

Changes in Reciprocity: From Patron–Client Relationships to Commercial Transactions in Rural Central Java

Imam Santosa^a, Muslihudin Muslihudin^b, Wiwiek Rabiyyatul Adawiyah^c,
^{a,b}Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Jenderal Soedirman University, ^cDepartment of Management, Faculty of Economic and Business, Jenderal Soedirman University, Email: ^aScokronegoro@yahoo.com,
^bMuslihudin1963@yahoo.com, ^cwiwiekra@gmail.com

This study aimed to explore the nature of present day relationships among landowners, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and agricultural workers. The trends and changes in these relationships in rural Central Java were examined. This qualitative research used a semi-grounded, phenomenological method. This research was conducted in the Purbalingga, and Banyumas Regencies of Central Java. The results indicated that peasants in rural areas, which are relatively remote from a city, tend to be in asymmetrical and exploitive working relationships with landowners, whereas farmers are not. By contrast, the largely commercially motivated relationships with farmers in rural areas near cities tends to be more symmetrical. In fact, farm labourers are in a stronger bargaining position than landowners because of the scarcity of agricultural workers. This research suggests that the working relationship between landowner-farmers, and cultivating farmers is beneficial to both parties, and should therefore be maintained. However, the asymmetrical nature of the working relationship requires attention, so that it does not create difficulties for either party.

Keywords: *Reciprocity, Patron-client, Relationships, Commercial transactions, Landowners, Labours.*

Introduction

In agrarian societies, reciprocity in social relations may be symmetrical or asymmetrical. When the reciprocity in social relations in farming businesses is asymmetrical, undue pressure is exerted by one party on another. This pressure can take the form of domination or exploitation, which disrupts work operations and farm management. Asymmetrical reciprocity has thus far benefited landholder farmers, and agrarian village elites (Scott, 1983; Dumasari et al., 2019; Jana et al., 2013; Baldassarri, 2015). However, with globalisation now penetrating commercial markets, it appears that the dominant role of village elites, including landowners, is being challenged by a strengthening of the bargaining position of farm labourers. This strengthening of farm laborers' bargaining position relative to landowners is a new phenomenon in social agriculture.

Gradual changes in these asymmetrical relationships, such that farm labourers now hold a dominant position over landowners in suburban areas, is due in part to the scarcity of agricultural labour in the countryside (Evers, 1982). Farmers of productive age with a landless peasant status prefer to work outside the village or move to urban areas. Given the scarcity of agricultural labour, it is difficult for landowners to hire farm labourers in the countryside. Any available farm labourers are entitled to earn part-time wages, in accordance with the local labour market. This situation is often seen in rural areas that are relatively close to urban centres (Santosa et al., 2019). Social relations between farm labourers and landowners have shifted from patron–client relations to purely economic transactions. Thus, the value of patronage has gradually diminished.

Reciprocity is a form of social relations between landowner and labourers. Reciprocity, itself, can be categorised in two forms of relation: symmetrical, and asymmetrical. If reciprocity is asymmetrical, social relations in the farming business create social vulnerability. This may lead to the presence of domination or exploitation, which disrupts the process of work and the atmosphere of social relations in the context of farm management. Asymmetrical reciprocity has before now benefited landowners, including the process of work, and the atmosphere of social relations. Asymmetrical reciprocity has benefited landowner farmers or agrarian village elites (Scott, 1989; Dumasari et al., 2019; Jana et al., 2013; Baldassarri 2015). Nonetheless, as urbanisation increases and penetrates the labour markets, it becomes clear that the labourers will have greater possibilities upon having more alternative generating income, as the employment opportunities arise.

Asymmetrical reciprocity can weaken the bargaining position of farm labourers. Landowner-farmers are still in a dominant position in villages that are remote from urban areas, such that farm labourers and smallholder farmers have limited income-generating opportunities. Asymmetrical reciprocity interferes with farm productivity. In particular, problems can occur

when one party has a larger economic burden. Achieving fairness is difficult if reciprocity remains asymmetrical. Farm labourers face poverty if the wages they receive remain relatively stagnant due to the dominance of landowner farmers.

Certain sociocultural and economic conditions in farming communities could be addressed to promote harmonious social relations, which are characterised by symmetrical reciprocity (Dumasari et al., 2019). One possible strategy for reducing the dependence of farm labourers on landowner-farmers is empowerment based upon improved management of the natural resources (Santosa et al., 2019; Dumasari et al., 2020). It is important to enhance the ability of farm labourers to engage in both on- and off-farm work, including the management of micro-businesses aimed at the environmentally friendly processing of agricultural waste (Dumasari et al., 2020).

This study was designed to examine the variations in rural farming relationships. This is an important topic because it involves economic and social justice issues with implications for stable and progressive agricultural activity. Currently, in rural hinterlands, patron–client relationships that are supposed to protect communities are in decline. Originally, in accordance with their political and economic power, patrons could secure relatively inexpensive labour. In turn, patrons had an obligation to help their clients during various adverse life circumstances. However, the present situation is very different. Scott (1989) described how subsistence farmers must prioritise safety, which remains relevant today. In an early study of social relations in the context of farming, Homans (1974) argued that from a sociological perspective, true reciprocity is characterised by a reciprocal social exchange between parties; an ideal reciprocal relationship is characterised by equitable social exchange. Blau (1964) had a different conception of reciprocity, arguing that social exchange is inherently uneven, as supported by our findings in rural areas. In areas close to the urban centre, the position of farm labourers increased in strength due to the availability of alternative income sources. In some agricultural communities, reciprocity occurs in the context of several cultures and markets involved in agricultural and environmental businesses (Betrisey et al., 2016).

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of present day relationships among landowners, smallholder farmers, tenant farmers, farm labourers, and agricultural workers. Furthermore, the trends and changes in these relationships were examined. Our hypothesis was that the relationships among the various parties in localities close to urban areas are more equitable than those in rural hinterlands, and suburban areas.

Methodology

The rural–urban border and hinterland areas in the Purbalingga, and Banyumas Regencies of the Central Java Province were selected as the study sites because they represent high and low population density areas, respectively. In both areas, the main source of income for farmers is the cultivation of the land. Santosa et al. (2019) found that a large proportion (>30 per cent) of farmers were classified as landowners and landless peasants, with the status of farming labourers. For the current study, primary and secondary data were collected through in-depth interviews and observation. The study cohort comprised two groups: landowners, and landless farmers. The respondent data was gathered using a purposive sampling technique, and was analysed qualitatively in terms of the trends and types of working relationships.

Result and Discussion

Social relationships between landowner-farmers and the various types of workers in villages close to and remote from urban areas tended to be characterised by reciprocal exchange. Symmetrical reciprocity was found in the social relationships of landowners with landless farmers, farm labourers, and tenant farmers. Equality in material benefits (wages), and services (labour and work time) was reported by the majority (>50 per cent) of the respondents, in line with the studies of Homans (1974), and Santosa (2017).

The reciprocal exchange between landowners and sharecroppers was expressed in the willingness of the former to provide access to all of the agricultural production facilities and materials necessary for the period between the start of planting and harvest, including plant seeds, fertilisers, chemicals for controlling pests and diseases, and tractors. Thus, the farmers could focus on seeding, planting (including creating channels), fertilising, spraying for pests, weeding, and harvesting. The cultivating farmers demonstrated their loyalty to the landowners by working throughout the season. However, the client–patron relationships still experienced several complexities. Landowner-farmers often have their own economic problems, and sometimes expect assistance from smallholders in carrying out activities beyond the production process, such as maintaining home yards and gardens, after the latter receive their share of the harvest at the end of the season. Cultivating farmers do not receive daily or weekly wages. Instead, they receive a share of the harvest from the landowner. Under the *maro* system, the two parties halve the yield. In other words, each receives 50 per cent of the harvest. However, this system is becoming less popular. In fact, it has largely being replaced by the *mrapat* system, in which tenants and landowners receive one quarter, and three quarters of the yield, respectively. The *mrapat* system is justified based on the premise that smallholder peasants are protected from the risk of crop failure because all production facilities are provided by landowner-farmers.

Asymmetrical relations occur when landowners live near urban areas because they bear a greater economic burden, in association with the purchase of agricultural production facilities, and the provision of wages to farm labourers. Due to the scarcity of workers, where many workers are farming their own land, the landowner-farmer respondents reported being forced to provide higher wages at each step of the production process to attract farm workers.

In this case, asymmetrical reciprocity was characterised by a stronger bargaining position on the part of farm labourers. This can be understood in terms of the theory of displacement proposed by Blau (1974), and Marx (2010), according to which the owner of the means of production determines the labour relations. This is in accordance with study of Barreera and Azeez (2018), who stated that the more urbanised an area becomes, the scarcer cultivation land becomes, which can cause conflict. In the present research, the landowner-farmers, and farm labourers were no longer in a patron–client relationship. Instead, the landowners were motivated entirely by economic factors, desiring increased labour and work times (asymmetrical reciprocity). Although the rate of increase in farm labourers’ wages is not high because it is adjusted according to the labour market in the surrounding villages, the worker respondents reported that the relative wage was increased by reducing work productivity, including on-farm labour. Asymmetrical social relationships between landowners, and farm labourers who live in the villages which are remote from urban areas, were also seen in this study. The cultivating farmers, in this case, were the most respectful towards landowners because they were confined in difficult economic circumstances due to relatively low wages. The various social relationships and types of reciprocity observed in this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: The various social relationships and types of reciprocity observed

No	Participants in Social Relations	Types of Exchange		Nature of Reciprocity			
		1	2	Villages near a city		Villages remote from a city	
	-	-	-	Symmetrical	Asymmetrical	Symmetrical	Asymmetrical
1	Landowner-farmers – Sharecroppers	Provision of land and production facilities, and profit sharing with sharecroppers.	Provision of labour during production and other types of work (average 5 hours per day).	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and sharecroppers.	Less powerful position for landowner-farmers.	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and sharecroppers.	Less powerful position for sharecroppers.
2	Landowner-farmers – Labour farmers	Provision of land and daily or weekly wages.	Provision of labour for selected activities (average 8 hours per	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and farm workers.	Very strong position for landowner-farmers.	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and farm workers.	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and farm workers.

			day).				
3	Landowner-farmers – Tenant farmers	Land permits, land rent, and land management trusts for tenant farmers.	Land rent payment and management of land leased for farming.	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and tenant farmers.	-	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and tenant farmers.	-
4	Landowner-farmers – Cropper tenant farmers	Land permits, land rent, and land management trusts allowing tenant farmers to farm autonomously.	Land rent payment, management of land leased for farming, provision of labour during production, and working on the land (average 8 hours per day).	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and tenant farmer sharecroppers.	-	Very strong position for landowner-farmers and tenant farmer sharecroppers.	-

Source: Primary data 2020 (to be analysed)

Regarding the status and roles in farm management, and motives for offering and accepting agricultural employment, certain elements are longstanding, although new phenomena are also emerging in agricultural labour relations (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Types of social relationships observed in this study (based on primary data).



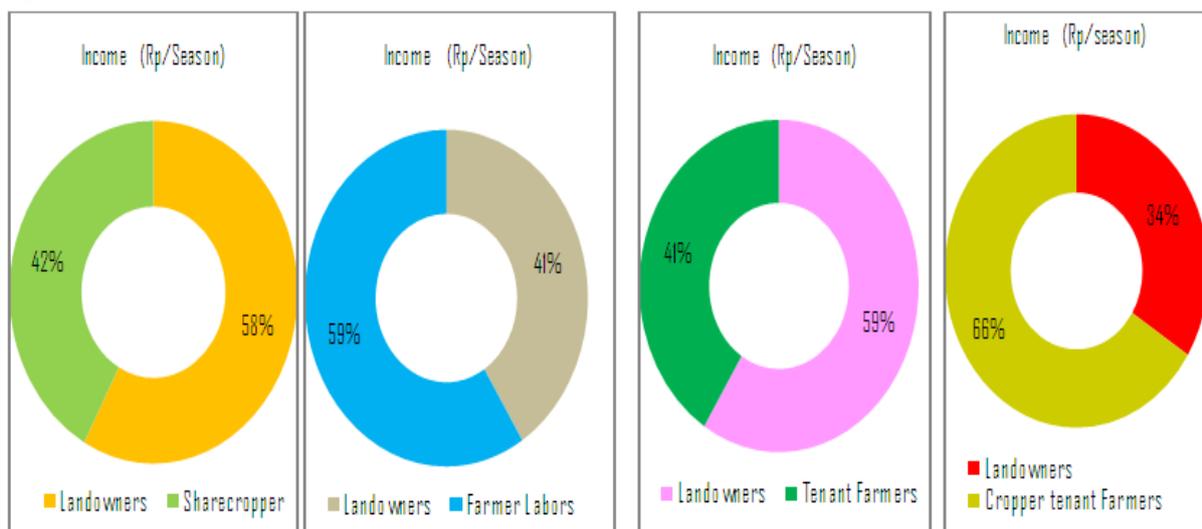
The relationships between landowners, and tenant farmers are motivated by social and economic factors, with the latter being dominant. Employment relationships are based on contractual agreements and mutual trust. The factors motivating the various types of social relationships reported by our respondents are shown in Figure 1. Interestingly, although they

are often in a somewhat exploitative relationship, especially in rural areas remote from urban centres, peasant communities and farm labourers do not engage in social protests. According to Amaluddin (1994), this is because of the reciprocal bond between landowner-farmers, and the tenant farmers, and the farm labourers who work for them.

The Figure 2 shows the relationships between landowner-farmers, and three other types of farmers. The figure illustrates the marked difference in income during a single growing season. For example, the landowner-farmers receive a 59 per cent share of the total harvest, whereas farm workers receive 41 per cent. The relative proportions between landowner-farmers, and smallholders are 58 per cent, and 42 per cent, respectively, and those between landowner-farmers, and tenant farmers are 41 per cent, and 59 per cent, respectively. The situation in this latter case is different because the landowner-farmers only receive land rent.

Furthermore, Figure 2 shows the relationship between farmers who own land with the three other types, which shows a difference in the proportion of income distribution. The income distribution in one growing season for work relations between the owner, and farmer farmers shows an imbalance with the economy. Farm workers receive an average of 41 per cent of the total harvest. Meanwhile, farmers owning land receive a share of 59 per cent. The income distribution for the participation pattern of farmers, and smallholders is 58:42, while for the income distribution of owner farmers, and tenant farmers is 41:59 because the owner farmers only receive land rent.

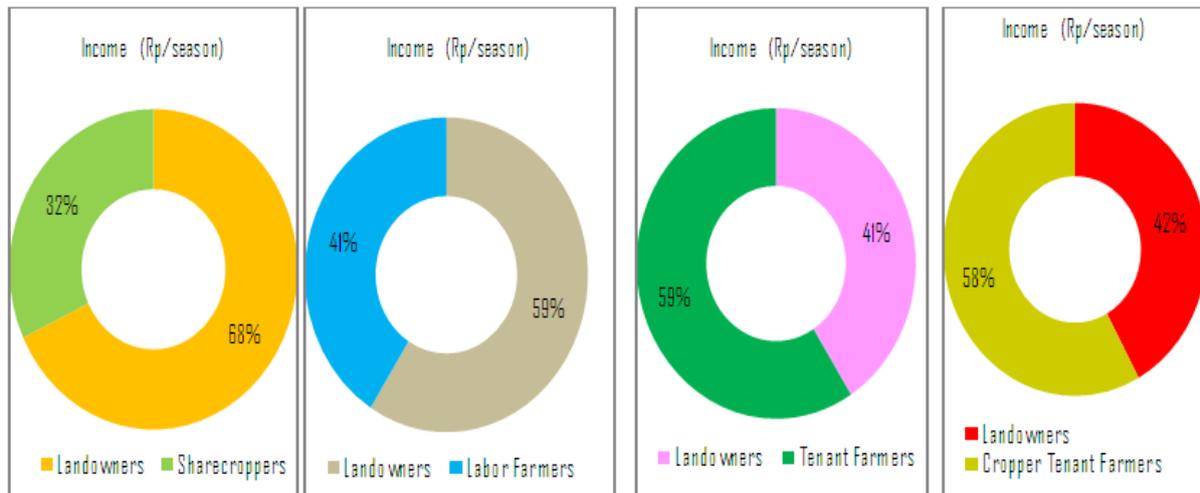
Figure 2. Variation of income distribution by type of social relations in the activities in the agricultural areas which are far from the centre of town.



The distribution pattern for owner farmers, and tenants is 34:66. The pattern of income distribution that is most dominant is the owner farmer, who still wants to work on his farm.

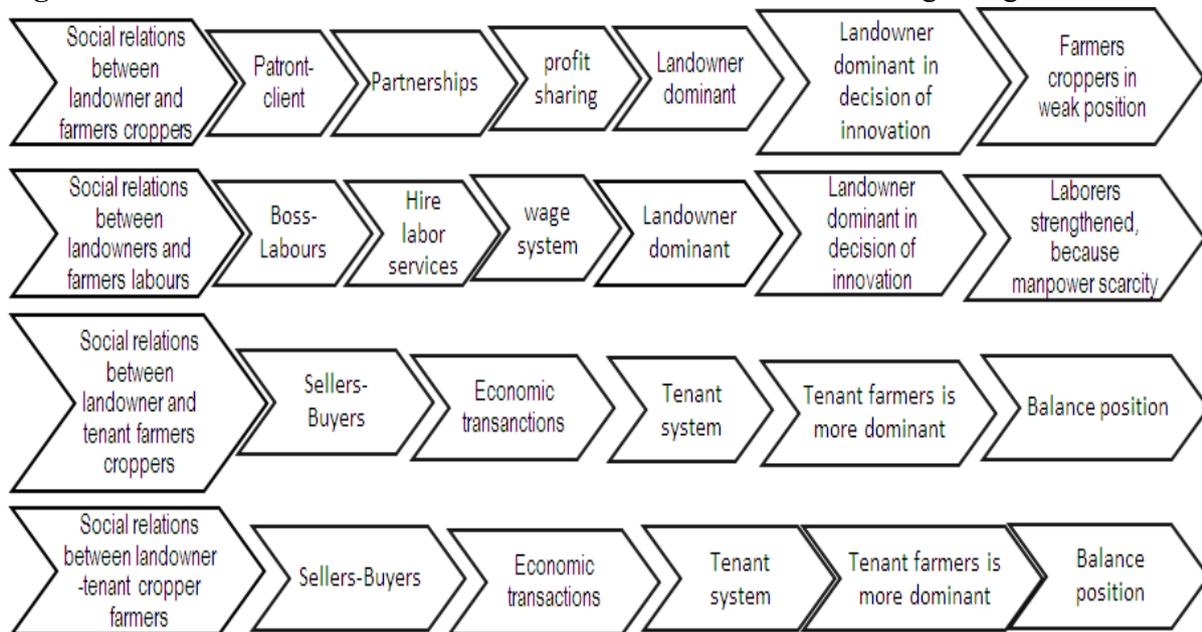
For farmers who spend their profits are very limited, by these groups should make a breakthrough so that agricultural products do not suffer losses. Each party has, each party, because now the farmer has relatively large property rights, namely the agricultural land that belongs to him (Jana et al., 2013).

Figure 3. Variation of income ratio by type of social relations in the agricultural activities in the suburban areas.



Slightly different from the variation in the relationships between farmers who own land with the other three types, the results show a difference for the proportion of income distribution in the villages close to urban areas. The distribution of income in one growing season for work relations between the owner farmers, and farm labourers shows an economic imbalance. The distribution of income is in contrast with farm labourers based far from urban areas. The farmers benefit more because on average they receive 59 per cent of the total harvest. Meanwhile, landowner farmers receive a 41 per cent share. The distribution of income is for the pattern of the relationship between the owner and the cultivating farmer 68:32, while for the income distribution of the owner, and tenant farmer it is 41:59 because the owner farmer only accepts to receive the land rent. The distribution patterns for owner farmers, and tenant is 42:58. From the pattern of income distribution, the most dominant is benefit for farm labourers, compared to those far from urban areas. The farmer owners who are still willing to work on their agricultural land continue to benefit. However, if they are dependent on wage labour, the owner farmers tend to receive a small distribution.

Figure 4. Social relations between varied statuses: roles and social bargaining



The social relationships with landowners, and smallholder farmers show the client relationships that occur during the production process with the existence of social relations between providing opportunities for mutual partnership. It can be agreed that the pattern of income distribution obtained through the system for the final results continues to survive. This phenomenon has often been explored by Scott (1989), and Mashavave (2013). Furthermore, this traditional work relationship is still relatively better. Farmer informant landowners remain dominant in making decisions to determine the production technology used from one season to another. Concerning the reciprocity relationship between smallholder farmers who have a weak bargaining position, this is related to the work of Santosa (2017), and Santosa et al. (2019). This happens because the landowner farmers require greater production costs. A landlord informant with the initials, ‘NS’ (59 years), explained the large economic dependents, as follows:

“We both work together. I am 80 per cent as the owner of the land, and 20 per cent for the tenants. If the harvest fails, I don't give it for the results because what [is there that] should be shared? Here the tenants participate in loss”.

The social relationships with farmers who own land, and farm labourers indicate employers and labourers during the production process. The existence of a social relationship between the two provides an opportunity to partner labour services with the wage system. The decision making is entirely undertaken by the land owner because all the means of production are from the land owner. The bargaining position of farm labourers is strong, especially in

rural localities close to urban areas due to a shortage of labour in the agricultural sector. A landlord informant with the initials, 'RM', explained as follows:

"We work together. If I use a rational calculation, if I work, I pay Rp 40,000 daily, but if I don't work, I don't pay. Of course all the results are for me because all the costs are also increased, starting with the seeds, fertiliser, and also the cost of eradicating pests, [which] I always do in order to be able to harvest. If it's not sprayed, it's not harvested".

The social relationships between landowners, and tenant farmers show the relationship between sellers, and buyers. The context of this relationship discusses economic interactions with land lease agreements. Of course, the rental system consists of a land contract (lease) agreement, and the amount of the agreed rental fee. The average renting period is between one and five years. The decision to adopt an innovation depends upon the tenant farmers. Usually, tenant farmers pay rent to choose which is more profitable. The bargaining position between the two parties depends on a balanced and mutual understanding. This condition can occur in rural, as well as urban areas. The land owner informant with the initials, 'SK', explained as follows:

"Social relationships with landowners, and tenants show[s] buyers as sellers, and buyers. The context of this relationship moves pure economic transactions with land lease agreements".

In this context, the agreed rents are the key to the existing social relations. Filled in including the timeliness of paying the rental fee. The social relations between owner farmers, and tenant farmers do not use formal written agreements. This characterises a relatively informal and personal relationship that is still their working relationship. All can be resolved through non-criminal channels. If problems arise where they find injustice occurs, then they cannot do much. This social relationship takes place verbally, and is based on a mutual trust. A lease of between one and five years applies. The decision to adopt an innovation depends upon the tenant farmers. Usually, tenant farmers pay rent to choose which is more profitable. The bargaining position between the two parties depends upon being symmetrical and balanced. This condition can occur in rural, as well as urban areas. The informant with the initials, 'SMN', explained as follows:

"We work together. If I use rational calculations, then of all the most difficult farmers, tenants will have to come out with cheaper land rent. All prices also go up. Only to get the nickname can only work".

Related to variations in work relationships that occur. This is in line with the findings of Rustinsyah (2011), Baldassari (2017), Santoso and Suyanto (2018), and Dumasari et al.



(2019), whose essence is related to commercial. Clients can improve their relationships. For each region related to work in the field of uniform agriculture. As a consequence, farmers, and wage labourers still need to carry out empowerment activities to strengthen their bargaining position, which is now increasing.

Conclusion

Working relationships among the various farming stakeholders in suburban villages tend to be more symmetrical and mutually beneficial, whereas those in rural hinterlands tend to be more asymmetrical, with greater benefits for landowner-farmers. It is suggested that mutually beneficial working relationships between landowner-farmers and cultivating farmers should be fostered. In cases where the relationship is exploitative, the provision of continuous assistance and empowerment of the disadvantaged parties is required.

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