of food items or foodstuffs arranged to resemble a mountain. Over time, this arrangement is prayed over and then brought out for the community to take as blessings. Grebeg Pancasila Blitar is one of the many festivals celebrated by the Javanese community to mark significant historical events, specifically timed to coincide with the commemoration of the birthday of Pancasila. Grebeg is seen as a way to instill Pancasila's values (Putriana, 2019) and to foster national character (Septinaningrum, 2023).

Most research examining the environmental ethics of Javanese society is symbolized in *tayub* dances (Febriani & Dani, 2023), the concept of Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono (Brontowiyono, 2019), wayang (Sulaksono & Saddhono, 2018), Javanese literature (Pamungkas & Widodo, 2018), Javanese mantra (Pamungkas et al., 2022), and the nyadran tradition (Amidi et al., 2023). Sri Widayanti (2016) argues that many Javanese expressions embody moral or environmental ethical values. Javanese environmental ethics is not only anthropocentric but also cosmo-centric and theocentric, indicating that God's creatures maintain a reciprocal relationship with the universe, alongside an ethical relationship with both God and the universe.

However, only a few studies show the relationship between Javanese ethics or traditions which directly affect the condition of nature and the surrounding environment. Among these studies are environmental ethics through *Protomongso* traditional calendar responding to climate change issues (Retnowati, et.al., 2014). Furthermore, research on local traditions such as *rasulan* and *gumregan* which are manifested through food and rituals may have contributed to plant conservation (Sulistiyowati, et.al., 2014). Thus, an understanding of environmental ethics is

internalized in traditions through activities which impact environmental goodness.

These studies show a positive relationship between Javanese teachings and the ethical principles of human attitudes towards the environment, including non-humans. However, the positive relationship is mainly at the interpretative level of Javanese traditional symbols which have potential connections to environmental ethics. However, few activities show real implications for daily activities related to empathetic attitudes toward environmental conditions. With little evidence of the relationship between Javanese environmental ethics and their practices in dealing with the natural environment, it is necessary to question how these ethics are built and understood and what influences this understanding.

This research aims to uncover other interpretations of Javanese life about environmental ethics, which is embedded in food symbols in cultural rituals. So, the research question is how Javanese people interpret the food served in rituals as a symbol of life ethics, especially related to environmental ethics. The question then leads to the second finding, which is the concept of salvation for the Javanese. How do the Javanese understand the concept of salvation and environmental ethics? As claimed by previous studies, is there a potential for a positive relationship? This research was conducted on two rituals, specifically *Takir Plontang* food ritual in Junjung Village, Tulungagung Regency, and *Grebeg Pancasila* ritual in Blitar City. The two locations were chosen because *Takir Plontang* ritual and *grebeg* tradition have a unique history, which, although far from the centre of the Javanese Mataram Kingdom, still maintain traditions and some of the beliefs, primarily related to food symbols. In addition, one of the two types of rituals represents the ancient Javanese tradition of *Takir Plontang*, and the other is a festival deliberately created for a specific purpose

using Javanese beliefs, traditions, and arts, one of which is *gunungan*.

Environmental Ethics Through Belief and Ritual

The study of ethics always involves a discussion of right and wrong actions. However, such simplistic conclusions about the study of ethics are premature and need more substance to explore the topic of environmental ethics in detail. Ethics should consist of complex ideas, applications, and interpretations of right and wrong and why something is right and wrong (Bishop, 2013). According to Ciulla (2004), ethics is a reflective process in which humans try to know their rights and obligations and how to behave with others. In general, ethics is concerned with the moral behavior of individuals based on established group standards.

J. Baird Callicott agrees with Aldo Leopold that Kantian anthropocentrism, which focuses on rationality, linguistic ability, self-awareness, or anticipation of the future, "the humane moralist", separates humans from other creatures in nature as the only creature worthy of moral consideration (Callicott, 1984). Therefore, only humans, at least if they meet the qualifications, have moral value. The consequence is the treatment of creatures or ecosystems outside the realm of moral consideration as a means to achieve human ends. Such judgment and treatment are morally justified by criteria assumed to be moral values (Callicott, 1984). Although humane moralists extend the realm of moral consideration beyond humans, they still distinguish between morally qualified individuals, whether based on the criteria of consciousness or life-experiencing subjects, and those who are not qualified. In doing so, they also create a separation which excludes some individuals and ecosystems from moral consideration. Although the cut-off point may differ, given the specific qualifications for moral consideration, these positions still leave those who need to be

qualified outside moral consideration and, therefore, subject only to the interests of sentient beings or beings experiencing life (Massanari, 1998).

Therefore, it is unsurprising that the environmental movement focuses on this anthropocentrism, which assumes that nature is only meaningful if it is related to human life. It states that environmental problems must be understood and solved with humanity's interests and benefits. An alternative to this anthropocentric stance is the more recent "eco-centrism," which attempts to shift humans from the center of the moral universe and claims that nature has intrinsic value independent of human existence and occupation; in other words, ecological systems have their rights and values, and therefore should be morally respected (Yao, 2017).

A common debate in environmental issues is the dilemma between economic progress and concern for ecological issues. Aldo Leopold (1966) and most environmental ethicists do not believe people should choose between economics and ecology. Instead, they argue that economic systems need to be understood in context. The human economy is always part of the natural system. Humans can only thrive if the environment is healthy enough to support them. Leopold criticized the mechanistic and instrumental approach to conservation of his time for making false assumptions. Instead, he asserted, humans must learn that our livelihoods and growth depend on the larger natural systems. In *Land Ethics*, Leopold stated that the land is community, while humans and our institutions are members of that community.

Lauret Savoy (2025) criticized Leopold, saying that ethics should not be abstract. Human behavior is not only shaped by big ideas and moral principles but also by the social structures in which people live and the institutions shape everyday life. Human actions are often shaped by privilege and micro-aggression based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and class.

Ecological ethics is complete with accounting for these dynamics.

Aldo Leopold makes broad and sweeping claims about ecology, proposing universal truths and pointing towards a unifying theory of truth and ethics which can unite humanity. Lauret Savoy focuses on how particular experiences shape ecological truths, allowing people from different contexts and identities to arrive at different conclusions (Savoy, 2015).

In contemporary discussions, spirituality is generally contrasted with religion: spirituality is seen as personal and subjective, while religion is understood as institutional and dogmatic. The idea is that a religious understanding of the human-nature relationship includes an element of deep connection or kinship between humans and non-humans. Religious-natural concepts involve the idea that human relationships with nature can promote positive transformation and healing. As with the notions of "religion" and "spirituality", the concepts of "ethics" and "morality" are usually distinguished. "Morality", like "spirituality", tends to be associated with concrete experiences and actions, whereas "ethics", like "religion", tends to refer to a systematic approach to morality. Therefore, morality refers to matters relating to individual human choices and character. In contrast, ethics refers to a systematic set of principles or frameworks for establishing what constitutes right or good action (Van Wieren, 2018).

Related to rituals, environmental ethics are also transformed through ancestral messages passed down in rituals. In the book *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, Rappaport (1999) argues that long before the evolution of engineering and technology, language enabled humans to adapt, live, and hunt in all earth's habitats and succeed ahead of other species. Language gave humans the power for collective action and planning far beyond that of different species. However, scientists are still studying the extent to which such power exists in fellow mammals such as

dolphins. However, language also gives humans the ability for individuation and rationalization, significantly reducing the effectiveness of group or species thinking in restraining behaviors with undesirable collective outcomes, such as habitat destruction and pollution. Religion, according to Rappaport, is an evolved response to this species' trait, providing humans with the means to create community customs, moral codes, myths, and rituals which curb individualism and set apart particular creatures, places, and procedures as "sacred", while making problematic behaviors and practices taboo. Rappaport's central thesis is that religious rituals are how prehistoric humans developed social and ethical regulatory mechanisms to restrain excessive individualism and anti-social behavior (Rappaport, 1999).

In a recent study of environmental ethics, Michael S. Northcott argues that an ontological shift that respects the differentiation of human and non-human agency and draws on sacred traditions will make it possible to ameliorate the destabilizing impact of contemporary human activity on the Earth System and its constituent ecosystems (Northcott, 2022).

Methods

This research uses two methods of data collection. First, participant observation and interviews are conducted in the two locations, the Ritual of Takir Plontang in Junjung Village, Sumbergempol Subdistrict, Tulungagung Regency, and Grebeg Pancasila in Blitar City. Second, the data collection method is from online media, both online media which reports on rituals and grebeg, and the official websites of village and city governments. The sources for *Takir Plontang* ritual included the organizers of Junjung Village event offering community, two elders, and two residents who attended. As for *Grebeg Pancasila* activity, the sources were the Head of the Tourism and Culture

Office of Blitar City and the participants who attended the celebration. All information is written in narrative, then analyzed with the perspectives written in the theoretical framework by comparing how the meaning of food symbols is understood and constructed.

Result

Takir Plontang Ritual

1. Profile of Junjung Village, Sumbergempol Sub-district, Tulungagung Regency

The first research location is Junjung Village, Sumbergempol Sub-district, Tulungagung Regency. Junjung Village area is at an altitude of ± 95 M above sea level, located 10 km southeast of the Tulungagung Regency City and 6 km southwest of the Sumbergempol sub-district. Junjung Village, with an area of 485.50 Ha, is divided into three hamlets: Krajan Hamlet, Kedungjalin Hamlet, and Pasir Hamlet.

Junjung Village is strategically located as the preferred route for people from the western region travelling east and people from the southern region heading to the north or the district capital. With a relatively flat and fertile topography and a river running through the village, Junjung Village has great potential for developing the agricultural sector. This condition supports the high productivity of agricultural products.

The land use pattern in Junjung Village is dominated by food and horticultural agricultural activities. The primary commodities are rice, corn, melons, tobacco, and sugarcane. An adequate irrigation system using technical irrigation from Lodoagung supports the sustainability of agriculture in this village.

In the southern part of Junjung Village, there is the Perhutani area which includes a series of limestone mountains. This area is known for its popular tourist

attraction, Goa Pasir, which is also part of a natural and cultural reserve site. In addition, the forest, dominated by *sono* and teak plants, is still preserved. The existence of this forest is a unique characteristic of Junjung Village, which is not owned by other villages in the Sumbergempol Sub-district area. With local wisdom and community awareness, this forest remains sustainable and functions as the lungs of the village, supporting ecological balance and biodiversity. The population of Junjung village is 6,638 people, consisting of 3,328 male and 3,310 female, with an average growth rate over the last six years of 0.7% and a density of 162 people/km².

According to the folklore, before the formation of Junjung Village, the area consisted of four long-established villages: Sentul, Prajekan, Kedungjalin, and Pasir. *Perdukuhan Sentul* was named after a figure named Sentul, who opened and controlled the area. Meanwhile, Prajekan comes from the word *rajek*, which means fence, referring to an area which had neatly organized fenced houses at that time. *Perdukuhan Kedungjalin* derives its name from *kedung*, or puddle, and *jalin*, a type of plant which grows around the *kedung*. As for Pasir, it comes from the word *pasiraman*, which means bathing place, because there used to be a large pond used by prominent people in this area. Legend has it that many fugitives from the Majapahit Kingdom settled in this area, as evidenced by relics such as caves, statues, and stone reliefs. The name Pasiraman was later shortened to Pasir, and the cave in the area is known as Goa Pasir.

In its development, these four villages became increasingly crowded and formed a village government led by a *demang*. The name Junjung Village comes from the construction of a community hall in Tulungagung Regency. At that time, wood for one of the hall's pillars was taken from around Goa Pasir. Due to limited means of transportation, the government held a *tayub* entertainment to gather residents to help lifting (*njunjung*) the wood. This event later

became the origin of naming the village to Junjung Village. Today, Junjung Village is divided into three hamlets: Krajan Hamlet, Kedungjalin Hamlet, and Pasir Hamlet.

2. The Process of *Takir Plontang* Ritual

Takir Plontang ritual is also called *slametan baritan* or *kenduri*. The tradition is found in many cities and districts in the southern part of East Java, from Trenggalek, Tulungagung, Blitar, Malang, Jember, and Banyuwangi. People organize *Takir Plontang* *slametan* at every intersection of village roads. Each house usually brings a kind of *takir*, *plontang*, which is adjusted to the number of family members. The collected *takirs* will be distributed back, but they are not allowed to take their own.

Satu Suro is the first day of the Javanese calendar in *Sura*, coinciding with 1 Muharram in the Hijriyah calendar. The first day of *Sura* is usually commemorated in the evening after Maghrib on the day before the beginning of the month. The Javanese day begins at sunset on the previous day, not at midnight. Javanese people believe the first day of *suro* is sacred, especially on *Jumat Legi*. For some people, on the night of the first *suro*, it is forbidden to travel except to

pray or perform other worship. On the first day of *Suro*, people should emphasize inner peace and salvation. The ritual aims to obtain blessings and ward off the arrival of danger. In addition, throughout the month of *Suro*, Javanese people believe in being *eling* and *waspada* (vigilant). *Eling* means that humans must remember who they are and where they stand as God's creation. Meanwhile, being *waspada* means humans must be awake and vigilant from misleading temptations.

Javanese people recognize *Suro* as the month of *tirakatan*. *Tirakatan* is not sleeping all night long with *tuguran* (self-reflection while praying) and *jedor* performances. Among these traditions, some people use the night of the first *suro* as the right time to do *ruwatan*.

The *Suro* tradition organized by Junjung Villagers is a hereditary ritual previously organized by the ancient elders. The *Suroan* tradition starts at 05.00 PM and continues until morning (overnight). It must be carried out on Thursday night, Friday, and late afternoon.

Evening signifies that the end of the year will come, while after Maghrib signifies the beginning of the year. So, in the evening, residents read prayers led by elders.



Figure 1. The ritual *Suronan Takir Plontang* in Junjung Village, Tulungagung Regency

One of the elders explained that in ancient times, there was a saying: *gung liwang liwung*, which means that everything has *bawahan* (subordinates) and supernatural beings which complement each other and work together. For example, after borrowing a sewing needle to the supernatural realm, it must be returned when finished. Musical instruments are also treated in the same way. After people 'borrow' them, they must be returned after they have finished using them. The source explained as the following.

"There are two dimensions in Java, but they often mixed, leading to problems. Many people utilize other nations (supernatural beings) for specific purposes, which can eventually lead to problems, such as conflicts, accidents, or other disturbances. To avoid these things, Java has wise local wisdom. One of them is the principle of 'tunggal buru ora nggangu', which means that each party - both humans and supernatural beings - has its own business and does not interfere with each other.

In Javanese tradition, slametan is held as a form of collective prayer. This prayer is intended for humans, supernatural beings, and ancestors. This is what characterizes the uniqueness of Javanese tradition. When asking supernatural beings to leave, the approach is not done rudely or directly expelling them. Instead, they are respected first, such as being 'fed' or meeting their needs, before being asked to leave. This approach shows the balance between the real and supernatural worlds, which are highly valued in Javanese culture"

There are two dimensions, but some people mix the two dimensions so that it causes disaster. From the explanation, it is described that Javanese people believe that life consists of two dimensions: the human dimension and the metaphysical dimension. People often make the mistake of mixing these two dimensions. Therefore, the Javanese refer to efforts to negotiate between these dimensions in the event of conflict as offering a *tumbal* (ritual offering or sacrifice). For example, to avoid disaster, the Javanese believe it is necessary to understand the needs of the beings that inhabit the metaphysical dimension, whom they refer to as *wong alus* (subtle beings or spirits). By doing so, the *wong alus* will not disturb the human realm. The Javanese call this negotiation process *tunggal buru ora nggangu*, which implies coexistence without disturbance.

The *slametan*, which refers to a ritual for safety or well-being, serves one of its functions to maintain peace between the human and metaphysical dimensions, between humans and spirits. If the *wong alus* or spirit has already caused disturbances—such as possessing people or objects—then an exorcism process must be carried out in a respectful manner, such as by fulfilling the spirit's wishes and then politely asking it to leave the human realm.

Another example is the concept of *demit*, spirits believed by the Javanese to inhabit large trees or sacred places. People are forbidden from damaging these places so as not to disturb the spirits and bring misfortune upon the village.

One of the people who led the ritual explained the philosophical meaning of *Takir Plontang*. The word *takir* comes from the Javanese *tulak*, which means to restore *pancabaya*, aiming for the local community not to be endangered by disaster. *Takir Plontang* serves to give alms to people in the neighborhood, to ask God for salvation, and to connect with the community. The food container must use bananas and young coconut leaves (*janur*). The leaves

symbolize the origin of human beings. The ritual leader said: "*It can also be referred to as janur, where jaa means "to come" and nur means "light". So, it refers to a beam of light. What kind of light? It is the light of Islam.*"

Takir is the place of food, usually used for offerings. *Takir* also provides a tangible form of simplicity for rural communities. People can give to charity by providing one *takir*. *Takir* also means *tak kikir*, not being stingy, being generous, even under challenging conditions. This sharing applies to everyone regardless of social status.

Takir Plontang is understood by the people of Junjung Village, and it has three meanings for sorting out the banana leaves used. First, the young leaves are called *pupus*, which means that in navigating the ark of life, people must always surrender to God who governs life. So, everything is left to the Supreme Ruler. *Tawakal* must always adorn all the movements and steps of everyone. Second, the dark green leaves are called *ujungan*. *Ujungan* in Javanese means surrender, the surrender of a servant to his God, or the surrender of a child to his father. People must surrender to the Supreme Creator. Humans were created only to serve the Almighty Creator. Third, the dried leaves are called *klaras*. *Klaras* become *nglaras*, which means life should be relaxed, with no need to rush, so every step is always passed in the truth. If not, humans will easily make mistakes.

In *Takir Plontang*, the container used is a dark green leaf called *ujungan*. This container is made of banana leaves and a jar shaped like a boat, tied with sticks at the end of the right and left sides. However, many people have replaced *takir* with a more modern container, like paper or plastic. People think it is more practical and manageable; making *takir plontang* for the *Suroan* event will be time-consuming if they make the food themselves.

The dish is exact with *srundeng*, and *fried peanuts* are a must, and also the side dish most people cook is an omelet cut lengthwise like noodles. Eggs have a

breakable character, meaning when encountering problems, they will solve them well and can start new things again. Everyone hopes to start life in the new year with good things. One of the residents said that in the past, each house made a variety of dishes, but nowadays, the foods served are uniform to make it easier for residents.

The speaker, who is also the Chairman of Majelis Luhur Kepercayaan Indonesia (MLKI) Tulungagung, Sukriston, added that the celebration of *Suro* New Year is the pride of the Javanese because it is a ritual that shows the transformation of the results of spiritual values believed by the ancestors. According to him, *Suro* means courage, the courage to face the challenges which will be encountered in the future.

The benefits of *Takir Plontang* ritual are maintaining friendship and continuing the historical-cultural values. Sukriston also added as below.

"The offerings are a form of respect for the ancestors and the environment, intending to create a better spirit in the future within the bonds of friendship. This tradition is also an effort to honor the Sultan's message of memayu hayuning Bawana—preserving the world, including repairing dry forests as a source of life.

Offerings also provide inner satisfaction for people who respect their ancestors and the past. If this tradition is not practiced, it can cause an imbalance in the human mind, which can affect the surrounding environment and lead to disasters, both outwardly and inwardly.

For example, under the gelung tradition, people release all their burdens, surrender their hopes to the Almighty, and express gratitude and prayers through offerings. This tradition symbolizes the harmony

between humans, nature, and spirituality, which support each other's survival."

Sukriston added that the commemoration of *Suro* using leaves symbolizes the spirit of returning to ecology, resulting from the community itself.

"Back to the concept of balance, this food makes up our DNA, our food determines our container, and the ingredients are not contaminated with destructive things. This is high respect, respect for the universe."

Grebeg Pancasila Blitar

1. Blitar City Profile

Blitar City is one of the regions in the East Java Province which is geographically located at the southern tip of East Java with an altitude of 156 m above sea level. Blitar City has few natural resources because the entire area is urban, in the form of settlements, trade, public services, agricultural fields, mixed gardens, and yards. Therefore, as an economic driver, Blitar City relies on the potential outside of natural resources, that is human and artificial resources.

Blitar is also known as Kota Proklamator. This is because in this city, there is a tomb of the Independence Proclamation and the First President of Republic of Indonesia, Soekarno. Bung Karno's tomb is located on Jalan Ir Soekarno, Number 152, Bendogerit, Sananwetan District, Blitar City, East Java.

The anniversary of Blitar City was set on April 1, 1906. This date is related to the decision of the Dutch colonial government regarding the formation of cities in Java. During its independence, Blitar City was formalized through Law Number 22/1945, which concerned the name change of Blitar Shi to Blitar City.

2. The Events of *Grebeg Pancasila*

Grebeg Pancasila is a cultural tradition of Blitar City commemorating Pancasila's birthday. This festival is an annual activity to remind the people of Blitar City about the city's history, especially related to Bung Karno's identity so that it is not lost. Thus, the government and the community formed a festival called *grebeg Pancasila*.

Grebeg Pancasila is a cultural tradition in Blitar City since 2000 to commemorate Pancasila's birthday. Initially, this series of cultural activities only consisted of three rituals, specifically the cultural ceremony, *Gunungan Lima*, and Pancasila *kenduri*. In 2004, there was a change in the rituals of *Grebeg Pancasila* from three to five rituals, the same as Pancasila which consists of 5 precepts. The five rites are (1) *Bedholan Pusoko*, which is paraded from Gebang Palace to the Blitar City Government Office, (2) *Malam Tirakatan*, (3) Cultural Ceremony, (4) *Gunungan Lima* parade from Alun-Alun Kota Blitar to Bung Karno's Tomb, and (5) *Kenduri Pancasila*. One resident explained that nowadays the event of *Grebeg* have been more organized.

The second rite is *malam tirakatan*. All core rite participants have to wear traditional Javanese clothes on the night of *tirakatan*. They pray while *tetembangan* (singing Javanese songs) with *tembang Macapatan Banjaran Bung Karno* which contains Soekarno's biography. On the night of *tirakatan*, *jajanan pasar*, *pisang ketandan*, and a more Javanese atmosphere, such as lighting incense and candles, are the supporting facilities.

The third rite is the cultural ceremony where all community members, government officials, and school children wear traditional Javanese clothes. The cultural ceremony includes mayor giving out advice, speech from the ceremony coordinator, *gending Pancasila*, national songs with gamelan accompaniment, *paskibraka* troops, and traditional dance performances.



Figure 2. Gunungan Lima Grebeg Pancasila Blitar

The fourth rite is kirab *gunungan lima*. Kirab gunungan lima is a procession of *Gunungan Lima* as a depiction of the five precepts of Pancasila. *Kirab Gunungan Lima* is a cavalcade of crops shaped like a *gunungan*. There are two types of *gunungan*. First, *gunungan lima* or called *gunungan lanangan*. Second, *gunungan wedok* which is made to enliven *grebeg*. The difference between Gunungan Lanang and Gunungan Wedok lies in their form and symbolism; where Gunungan Lanang is simpler, with crops symbolizing life values such as fortitude, while Gunungan Wedok is more complex and decorated with fruits and cakes symbolizing completeness and diversity. Both depict the balance between masculine and feminine elements in Javanese culture. However, *gunungan* must contain *onthong* (banana heart), *lanjaran* beans (long beans), *chillies*, oranges, carrots, shallots, and garlic.

The conical tip of the *gunungan* is a Banana Heart (*onthong*) which symbolizes a pure heart. *Chillies* and oranges represent the spiciness and sweetness of life; long beans mean that all the living must follow the law, not to act arbitrarily; and red and white onions are symbols of the origin of the human body and soul.

The highlight of *kirab* is to seek blessings from the crops in the five *gunungan* which have been prayed. People believe that *gunungan* being prayed for in Bung Karno's grave has power beyond the world; if they get any part of *gunungan*, they will be blessed. So, the community enthusiastically fights over the contents of the five *gunungan* as a form of gratitude for the crops and blessings from God.

The last procession is *Kenduri Pancasila*. In this *kenduri*, people have dinner together. The elders prayed for *tumpeng* before all participants ate *tumpeng* together.

Discussion

Environmental ethics are embedded in traditions and rituals resulting from past generations' experiences in adapting and surviving. There are some differences in how this environmental ethic survives or transmits. For Western societies with a background of rationalism and modernism, the value of morality is focused on good and bad for humans. Nowadays, however, there is a shift in this paradigm, taking into account non-human agency which is not essentially 'lower' than humans from a hierarchical

perspective. For Eastern societies, the integration between humans and nature is embedded in the belief that everything has agency. However, it should be noted that the modernization process has dramatically influenced the paradigm of the relationship between humans and nature.

As in this study, Javanese society shows that traditions and rituals are understood as shared activities passed down by the ancestors. If people are asked how long the tradition has been carried out, all of them will answer that it has been carried out for generations, so it has not been known when it started. However, each generation will feel the differences and changes in how tradition changes following the conditions of the community. For example, in the case of the strong *takir plontang* ritual tradition, the type of food served is not only food intended for eating together. Food has a special meaning that can transmit Javanese values and ethics to be taught to the next generation. Some of these foods are easily found in other traditions in Javanese society; for example, the food in *Takir Plontang* is the same as in *tumpengan*. Both also use banana leaves as a base and place. However, some Javanese people also tolerate changes in the food menu for convenience and taste. The only thing retained in this tradition is the values of togetherness and cooperation. Unsurprisingly, all news reports and interviews with residents will refer to the social engagement function of this ritual.

For the elderly, the strong *Takir Plontang* ritual tradition in Junjung Village still connects human and non-human lives. This belief is maintained, as Wilken argued a hundred years ago. Beliefs in supernatural beings are adapted to the beliefs of Muslims, the ritual process, and the prayers recited (Wessing, 2006). From the perspective of environmental ethics, such Javanese beliefs, although going around, compared to the eco-centrism theory of environmental ethics which places nature as having independent intrinsic value, are better than

eliminating agency through belief in ancestral spirits and spirits inhabiting the Earth and forests. Likewise, in one interview, the relationship between ritual and ecology was mentioned, related to the food and offerings served in the strong tradition, referring to the food consumed and the human body, but this perspective is still human-oriented. Salvation is understood as harmony between two dimensions, namely humans and supernatural beings, between the outer and the inner, between humans and the environment.

In the second case, *Gunungan Limo Grebeg Pancasila*, the meaning of *gunungan* which has been explained in the findings shows that although the symbol used is a mountain, as part of nature, the sense which emerges is how humans behave in the world. Javanese ethics in life include a sacred heart with a character capable of facing the difficulties of life and obeying the rules for the sake of peace and harmony.

The comparison of *Takir Plontang* and *Grebeg Pancasila* rituals includes the element of similarity, both of which use food as a symbol of crops and a medium to continue ancestral messages. The message mainly refers to the ethics of life for Javanese people, such as having the ability to solve life problems and respecting order by not acting arbitrarily. Another similarity is that the two rituals and traditions are compared with the perspective of environmental ethics, then the common thread.

The two are that food also symbolizes two dimensions of the world, specifically the human world and the non-human world, be it in the form of spirits or supernatural beings, which, in their belief, the harmony of these two worlds is essential for human life. Such beliefs are enough to suppress human greed to exploit nature, as argued by Rappaport, and in line with Michelle Northcott's statement which respect for the differentiation of human and non-human agents can start from sacred things.

Besides these similarities, there are differences between the *takir plontang* and *grebeg gunungan* rituals. The *suroan* ritual is a folk ritual performed from generation to generation as an obligation to Javanese beliefs and ancestral traditions, so this rite is carried out in a more popular and egalitarian manner without being rigidly regulated through any written regulations. Thus, this ritual can be organized in a very diverse way, only paying attention to things considered sacred to be maintained, such as *takir*, food served, offerings, and the event's location. In contrast to *Grebeg Pancasila*, a festival created by utilizing the richness of Javanese culture, the implementation process is regulated by regional regulations. It is only in one location with a specific purpose, which may be political. With this style, *Grebeg Pancasila* does not transform many messages related to environmental ethics compared to the *Takir Plontang* ritual. The *gunungan* symbol used is considered an expression of gratitude to God for the crops of the agricultural community.

Conclusion

Studies on Javanese rituals generally focus on their function as social connectors, strengthening relationships between individuals in the community. However, studies focusing on food and salvation reveal another dimension of ritual symbols related to environmental ethics. These environmental values are often overlooked, as more common approaches emphasize the hierarchical relationship between humans and God, primarily focusing on expressions of gratitude.

Traditional Javanese cosmology has the potential to contribute to the formation of environmental ethics by offering a holistic framework which emphasizes the interconnection between humans, nature, and the spiritual world. However, it differs from modern principles in environmental ethics which separate the material world

from the metaphysical, that everything is measured using the rational. Exploring Javanese cosmology can help to enlarge the perspective of environmental ethics by placing humans and non-humans as interdependent agents. By seeing nature as an active agent rather than an object to be exploited, a new collective consciousness can be awakened in managing and maintaining environmental sustainability.

Based on the comparison of the two studies on food and the concept of salvation in Javanese beliefs, it can be concluded that one of the environmental ethics which is important to maintain is the belief in the harmony between the two worlds, human and non-human, the outer world and the inner world. Although this ethic refers more to the procedures of how humans live in the world, it does not eliminate other agencies that affect human life. Thus, the environmental ethics of Javanese society continue to be negotiated and reproduced in a different form and differ from the beliefs of its ancestors, but through expressions of gratitude to God, Javanese society connects humans, ancestors, and the universe as something which must be considered for salvation.

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