# THE SECULARIZATION OF RECIPROCITY: SHIFTING SOCIAL SOLIDARITY AND ISLAMIC VALUES IN JAVANESE RURAL COMMUNITIES

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## *Abstract*

*Reciprocity has long served as a central mechanism of social solidarity in Javanese rural communities, where mutual assistance is closely linked to communal obligations and the Islamic value of ta'awun. Modernization, market relations, and changing livelihood structures have significantly altered how communities organize and value such assistance. This study investigates the reconstruction of reciprocity in Karangsari Village, Kebumen, focusing on three traditional practices: sinoman, sambatan, and nyumbang. Employing a qualitative intrinsic case study approach, the study collected data through participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected informants, and documentation, and analyzed them using open, axial, and selective coding. The results indicate that reciprocity has experienced functional secularization: while traditional practices persist institutionally, their underlying motivations increasingly reflect instrumental and economic rationality. Sinoman demonstrates reduced voluntary participation and increased dependence on paid assistance. Sambatan has evolved into a hybrid system, with paid workers performing skilled and time-intensive tasks while the remaining reciprocal labor is justified by anticipated mutual need rather than religious merit. Nyumbang continues to be practiced but is increasingly characterized by detailed accounting, expectations of return, and social debt. Modernization, therefore, transforms rather than eliminates the foundations for participation. In practical terms, collaboration between religious leaders and village governments is recommended to integrate ta'awun into religious education, facilitate deliberative forums and responsive village regulations, and allocate village funds to community-labor schemes that sustain mutual assistance while adapting to contemporary economic realities.*

***Keywords****: Nyumbang, Reciprocity, Secularization, Sinoman, Sambatan*

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## INTRODUCTION

The tradition of reciprocity in rural societies has long been debated in economic sociology and global development studies (Meert, 2000). Amid global modernization, reciprocity is no longer viewed merely as an exchange of goods or services but as a complex moral structure that binds community members (Molm, Schaefer, and Collett, 2007). It encompasses how individuals build trust, maintain social networks, and balance personal interests with collective needs. However, market pressures often compel rural communities to redefine these values in response to contemporary demands (Fahmi and Mendrofa, 2024). Understanding reciprocity is therefore essential to examining grassroots social change, particularly in societies transitioning from agrarian to industrial economies.

In Indonesia, particularly within Javanese culture, the tradition of *gotong royong* (cooperation) remains fundamental to communal life. Practices such as *sinoman*, *sambatan*, and *nyumbang* sustain social solidarity during external disruptions (Soelistyo and Febrianto, 2024). Beyond social routines, these traditions embody collective identity and have historically served both social and sacred functions, including the Islamic principle of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) (Muthoifin et al., 2024). Islamic values provide moral justification for helping others without expecting direct material compensation, framing mutual assistance as a spiritual obligation (Sa'idah, Prasetiya, and Sain, 2026).

Although these practices share a common normative foundation of mutual assistance, they involve different forms of exchange. *Sinoman* entails collective labor during communal celebrations; *sambatan* involves reciprocal labor in household and agricultural activities; and *nyumbang* centers on material contributions during life-cycle ceremonies. These distinctions matter because modernization may affect each practice differently. A comparative examination of these practices reveals how modernization transforms not only traditional reciprocity but also its forms, meanings, and underlying motivations.

However, integration into broader market systems has diminished the moral and spiritual significance of these practices (Khasri, 2021; Purba and Sundawa, 2023). As market logic increasingly shapes village life, tensions emerge between preserving religious identity and adapting to economic realities, with sacred values often subordinated to pragmatic concerns.

This transformation is particularly evident in Kebumen, Central Java, where established Islamic traditions face rapid modernization. Everyday practices reveal changing understandings of why people help their neighbors amid economic inflation and shifting social structures. Despite these developments, the literature lacks explicit analysis of how Islamic values persist amid such changes. Research on reciprocity in Indonesia has largely focused on microeconomic resilience and local cultural preservation, leaving its underlying spiritual erosion insufficiently explored (Lukiyanto and Wijayaningtyas, 2020; Widawati, Muzaiyan, and Ferian, 2018).

This study addresses this gap by examining how religious narratives of blessing (*berkah*) and almsgiving (*sedekah*) are negotiated with transactional logic in everyday practices (Manan et al., 2025; Masithoh, Wijaya, and Kartono, 2013). Understanding how religion accommodates increasingly secular practices is crucial to envisioning the future of rural Muslim societies. Karangsari Village, Kebumen Regency, provides a relevant setting for examining this phenomenon. Amid economic transition, its community exhibits seemingly contradictory tendencies: maintaining ancestral traditions while adopting modern economic rationality.

Based on this background, this study examines the changing meanings of reciprocity in Karangsari Village, focusing on how the community reconstructs *sinoman*, *sambatan*, and *nyumbang* in

response to modern life. It explores how the outward forms of these traditions persist while their underlying meanings and motivations transform.

## Literature Review

In *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, James Scott argues that peasant societies in Southeast Asia, including Java, operate according to a subsistence ethic. Reciprocity functions as informal social security, ensuring that community members do not fall below the subsistence threshold or face starvation (Scott, 1983). This collective moral principle takes precedence over individual profit accumulation, establishing a safety-first ethic.

Nevertheless, this framework has been criticized as static and romanticized. Popkin's (1979) "rational peasant" thesis argues that peasants make individual cost-benefit calculations even within village institutions, demonstrating that rural communities are not immune to economic rationality. Recent studies further show that capitalism's penetration into rural areas transforms prosocial behavior into more rational-instrumental and individualistic conduct (Chui et al., 2025). This shift reshapes values traditionally underpinning village life and fragments previously cohesive communities (White, 2003).

Research by Robert Hefner indicates that Muslim communities in Indonesia are experiencing cultural transformations in which religious values are renegotiated (Hefner, 2020). This process often produces more pragmatic forms of religiosity closely aligned with market logic (Rudnyckyj, 2009). Such developments reflect broader findings that social and religious practices may persist even as their underlying religious authority declines (Chaves, 1994; Dobbelaere, 1999). While Khasri, 2021) tends to portray modernization as a force that dismantles the gotong royong system, empirical realities suggest that traditions do not necessarily disappear. Instead, their meanings are reconstructed to accommodate new economic interests, producing a hybrid existence between traditional values and modern rationality (Zulkifli and Ridwan, 2019).

Studies of Indonesian local traditions reveal similar tensions. Communal practices such as mapalus are increasingly confined to older generations' memories amid growing individualism and urbanization (Mansi, 2007; Wagiu et al., 2026). Conversely, local religious rituals can be revitalized as instruments of collective empowerment and *ta'awun* when supported by religious authorities (Sumpena, Pauzian, and Sidik, 2026). However, these studies rarely compare how different forms of reciprocity, particularly labor-based and material exchanges, respond differently to monetization within a single community. This study addresses this gap through a comparative examination of these practices.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study draws on the idea of "functional secularization," building on Dobbelaere's (1999) multilevel account of secularization and Chaves's (1994) conception of declining religious authority. The term refers to situations in which individuals preserve traditional forms to avoid appearing to deviate from religious norms, while their underlying motives shift toward secular and transactional goals. Thus, religious labels remain, but actions are increasingly driven by worldly interests.

This study argues that this shift is particularly evident in nyumbang, where traditional giving increasingly functions as financially measured "social investment" (Manan et al., 2025). Contributions are meticulously recorded, generating expectations of equivalent or greater returns (Masithoh et al., 2013). This reflects the penetration of market logic into domestic and spiritual domains, where keikhlasan (sincerity) is increasingly replaced by profit-and-loss calculations (Ayuwandani and Tondok, 2023). Changes in livelihood structures further influence these values (Fahmi and Mendrofa, 2024). As livelihoods

shift from agrarian to industrial sectors, opportunities for communal interaction become limited (Umanailo et al., 2025), increasing the economic value of time and weakening voluntary reciprocity (Siradjuddin, 2023; Subejo and Matsumoto, 2009). Consequently, labor-based assistance is increasingly replaced by monetary compensation for efficiency.

Modernity also produces individuals who remain formally religious while acting secularly in their social practices (Dobbelaere, 1999). Participation in sinoman, for instance, is increasingly understood not only as a means of earning spiritual merit (pahala) but also as calculated social risk management (De Neubourg and Weigand, 2000). Fear of social sanctions, including ostracism, may become a stronger motivation than religious devotion (Nurdin et al., 2023). The framework also examines the "commodification of labor" in sambatan (Enggarianto, Masrukin, and Primadata, 2024). As residents increasingly prefer professional workers for efficiency and modern standards, opportunities for interpersonal interaction decline (Subejo and Matsumoto, 2009). These perspectives help explain how traditional forms persist while their spiritual meanings are reshaped by market logic.

This transformation is particularly relevant to sambatan, a form of reciprocal labor traditionally practiced in agricultural, household, and construction activities. As rural livelihoods diversify and wage labor becomes more accessible, the opportunity cost of participation increases, encouraging the replacement of communal assistance with paid workers or monetary compensation. Following Polanyi (2001), this conversion represents a process of disembedding, whereby labor becomes detached from its social relations and treated as a commodity. Within the typology of reciprocity, this marks a shift from generalized reciprocity, characterized by delayed and non-calculated repayment, toward balanced or market exchange, where equivalence and immediacy prevail (Guevara Beltran et al., 2023). This study therefore examines the transformation not simply as the disappearance of communal labor but as a shift from shared labor toward economically valued labor.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with an intrinsic case study design to explore shifting meanings of reciprocity in Karangsari Village, Kebumen, over three months (April to July 2025). This design captures dynamic social realities from local actors' perspectives without experimental intervention (Stake, 1995), focusing on the transformation of socio-religious values within nyumbang, sambatan, and sinoman. It also preserves the holistic characteristics of rural Javanese life amid modernization (Bartlett and Vavrus, 2017).

Purposive sampling was used to select 15 informants: community leaders (3), religious leaders/kiai (2), village officials (2), and residents from diverse occupational backgrounds (8), including farmers, traders, and factory workers (Palinkas et al., 2015). Aged 30–75, they represented generational and occupational perspectives on changing reciprocity practices and the influence of modern economic logic. Informants are identified by initials to maintain confidentiality.

Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation involved direct engagement in sinoman activities and nyumbang processions to examine spontaneous interactions and conversations. Because sambatan occurs less frequently, data on this practice relied primarily on interviews. Semi-structured interviews allowed informants to express their perspectives freely. With informed consent, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim (Kallio et al., 2016).

Data analysis followed three coding stages: open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin and Strauss, 1990; Naeem et al., 2023). Open coding identified concepts concerning reciprocity, motivations for

assistance, and perceptions of money. Axial coding connected these categories to patterns linking modernization with the erosion of ta'awun values. Selective coding integrated the findings into a theoretical narrative of reciprocity secularization in rural Java. NVivo supported systematic data organization and coding.

Research rigor was maintained through source and technical triangulation, alongside member checking. Source triangulation compared accounts from community leaders and ordinary residents, while technical triangulation examined consistency between interviews and field observations. Member checking involved reconfirming preliminary findings with selected key informants to ensure interpretive accuracy and strengthen the credibility of the conclusions.

## DISCUSSION

In Karangsari Village, social interaction functions not merely as a social routine but as a mechanism for maintaining communal equilibrium. Villagers interpret ancestral traditions and transform collective activities into symbols of social bonds.

In Karangsari Village, shared experiences and geographical proximity foster intimate social bonds. Reciprocity thus develops as a means of sustaining collective survival amid environmental and economic challenges.

In economic sociology, reciprocity refers to social exchange in which individuals give and receive goods or services based on unwritten obligations. Such exchanges establish strong social bonds through the moral responsibility to reciprocate (Sairin, Semedi, and Hudayana, 2002). In Karangsari Village, this principle operates through an implicit expectation that every gift will be reciprocated when the giver needs assistance.

Scott's (1983) moral economy perspective suggests that receiving goods or services generates obligations of equivalent return. Reciprocity therefore represents not merely generosity but a social debt requiring proportional repayment. Failure to fulfill these obligations may trigger social sanctions, ranging from gossip to ostracism. Consequently, reciprocity functions as an informal social insurance system that protects villagers where state institutions and formal markets may fall short.

Social exchange theory further suggests that individuals participate in interactions because they anticipate rewards. These rewards are not necessarily material or monetary but may include social support, respect, and status recognition (Stafford and Kuiper, 2021). In Karangsari, participation in communal traditions generates social capital through reputations as good and religious citizens. Conversely, withdrawal may undermine an individual's moral legitimacy. Reciprocity therefore involves a calculation between the costs of labor or material contributions and the social benefits obtained.

Guevara Beltran et al. (2023) distinguish three types of reciprocity: generalized, balanced, and negative, reflecting varying degrees of social proximity between actors. Generalized reciprocity typically occurs among family members and close friends, involving assistance without demands for immediate or specified repayment. However, modernization has increasingly blurred the boundaries between generalized and balanced reciprocity in Karangsari Village, as formerly voluntary contributions are now assessed in terms of economic value and expected returns.

The transformation of rural reciprocity is closely associated with the shift toward economic-instrumental exchanges. Blau, as cited by Cook et al. (2013), argues that reciprocity serves individual interests while maintaining social roles. Rather than following traditions solely through customary obedience, rural communities increasingly employ them to secure economic positions. This signals the secularization of social values, whereby

spiritual motivations are gradually reshaped by market rationality.

**The Dynamics of *Sinoman*: From Collective Obligation to Individual Choice**

Historically, the sinoman tradition in Karangsari Village exemplified mechanical solidarity across social strata, involving collective labor during major life-cycle rituals (*hajatan*), such as weddings and circumcisions. Participation was regarded as an expression of the Islamic value of *ta'awun* (mutual assistance) and a source of spiritual blessings (Muthoifin et al., 2024; Soelistyo and Febrianto, 2024). Youth involvement in kitchen work and guest services symbolized communal kinship. However, recent field observations indicate that these spiritual motivations are increasingly supplanted by pragmatic economic considerations.

The younger generation traditionally organizes *sinoman* through *Karang Taruna* (village youth organization), coordinating food logistics and guest services (Soelistyo and Febrianto, 2024). In Karangsari, close relatives usually form the core committee, managing the financial and operational aspects of celebrations. Informant Kosidah illustrates how kinship structures these responsibilities:

> *"I am the host's younger sister, so I handle the money and manage the kitchen purchases. Sometimes, if no one else is available, I go to the market to shop. This way, the host doesn't have to be overwhelmed."* (Kosidah)

While kinship remains central to these responsibilities, non-relatives increasingly undertake demanding tasks in exchange for cash rather than food alone. This wage system marks a shift from generalized reciprocity toward commercialized exchange. Youth participation, once driven by solidarity, is increasingly organized as a source of livelihood, reflecting the commodification of rural labor. This transformation gradually erodes the voluntary and selfless foundations of gotong royong (Purba and Sundawa, 2023), shifting relationships between hosts and penyinom (youth helpers) toward employer-employee arrangements.

Participation in Karangsari has declined, while coordination through Karang Taruna has weakened. Many young people increasingly perceive the time required for *sinoman* as incompatible with their personal priorities.

The older generation often interprets this decline as diminishing social sensitivity and mutual cooperation. Informant Udin expresses concern about young people's declining willingness to help spontaneously. This shift reflects a movement from communal identity toward greater individual autonomy and self-interest (Crocetti et al., 2023). Helping neighbors is increasingly treated as a personal choice rather than a moral obligation defining village identity.

Most young informants explicitly stated that *sinoman* is no longer a sacred obligation and that participation should remain a personal choice. Informant Wening, who has participated only once, illustrates the weakening of traditional ties among Generation Z. This perspective contrasts with *ukhuwwah* Islamiyah (Islamic brotherhood), which emphasizes mutual support during hardship (Junaidi and Yusuf, 2025). It also suggests a separation between religious values and everyday social responsibilities. Informant Rahman further explained:

> *"In my opinion, youth participation in sinoman is gradually declining here. Sometimes, during an event, I feel confused when no young people show up to help, even though there are many of them. Furthermore, they seem to think that they shouldn't help unless they are specifically instructed to do so. This is very different from when I was young; without being asked, I would immediately volunteer to help a neighbor in need."* (Rahman)

The declining concern about future reciprocal assistance further illustrates market penetration in Karangsari Village. Informant Isna explained that residents increasingly rely on event service providers and catering businesses rather than neighbors. Financial resources enable individuals to purchase assistance without incurring reciprocal social obligations. This reduces interdependence, which has historically sustained rural solidarity, as

market services offer an efficient alternative to maintaining relationships involving reciprocal responsibilities.

This transformation indicates a shift in *sinoman* from Scott's "moral economy" toward a "market economy." Youth participation is increasingly driven by pragmatic considerations rather than the moral imperative to help others (Msebi and Beukes, 2024). Without direct benefits, such as financial rewards or immediate recognition, participation tends to decline. This contributes to social fragmentation, resembling the weakening of mapalus among younger Minahasans (Wagiu et al., 2026). Thus, although *sinoman* persists formally, its original spiritual and solidaristic foundations have increasingly diminished.

### *Sambatan*: From Reciprocal Labor to Monetized Assistance

*Sambatan* is a form of reciprocal labor in which community members contribute time and physical effort to help households with demanding activities. In rural Javanese communities, it traditionally involves relatives, neighbors, and friends undertaking agricultural and non-agricultural tasks, including house construction and other physically demanding work. Unlike wage-based arrangements, *sambatan* operates through long-term, non-strict reciprocity, whereby assistance creates expectations of future help rather than immediate monetary repayment (Subejo and Matsumoto, 2009). Labor thus functions as both an economic resource and a social relationship sustained through kinship, trust, and neighborhood ties. Historically, *sambatan* covered activities ranging from house construction and concrete pouring to support for bereaved families (Bintari and Darmawan, 2016). Comparable traditions include *mapalus* in Minahasa and *marakka' bola* among the Bugis, where collective labor expresses *ta'awun* and *ukhuwwah* (Mansi, 2007; Mubarak et al., 2025).

Findings from Karangsari indicate that *sambatan* persists in certain activities, although its scope and frequency have declined. According to Bambang:

> *"Sambatan is usually done when someone needs help with heavy work, such as building or repairing a house. Usually, the neighbors and relatives come together to help. We help each other because when someone needs help, we know that we may also need their help in the future."* (Bambang)

Bambang justifies participation through anticipated future assistance rather than spiritual merit (*pahala*) or religious obligation. Thus, even where *sambatan* persists, its justification increasingly reflects pragmatic mutual insurance, consistent with Scott's (1983) understanding of reciprocity as a subsistence safety net. Secularization therefore emerges not necessarily through the disappearance of the practice but through the shift from religious to calculative justifications.

Changing economic and social conditions have also reshaped labor organization within *sambatan*. Activities once performed collectively are increasingly assigned to paid workers or skilled craftsmen. As Arifin explained:

> *"Nowadays, people do not always have the time to help each other as they did before. If the work is difficult or requires special skills, it is easier to hire someone to do it. We still help our neighbors when we can, but for certain kinds of work, people prefer to pay workers because it is faster and more practical."* (Arifin)

This development represents a reconfiguration rather than the disappearance of *sambatan*. Subejo and Matsumoto (2009) similarly demonstrate that expanding off-farm employment and labor-market opportunities increase the opportunity cost of reciprocal labor.

Evidence from Karangsari suggests a hybrid labor arrangement rather than complete substitution. Two criteria determine whether tasks remain reciprocal or shift to market-based arrangements: skill and time. Tasks requiring specialized skills increasingly involve paid craftsmen, while simpler activities remain shared among neighbors. Meanwhile, limited availability reduces participation as communal work competes with wage employment. These

changes reflect livelihood diversification and growing engagement in off-farm and factory employment (Fahmi and Mendrofa, 2024; Umanailo et al., 2025). Consequently, a two-tiered labor arrangement emerges, with reciprocal assistance persisting in supporting activities while core tasks are increasingly purchased.

This transformation becomes more significant as labor is increasingly valued in monetary terms. The preference for paid workers reflects growing attention to efficiency, availability, and cost, shifting assistance from a social obligation toward an economically evaluated activity. Research on rural Indonesia similarly identifies the commodification of labor within gotong royong, whereby contributions once associated with solidarity and social recognition are increasingly treated as material commodities (Enggarianto et al., 2024). In Polanyi's (2001) terms, this represents labor disembedding.

This transformation also has distributive consequences. Households able to afford skilled workers can complete projects without accumulating reciprocal obligations, while those with limited financial resources remain dependent on increasingly scarce communal assistance. The monetization of *sambatan* may therefore widen inequalities between households able to purchase assistance and those reliant on social solidarity, consistent with research on the unequal distribution of social capital across social classes (Erices-Ocampo, Lubbers, and adams, 2025).

This transformation also complicates the relationship between *sambatan* and the Islamic value of *ta'awun*. Voluntary labor extends beyond task completion by expressing mutual responsibility and solidarity, consistent with the Qur'anic directive to "help one another in righteousness and piety" (Q.S. al-Mā'idah [5]: 2). Although monetary transactions preserve the practical function of assistance, they may alter its normative foundation. The central issue is therefore not the disappearance of *sambatan*, but whether assistance remains grounded in reciprocal obligation and moral solidarity or becomes increasingly shaped by time, cost, convenience, and material benefit. Karangsari thus illustrates functional secularization, whereby the social function of assistance persists while its underlying moral and economic rationales evolve.

### *Nyumbang*: The Paradox of Solidarity and Social Debt

The tradition of *nyumbang* remains the most resilient social practice in Karangsari Village, although its meaning has undergone a paradoxical transformation. Theoretically, it reflects balanced reciprocity, whereby every gift is expected to be returned. Masithoh et al. (2013) explain that this tradition encompasses the human life cycle, from birth to death. In Karangsari, however, *nyumbang* has evolved beyond voluntary assistance into a binding customary obligation, reflecting efforts to maintain solidarity amid economic pressures.

In Karangsari, the household serves as the unit of contribution, with husbands and wives regarded as a single contributing entity. Contribution amounts depend on social grouping and emotional proximity, with closer relatives expected to give more, whether in cash or food. Thus, *nyumbang* functions as an indicator of social proximity and status. However, strict repayment expectations increasingly transform giving into a financial obligation rather than an expression of generosity.

The tradition involves detailed record-keeping, with every contribution documented to ensure accurate repayment. Such documentation helps maintain communal bonds and a sense of shared destiny in Javanese society (Ayuwandani and Tondok, 2023). For instance, receiving a sack of rice creates an obligation to return the same quantity and quality. Giving thus becomes a social debt requiring precise settlement, while failure to reciprocate may damage a family's reputation and dignity (*martabat*).

The distinction between rice and non-rice contributions also reflects social stratification and relational proximity. Close relatives typically provide side dishes or expensive cakes, signaling stronger support, whereas outsiders and younger colleagues tend to contribute cash for practical reasons. These distinctions demonstrate how gifts convey symbolic meanings about the relationships between givers and recipients.

Problems emerge when *nyumbang* becomes an obligation to repay regardless of the giver's financial condition. Residents may borrow money or sell assets to fulfill their contributions. Shame and fear of losing face (*isin*) before the host often drive this behavior. Consequently, prestige and self-esteem may take precedence over the original purpose of mutual assistance (Ayuwandani and Tondok, 2023). Rather than alleviating economic burdens, reciprocity can create cycles of debt that disproportionately affect poorer households.

Psychologically, mutual trust is increasingly accompanied by social surveillance, as villagers closely monitor who contributes and who does not. Although social harmony remains outwardly intact, participation is increasingly driven by recognition and conformity rather than sincerity (*ikhlas*). This supports the argument that modernity transforms social "faith" into social "investment" (Manan et al., 2025), encouraging pragmatic management of relationships to secure individual social positions.

Participation in *nyumbang* also serves as a means of gaining social recognition and status. Informant Luqman described it as social savings that can be recovered when hosting one's own celebration. Through this practice, residents gain recognition as legitimate community members. Such expectations may encourage households to organize celebrations beyond their financial means to reclaim accumulated social contributions. This cycle illustrates the influence of reciprocal obligations on rural economic behavior (Masithoh et al., 2013).

The transformation of *nyumbang* in Karangsari reveals how symbolic and economic interests increasingly reshape solidarity. Originally a communal practice, it has become a platform for displaying financial capacity and social networks (Lukiyanto and Wijayaningtyas, 2020). This illustrates the paradox of secularization: a tradition maintained through religious and customary narratives increasingly operates according to transactional and capitalistic logic. Although the community remains outwardly religious, its social practices are increasingly shaped by instrumental rationality rather than by their original spiritual values (Tracey, 2012).

Comparative findings demonstrate that modernization transforms different forms of reciprocity according to the resources exchanged and the expectations attached to participation. Table 1 summarizes these differences before and after modernization as follows:

Table 1. Transformation of Reciprocity in *Sinoman*, *Sambatan*, and *Nyumbang* before and after Modernization

| Tradition | Dimension | Before modernization | After modernization |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Sinoman*** | Motivation | Moral obligation as a community member; *ta'awun* and expectation of spiritual blessing (*berkah*); youth volunteer spontaneously | Selective, individual choice; participation depends on personal priorities, explicit requests, or direct benefits |
| | Form of return/reward | Meals, reciprocal help at one's own future *hajatan*, social recognition | Increasingly cash compensation; tasks outsourced to paid helpers, catering, and event-service providers |
| | Value foundation | Generalized reciprocity; mechanical solidarity and *ukhuwwah Islamiyah* | Market-mediated, employer–employee relationship; religious meaning separated from social duty |

| Tradition | Dimension | Before modernization | After modernization |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Sambatan*** | Motivation | Long-term mutual assistance among neighbors and relatives for heavy work | Help offered "when we can"; justified by future mutual need and weighed against time, skills, and opportunity cost |
| | Form of return/reward | Delayed, non-equivalent reciprocal labor (help now, be helped later) | Wages for hired workers and skilled craftsmen; reciprocal help limited to simpler supporting tasks |
| | Value foundation | Generalized reciprocity embedded in kinship and neighborhood; *ta'awun* | Balanced/market exchange; labor valued as an economic commodity |
| ***Nyumbang*** | Motivation | Mutual support and sharing the host's burden during life-cycle ceremonies | Social obligation driven by shame (*isin*), prestige, and "social savings" to be reclaimed |
| | Form of return/reward | In-kind or cash contributions returned in the future as a token of solidarity | Contributions recorded in ledgers and expected to be returned in equivalent quantity, quality, or value |
| | Value foundation | Solidarity and sincerity (*ikhlas*) | Calculated reciprocity, prestige, and social debt |

Source: Field observations and interviews, analyzed by the authors

The comparison shows that the secularization of reciprocity operates through different mechanisms. In *sinoman*, the principal transformation concerns the organization and valuation of communal labor; in *sambatan*, it concerns the conversion of reciprocal labor into economically valued assistance; and in *nyumbang*, it concerns the increasingly systematic calculation of material contributions and future returns. Across the three practices, the value foundation moves in the same direction, from generalized reciprocity grounded in *ta'awun* toward calculated, market-mediated exchange, even though each tradition's outward form is affected to a different degree. Thus, the persistence of traditional forms should not be interpreted as evidence that their original normative foundations remain unchanged.

## Secularization of Values and the Erosion of Spiritual Reciprocity

The shifting meanings of *sinoman*, *sambatan*, and *nyumbang* collectively illustrate a process of secularization in rural Java. Here, secularization does not mean religion's disappearance from public life, but a shift in value authority from the transcendent-spiritual to the immanent-profane (Chaves, 1994; Huss, 2015). Although Karangsari residents continue to perform religious rituals, their social actions are increasingly shaped by material interests. The value of ta'awun is thus marginalized by the profit-and-loss logic of modernization. As informant Luqman explained:

> *"The nyumbang activities carried out by residents are a form of savings, both for ordinary citizens and the village government. Ordinary people even strive to host celebrations to gain recognition from their neighbors. When guests visit their homes during these events, they feel more acknowledged and respected within the community."* (Luqman)

Capitalism has reframed time and labor as economic assets to be converted into monetary value (Prata Feres, Palludeto, and Dias, 2024). When villagers measure time in monetary terms, unpaid communal activities become perceived economic losses. This creates social distance, making professional transactions more appealing than reciprocal relationships. Consequently, social cohesion weakens as temporary, contract-like arrangements emerge (Enggarianto et al., 2024), signaling the decline of the moral economy that once characterized rural Javanese society.

The transformation of *sambatan* further demonstrates how changing

valuations of time and labor reshape reciprocity. This erosion is selective: *sambatan* persists when tasks are simple and neighbors' help remains indispensable, but declines where affordable market alternatives exist. Thus, communal traditions are not necessarily eliminated; rather, the basis for participation and its justification change.

From an Islamic perspective, commercializing gotong royong may erode sincerity (*ikhlas*), a core principle of social worship (*ibadah ghairu mahdhah*). Traditions once expressing gratitude and obedience to God increasingly serve prestige (*gengsi*) and individual economic security. This shift suggests a declining role for religion as a moral regulator of economic behavior (Kirchmaier, Prüfer, and Trautmann, 2018). Fear of social sanctions, such as neighborhood gossip, may outweigh concern for losing spiritual merit, reflecting a form of "formalistic religiosity" detached from the spiritual depth of tradition.

Modernity has also reshaped younger generations' identities in Karangsari, encouraging individualism. Higher education and global media exposure have fostered aspirations centered on personal achievement rather than collective harmony. Young people increasingly view traditions such as *sinoman* as historical burdens incompatible with modern life, creating space for secular values that prioritize individual autonomy (Tahom and Srisophon, 2025). Information technology reinforces this shift as intimate, face-to-face communication gives way to more superficial social media coordination (Žanić, 2023).

Despite this erosion of spiritual meaning, the outward forms of *nyumbang* and *sinoman* remain intact, while *sambatan* persists in a reduced, hybrid form. These traditions have become cultural identities that are difficult to abandon without risking social exclusion. The community therefore adapts them to coexist with market logic, a process described as "value hybridity" (Subiyantoro et al., 2022). Economic inequality further intensifies this process: wealthier residents can "purchase" freedom from communal obligations, while poorer residents remain burdened by social debts, reinforcing class distinctions (Erices-Ocampo et al., 2025).

Overall, these findings qualify James Scott's thesis that peasant morality consistently resists market forces. Karangsari residents instead incorporate market logic into their traditions to maintain their social position, as Popkin (1979) anticipated. In contemporary Indonesian Islam, this transformation highlights the need to revitalize *ta'awun* at the grassroots level. Religion should guide not only formal rituals but also socio-economic behavior (Sumpena et al., 2026). Without a strengthened moral foundation, gotong royong risks becoming an increasingly transactional practice (Zulkifli and Ridwan, 2019).

## Revitalizing *Ta'awun*: Religious Leadership and Responsive Village Governance

Revitalizing *ta'awun* requires more than moral exhortation because the pressures driving the monetization of reciprocity are structural. Sustaining mutual assistance therefore requires culturally grounded institutional support. Responsive law offers a useful framework. Nonet and Selznick (2001) distinguish repressive law, which serves power and imposes order, and autonomous law, which emphasizes procedures, from responsive law, which is purposive, participatory, and attentive to social needs. Similarly, Kusumaatmadja's (2002) development law theory views law as an instrument of social renewal (*sarana pembaharuan masyarakat*), effective when aligned with society's living values.

Village Law No. 6 of 2014 provides institutional space for responsiveness by recognizing village authority based on origin rights and local-scale authority and channeling village funds *(Dana Desa)* toward community-defined priorities (Antlöv, Wetterberg, and Dharmawan, 2016). However, implementation studies

show that legislation does not automatically transform practice: bureaucracies retain substantial control, while village governance remains vulnerable to elite capture and weak downward accountability (Antlöv et al., 2016; Vel, Zakaria, and Bedner, 2017). State recognition of local and customary institutions is also ambivalent, often conditional and disconnected from actual community organization (Bedner and van Huis, 2008). Village regulations should therefore facilitate rather than coerce reciprocity. Sanctioning non-participation would reproduce repressive law and undermine the voluntary meaning of *ta'awun*.

Three practical measures are proposed. First, religious leaders (*kiai, ustaz,* and mosque administrators) can reinforce the ethical foundations of gotong royong by integrating *ta'awun* and *ikhlas* into Friday sermons, religious study groups (*majelis taklim*), and premarital counseling. *Sinoman* and *sambatan* should be framed as social worship rather than customary obligations. Religious leaders can also encourage *nyumbang* according to one's means, rather than as a repayable debt, and model modest life-cycle celebrations to reduce competitive giving. Mosque-based organizations can coordinate volunteer rosters for *sinoman* and *sambatan* and manage *zakat*, *infak*, and *sedekah* funds to assist poor households with ceremonial or housing needs. This approach reflects evidence that ulama authority can turn local rituals into instruments of collective empowerment (Sumpena et al., 2026).

Second, village governments can institutionalize reciprocal support through deliberative and budgetary measures: (a) holding regular village and neighborhood forums (*musyawarah desa and rembug warga*) to establish shared norms for nyumbang and communal-work schedules accommodating factory shifts and other wage commitments; (b) recognizing *sinoman* and *sambatan* groups under Karang Taruna and RT/RW through a village regulation (*Peraturan Desa*) that defines their roles without penalizing non-participation; and (c) allocating village funds to community-labor schemes, such as cash-for-work (*padat karya tunai*) programs to repair vulnerable households' homes, combining modest compensation with communal participation. Such hybrid arrangements recognize the economic value of villagers' time while preserving mutual assistance's collective form and social meaning.

Third, collaboration between religious leaders and village authorities is essential because they command complementary resources: moral authority and regulatory and budgetary capacity. Joint initiatives, such as youth mutual-aid activities organized by Karang Taruna and mosque youth groups, can help younger villagers experience reciprocity as socially meaningful and compatible with their livelihoods. The aim is not to reject monetization, but to prevent economic efficiency from displacing the moral foundations of rural solidarity.

## CLOSING

This study concludes that reciprocity traditions in Karangsari Village have undergone "functional secularization," whereby *sinoman*, *sambatan*, and *nyumbang* persist in form but increasingly operate through transactional logic. This shift reflects the erosion of the traditional moral economy and the growing influence of market rationality, as assistance is increasingly measured through wages and social debt. Thus, modernization in rural Java does not eliminate religious practices but reconfigures them into pragmatic economic instruments, diminishing the sacred value of *ta'awun*.

The three practices have evolved differently. *Sinoman* increasingly involves selective participation and commodified communal labor. *Sambatan* persists for heavy tasks but has become hybrid, with skilled and time-intensive work assigned to paid laborers while reciprocal assistance depends on anticipated mutual needs rather than religious merit. Meanwhile, *nyumbang*

remains institutionally resilient but increasingly relies on detailed accounting, expectations of reciprocity, and accumulated social debt.

Theoretically, these findings extend James Scott's moral economy framework by demonstrating how contemporary peasant societies adopt capitalist logic to secure individual social positions alongside collective subsistence ethics. They also contribute to Islamic and sociological studies by illustrating the formalization of rural religiosity, in which rituals persist while motivations shift from an eschatological (*ukhrawi*) orientation toward worldly interests.

Revitalizing *ta'awun* therefore requires adapting its moral foundations rather than restoring traditional reciprocity in its former form. This requires coordinated action: religious leaders reinforcing *ta'awun* and *ikhlas* and supporting vulnerable households, and village governments providing deliberative forums, supportive regulations, and community-labor funding.

This study is limited by its focus on a single village and reliance on interview data, particularly regarding *sambatan*. Future research should compare diverse village typologies, incorporate direct observation of *sambatan*, and examine how digitalization reshapes reciprocity among rural Muslim communities.

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**Interview:**
Interview with Ahmad (Village Official), 2025.
Interview with Arifin (Community Leader), 2025.
Interview with As'ari (Religious Leader/Kiai), 2025.
Interview with Bambang (Factory Worker), 2025.
Interview with Gibran (Factory Worker), 2025.
Interview with Hakim (Religious Leader/Kiai), 2025.
Interview with Isna (Trader), 2025.
Interview with Komah (Farmer), 2025.
Interview with Kosidah (Trader), 2025.
Interview with Luqman (Community Leader), 2025.
Interview with Muhammad (Village Official), 2025.
Interview with Rahman (Trader), 2025.
Interview with Udin (Community Leader), 2025.
Interview with Wawan (Farmer), 2025.
Interview with Wening (Factory Worker), 2025.