

## OFFERINGS AS A REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL ECOLOGY IN THE SELAMETAN OF THE YOGYAKARTA INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

Marista Christina Shally Kabelen<sup>1)\*</sup>, Atik Kurniawati<sup>2)</sup>, Rusfadia Saktiyanti Jahja<sup>3)</sup>, Meila Riskia Fitri<sup>4)</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4)</sup> Sociology Department, Law and Social Science Faculty, State University of Jakarta, Indonesia

\*corresponding authors: [maristashally@unj.ac.id](mailto:maristashally@unj.ac.id)

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the offering culture in the *Selamatan* ritual of the Yogyakarta indigenous community as a representation of cultural ecology. Offerings serve as symbolic expressions of local wisdom, reflecting gratitude to ancestors and requests for harmony with nature and spiritual entities. Using a qualitative approach with structured interviews and participant observation, the research reveals how offerings function both as spiritual rituals and adaptive ecological practices. Each component of the offering—such as rice, fruits, and flowers—embodies ecological knowledge and seasonal awareness, reflecting the community's efforts to live in balance with their environment. The findings show that offerings strengthen social bonds, preserve cultural identity, and promote environmental sustainability. Furthermore, the research highlights how traditional ecological knowledge is embedded in ritual practices, shaping the community's worldview and responses to environmental change. This study contributes to the academic discourse by linking offerings to cultural ecology, filling a gap in the literature on the intersection of ritual, environment, and sustainability. It also emphasizes the practical value of preserving indigenous practices as models for ecological awareness and cultural resilience in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** Offering, Sesajen, Cultural Ecology, Adaptation, Preservation

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini mengkaji budaya persembahan dalam ritual selamatan komunitas adat Yogyakarta sebagai representasi ekologi budaya. Persembahan berfungsi sebagai ekspresi simbolik dari kearifan lokal, mencerminkan rasa syukur kepada leluhur dan permohonan akan harmoni dengan alam serta kekuatan spiritual. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif melalui wawancara terstruktur dan observasi partisipatif, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa persembahan memiliki peran ganda sebagai ritus spiritual sekaligus praktik ekologis yang adaptif. Setiap elemen persembahan—seperti nasi, buah, dan bunga—mengandung pengetahuan ekologis dan kesadaran musim, mencerminkan upaya komunitas untuk hidup selaras dengan lingkungan. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa persembahan memperkuat ikatan sosial, melestarikan identitas budaya, dan mendorong keberlanjutan lingkungan. Penelitian ini juga menyoroti bahwa pengetahuan ekologi tradisional tertanam dalam praktik ritual, yang membentuk pandangan dunia masyarakat serta respons mereka terhadap perubahan lingkungan. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada wacana akademik dengan menghubungkan persembahan dan ekologi budaya, serta mengisi kekosongan dalam literatur mengenai relasi antara ritual, lingkungan, dan keberlanjutan. Selain itu, penelitian ini menekankan nilai praktis pelestarian praktik adat sebagai model kesadaran ekologis dan ketahanan budaya dalam masyarakat kontemporer.*

**Kata Kunci:** Persembahan, Sesajen, Cultural Ecology, Adaptasi, Pelestarian

## INTRODUCTION

*Selamatan* is a ritual carried out by the Javanese people (Holik et al., 2024), this activity is a manifestation of shared hopes for the safety and welfare of the community. As stated by Clifford Geertz in *The Religion of Java* (1960), this *Selamatan* ritual is performed with neighbors and ends with sharing food that has been prayed for or can be called blessed. The *selamatan* ritual is usually held to commemorate important community events, from birth to death.

According to Andrew Beatty (1999), *selamatan* is a form of collective prayer in Javanese society, which is a basic rite to maintain order. *Selamatan* is a ritual that provides offerings to the transcendent to ask for protection and maintain harmony with nature. The ritual of salvation is a form of culture, which is non-material culture covering aspects such as beliefs, values, and spiritual practices that help shape the identity of Indonesian society. *Selamatan* usually aims to obtain safety, protection, and blessings when a situation is expected to run smoothly, and there are no obstacles to anyone (Koentjaningrat, 1984). It can be said that the *selamatan* ritual is one form of cultural expression that is rich in local values and wisdom. The offerings called *sesajen* are an expression of gratitude, respect for ancestors, or a request for blessings to nature and spirits that are believed to influence everyday life. The *selamatan* ritual is a form of tradition that is passed down and taught from parents to children from generation to generation so that the Javanese people do not lose their identity.



Picture 1. Example of Offerings  
(source : Research Documentation)

One of the important elements in the *Selamatan* ritual is offerings. Offerings

are symbols in the form of natural products that are presented and represent deep meaning. In Indonesian culture, offerings are not merely religious ceremonies or age-old traditions but also reflect people's beliefs about the relationship between effort, prayer, fate, and luck in life. Many Indonesians still believe that one's destiny is influenced by hard work, prayer, and unpredictable fate, often called the "X factor" (Giri, 2010).

With this understanding, ritual offerings are not merely symbols of spiritual belief but also reflections of the values held by society. Through offerings, people strive to balance humans and nature and build a harmonious relationship with the forces they believe influence their lives. Culturally, the ritual of offerings carries a message that in living life, humans must acknowledge their limitations and always seek blessings from more extraordinary powers.

In the Yogyakarta indigenous community, rituals involving offerings are almost always present at every critical moment. From birth to death, the people of Yogyakarta largely present offerings in every ritual they conduct. Offerings become a symbol of gratitude to superior entities, which then become part of traditional communities with strong cultural beliefs. Essentially, the ritual culture and offerings are inseparable from the worldview of the Javanese people, particularly those in Yogyakarta, who derive meaning from spiritual life. Thus, it can be said that offerings are an integral part of community life, functioning as a medium for communication with spiritual forces and a bridge between humans and nature. Moreover, rituals also help shape cultural identity and strengthen social bonds within the community.

Knowledge and perception shape human interaction with their environment (Vedwan, 2006). Community groups adopt Norms and values as the basis for their actions and behaviors. A strong belief in spiritual forces becomes a unique characteristic of these communities (Peoples et al., 2016). As seen in Java, these traditions, rich in spiritual values, are often integrated into daily activities.

These traditions are not merely part of spiritual rituals but also have a broader impact on how people view their surrounding environment, including how they treat natural resources. Nature is seen as a resource to be utilized and as an entity with a soul that must be respected. This perspective fosters an interaction

pattern that is not solely exploitative but emphasizes preservation and balance. Respect for the environment and belief in forces beyond oneself shape how people manage resources, creating a harmony that integrates humans, nature, and the spiritual realm.

In line with the ritual's aim of respecting the environment, communities have long developed creative thinking abilities to “withstand the challenges posed by nature” (Waluya et al., 2023). Thus, the creative thinking ability of the community also becomes an essential part of adapting to environmental challenges, demonstrating the close relationship between culture and the ecosystem. In the *Selamatetan* ritual, offerings can be said to be a form of cultural adaptation from the local ecosystem. Because in practice, the community prioritizes the use of agricultural products that are easily available in the environment around them. Starting from flower gardens, coconuts, and other miscellaneous items, they try to get what is easily obtainable around them. Apart from that, the use of banana leaves and coconut leaves in serving offerings also reflects the principle of sustainability in the cultural practices that the community applies.

From Julian Steward's perspective (Kerns, 2016), cultural adaptation to specific environmental conditions reflects how communities shape life patterns that align with their surrounding environment. Steward emphasized that culture cannot be separated from the physical environment in which communities live. Conversely, culture evolves due to the continuous interaction between humans and their environment (Kerns, 2016). This concept is called cultural ecology, which emphasizes the importance of dynamic interaction between humans and their environment (Sun & Wang, 2023). Steward observed that how a group of people adapts depends on existing environmental factors and specific cultural needs. Two aspects that shape the concept of cultural ecology are environmental limitations and cultural needs (Fox, 1992). In other words, changes in the environment play a vital role in the dynamics of technological innovation and productivity (Waluya et al., 2023). The primary principle within local communities is to ensure that their cultural wisdom is not lost, often supported by restoration efforts. Steward's cultural ecology emphasizes that the interaction between culture and the environment is a dynamic process in which societies develop adaptive patterns to survive and grow

(Sun & Wang, 2023). Steward's idea of adaptation explains that every successful effort to overcome environmental challenges requires transferring knowledge from the scientific domain to culture/society and integrating knowledge, values, norms, and ideas for a sustainable future (Lapka et al., 2012). In the context of ritual offerings, this often involves giving offerings to ancestral spirits or natural forces as a gesture of respect and a request for well-being. Offerings, which typically consist of food, flowers, or other items available in nature, reflect how the Javanese people use and value the natural resources around them in understanding their relationship with their belief system. Ritual offerings can be seen as a cultural response to environmental challenges (such as agriculture, seasonal changes, or natural disasters) and as a way to maintain balance and harmony with nature and its "rulers."

Thus, this tradition reflects cultural ecology, where a unique harmony is woven between humans, nature, and spirituality. Offerings are symbolic acts of devotion and represent how communities organize their relationship with the physical and spiritual environment. This practice illustrates how people reflect to environmental conditions, respect natural forces, and maintain cosmic balance, involving knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs. It demonstrates that cultural preservation and environmental balance are fundamental parts of life, transmitted from generation to generation as a form of local wisdom (Mutia et al., 2024).

In the midst of widespread environmental issues, ritual practices that involve offering offerings have become an attempt by humans to interact with nature. Interestingly, these offerings intersect with sustainable development efforts. In one of the rituals, namely the *selamatan*, offerings are often made from agricultural products, which can be seen from the miscellaneous items such as tumpeng, traditional snacks, and other symbols in the offerings. This actually reflects that society is aware of the importance of maintaining ecological balance, which will have an impact on the sustainability of natural resources.

Thus, this research aims to analyze more deeply how the offerings in the Selamatetan rituals are not just symbolic elements but as an ecological relationship in the form of interactions between humans and the environment, as well as how the offerings in the *Selamatetan* rituals are part of the culture core, which prioritizes

natural materials found in the surrounding environment. Thus, this can be a reflection for society to continue to maintain the balance of our environment amidst an increasingly real climate, as stated in Mutia *et.al.* (2024) previous research. The cultural significance of offerings lies in their symbolic value and their ability to integrate local ecological knowledge into community traditions.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Ritual Offering Culture

A *selametan* ritual involving offering is part of the culture. Tylor (1871) defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 1). Geertz (1973) defined religion as a cultural system of symbols that informs actions, social order, and world views.

Essentially, the ritual offering is an attempt by humans to connect with the forces of nature directly. As expressed in Van Peursen's (1985) "Cultural Strategy," rituals emerge from the mystical mindset of humans. The sense of powerlessness against greater forces leads people to find ways to ward off or even control various dangers and ensure food abundance through rituals believed to serve as a medium of communication with higher powers. Later, humans began to think more logically and sought knowledge behind these forces. In the stage referred to as the ontological mindset, people started to involve reason, emotions, social conditions, and beliefs. According to Clifford Geertz, a ritual is the unification of symbolism between worldview and ethos. Geertz specifically linked rituals with religion (Geertz, 1973). Similarly, Mircea Eliade considered rituals part of primitive religions, inseparable from sacred spaces (Pals, 2012). In *The Forest of Symbols*, Victor Turner (1967) associated rituals with symbolic forms of religious and magical actions. It can be interpreted that rituals are also defined as formal behaviors performed within a specific time frame, not just routine acts but actions based on belief in mystical power or force.

The *selametan* ritual in Javanese beliefs carries symbolic meanings such as social and mystical unity for its participants. According to Geertz and Beatty (1999; 1960), *selametan* is a product of Javanese culture. According to them, there are four



types of *selamatan*. The first is *selamatan* related to the human life cycle, such as death, circumcision, birth, and marriage. The second is related to commemorations in the Muslim calendar. The third is related to the unity and/or activities of the village community, such as the village cleaning ceremony. The fourth is related to irregular intervals and unusual events, for example, someone moving, long journeys, illness, change of residence, and so on.

It can be said that ritual offerings are gifts, physical objects, and symbols presented to superior entities, which become integral parts of traditional communities with cultural beliefs. Each element has rich symbolic meanings. These symbolic elements illustrate the embeddedness of the offering tradition within the socio-cultural fabric of the community, representing a form of local wisdom that is socially reproduced across generations (Septia, 2024).



Picture 2. Example of Offerings Equipments Seller in Traditional Market  
(source: Research Documentation)

This tradition reflects a close relationship between humans and the environment and serves as a cultural heritage that enriches the community's identity. By preserving ritual offerings, people also uphold cultural values that shape their worldview, both socially, spiritually, and ecologically. In addition to being a cultural heritage, offerings are essential in building relationships between human spiritual forces and the surrounding natural world. By practicing this tradition, communities help preserve the environment, respecting and seeing nature as an essential part of their spiritual life. The materials used in offerings generally come from nature, reflecting gratitude and respect for natural resources. This, in turn, contributes to environmental sustainability, as people feel responsible for

protecting and not harming what they consider sacred. Thus, offerings not only serve as spiritual rituals, but also have a role in conservation and sustainability efforts as well as supporting the welfare of the surrounding community.

### **Cultural Ecology Julian Steward**

The cultural ecology theory is an anthropological approach developed by Julian Steward, first introduced in his book *Theory of Culture Change* (1972). This theory emphasizes the relationship between humans, the environment, and culture (Lapka et al., 2012). According to Steward, the way of life of a society is a response to environmental pressures, and culture is a tool for human adaptation to the environment. Cultural ecology, in contrast to human or social ecology, focuses on analyzing how distinct cultural traits and behavioral patterns emerge as adaptive responses to specific environmental contexts within particular regions, rather than formulating universal principles across diverse socio-environmental systems (Steward, 1972). Cultural ecology is based on the interaction between culture, humans, and the environment (Sun & Wang, 2023). Unlike human or social ecology, cultural ecology is primarily concerned with examining how particular cultural forms and practices emerge in response to the material and ecological conditions of specific regions. Rather than seeking overarching laws applicable across contexts, it emphasizes the situated interplay between culture and environment in shaping localized social structures and meanings (Gunn, 1980).

According to this theory, culture is an adaptive response to the environmental conditions in which humans live. Culture is a dynamic and adaptive construct, continually shaped and reshaped through its interaction with the physical environment, reflecting the capacity of social groups to modify cultural practices in response to ecological conditions (Steward, 1972). Steward noted that environmental ecology presents both challenges and methods. The challenge relates to ensuring the adjustment of human behavior patterns to their environment, which can be flexible and constrained. The cultural ecological method is complex and considers different levels of society (Lesmana & Sudikan, 2019). In advanced societies, cultural patterns are determined by complex technologies and productive structures.

According to Steward (1972), human adaptation to the environment has a



unique character in cultural development. This development can be observed in work systems, social structures, and religion. Gunn (1980) explained cultural ecology as a way to study culture so that it can adapt to environmental conditions. The main emphasis of cultural ecology is the concept of change and adaptation to the environment, as a dynamic environment causes variations in change over space and time. Cultural ecology is driven by action and cognition, with a profound interest in environmental and social issues (Lapka et al., 2012). This approach understands the relationship between humans and nature as an equal dialogue deeply expressed in the cultural landscape.

The three main concepts in the theory of cultural ecology (Steward, 1972):

- Cultural Core: The core of culture consists of technology and economy, which society uses to adapt to its environment.
- Multilinear Evolution: Cultural development is not linear but occurs in various directions depending on the existing environmental conditions.
- Adaptation: This is the form of cultural adjustment to the physical and social environment. The relationship between humans and the environment is reciprocal. Humans are not only influenced by the environment but also actively shape it.

There have been several previous studies related to offerings, both from the aspects of their symbolic meaning, perspective analysis, and cultural ecological adaptation. Research conducted by Sanjaya & Gandha (2022), Septia (2024) and Azizah, Niswatin, & Wijayanti (2024) examined offerings in terms of symbolic transformation due to modernization, the symbolism of special offerings in Javanese traditional wedding ceremonies, the concept of mystic synthesis between Islam and local beliefs in the sea alms ritual, and the spiritual and cultural expressions of the community in certain rituals in the Madura region. Offerings were also analyzed in the context of religion and spirituality in society, as conducted by Somawati, Hartaka, & Dewi (2024) and Riyandi & Mulyati (2023). Furthermore, offerings are also considered as forms of nature conservation as studied by Hartati (2024), and Mubayanah & Amin (Mubayanah & Amin, 2024). The research is expected to develop previous research in terms of community adaptation to changes in their environment, as well as enrich it with Julian Steward's cultural ecology

approach to be able to see that offerings are also an adaptation that connects humans with their ecosystem.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing descriptive data derived from informants' verbal and written narratives, as well as field observations, to explore and interpret social phenomena in depth (Creswell, 2015). Structured interviews were conducted to gather direct responses, opinions, and perceptions from the informants regarding the practice and development of ritual offerings, particularly in Java. A literature review was conducted to understand the concept of *Selametan* rituals and offerings (Sun & Wang, 2023), while in-depth interviews were conducted to gain direct understanding from informants who were directly involved in or carried out the practice of *Selametan* rituals.

This study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in which informants were deliberately selected based on specific characteristics or conditions that correspond with the aims of the research (Arikunto, 2011). There were 7 informants who routinely perform the *selametan* ritual and are actively involved in the *selametan* ritual. This research was conducted in Yogyakarta, an area that still maintains Javanese traditions quite strongly despite the impact of globalization and modernization. Structured interview techniques were used to directly collect responses, opinions, and perceptions of informants regarding offerings in the *selametan* as a representation of cultural ecology, as well as to explore the meaning and purpose of implementing offerings in a *selametan* ritual. The data analysis process was conducted through a series of systematic stages, as: organizing data, both observation data and interviews conducted, data processing carried out to be able to draw key insights from expressions in interviews, interpreting data and its correlation with the theory of cultural ecology used, and culminating in the formulation of conclusions derived from the analytical interpretation of the findings and discussions (Newman, 2006).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Offerings in Yogyakarta

The ritual of offerings in Yogyakarta has a long history rooted in ancient Javanese traditions. This cultural form began with the spread of Hinduism by kingdoms in Indonesia, such as Mataram, Majapahit, and Sriwijaya. Over time, this culture became ingrained in society and blended with Islamic traditions, demonstrating cultural adaptation. Offerings or sacrifices are a form of spiritual element that exists in Java as an offering to divine substances (Adam et al., 2019). Offerings then became the actualization of practitioners' thoughts, desires, and emotions to become closer to God or deities.

The relationship between rituals that use offerings, and the Yogyakarta Palace is very close. The palace is the center for preserving Javanese traditions and culture, including offerings. The palace plays an important role in maintaining the continuity of this culture through various traditional ceremonies involving offerings (Arifah et al., 2024), such as the Grebeg and Labuhan ceremonies. For example, in the Labuhan ceremony at Parangkusumo Beach, this ritual is interpreted as a form of reciprocity or human obligation to the earth that has provided space for life with various blessings (Jalil, 2015). Like Javanese society in general, its residents still believe in the power of supernatural spirits, so they feel the need to always maintain a good relationship with these powers, one of which is through giving offerings. This is evidenced by the integrated offerings in the daily lives of the people of Yogyakarta (Erlan Muliadi et al., 2024), for example, in celebrating big days, family ceremonies, or rituals for safety. Offerings then become an acculturation of various cultural and religious elements that originate from the process of thoughts, desires, and feelings to get closer to God (Rohman et al., 2024). Offerings become a medium for society to perform sacred prayers (Kholis, 2022).

Often, offerings are not the "main agenda" but rather an integral part of traditional ceremonies in Java, such as the Labuhan ceremony or *ruwatan*—a ritual believed to ward off bad luck (Mubarak et al., 2024). Offerings include many components that carry positive meanings for the practitioners and the surrounding community. In offerings, there are many complements that The symbolic meaning of several elements that often appear in Javanese offerings includes (D.E. &

Kartika, 2022; Ristiani et al., 2024):

- *Tumpeng / Ambengan*: means gratitude for the abundant harvest and fortune. The cone shape means to always strive for God Almighty. Some interpret it as "*tumindak mempeng*" which means trying and working hard;
- Flowers: express the outpouring of the heart. It is hoped that the community will always be fragrant like flowers;
- Red-white colored porridge: symbolizes the father and mother or ancestors, so that all mistakes are forgiven;
- Whole chicken / *Ayam Ingkung*: is a chicken that is cooked whole. Comes from the word "*manengkung*," which means seriously. A jug or teapot filled with water, which means the water of life or purity;
- Market Snacks: are various typical foods that are usually sold in traditional markets, which means that life must be according to the rules, ensure personal well-being, and serve as a symbolic expression of social harmony;
- Raja (King) banana fruit, which means greatness and good hopes. Banana in Javanese "*Gedhang*" is interpreted as an abbreviation of *gesang ora mung madhang*, which means life is not just for eating.

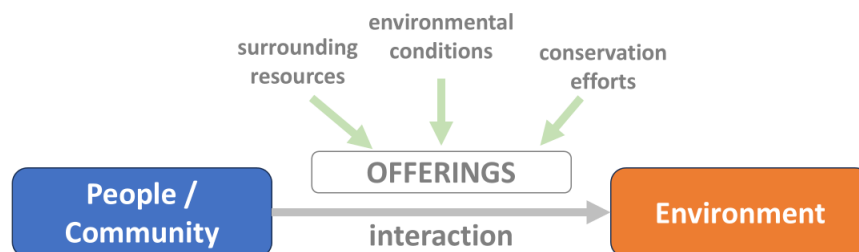
Offerings thus hold significance for the community. Offerings communicate with the spirit world and ancestral realms, maintain world balance, express gratitude, request blessings, preserve ancestral heritage, and strengthen the community. Additionally, offerings play an essential role in building and reinforcing social bonds. During their performance, offerings provide a moment for people to gather and foster a sense of togetherness among community members. Offerings are also an expression of cultural ecology, reflecting people's awareness of the importance of maintaining balance between humans and nature (Sihite et al., 2024).

Sihite *et.al.* (2024) also described offerings as a reflection of cultural ecology, indicating the community's awareness of the importance of maintaining the balance between humans and nature. The selection of materials used in offerings ritual often reflects local biodiversity and agricultural cycles, which shows reinforcement of the idea that humans must give back to nature in gratitude for its abundance. The practice of making offerings encourages sustainable harvesting, as

communities ensure that materials used for rituals remain available for future generations. Over time, offerings evolve to accommodate environmental shifts. In areas facing scarcity, substitutions are made to ensure rituals continue without causing ecological degradation. The narrative aligns with Julian Steward's cultural ecology theory by integrating cultural and ecological elements.

### **Offerings as a Socio-Cultural Practice Mediating Human–Environment Relations**

The study confirms that ritual offerings reflect adaptive responses to environmental conditions (Setyawati et al., 2019). Findings highlight that the use of natural materials—fruits, water, and plants—demonstrates the community's respect for and sustainable use of natural resources. This aligns with Steward's concept of dynamic human-environment interaction, where cultural practices develop in response to environmental challenges (Kerns, 2016). Essentially, culture is the result of human adaptation to environmental conditions (Smolla & Akçay, 2023). The ritual offering is a form of adaptation to the environment.



Picture 3. Offerings as a Cultural Mechanism Through Which Human–Environment Interactions Are Expressed and Negotiated  
(Source : Data processed by the researcher)

In the offering rituals of Yogyakarta (Setyawati et al., 2019), some utilize harvests or natural products such as fruits or water in specific quantities, reflecting an effort to use natural resources wisely and to respect nature as a source of life. This demonstrates the wise and locally relevant use of natural resources. The symbols that are manifested in the elements of the offerings are harvests or products from the natural environment, such as flowers and fruit, or water in limited quantities, showing an effort to use natural resources wisely and respect nature as a source of life. This shows a form of human effort to "interact" with their environment.

*"but the materials that are shared are indeed those provided by nature, and at that time, what is being harvested".* (interview with RK, July 22nd 2024)

*"...utilizing local potential. There are offerings and also using rice, so that utilizes the potential of the rice fields around the house."* (Interview with MA, July 22nd, 2024).

Using natural materials is how the community adapts and balances cultural needs and environmental limitations. From Steward's perspective, offerings are a tangible form of dynamic interaction between humans and the environment and culture that develops as a response to nature's various challenges and opportunities (Steward, 1972). Therefore, offerings serve as spiritual ceremonies and mechanisms to ensure sustainability and harmony between humans, nature, and the spiritual realm. Thus, this practice is an adaptation to environmental aspects that are beyond human control. Offerings are also an effort to help fulfill the needs and drive the economy of the surrounding community (Zini & Danardono, 2024).

*"More to the surrounding community who have agricultural or livestock products that are needed in the offerings. The distribution prioritizes local residents"* (interview EJ-descendant of ex-King of Yogyakarta's descendants, July 23rd, 2024).

This adaptation also illustrates the connection between cultural needs and environmental limitations. The people of Yogyakarta understand that to achieve balance in life, they must adjust their cultural practices to fit environmental conditions, both physically and spiritually. The ritual offering is part of an effort to maintain a relationship with the environment, which is seen not just as a resource but also as an entity that must be respected and cared for. Therefore, offerings not only reflect religious practices or age-old traditions but also demonstrate how communities continually adapt to their environmental conditions, both visible and invisible. Offerings are part of efforts to maintain relationships with the environment, which is considered not only as a resource, but also as an entity that must be respected and maintained. Therefore, offerings not only reflect religious practices or hereditary traditions, but also show how society adapts sustainably to the conditions of its environment, both visible and invisible.

### **Offerings as an Expression of Cultural Core**

The belief system in supernatural forces, ancestral spirits, or deities forms



the foundation of the offering practice. These rituals are a means of communication with supernatural forces and help shape group identity and the community's social values as an integral part of the cultural core (Andries, 2018).

As mentioned above, offerings often use natural materials, such as specific flowers or vegetables. This reflects that, perhaps unconsciously, the community already understands natural resources and ecological cycles. Each element used in offerings, such as flowers or vegetables, and even the choice of ritual timing, has symbolic meanings related to nature and sustainability. This indicates that the elements are chosen based on their availability in nature and natural cycles, directly linking to how people maintain their social and spiritual existence while adapting to their environment. In the context of cultural core, adaptation to the environment is not only about economic and material aspects but also encompasses symbolic and spiritual elements crucial to the community's life (Banda et al., 2024).

It can be concluded that offerings are a cultural practice closely linked to fundamental human needs, such as safety, blessings, and well-being. By involving elements from the existing environment, offerings can be seen as part of the cultural core that influences and directs the community's way of life. Although offerings are not directly related to production or food distribution, they are essential in maintaining social, spiritual, and environmental balance—all fundamental aspects of community survival.

Through analysis, the belief in supernatural forces and the integration of natural materials in rituals reveal how the cultural core directs social and spiritual life. This supports Steward's argument that cultural traits evolve to meet the dual demands of social and environmental factors. The findings demonstrate how symbolic and spiritual aspects of offerings serve as mechanisms for maintaining ecological balance and cultural sustainability.

The offerings, which are believed to be rooted in Hindu religious culture, can be adapted to the Islamic religion, which is currently adhered to by the majority of Yogyakarta society. As expressed by one informant,

*"For example, the kenduri activity is replaced with Thanksgiving, in terms of language, it is more Islamic. The contents of the offerings are also more contemporary. In the past, there were many kinds, and it had to be that; now it is simpler and just whatever is available around."* (interview with RK, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024)

From the informant's statement, it can be said that the tradition of *Kenduri* presenting offerings has not really disappeared but has transformed to remain relevant in the lives of Muslim communities. This adaptation shows that culture is flexible in responding to change without having to abandon the social meaning contained therein. So, offerings are not only a spiritual practice, but also an important strategy to maintain ecological balance and cultural sustainability. Through ritual practices involving these offerings, knowledge about how to interact with nature is passed on to the next generation. So that the cultural core continues to live and adapt to environmental changes.

This is reinforced by the statement of another informant who stated that cultural habits are passed down from generation to generation.

*"Because at that time I was still small, but over time I got to know them. This is because I was directly involved, right, Mas, with my parents, relatives, siblings".* (Interview with EJ, July 23rd, 2024).

The statement above confirms that the cultural core includes how cultural values are transmitted between generations. So that children who grow up in a particular society that carries out the *Selamatan* ritual by giving offerings will slowly get to know the practice as part of their cultural identity because they are directly involved.

Thus, the ritual of offerings is not just a spiritual practice but also an essential strategy for maintaining ecological balance and cultural sustainability (Erlan Muliadi et al., 2024). Through these ritual practices, knowledge of interacting with nature is passed on to the next generation, ensuring that the cultural core continues to live and adapt to environmental changes (Jakes, 2024).

### **Cultural Ecological Adaptation in the Practice of Offering Rituals**

As Nur (2021) states, the eco-centric and biocentric values underlying Indonesian culture have shaped harmonious social practices with nature. As one manifestation of this culture, the offering ritual becomes an exciting focus for study in the context of cultural ecological adaptation. From Julian Steward's (2016) perspective, societies adapt to their physical and social environments by engaging in cultural practices like the offering ritual. Through offerings, communities strive

to maintain harmony between their physical, spiritual, and environmental needs. The form of adaptation in cultural ecology within the offering ritual is evident from the process of implementation, which involves nature as a critical element.



Picture 4. Cultural Ecological Adaptation in Offering Practices

(Source: Data processed by the researcher)

Steward (1972) provided an essential foundation for understanding how culture functions as an environmental adaptation mechanism. In the context of the offering ritual, innovations in agricultural technology, fisheries, or other uses of natural resources are often integrated into the ritual practice. This demonstrates that the ritual is not merely symbolic but also serves an adaptive function, significantly supporting the community's survival.

Offering rituals often uses locally available resources while also considering seasonal cycles and agricultural abundance (Rappaport, 2000). Rituals help regulate the consumption of resources, preventing overexploitation. Many offering rituals refer to natural elements, embedding conservation aspects within the tradition. Some rituals act as a medium for cultural preservation and collective identity (Tuti & Safitri, 2024). Communal feasts, which usually involve offerings, facilitate symbolic communication, transmitting collective values across generations. This cross-generational participation fosters cultural continuity and social harmony (Tuti & Safitri, 2024).

Furthermore, rituals are a tangible manifestation of local wisdom, reflecting how communities adapt to their environment and maintain balance in life. Local wisdom, as defined by Ife (1995), plays a central role in offering rituals. Local knowledge about natural cycles, the properties of plants and animals, and the potential and limitations of natural resources form the basis for selecting the

offerings, timing of rituals, and the procedures involved. Thus, the offering ritual is not merely an offering but also a form of respect for nature and an effort to maintain ecosystem balance (Kumarasiri, 2025).

Offerings can help ease the economic burden and prevent food shortages as a problem faced by urban communities with limited resources.

*"it automatically helps MSMEs and helps maintain food security."*  
(interview with FU, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2024)

*"So indeed, indirectly, these less fortunate people are helped by the existence of these alms. Because usually it is impossible for people to just make offerings."* (interview with RK, July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2024)

Although eco-centric and bio-centric values are deeply rooted in Indonesian culture, the paradox between economic development and environmental preservation remains challenging. Unsustainable development often neglects local wisdom and damages the environment, leading to biodiversity loss, land degradation, and climate change, ultimately threatening human survival.

The offerings can be seen as a unique form of community empowerment ("Curvilinear Effect," 2023). Through this ritual, people preserve their cultural identity, strengthen social ties, and reinforce the values of mutual cooperation. This shows that the community not only maintains its cultural identity, but also strengthens social relations and the values of mutual cooperation (Marzuki, 2024). This is supported by the statement of one of the informants, who stated how offerings preserve the values of mutual cooperation.

*"because every time there is an activity, the villagers help each other and work together so that the event can run smoothly"* (FU interview, July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024)

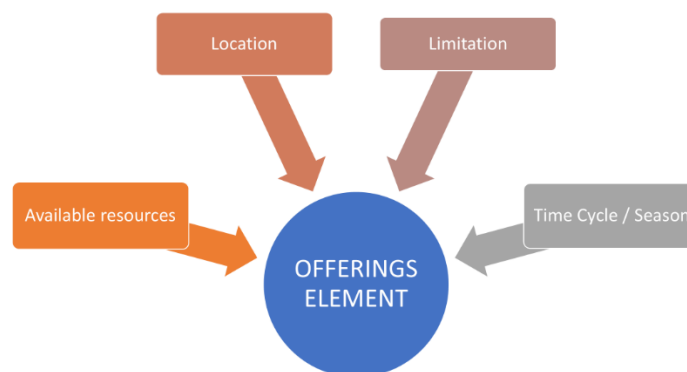
However, challenges such as unsustainable development and environmental degradation were noted, threatening the continuation of these practices. In the practice of the *selamatan* ritual, the community often also works together in preparing offerings, so that the community not only adapts to the environment but also builds social solidarity among each other.

## The Influence of Ecology in Ritual Offerings

Ecology is essential in influencing, shaping, and sustaining rituals across various cultures, particularly in the Yogyakarta community. First, natural resources serve as vital elements in rituals (Septia, 2024). Offerings often use materials available in the local environment, such as flowers, fruits, crops, and water from local sources.

Second, ecology also influences the timing and location of rituals. Rituals are usually designed to maintain balance with nature; thus, rituals are performed considering planting and harvesting cycles. Even the places where these rituals are carried out—such as mountains, beaches, or large trees—are carefully chosen. The selection of these locations reflects how people negotiate with natural forces considered sacred and influential.

In addition to the materials used, ecology also impacts the locations where offering rituals are performed (Prasetyo, 2023a). Many rituals are held in places believed to have significant spiritual power, such as mountains, beaches, rivers, or large trees. The selection of these locations aligns with the community's belief in maintaining harmony with nature as an integral part of their environment.



Picture 5. The Influence of Ecology on The Elements Of Offerings

(Source: Data processed by the researcher)

The study found that ritual locations—mountains, beaches, rivers, and trees—are carefully chosen based on their spiritual significance. This supports the concept of cultural ecology, where rituals embody respect for natural elements considered sacred. Observations confirmed that these practices not only maintain cultural identity but also strengthen ecological awareness.

*"For example, in the rice fields, there will be 'nature's alms' so that the harvest will be abundant, and we will also avoid crop failure, pests, floods, and so on" (interview MA, July 23rd, 2024).*

On the other hand, sometimes the selection of a location is intended to protect a resource by making it "sacred".

*"For example, we make a ritual for a sacred place, well, that place will not be damaged by residents or the community because it was sanctified." (interview FU, July 23rd, 2024).*

## CONCLUSION

The ritual procession of offerings remains an integral part of the culture of the Javanese people. Though it originated from animistic and dynamistic beliefs, the ritual has evolved and adapted to changes. Findings highlight that offerings serve as mechanisms for ecological adaptation, cultural identity preservation, and social cohesion. Through the use of natural materials, communities demonstrate sustainable practices that align with Julian Steward's cultural ecology framework, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between humans and their environment (Fauziyah et al., 2024). The offerings are a spiritual practice and reflect the close relationship between humans and their environment (Sihite et al., 2024). This practice supports ecosystem balance and preserves cultural and social values passed down to future generations (Prasetyo, 2023). In the ecological context, the offering ritual helps the community maintain environmental balance through respect for nature and implementing rituals aligned with natural cycles.

The study's findings contribute practical implications for promoting environmental sustainability and safeguarding cultural heritage. Additionally, the integration of cultural traditions into environmental initiatives can strengthen community cohesion while addressing sustainability goals. This study expands on cultural ecology theory by demonstrating how traditional practices contribute to environmental sustainability and community resilience. It highlights that rituals like *Selamatan* are not static traditions but evolve as adaptive responses to socio-environmental changes. While offering valuable contributions, this study is not



without limitations. Its analytical scope is centered on the Javanese cultural context, specifically the Yogyakarta region, which may constrain the applicability of its findings to broader socio-cultural settings that exhibit distinct ecological and ritual traditions.

Future research could explore similar practices in other cultural settings to provide comparative insights. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine the evolving role of ritual offerings in response to environmental and social changes, highlighting how traditional practices sustain relevance in modern contexts. Expanding the methodological scope to include quantitative approaches would also provide broader generalizability and robust data to support the theoretical framework presented here.

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