

# A Landowning Structure Shift to the Irrigation Ecosystems in Wotan Village, Sukolilo District, Pati Regency during 2000-2015

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**Abstract.** This research was triggered by the question why there was a shift in the landowning structure to the irrigation ecosystems in Wotan village, Sukolilo District, Pati Regency during 2000-2015. Through a critical history method, the research significant determinants were identified based on the success of Indonesian migrant workers (known as TKI/Tenaga Kerja Indonesia) from the Wotan village, Sukolilo District, Pati Regency who had given the birth to newly wealthy people (known as OKB/Orang Kaya Baru). These newly wealthy people bought agricultural land having good irrigation from Jratun Seluna reservoir resulted from their remittances while working abroad. This choice of investment was quite productive and effective to increase the household income leading to the improving family welfare. The success story then motivated the migrant workers from the village even some surrounding villages to do the same thing by spending their remittances to buy agricultural land and open other productive businesses. The condition then shifted the landowning structure made by the migrant workers who originally had no agricultural land and then became the owners of agricultural land. The shift of landowning structures had a positive impact on agricultural productivity because the availability of their capital tended to intensify the agriculture, especially the use of fertilizers and pesticides. In addition, they also opened and developed other productive businesses, so that the economic activities of the people of Wotan Village progressed dynamically.

## 1 Introduction

Farmers' life Farmers' life in rural areas who relied their source of life on agriculture, including in Java at the beginning of the 20th century, was described by Scott [1] as having a familiar personal relationship and full sense of kinship and helped each other in the patron-client relationship with the moral economy of 'subsistence ethics'. They had a socio-economic institution that was full of good and simplicity where there was a subsistent management guarantee of life for smallholders and farm labourers from rich farmers through a pattern of employment relations in the agricultural/agrarian sector. Popkin [2] had a different view that in the relationship of the patron-client, there was a transactional relationship leading to exploitation by rich farmers to small farmers or farm workers, and in

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such cases that small farmers were quite rational to make a choice and take strategic steps in order to survive including small investment habits in the form of livestock and migrating out of the village for better livelihoods.

Migration outside the village has continued until today. Residents who migrate outside the village are usually followed by their families, relatives, neighbours and close friends. Their kinship has been supported by traditions and close bonds in the area of origin. This condition causes ones to stay (Centripetal Force), and even if they have to migrate, they will do it together [3]. Brotherhood and kinship among them, mutual cooperation system, and attachment to their place of origin are the reasons underlying their actions. On the other hand, there is emerging power that encourages them to leave the area (centrifugal force), among others are the difficulties to find jobs outside the agricultural sector and work expectations elsewhere. The term centripetal forces and centrifugal forces were widely used by researchers in examining community migration issues from one region to another. There was a power causing people bound to his homeland. The mention of centripetal forces was used to call people who had the attachment to the birth post, which was then bound to the land of parents' inheritance or bat of the birth of the land as an ancestor. Meanwhile, Centrifugal Forces were used to refer to people who chose to leave the land of birth because of the education needs or limited employment in the area of origin [4].

According to Husken, based on Javanese rural studies conducted in the 1970s, there was an agricultural revolution. This was seen in increasing polarization in traditional farmers. One of them was the divination of the agricultural society in the class of commercial rice farmers on the one hand and the emergence of other proletarian groups [5]. This phenomenon also occurred in Wotan Village, Sukolilo District, Pati Regency, Central Java Province. Wotan Village has the largest agricultural land in Central Java, which ranks third nationally.

The farmer community in Wotan has decided to work as migrant workers (TKI) due to the need to fulfil life and effort to improve family welfare. They sold their land in the village to cater for the cost needed to realize their dreams to be migrant workers. The number of migrant workers originating from the village of Wotan continued to grow as many of them were successful, and it also became the magnet for other villagers to migrate outside the village. Moreover, the remittances of Indonesian migrant workers from the village of Wotan then succeeded in dynamizing the economic activities, which increased the number of productive newly wealthy villagers with various businesses opened and agricultural land investments. Since the land has a high value, it is easy to sell at any time, especially when there is a good opportunity [6]. The purchase of agricultural land permanently from generation to generation by the people of Wotan Village from the results of their remittances as migrant workers is an interesting phenomenon because it was done by several people and succeeded in changing their social status as newly wealthy people who were respected in their environment. Socio-economically, they appeared to be referenced because the socio-economic activities in the village were increasingly dynamic and contributed to the progress of society. Based on the above background, this research discussed further how the landowning structure shift to the irrigation ecosystems in Wotan Village during 2000-2015 took place and caused impacts.

## **2 Results and Discussion**

### **2.1 Farmer Dilemma: to Farm or to be Migrant Workers**

Wotan Wotan village consisted of ten hamlets, eleven rukun kampung (RK) and forty-six neighbourhood units (known as RT). The existing settlement system tended to split and

separate from one village to another. The settlement pattern in Wotan tended to be spread out, consisting of hamlets and buildings scattered over a certain distance.

The total population of Wotan Village was recorded by 7,613 people, consisting of 3,793 men and 3,820 women. The main livelihoods of the Wotan people were farmers and agricultural labourers. This was because the agricultural area in Wotan Village reached 1,756 hectares (Interview with Madekur, 2020). Meanwhile, the other livelihoods widely cultivated by the residents were construction workers, industrial workers, entrepreneurs, transporters, civil servants, fishermen and others.

Although agricultural land in Wotan village was a strategic food production area, this region's agricultural land was an area with a very high vulnerability status due to the floods, droughts, pest attacks (brown planthopper, rice and tungro virus) and plant diseases. In its history, the area of Wotan village was the former Muria Strait or called a mud solace. This caused labile soil conditions. During the rainy season, the streets were easily flooded. While during the dry season, the land in the village was cracked. The rice fields were susceptible to submerging in water during the rainy season. Often times the rice plants that were ready to harvest could not be sold to wholesale buyers because they were submerged in water.

In addition, many rice fields are out of reach of primary irrigation channels from Jratun Seluna, thus causing farmers to have to pay additional costs for pumping. Channel reservoir (WS) JratunSeluna was a Reservoir Development Project during the New Order, which was a continuation of the Kedung Reservoir Construction Project OMBO-Grobogan, as the realization of the Green Revolution program in Indonesia. In addition to expanding the waterways from the reservoir of Kedung Ombo, the construction of this reservoir to improve the rice fields in various fields of rice fields passed. The construction of WS Jratun once through the Pantura area in twelve districts in Central Java, including Pati Regency. Wotan Village, including in the WS Jratuneluna Irrigation Development Project. Although it was enough to benefit from the construction of this Jratuneluna WS, but not all agricultural land in Wotan village got a water supply from WS Jratunseluna. The profit-sharing system of the water management committee also reduced farmers' income. Farmers had to submit a certain area (usually 1/8 or 1/16) to be given to the water committee. This very high threat of vulnerability caused crop failure that farmers often complained about [7].

On the other hand, when the dry season came, the threats to farmers were mice or plant hoppers and stem borer pests which came in turns. This situation has made farmers' rice fields unreliable as a source of income. Agriculture in Wotan Village was considered to be not going well. Owning agricultural land did not provide income security for farmers. The land is the most important factor for human life. The land is a gift from nature. The relation between humans and land must be seen as a unit [8]. In Java and other areas, land fertility is equipped natural irrigation systems become the expensive assets [9]. Agricultural development must pay attention to scale. Meanwhile, farmers are looking for a profit [10]. Meanwhile, extensive agricultural lands did not guarantee that they were free from the risk of being unable to fulfil their daily needs. Debt then became a further problem which was then treated as an alternative.

The condition led to the initiative to look for other more promising sources of income. One of the alternatives to get income was to work as a migrant, both inside and outside the country. Since the 90s, the phenomenon of Wotan villagers becoming overseas migrants began to emerge and reached its peak in 2010. At that time, 45% of the residents in Jongso Hamlet, Wotan Village were known to have become Indonesian migrant workers (known as TKI/Tenaga Kerja Indonesia).

The destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers from Wotan were South Korea, Malaysia and Dubai. One of the reasons people choose to become migrant workers

was the fulfilment of their daily needs and the desire to achieve a more decent life. In the village, there were no reliable jobs to make, while job competition outside the village was increasing. On the other hand, to become a migrant worker, of course, required a lot of capital. From here, residents who chose to become migrant workers tried to find ways to raise capital by mortgaging or selling their agricultural land or by proposing a loan to the bank.

Meanwhile, in the tradition of the Wotan Village community, the land had a very high value. This contradicts the data above, saying that the land in Wotan was unproductive, flooded, etc. Rice fields were referred to as "gawan" or inheritance, determining a man's self-image when proposing a woman to marry. When a man already owned a rice field, then he was considered appropriate to choose as a life partner. High land value could also be seen from land ownership determining one's social class. Currently, there are many unique phenomena occurring in Wotan Village related to the sales and purchases of rice fields (Interview with Madekur, 2020).

Village farmers who wanted to sell their rice fields were highly sought after by the people who owned the capital. Those who had high incomes were migrant workers who were still abroad or retired migrant workers who invested their money in the form of paddy fields. However, there were also communities participating in seeking rice fields, namely overseas workers who had become overseers. These people were the ones hunting for rice fields if there were farmers selling their fields without having to bargain about prices. This was the reason why the price of agricultural rice fields in Wotan Village was quite high. Based on the statement of the Head of Wotan H. Madekur Village (27/4), currently, the price of 0.5 hectares of rice fields could reach 200 to 250 million rupiahs. This was different from the price of paddy fields in other villages in the Sukolilo District area. In Prawoto Village, for example, the price of 0.5 hectares of rice fields generally reached 75 to 100 million rupiahs.

Not only buying rice fields in Wotan Village, but the owners of capital had also expanded the rice field investment area to other neighbouring villages, such as Baturejo Village, Sukolilo District, adjacent to the Wotan village area. Currently, the owners of around 25 per cent of agricultural land in Baturejo village are Wotan residents who have become migrant workers, retired migrant workers or overseas workers (Interview with Sya'roni, 2020). They, who are the owners of capital, expanded to other areas by buying rice fields in other villages as an effort to affirm social affairs and improve social status in the community. Half of the land of the vast landowners in ancient times until now is still highly respected by the community or are termed metaphors "dangkal jati dangkal jarak".

## 2.2 Irrigation Ecosystems and Agricultural Production

The years 1980 to 1995 marked the beginning of the development of the green revolution in Indonesia. At this time, it was marked by a change in agricultural patterns from traditional to modern. Concerning agriculture in Wotan Village, at this time, there has been no significant change. Wotan village was originally a swamp area. Given this area, it was a former Muria strait. In those years, many agricultural lands were still in the form of swamps, so the cultivation of agricultural land did not run optimally. This situation did not only occur in Wotan Village, but several other villages in Sukolilo District experienced the same thing.

In 1980 the New Order government started the construction of Kedung Ombo Reservoir and the construction of the Jratun Seluna Canal Reservoir. The construction of Kedung Ombo Reservoir aimed to regulate the flow of agricultural water in several areas in Central Java, starting from Grobogan, Pati, Demak, Kudus to several other districts. As a continuation of the construction of Kedung Ombo Reservoir, the New Order government

also carried out the construction of Jratun Seluna Canal Reservoir. The construction of Kedung Ombu Reservoir and Seluna Jratun Canal Reservoir took a long time. Given that to expedite and expand the reservoir area, the New Order government had to acquire the land around the reservoir area. As for the construction of Jratun Seluna Canal Reservoir, it passed through most of the villages in Sukolilo District, including through Wotan village.

With the construction of this Canal Reservoir, the irrigation system in Wotan Village and its surroundings has begun to be regulated through irrigation channels. Agricultural stretching had begun to appear in this area, considering that before the construction of Jratun Seluna Canal Reservoir, the irrigation pattern of the fields used a mechanical pump system controlled by the irrigation committee. After the construction of Seluna Jratun Canal Reservoir crossing the agricultural area in Sukolilo District, it had a significant impact on the cultivation of agricultural land. From here began to show the stretching of agriculture in this region.

1995 to 2005 were a phase of community change in Wotan Village in fulfilling family needs. Although agricultural activity seemed to have increased in this area, it did not significantly impact the farmers' income. The extent of agricultural land in this village did not impact increasing the residents' incomes. During this period, Indonesia also experienced an economic crisis which later resulted in a multidimensional crisis [11].

This situation also affected the Wotan community, who then looked for alternative sources of family income. One of the efforts taken was to become Indonesian Workers (TKI) abroad. It was the beginning of a small part of the people of Wotan Village to seek their fortune as TKI with the destination country of South Korea. Entering the year 2000, the number of Wotan residents who became migrant workers increased; this was also supported by the opportunity for the South Korean to accept the Indonesian Migrant workers from Wotan village.

The years 2005 to 2015 were the peak phase of economic change in Wotan Village. The flow of citizens who chose to become migrant workers increased, coupled with the establishment of Korean language courses in 2006. The establishment of this institution provided Korean language courses and acted as an agency directing the prospective students to be placed in companies in South Korea. At this time, in Jongso Hamlet, Wotan Village, out of 950 people, 450 people were migrant workers in South Korea and other countries. The villagers sold a plot of rice fields to finance the departure process as a migrant worker and a language training program. From here, buyers of rice fields were migrant workers who were still abroad or former migrant workers.

Based on the explanation in the paragraphs above, the phenomenon of agricultural landowning in Wotan was motivated by the desire to increase the social status in agricultural communities. In particular, the residents of Wotan Village who became the migrant workers were motivated to invest their work and a desire to obtain a better social status through the purchase of agricultural land. For the people of Wotan Village, rice fields or agricultural lands were a symbol of status or prestige because they were the primary source of livelihood. Agricultural land was seen as an inheritance that had to be owned as a villager. This was not only because of the traditional point of view that positions assets in the form of agricultural land as the most important thing, but also because the irrigated agricultural ecosystem was believed to guarantee maximum agricultural productivity.

### **3 Conclusion**

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the agricultural landowning structure shift to the irrigation ecosystem in Wotan Village, Sukolilo District, Pati Regency 2000-2015 occurred due to 3 (three) factors.

First, working as migrant was the choice of some people of Wotan village due to the real conditions in which most people did not control the agricultural land and had not yet developed an irrigation ecosystem resulting in low economic condition. Moreover, business opportunities and job opportunities were very limited. Therefore, those of the young productive age groups chose to become migrant workers seen as more promising employment opportunities and economic improvement.

Second, the success story of several migrant workers in Wotan Village had proven to be a significant attraction for the local village community and surrounding villages to do the same thing to become migrant workers with the same or different destination countries.

Third, the emergence of migrant workers' habits using their remittances to open productive businesses and buy the agricultural land in the village had successfully stimulated a significant agricultural landowning shift to the irrigation ecosystem because agricultural cultivation could be performed intensively.

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