

Strategy of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel to Fight for Land Rights in Agrarian Conflict in Banyuwangi Regency

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Abstract

This study analyzes the strategies of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel in building movement resilience to defend land rights contested by PT Bumi Sari in Pakel Village, Banyuwangi Regency, during the period 2020–2025. The research adopts a qualitative approach and utilizes data collection methods including observation, interviews, and document analysis. The analytical process involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings demonstrate that Rukun Tani adopted resistance strategies that were adaptive to the evolving dynamics of the agrarian conflict. In terms of internal interaction, the social movement engaged in recruitment, capacity building, and organizational management. In its interaction with authorities, the movement organized land occupations and public demonstrations, while also pursuing legal and digital avenues of resistance. Furthermore, in its interaction with security forces, Rukun Tani combined confrontational actions, formal procedures, and social media campaigns. As a result, the movement was able to expand its strategic reach into institutional arenas. The study concludes that such strategies have played a significant role in enhancing the movement's resilience and sustaining its long-term struggle.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Agrarian conflicts are common in Indonesia. Based on data from the Agrarian Reform Consortium (KPA) in 2024, there were 295 land conflicts that occurred in all sectors. The distribution of the conflicts was in the plantation sector with 111 conflicts, infrastructure with 79 conflicts, and mining with 41 conflicts. Furthermore, there were the property sector (25 conflicts), forestry (25 conflicts), agriculture (8 conflicts), and military facilities (6 conflicts). Overall, these conflicts affected 67,436 families in 349 villages and involved an area of 1.1 million hectares.

In response to agrarian conflicts, in a number of cases, communities form social movements as a means of struggle to obtain land rights. These movements usually arise because of injustice that is felt collectively due to unilateral claims made by the state or corporations (Adi, 2017). The resistance actions carried out by the movement can vary. Some are direct, such as the land occupation actions carried out by the Landless Farmers Movement (*Landless Workers' Movement-MST*) in Brazil (Barros et al., 2013). There is also indirect resistance such as the Zapatista Movement in Mexico which emphasizes social transformation and building community autonomy (Munck & Sankey, 2020). Furthermore, social movements can carry out covert resistance through education and cultural practices such as those initiated by Sedulur Sikep in Central Java (Nurdin & Adzkiya, 2021). They

can also carry out open resistance such as the *Bharatiya Kisan Union* in India through protests and demonstrations (Kumar, 2022).

Along with the development of communication technology, social movement resistance has penetrated the digital world. With this, social movements can disseminate information more quickly with a wider reach. This contributes to increasing the effectiveness of the movement in voicing aspirations, organizing resistance, and building public awareness (Mamahit & Pratiwi, 2022; Firdaus, 2023). These types of resistance are not a dichotomy that only allows one movement to carry out one type of resistance. On the contrary, social movements can carry out all types of resistance, adjusting to the socio-political situation they face.

In this study, various collective actions of social movements are analyzed as efforts by these movements to build resilience in the struggle. The selection of this perspective takes into account the fact that the social movements studied have not fully succeeded in achieving their main goal, namely taking over the land completely (*in fact* And *de jure*). However, the movement has now been able to take over land in the form of action *land reclaiming* which has been carried out from 2020 until now. In addition, the study which specifically links resistance strategies with resilience of struggle is still relatively few. Thus, the scientific novelty of this research is to examine why certain actions are chosen and how these actions are carried out as an effort to build resilience of social movements, especially those that exist in agrarian conflicts.

One of the social movements that emerged in the agrarian conflict was Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel. Social movement organization (*social movement organization*). This was born on June 9, 2020, after residents held a meeting. Its presence is a response from residents of Pakel Village, Licin District, Banyuwangi Regency to the never-ending land problems in their area.

The land problem in Pakel Village is rooted in the inequality of land ownership between villagers and PT Perkebunan dan Dagang Bumisari Maju Sukses (PT Bumi Sari). This private company engaged in the plantation sector claims 257.1 hectares of land in the village on the pretext of having obtained a Land Use Rights (HGU). Meanwhile, residents consider the land to be their right based on the "Soerat Idin Memboeka Lahan" issued in 1929. The letter, which residents later referred to as the "1929 deed", was issued by the Regent of Banyuwangi Noto Hadi Suryo in response to a land clearing application submitted by the community in 1925. Based on the deed, Pakel residents consider PT Bumi Sari to have seized their agrarian rights (Puputan Pakel Committee and Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, 2023).

Furthermore, the Pakel residents' claim also refers to the Decree (SK) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (Kemendagri) number SK.35/HGU/DA/85. In the decree, PT Bumi Sari was stated to only have a HGU with an area of 1,189.81 ha which is divided into two certificates; SHGU Number 1 covers Kluncing Village with an area of 1,902,600 m² and SHGU Number 8 covers Songgon Village (now Bayu Village) with an area of 9,995,500 m². Even though it has been stated so, PT Bumi Sari continues to manage the land in the Pakel Village area. After the claim made by the company, the villagers chose not to immediately fight back. This is because the regime in power at that time (the New Order era) was repressive, so that the Pakel residents' resistance efforts were only carried out during the reform era (WALHI East Java, 2021).

Residents' resistance against PT Bumi Sari was carried out in 2018, after the Banyuwangi Regency Land Office (National Land Agency/BPN Banyuwangi) issued letter number 280/600.1.35.10/II/2018. This letter explicitly stated that Pakel Village was not included in PT Bumi Sari's HGU. Meanwhile, three years earlier, the Banyuwangi Regent issued Decree (SK) number 188/402/KEP/429.011/2015 which confirmed the boundaries

of Pakel Village. The two letters further strengthened residents' claims to the disputed land (Puputan Pakel Committee and Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, 2023).

Following the issuance of the BPN letter above, Pakel residents put up resistance in the form of reoccupying the land (*land reclaiming*). They did this by planting thousands of banana trees on the disputed land. However, the resistance efforts failed. In early 2019, PT Bumi Sari reported 26 Pakel residents to the police on charges of occupying the company's land. They were considered to have violated Article 107 letter a of Law Number 39 of 2014 concerning Plantations (WALHI East Java, 2021). The failure of the efforts, however, did not dampen the enthusiasm of Pakel residents in defending their land rights. They continued their struggle by forming the Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel organization.

Only three months after the founding of Rukun Tani, the organization with more than 1000 members took action again. *land reclaiming* on September 24, 2020, coinciding with the 60th National Farmers' Day and the birth of Law No. 5 of 1960 concerning Basic Agrarian Regulations (Puputan Pakel Committee and Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, 2023). This time, the resistance action was able to survive thanks to the mobilization of resources carried out by organizational actors. In 2025, the action *land reclaiming*. It has been able to survive for five years, although in its continuity it has often faced challenges.

During the action *land reclaiming*, Pakel residents admitted that they often experienced disturbances. These disturbances included acts of intimidation and repression. Not only that, a number of residents had even been reported by PT Bumi Sari with various accusations. For example, in early 2023, three Pakel residents were arrested by the police on charges of spreading hoax news that caused chaos. The Pakel trio were Mulyadi (Head of Pakel Village), Suwarno (Head of Durenan Hamlet), and Untung (Head of Taman Glugo Hamlet). The hoax news in question was still related to the agrarian conflict. As a result, the three community leaders were sentenced to 5.5 years in prison, before finally being released through a cassation decision (Priyasidharta, 2024a).

Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel did not remain silent in the face of various threats. They responded with a number of resistances, including through confrontational actions, litigation, and digital. In carrying out these collective actions, Rukun Tani did not act alone. They collaborated with the People's Movement Advocacy Working Team for Agrarian Sovereignty and Natural Resources (Tekad Garuda) alliance. This alliance consists of a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), such as the Surabaya Legal Aid Institute (LBH) and the Indonesian Environmental Forum (WALHI) East Java. In addition, Rukun Tani also has a solidarity network that helps with the resistance (Usman, member of Tekad Garuda, interviewed on April 15, 2025).

One of the acts of resistance carried out by Rukun Tani during the action *land reclaiming* ongoing litigation (legal) struggle. The action is usually held when a Pakel resident is reported to the police and undergoes trial related to land issues. In carrying out the litigation struggle, Rukun Tani is assisted by the Tekad Garuda alliance as legal counsel. So far, they have overseen a number of cases of alleged criminalization of Pakel residents, including the one that befell the Pakel trio in early 2023 (Santoso and Hutasuhut, 2023).

Along with the litigation struggle, Rukun Tani also held demonstrations to monitor the case of Pakel residents who were allegedly criminalized. For example, Rukun Tani once held a demonstration in front of the National Police Headquarters, Jakarta, on June 17, 2021. The action was part of a national action held in three locations, namely Jakarta, Surabaya, and Banyuwangi. They demanded the release of two Pakel residents who were allegedly criminalized and the revocation of PT Bumi Sari's HGU (Hidayat, 2021).

In addition, Rukun Tani also uses the internet as a medium of resistance. During the struggle, the organization has created an online petition about the agrarian conflict and the alleged criminalization of a number of Pakel residents to the police. Meanwhile, to

disseminate information related to the struggle to the wider community, Rukun Tani uses a number of social media, including Instagram @rukunpakel, *facebook page* Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, and X (Twitter) @rukunpakel. The information shared includes events that occurred in Pakel Village, the implementation of collective actions, and support for the Rukun Tani struggle conveyed by the solidarity network.

The above explanation shows that the struggle of Pakel residents to obtain land rights has been going on for decades. Of the many collective actions, they have taken, this study focuses on the actions carried out by Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel from 2020 to 2025. This period was chosen because it is a period that shows the existence of the Rukun Tani movement as well as the ongoing actions.*land reclaiming* which can last longer than previous similar actions. In addition, in the same period the intensity of agrarian conflicts increased compared to previous periods as reflected in the many events that occurred. Based on this description, this study aims to examine the strategy of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel in building movement resilience and fighting for agrarian rights in 2020-2025.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted qualitatively using a case study approach. With this approach, researchers can conduct in-depth analysis of cases that occur in individuals or groups (Creswell, 2016). In the case of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, researchers critically examine the movement's strategy in dealing with agrarian conflicts through data and information that has been collected. The data collection techniques used in this study include unstructured observation, interviews, and documentation studies (Creswell, 2016). Furthermore, the collected data is analyzed and interpreted by means of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 2007).

The analysis in this study was carried out using the concept of repertoire of conflict (*the repertoires of contention*) as put forward by Alimi (2015). He defines repertoire as a set of skills, action patterns, and activities that have been recognized by social movements, which also determine the choice of forms of resistance that they use for their struggle. In this case, repertoire operates in three arenas of interaction. *First*, intra-movement interaction arena which includes interaction between members and between members and leaders. *Second*, an arena for interaction between movements and authorities that involves the dynamics of movement resistance to state institutions as holders of power. *Third*, the arena of interaction between movements and security forces related to the handling model by the forces and the response of social movements.

In the context of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, researchers analyze its resistance strategy using the three interaction arenas. Through the intra-movement interaction arena, researchers can examine Rukun Tani's strategy in building commitment and internal organizational solidarity. Then, through the movement and authority interaction arena, researchers can analyze collective actions carried out as a form of resistance as well as demands on the government. Finally, through the movement and security forces interaction arena, researchers can examine Rukun Tani's resistance response to the treatment of the authorities.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The resistance strategy of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel in facing agrarian conflicts and marginalization of farmers' lives includes organizing a number of collective actions. In this case, they use an adaptive repertoire as an effort to negotiate the position of farmers amidst the dominance of state and corporate power. Referring to Alimi's (2015) concept of repertoire of conflict, movement actions can be classified into three fields of interaction, namely intra-movement, movement and authority, and movement and security forces.

3.1 Internal Interaction of Movement (*Intra-Movement Interaction*)

The Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel organization consists of the majority of Pakel residents, while the others are residents of surrounding villages. In this case, the membership of the social movement organization (*social movement organization*) is voluntary. This is what at a certain stage triggers the emergence of dynamics as well as internal challenges for the organization in the midst of the long struggle to face the never-ending conflict. The challenges faced by the actors of the Rukun Tani movement are related to efforts to build solidarity, maintain commitment, and maintain the consistency of members so that they remain steadfast to the main goal (Usman, member of Tekad Garuda, interviewed on April 15, 2025). In overcoming these problems, Rukun Tani carries out a number of repertoires including member recruitment and retention, collective identity consolidation, and internal organizational management.

The recruitment process carried out by Rukun Tani is open. This makes the organization have more than 1,000 members with different backgrounds. However, the members can unite because of the same interests, namely fighting for agrarian rights. Open recruitment does not necessarily make all Pakel residents join Rukun Tani. In this case, the organization first ensures the commitment of residents to the common goal. Therefore, every resident who joins Rukun Tani is required to make a written commitment (Rudi, Rukun Tani activist, interview on April 27, 2025). This form of commitment is intended to strengthen the bonds of solidarity between members and members with the organization. On the other hand, it is also a form of retention for Rukun Tani members.

Furthermore, Rukun Tani also organizes a number of trainings such as law and political schools to increase the organization's capacity. For example, the organization once held a law and paralegal school in February 2022. In this case, Rukun Tani collaborated with the Tekad Garuda alliance to educate Pakel residents about agrarian rights. In addition, in other training, they also provide an understanding of how to consolidate collective actions. This makes residents more courageous to speak out about conflicts and have the ability to organize collective actions (Usman, member of Tekad Garuda, interviewed on April 15, 2025).

Next, Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel formulated a repertoire to build a collective identity. One of the repertoires is in the form of coordination of meaning (*frame alignment*) within the organization. For example, in the uploads on the Instagram account Rukun Tani @rukunpakel, they often narrate the disputed land as "people's land" that has been managed for generations by Pakel residents. In addition, Pakel residents label themselves as "little people's fighters" who dare to fight injustice. In general, social movement actors try to construct specific meanings, so that members have the same interpretation. Thus, this can trigger the birth of collective emotions such as solidarity, hope, and even anger.

Besides *framing* Internally, collective identity is also formed through narratives of struggle. This narrative plays a role in creating collective memory as well as determining the direction of the struggle. Rukun Tani narrates the struggle in various ways, including using the hashtag(*hashtag*)#rebutkembalipakel and #cabuthguptbumisari consistently in various content they upload on social media. In addition, they also made a number of video testimonials of residents' experiences to documentation of the history of the struggle in the form of a book "Atas Nama Tanah Pakel". The narrative of the Rukun Tani struggle plays a role in enlivening the spirit and political imagination of residents that their struggle is worth doing and the expected changes are very likely to come true.

In an effort to realize this change, Rukun Tani also built good organizational management. Institutionally, they have a neat organizational structure and adequate rules (Usman, member of Tekad Garuda, interviewed on April 15, 2025). In addition, Rukun Tani also seeks to create collective leadership. Thus, the wheels of the organization can run even though the movement figures are hindered from attending, as happened during the detention of the Pakel trio in 2023. The existence of a clear division of roles for each administrator and movement actors who actively participate allows the organization to survive and organize resistance actions in a more structured and strategic manner.

Overall, an inclusive recruitment process, adequate member training and education, and good organizational management can overcome a number of internal problems of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel. Thus, solidarity between members can be created and organizational capacity can be increased. This is a determining factor in building the resilience of Rukun Tani's struggle.

3.2 Interaction of Movement and Authority (*Movement and Authorities Interaction*)

In the agrarian conflict in Pakel Village, the interaction between Rukun Tani and the authority holders was relatively intense, although the party did not act as a direct object of resistance. In this study, the main object of resistance was PT Bumi Sari. However, this does not negate the arena of interaction between social movements and the government as a determinant factor that influences the selection and change of Rukun Tani's repertoire. This is because the political system tends to be dynamic, nothing is completely open or closed to the demands of the movement, so that the structure of political opportunities is also a consideration (Alimi, 2015).

Based on field findings, Rukun Tani uses a number of resistance repertoires that are considered adaptive amidst uncertain political dynamics. In this case, the movement chose the action of reoccupying land (*land reclaiming*) as the main form of competition. They have been carrying out the action since 2020 until now by planting thousands of commodity crops, such as corn, bananas, coffee, and durian. In addition, they also set up a struggle post on the land reclaiming as a symbol of resistance against PT Bumi Sari's claims.

Action selection and *reclaiming* the main resistance repertoire is based on the failure of government efforts to resolve agrarian conflicts. In addition, these actions tend to be more easily accessible to citizens directly, so they do not require a lot of costs (Usman, member of Tekad Garuda, interviewed on April 15, 2025). As a resistance repertoire, the action *land reclaiming* can directly influence the dynamics of conflict, give rise to strong symbolism, and create a space for ongoing struggle.

Along with the action *land reclaiming*, Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel also carried out other resistance repertoires such as audiences and litigation. For example, the organization once held an audience with the Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency (ATR/BPN) accompanied by the Tekad Garuda alliance in 2022 (Yefriza, 2022). Meanwhile, Rukun Tani's litigation struggle with the alliance was reflected in legal assistance in a number of trials involving Pakel residents, for example in the Pakel trio case. From a number of audiences and litigation struggles, most of their efforts reached a dead end due to the impartiality of the results of the struggle towards Pakel residents. Therefore, Rukun Tani also held demonstrations, especially when there were residents who were detained by the police and underwent trials. A number of these repertoires were not only used to show the solidarity of residents, but also to strengthen their bargaining position against the authorities.

In addition, Rukun Tani also practices symbolic repertoire. The repertoire includes expressive actions such as art exhibitions and theatrical performances in demonstrations. For example, the flower-strewing action in front of the Banyuwangi District Court on November 15, 2023. The action was a response to the court's decision to sentence three Pakel farmers to 5 years and 6 months in prison (Rohman, 2023). Pakel residents considered the decision as a form of criminalization. As a form of protest, Pakel residents held a parade wearing all black clothes like people in mourning and carrying a coffin with the words MATINYA KEADILAN PN Banyuwangi written on it.

Figure 1. Flower-laying Action in Front of Banyuwangi District Court



Source: Sumberejo Pakel Farmers Association

The flower-strewing action above is an expression of people's disappointment towards the state as well as a sharp criticism of the court institution which is considered to have failed to uphold justice. As a symbolic repertoire, the action functions as a communication medium to give testimony to the community about the injustice experienced by Pakel residents. In addition, the action also reflects the flexibility and adaptation of social movements in using repertoires that are relevant to the situation faced and the culture of the mass action.

3.3 Interaction between Movement and Security Forces (*Movement and Security Forces Interaction*)

According to Alimi (2015), direct interaction between social movements and the authorities also influences the repertoire used by the movement. This is because the security style of the authorities can vary. The security style can be repressive or tolerant, harsh or gentle, selective or diffuse, reactive or anticipatory, and legal or illegal (Della Porta and Reiter 1998). In the case of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel, the security of the authorities against collective actions such as demonstrations tended to be peaceful. However, the police together with the security of PT Bumi Sari were reported to have committed acts of violence on the disputed land, precisely in the early hours of January 14, 2022. As a result of the incident, three Pakel residents and one student who was guarding the garden were injured. However, the Banyuwangi Police denied that their

members had committed acts of violence. The police claimed that they were only conducting regular patrols (Hafiluddin, 2022).

Responding to the incident above, Rukun Tani together with the Tekad Garuda alliance came to complain to Komnas HAM. The institution then followed up on the complaint by sending an investigation team to the field and issuing recommendations regarding conflict resolution (Suminar, 2022). In addition, Rukun Tani also reported the incident to the wider community, including through uploads on their Instagram account @rukunpakel. Based on the researcher's monitoring of the account, there was a lot of solidarity support flowing from various community groups and a number of media also covered it. After the incident, Pakel residents collectively guarded a number of points in the plantation area.

Furthermore, the tragedy on the disputed land occurred again within a few days in March 2024. The tragedy involved the destruction of huts and crops belonging to residents, allegedly carried out by PT Bumi Sari security forces and hundreds of paid thugs. Not only that, some residents even experienced intimidation and violence in the incident. Due to this incident, both parties made reports to the police, but what was processed was PT Bumi Sari's report (Priyasidharta, 2024b). As a result, one Pakel resident, Muhriyono, was sentenced to nine months in prison on charges of assaulting the company's security forces (Rohman, 2025).

Figure 2. Condition of Residents' Plants After the March 2024 Event



Source: Sumberejo Pakel Farmers Association

The above incident triggered Rukun Tani to fight back. In addition to filing a report to the police, they also fought a litigation struggle to accompany Muhriyono during the trial. In addition, Rukun Tani also held a number of demonstrations, demanding the release of the Pakel resident. Then, they gave testimony to the public regarding the tragedy that occurred in March 2024 via social media. A number of the actions above were chosen as a form of protest against PT Bumi Sari as well as to convey a message to the public about the injustice and acts of repression and intimidation experienced by the Pakel residents.

In fact, the March 2024 incident not only triggered resistance from Rukun Tani, but also prompted a number of parties to respond. For example, Komnas HAM again gave recommendations to the Banyuwangi Regency Government to maximize efforts

to resolve land conflicts (Priyasidharta, 2024b). In addition, there is also a legal opinion from the Center for Law and Social Justice Studies, Faculty of Law, Gadjah Mada University. They condemned the acts of terror and intimidation against Rukun Tani members on disputed land and stated that these actions were a form of human rights violation (<http://bit.ly/PendapatHukumLSJ>). This shows that the expansion of the repertoire has entered the institutional realm. This also strengthens the legitimacy of the Rukun Tani movement while weakening the position of PT Bumi Sari in the eyes of the public.

4. CONCLUSION

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the repertoire of Rukun Tani Sumberejo Pakel is a determinant factor that forms the resilience of the social movement in the agrarian conflict facing PT Bumi Sari. The dynamics of its resistance repertoire occur in three main interaction arenas. In the intra-movement interaction arena, Rukun Tani has a solid institutional capacity. In the arena of movement interaction with authority, the movement carries out various forms of adaptive repertoires, such as *land reclaiming*, hearings, litigation, and demonstrations. Meanwhile, in the arena of interaction with security forces, repressive acts of intimidation and criminalization trigger resistance from residents and expansion of the repertoire into the institutional realm through reporting to Komnas HAM. All of these collective actions reflect the strategic repertoire of Rukun Tani in an effort to fight for land rights. This allows their struggle to survive for a relatively long period of time.

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