

The Resistance Message Against Capitalism Conveyed by the Tomato Farmers of Cikareumbi Village, Lembang, Through the Cultural Event of *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*

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ABSTRACT: This research examines the message of resistance against capitalism conveyed by the tomato farmers in Cikareumbi village of Lembang sub-district through the cultural event of Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat or, as it is simply called, the “tomato battle”. Methods: This research adopts a critical discourse approach with a qualitative method. Results: The research shows that the Cikareumbi tomato farmers present their message in two steps. Firstly, they let their tomatoes go bad. Secondly, they start the tomato battle event. In practice, the message of resistance is delivered through the symbolisms found in the tomato battle. The guards represent capitalism that has made the farmers suffer, the mask worn by the guards represents the falseness of capitalism, the tomato battle represents the unity and strength of the tomato farmers against capitalism. Meanwhile, the processing of rotten tomatoes used in the battle into fertiliser and new seeds represents their class’ independence. Conclusion: Their action is propelled by two things, i.e., the unfair price set by the bourgeoisie class and the lack of government’s support for the farmers. Their resistance is ultimately against capitalism that is represented by the bourgeoisie class and their message also conveys their wish to be supported by the government.

Keywords: Message of Resistance, Cikareumbi Tomato Farmers, Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat.



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INTRODUCTION

Since 2012, the residents of Kampung Cikareumbi, located in Cikadang Village, Lembang Sub-district, West Bandung Regency, have regularly held a cultural event known as *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*, more popularly referred to as the Tomato War. In this event, villagers engage in a ritualistic battle by throwing rotten tomatoes at one another. This annual tradition has even become part of West Java’s cultural tourism agenda (D. Ariztia & M. Pallavicini, 2020). In the context of traditional understanding, the Tomato War is interpreted as a symbolic act of discarding human vices. More broadly, it conveys meanings related to greed and suffering. The vice of greed possessed by certain groups often brings suffering to others. Thus, it can be understood that in the mindset of the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi, there is an acknowledgment of greed from certain parties that causes their suffering. In relation to this, Nanu Munajar Dahlan better known as Abah Nanu Muda the initiator of the *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat* activity, stated that the Tomato War began as a response to the

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anxiety felt by the tomato farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi regarding the drastic drop in tomato prices during every harvest season (N. M. Dahlan, 2020). This Sundanese cultural figure, who is also active in the arts, further explained that the condition of farmers suffering from plunging prices and the sight of tomatoes left to rot in gardens and yards inspired the idea to create this cultural event.

During the off-season, the price of tomatoes from Cikareumbi farmers can reach IDR 9,000 per kilogram. However, data from 2020 indicates that during the harvest season, prices plummet drastically, even reaching as low as IDR 1,000 per kilogram, while the production cost per kilogram is approximately IDR 5,000 (*Statistics of Horticulture 2020 - BPS-Statistics Indonesia*, n.d.). This price drop represents a severe market failure and economic contradiction often seen in agricultural commodities under a semi-capitalist system (Davies et al., 2017; Lamb, 2018; Marx, 2020). While farmers generally celebrate their harvests, this is not the case for the tomato farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi. They chose to refuse selling their harvest at such low prices, allowing the tomatoes to rot in their gardens and yards instead.

From this situation, the people of Kampung Cikareumbi conceived the idea of using rotten tomatoes as a form of resistance. They refused to succumb to the situation by selling their tomatoes cheaply to middlemen or brokers. Instead, the rotting tomatoes were used in the Tomato War, which became a symbolic act of class struggle carried out by the tomato farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi.

Class resistance often refers to the struggle between social classes. It arises as a response to the conflict between the proletariat representing the lower class and the bourgeoisie, representing the capitalist class. This notion is also expressed by Marx. He stated that within society, there are only two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat (Buzgalin, 2022; Scott, 2008). As scholars have noted, such class-based symbolic resistance often emerges in rural communities where structural inequities are left unresolved by formal institutions (Han, 2025; Kish-Gephart et al., 2023).

Reflecting on Marx's perspective, it can be understood that, fundamentally, the history of humankind has always been shaped by two opposing poles. Furthermore, the notion of these two classes, according to Marx, forms the very foundation of the world's structure. Human civilization, he argues, began with the conflict between "masters" and "slaves," which was later succeeded by feudalism bringing about a new form of opposition between "landowners" and "tenant farmers" (Scott, 2008). Feudalism eventually gave way to a more advanced societal form, where agricultural land was abandoned in favor of urban industrial society. This shift ushered in a new class conflict: between capital owners and laborers commonly referred to as the era of capitalism (Hall, 2022; Scott, 2008).

In this context, it is important to note that the concept of tenant farmers in the present day and particularly in the context of this study can be equated with that of laborers. Essentially, tenant farmers are also laborers, more specifically known as agricultural laborers (Saptana et al., 2023; Tulungen et al., 2025).

Among the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi, a class consciousness emerges as they recognize themselves as part of the proletariat a group historically subjected to systemic oppression. This

consciousness is manifested in their refusal to sell their harvested tomatoes at unfairly low prices, as well as in their collective performance of the Tomato War. This aligns with the concept of symbolic resistance in rural society, where rituals become a form of non-verbal class protest (Kish-Gephart et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, the bourgeois or capitalist class exists within a different societal realm, embodied by the middlemen or tomato brokers operating at both local and global scales. The plight of the tomato farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi is further exacerbated by the government's failure to effectively manage Indonesia's tomato export situation. Although tomato farming is the fifth-largest vegetable export in terms of volume and value in Indonesia (Davies et al., 2017; Marx, 2020)[4], export levels remain modest: in 2023, fresh tomato export value was only USD 330.6K with a volume of 500.9 metric tons (Davies et al., 2017).

Through the annual Tomato War, the farmers of Cikareumbi deliver their message of resistance. This message is not expressed through words, but through the symbolic and festive chaos of *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*, their resistance resonates loudly and powerfully (D. Ariztia & M. Pallavicini, 2020).

Based on the explanation above, the researcher formulates the following three research questions, which are intended to explore the message of resistance conveyed by the farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi, Lembang Sub-district, against capitalism through *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*:

1. What forms of class struggle are expressed by the farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi in opposing capitalism?
2. What is the content of the class resistance message conveyed by the farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi through *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*?
3. Why do the farmers of Kampung Cikareumbi choose to convey their message of resistance against capitalism through *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*?

METHOD

This research adopts a critical paradigm. Within this paradigm, social reality is understood as a system that is constructed and shaped by power specifically, the power held by dominant groups. Research grounded in the critical paradigm seeks to reveal and analyze social realities by questioning the existing imbalances in social relations. It is supported by critical theory perspectives and the assumptions that underpin them.

In this study, the critical tradition is applied to expose the competition and conflicts of interest between local tomato farmers and capitalist market forces, while striving to overcome such conflicts by prioritizing the interests of marginalized groups in society. Neuman asserts that critical social research is based on the assumption that social reality is constantly changing, and that these changes are rooted in tensions, conflicts, or contradictions in social relations or institutions (Neuman, 2013). Thus, critical social research is focused on change and conflict and is inherently action-oriented.

In this study, the **qualitative research method** is employed. Qualitative research can be defined as a method that aims to uncover social conditions and the issues surrounding them. This aligns with the perspective of Denzin and Lincoln (as cited in Mulyana), who describe qualitative research as *interpretive*, meaning that it relies heavily on the interpretation of social phenomena (Lincoln & Denzin, 2018).

In line with this, qualitative research refers to research procedures that generate descriptive data namely, what people say (either verbally or in writing), and what they do based on direct observation in specific contexts, with an emphasis on engaging with people in their own language and terminology (Siddiqua, 2023).

Similarly, Pawito states that qualitative research in communication is generally not intended to provide explanations, control symptoms, make predictions, or test theories. Rather, it aims to present rich descriptions and/or interpretations of how and why certain communication phenomena or realities are formed (Pawito, 2017).

Based on the views presented above, it can be understood that qualitative research essentially focuses on interpreting phenomena. Interpretation is the key to uncovering social problems present within a community in this case, among tomato farmers in Kampung Cikareumbi.

One important aspect to note is that in qualitative research, theory is not meant to be tested for its validity through empirical trials. Instead, theory serves as an **analytical tool** to help researchers examine the problems under study. Through this method, meanings can be interpreted freely, yet must be grounded in responsibility. This responsibility is demonstrated through the reinforcement of analytical findings using relevant theoretical concepts as tools, along with the results of observation and document analysis conducted by the researcher.

Neuman asserts that qualitative research within the critical paradigm is intended to capture subjective meanings, definitions, and symbols (Neuman, 1997, 2013; Tittle-Ind Human Soc Sci et al., 2022). Based on Neuman's view, it can be understood that this study aims to examine the meanings embedded in the various symbols present in the Tomato War event. As previously mentioned, the message of resistance manifests in the form of class struggle. This relates to the theory of class conflict as proposed by Karl Marx. In its simplest understanding, Marx and Engels describe class as the social relationship between the proletariat and the owners of the means of production the bourgeoisie. Within this framework, the bourgeoisie is seen as exploiting the surplus value generated by laborers (Lamb, 2018; Marx, 2020).

From this definition, it can be concluded that the agents of social change are not individuals per se, but rather groups of people who share common conditions particularly in terms of economic struggles. This notion is echoed by contemporary Marxist theorists who affirm the centrality of **historical materialism**, which posits that the material economic base of society fundamentally shapes its social, political, and ideological superstructure (Chakrabarti, 2022; Eagleton, 2003). From this perspective, individual consciousness, actions, and even belief systems are a reflection of the broader economic relations shaped by class position and the structure of production in society.

A discussion of class is incomplete without addressing capitalism, which serves both as the antithesis and the foundational premise of Marx's theory of class. A deeper understanding of

capitalism helps clarify the class conflict central to Marxist theory. One defining feature of capitalist society is its division into classes: the capitalist class (bourgeoisie), who control the means of production, and the working class (proletariat), who must sell their labor to survive. Capitalists dominate the economic structure, while workers remain subordinate and dependent (Harvey & Marx, 2010; Sindzingre & Tricou, 2022).

Moreover, the driving force of capitalism is not only production, but **competition**, which compels capitalists to continuously reduce production costs and maximize output often at the expense of labor. This results in increased exploitation, alienation, and recurring crises of overproduction that disproportionately impact the working class (Harvey & Marx, 2010; Sindzingre & Tricou, 2022).

From these perspectives, it becomes clear that Marx's class theory fundamentally addresses two irreconcilable interests. Consequently, the lower class deprived of ownership and capital can only resist capitalism through collective social struggle. What Marx envisioned was a class-based revolution, carried out not by individuals but by a collective class consciousness. Through such solidarity, the voice of resistance may pierce through the structural dominance of the bourgeois class.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The history of resistance will always go hand in hand with class struggle an inevitable law of nature as believed by Marx. The tomato farmers of Cikareumbi belong to the lower class or the proletariat within the class structure. Their struggle began with the recurring collapse of tomato prices during each harvest season.

Phase of Resistance: Forms of Class Struggle by the Tomato Farmers of Cikareumbi

At the outset, in an attempt to overcome their economic difficulties, the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi opted to take on side jobs such as construction laborers, motorcycle taxi drivers (*ojek*), or other forms of informal and irregular work. Over time, a collective awareness of the need for united struggle emerged as their sense of oppression grew increasingly intense.

In addition to the plummeting tomato prices in the market, the farmers also expressed concerns over the high cost of transporting tomatoes from their fields to the wholesalers. Furthermore, the cost of seeds and fertilizers was not proportionate to the profits they received. Feeling that there was no financial gain to be had, the farmers began to leave their tomatoes to rot in the fields (*Asal-Usul Perang Tomat Di Lembang: Dari Derita Hingga Perayaan Se* | *IDN Times Jabar*, n.d.).

The tomato farmers of Cikareumbi gradually came to realize that, despite being at the forefront of food production particularly for tomatoes they were not receiving the attention and support they rightfully deserved. This awareness gave rise to the understanding that they were, in fact, positioned within a social caste or class intentionally created by the capitalist system to render them powerless. This sense of powerlessness marked a turning point and opened the minds of the Cikareumbi farmers to the existence of a class conflict between themselves, as the proletariat, and the tomato

brokers or middlemen, both local and international, as the bourgeois class whose economic power contributes to the farmers' suffering.

This recognition of class inequality then became the driving force behind the farmers' actions. They began to resist by refusing to sell their tomatoes, instead allowing them to rot in their yards and fields. As a result, the surroundings of their homes and farms became filled with decomposing tomatoes. Eventually, the Cikareumbi farmers came to realize one crucial point: their class struggle had yet to make a significant impact. The message of resistance in this first phase remained less effective, both symbolically and in creating broader social impact.

The end of this first phase gave rise to a second phase of resistance. Through discussions among the farmers, together with Abah Nanu Muda, an idea was born to transform the rotting tomatoes into a form of protest. This idea took shape in the annual event known as *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*. The concept was simple: each farmer would collect their rotten tomatoes, and on the day of the Tomato War, they would engage in a mock battle by throwing the tomatoes at one another.

A Voice Without Words: The Message of Resistance in the Class Struggle of Cikareumbi's Tomato Farmers Through *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*

The Tomato War contains a variety of symbolic elements that convey messages of resistance. These symbols are intentionally used by the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi to communicate their protest. There are no speeches, declarations, or political orations delivered during the event. Instead, through *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*, their voice is expressed through the symbolic representations presented throughout the ritual.

The main segment of the Tomato War always begins with a procession of young people dressed like guards or soldiers, wearing masks. These masked performers later participate in the tomato battle. Symbolically, these masked troops represent the capitalist forces that have brought suffering to the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi. Soldiers are commonly associated with power, and in this context, the masked troops serve as representations of the oppressive power of capitalism.

Another key symbol in the ritual is the presence of a special group wearing bamboo masks. These masks carry the message that human beings must cast aside falsehood and reveal their true, honest selves. The farmers believe that sincerity and moral clarity must replace the metaphorical masks people wear in society (*Di Balik Filosofi Perang Tomat Busuk*, n.d.; Keleş, 2024).

The masks themselves embody deeper meanings. Through them, the Tomato War communicates that capitalists are agents of falsehood. They appear to offer salvation by acting as intermediaries to absorb farmers' tomato harvests, but in reality, they are false saviors those who push farmers deeper into perpetual suffering. The sweat poured into each harvested tomato is never properly valued. The skillful hands of farmers are reduced to mere cheap labor in the capitalist economy.

As Abah Nanu Muda has stated, in both society and the state, people must not wear the masks of falsehood. Humanity must be guided by sincerity of heart. Without purity of heart, greed will continue to dwell within. Therefore, the symbolic masks representing deception must be destroyed.

This is where the message of resistance is represented through the act of hurling rotten tomatoes at these masks.

The message of resistance intensifies after this symbolic act. Once the tomato-throwing at the masks concludes, the event reaches its climax. All attendees of the Tomato War are allowed to throw the rotten tomatoes that have been prepared in large baskets around the battlefield. This is the moment when all the anger and protest of the proletariat erupts. People throw rotten tomatoes at one another freely. While the earlier scenes involve symbolic attacks on the masked figures representing the rejection of capitalist deception this final phase conveys a message of solidarity and unity among the participants.

The rotten tomatoes used in this scene symbolize the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi themselves perceived as worthless and disposable, much like the spoiled fruit. By throwing tomatoes at one another, their bodies become equally covered in the rotten remnants. This act conveys a powerful message: that the farmers of Cikareumbi, though labeled worthless by the bourgeois class, represent a unified force that refuses to remain silent in the face of oppression. Rather than sell their harvests at unfair prices, the farmers choose to let the tomatoes rot and destroy them through the symbolic act of the Tomato War.

Even more significantly, the core message of resistance emerges after the battle ends. In the name of class independence and as an act of defiance against exploitation, the rotten tomatoes used during the war are repurposed into compost fertilizer. This action demonstrates that the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi refuse to passively accept their suffering. The resulting compost is then used to nourish their tomato fields, while the seeds from the rotten tomatoes are saved and cultivated into new crops.

Through this post-war utilization of rotten tomatoes, another layer of resistance becomes evident this time against the fertilizer and seed distributors who act as brokers or middlemen. The farmers, having refused to sell their tomatoes cheaply, also reject the idea that their labor can be discarded. The capitalists will never acquire their produce at unfair prices. Instead, the farmers let the fruit decay and transform it into resources for their own self-sufficiency.

In the end, the message of resistance from the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi stands unmistakably clear. They will never surrender and will continuously fight against the oppression inflicted by capitalist forces. Through the repurposing of rotten tomatoes, they metaphorically shout that proletarian unity can always give rise to class autonomy. Moreover, through this action, the farmers of Cikareumbi deliver a powerful declaration: that capitalists will never profit from denying social and economic justice to the proletariat.

Understanding the Action: Why Must the Message of Resistance Be Delivered?

As outlined in the Introduction, the collapse of tomato prices in the market served as the trigger for the initiation of *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*. This price collapse can be attributed to at least two main factors. First, the oversupply of fresh tomatoes during each harvest season allows market prices to be manipulated according to the interests of the market interests which are largely

determined by the bourgeois class. The exchange value ultimately depends on the amount dictated by brokers or middlemen. From the perspective of capitalist economic logic, minimizing production costs is a primary strategy to maximize profit.

Second, it must be understood that although Indonesia's economic system is not officially based on capitalism, in practice, capitalist-like behaviors are frequently observed. It is precisely at such times that the state should intervene especially when economic practices that deviate from the nation's ideological foundations have begun to divide society into two opposing poles.

Beyond the various political and economic challenges, this situation reflects the state's weak capacity to ensure economic security and stability specifically in regulating tomato prices. When discussing conflicting interests, both the proletariat and the bourgeois class hold distinct goals. These goals give rise to group-based egos, which ideally should be mediated by the state to prevent friction between the two opposing classes.

As analyzed by Hegel, society requires a force capable of overcoming egoism and uniting its people (Rosenberg, 2023; Suseno, 2016). That force is the state.

Thus, the actions of the farmers can be seen as a form of protest directed not only at their immediate circumstances but also at the government and other actors who have failed to assist them in times of hardship (*Perang Tomat, Bentuk Protes Para Petani, Kini Berubah Jadi Atraksi Yang Dinanti*, n.d.; Wilderman, 2014).

In line with this, Abah Nanu Muda stated that the government should indeed give proper attention to the tomato farmers. It was from this suffering that the initiative to organize *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat* emerged an effort to make their voices heard by the government and to deliver the message that their tomatoes deserve proper recognition and fair value.

These two key concerns are what ultimately drove the tomato farmers of Cikareumbi to take action and express their message of resistance. They felt oppressed by the bourgeois class, which worships profit maximization, and simultaneously neglected by the government, which has failed to ensure price stability for their tomato harvests.

Nevertheless, one important aspect must be emphasized regarding the actions taken by the Cikareumbi farmers. While they indeed engaged in a class struggle to voice their resistance, their intention was never to abolish existing social classes. The utopian Marxist ideal that class struggle should culminate in the destruction of all class structures was something they consciously avoided even though their form of class struggle aligns with Marx's theory of class conflict.

The true essence of the resistance message delivered by the Cikareumbi tomato farmers lies in their desire for the government or the state to act as a mediator one capable of resolving the persistent issue of unstable tomato prices. Ultimately, their resistance is directed against the cruelty of capitalism, represented by the bourgeois class, and is a longing for protection and justice, which should rightfully be embodied by the state.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, several conclusions can be drawn. First, the awareness of the tomato farmers in Cikareumbi to express a message of resistance arose as a response to the oppression they experienced. This struggle unfolded in two phases, each reflecting a different form of resistance. The first phase involved the farmers' decision to let their harvested tomatoes rot in their yards and fields—a passive protest that they later realized had limited impact. The second phase evolved into a more symbolic and collective action through the event *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat*. In this event, the farmers gathered their rotten tomatoes and engaged in a symbolic battle, throwing them at one another to communicate their shared struggle.

Second, various messages of resistance are embedded in the *Rempug Tarung Adu Tomat* event through its symbolic elements. The entrance of masked guard troops represents the capitalist forces that exploit and bring suffering to the Cikareumbi farmers. The masks worn by these guards symbolize the deceit and falsehood of capitalism, while the act of destroying the masks with rotten tomatoes signifies the farmers' rejection of capitalist lies. The climax of the event, where farmers throw rotten tomatoes at each other, carries the strongest message: the rotten tomatoes symbolize how farmers are viewed by the bourgeois class—as worthless and disposable. Yet, by covering one another with these rotten tomatoes, the farmers affirm their unity and shared experience of devaluation, transforming this symbolic act into a declaration of solidarity and defiance. Furthermore, by turning the rotten tomatoes into compost fertilizer and tomato seeds after the event, the farmers extend their resistance beyond symbolism—challenging dependence on fertilizer and seed brokers and asserting economic independence. Through this act, they send a powerful message: the capitalists will not gain their tomatoes at unfair prices.

Third, two primary factors drive the farmers' resistance. The first is the injustice in pricing, where the oversupply of tomatoes during harvest season enables market manipulation by the bourgeois class, disregarding the welfare of the farmers. The second factor is the government's lack of effective intervention as a mediator to ensure fair trade and protect farmers' livelihoods. In essence, the Cikareumbi farmers' resistance is directed against the cruelty of capitalism and the failure of the state to uphold justice. Their struggle embodies both a rejection of exploitation and a plea for state protection—an assertion of dignity, independence, and solidarity in the face of systemic oppression.

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