

Using Freire to critique Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah's pedagogical framework

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Abstract

Neo-liberalization is a systematic and global movement of exploitation. However, neo-liberalization is fragile because of its reliance on culture. Since culture grants power to neo-liberalization, culture also paradoxically has the potential to diminish neo-liberalization. In Indonesia, Islam is the ultimate moral and cultural force and, therefore, it can be a powerful resistant instrument against neo-liberalization. This paper will first identify Islam as an ideology of resistance and, therefore, a source for a pedagogy of resistance among Muslims. Subsequently, it will bring into scrutiny the critical pedagogy framework of one of the prominent Indonesian youth Muslim associations called Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM) or Muhammadiyah Student Association. The examination incorporates the lenses of Freire (1970), one of the most influential critical education literature in the 21st century. This paper shows that while IMM can rearticulate critical pedagogy in its context so the transformation can be more easily accepted by the masses, IMM may fail to bring the liberation to a broader, global context where oppressions are deeply rooted.

Keywords: *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah, Paulo Freire, Critical Pedagogy, Neoliberalism*

Abstrak

Neoliberalisasi adalah gerakan eksploitasi yang sistematis dan global. Namun, neoliberalisasi itu rapuh karena bergantung pada budaya. Satu sisi budaya menguatkan neoliberalisasi, secara paradoks budaya juga berpotensi melemahkan neoliberalisasi. Di Indonesia, Islam adalah kekuatan moral dan budaya tertinggi dan, karena itu, Islam dapat menjadi instrumen yang kuat untuk melawan neoliberalisasi. Artikel ini pertama-tama akan mengidentifikasi Islam sebagai ideologi perlawanan dan karena itu, menjadi sumber pedagogi perlawanan di kalangan umat Islam. Selanjutnya, tulisan ini akan memeriksa kerangka pedagogi kritis dari salah satu asosiasi pemuda muslim Indonesia terkemuka yang disebut Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM). Penelitian ini menggunakan perspektif Freire (1970), salah satu rujukan pendidikan kritis paling berpengaruh di abad ke-21. Artikel ini menunjukkan bahwa IMM dapat mengartikulasikan pedagogi kritis dalam konteksnya sehingga transformasi dapat lebih mudah diterima oleh massa, hanya saja IMM mungkin akan gagal membawa pembebasan ke konteks global yang lebih luas di mana penindasan mengakar.

Kata kunci: *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah, Paulo Freire, pedagogi kritis, Neoliberalisme*

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I. Introduction

Some might argue that it is almost impossible to see the end of neoliberalism in the near future. Neoliberal agents have been the economic titans and have controlled all layers in our society (Harvey, 2007). The neoliberal agents successfully imprison states and their apparatuses from any possibility of escape. The United States of America (USA) and The United Kingdom are experiencing the impotency of their leaders upon undoing radical economic transformation in the Reagan and Thatcher eras. Similarly, Indonesia cannot be free from the grip of neoliberalism as the result of the courtship between The USA and Suharto's New Order. It appears that neoliberalism has successfully been the living God of the modern world.

Even though neoliberalism is hegemonic, there remains hope that we can cling to. In the last chapter of his book, Harvey (2007) draws attention to the emergence of local libertarian movements in many places. These local movements refer to, for example, the Zapatista in Mexico, the Green Peace in The USA and the Confucian movement in China. These movements are powerful and they can be an alternative to the sharp decline of the labor or middle-class resistant forces. The ultimate difference between these movements and the labor or left movement is their appreciation of the local values inherent in cultures or religions. While labor or left activists are quite often perceived as importing 'foreign' concepts, the local movements are welcomed since they are advocating the genuine concerns of the indigenous people using their own words. The key to the local movements' successful resistances is their utilization of the major cultural force in their context.

In Indonesia, we can find Islam as a major cultural force. Besides the fact that most Indonesians are Muslims, historically, Islam gave birth to Communism and Socialism in Indonesia, led the anti-colonialism or Indonesian independence struggle and played a vital role in the falling of Suharto's New Order regime (Hadiz, 2011). The last important attribute of Islam in Indonesia is that it owns a large portion of social, economic, health and educational institutions that provide social provisions to the poor people (Jackson, 2014; Latief, 2010; Rabasa, 2005). Considering Islam's vast capital ownership, nationalist-secular political parties in Indonesia often accommodate the aspirations of the Muslim agenda (Tanuwidjaja, 2010). This demonstrates that Islam is influential so it can steer the politics of Indonesia. This also demonstrates Islam as the major cultural force in Indonesia and, therefore, the strongest rival to Neoliberalism. The question worth to ask then, can Islam be the source for resistance?

Some might argue that Islam promotes neoliberalism. For example, in many places in Indonesia, neoliberal 'agents' who promote the worst form of capitalism incorporate Islamic teaching of 'hard work' and 'entrepreneurship' as the masks of neo-liberalization (Aspinall, 2013; Rudnykyj, 2009). Additionally, the decimation of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in 1965 was, in fact, partly due to the conspiracy between the

Muslims' bourgeoisie who wanted to preserve their status as the largest capital owners in Indonesia (Hadiz, 2011). These historical facts suffer the claim that Islam is fit to be a resistance ideology.

To answer that issue, it is important to closely examine the authentic teaching of Islam. In fact, Islam has the basic ingredients to be a resistant ideology. In its core teachings and myths, Islam fuels rebellions against tyrants. As in the story of David versus Goliath, Moses versus Pharaoh, and Muhammad versus Arab Elites, the prophets are the agent of liberation. They teach their followers to believe that nothing overpowers God and, therefore, it is only to God that humans submit their prayers. Humans, because of this relationship with God, are ontologically equal with each other. Globally, these resistant metanarratives have been vital in the construction of resistant educational frameworks among Muslim resistant movements (Holt, 2010; Maqdsi, 1993; McIntosh, 2004). It is important to name some prominent Islamic resistance movements such as the Iranian Revolution and the Nation of Islam (NOI) in America with its influential ex-spokesperson, Malcolm X.

In Indonesia, Islamic resistance pedagogy is not a novel notion. Most Islamic student organizations have experimented with their pedagogy of resistance. The four largest and oldest progressive Islamic youth organizations such as Islamic Students Association (HMI), The Action Group of Indonesia Muslim Students (KAMMI), Muhammadiyah Students Association (IMM) and Indonesian Muslim Students Movement (PMII) have been vital in adapting the philosophical ideas of critical teachers such as Paulo Freire and John Dewey into their educational systems (Johnson, 2006; Nuryatno, 2005). These Islamic Student organizations' experiments can be regarded as a great success since the organizations have been the key determinants for youth mass mobilizations in all radical political turning points in Indonesia and many of their alumni are now sitting in a vast number of chief government positions (Hadiz, 2011; Hamayotsu, 2011; Jazimah, 2013; Kartakusumah, 2016).

Nevertheless, some researchers have been observing the decline of the Indonesian Muslim student organizations' movements (Aisyah, 2016; Indra, 2015; Sugito, 2015; Valery & Krisdyatmiko, 2018). These researchers similarly report the dramatic deterioration of political movements among the Muslim student associations in the last decade. More importantly, most of these researchers agree that the problem is linked to the ineffectiveness of the current Muslim student organizations' education system and practice. The oppression is changing and the resistance education needs to continuously answer the change. Reflecting on this shared researchers' concern, it seems there is a need to examine the resistance pedagogy of these Islamic youth movements.

However, instead of examining the resistance pedagogy of all Muslim student associations, this research proposal brings the focus to one of the influential Muslim

youth organization called *Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah* (IMM) or Muhammadiyah Student Association. According to Johnson (2006), it is estimated that there are more than 100,000 active members of IMM nationwide and they are working at large public and Islamic universities across all provinces and cities. Considering its vast membership, IMM has been a powerful force to advocate the needs of the marginalized in Indonesia. IMM realizes that the unjust structure has established a huge gap between the small number of the richest and the majority of poor people. This realization leads IMM to initiate national movements to push its agenda and force the government to negotiate terms (Mahzan, 2012).

Although IMM has played a key role in advocating social issues, many view that IMM has become uncritical and slow to respond to some vital discourse in the last decade (Miswanto, 2015; Valery & Krisdyatmiko, 2018). While it is important to anticipate many factors such as external political interventions, the change of movement forms and IMM's leadership, it is more urgent to evaluate the educational framework within IMM. Liberation is a long process and requires the participation and critical awareness of the masses. Thus, for a liberation movement like IMM, the educational framework is the central element that dictates the peripherals. My main objective, therefore, is to build up a critique of IMM's educational frameworks.

The examination will be based on IMM's official cadre management documents and the author's reflection as a resistant educator in IMM. To analyze IMM's educational system, it will incorporate the critical pedagogy lens of Paulo Freire because, in the author's knowledge, Freire's transformative ideas are influential in shaping IMM's resistance education. To demonstrate, IMM designates Freire's *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (1970) as a compulsory reading for IMM's educators, allocates a portion of its educator training sessions to comprehend Freire's philosophical ideas and encourages IMM's educators to incorporate Freire's (1970) terms such as conscientization, praxis and banking-education in their educational and liberational practices. The present research proposal aims to build up a critique of IMM's resistant pedagogy to sharpen its ability to challenge oppression in all forms and in contemporary time.

II. METHOD

My main objective, therefore, is to build up a critique of IMM's educational framework. To achieve this main objective, a library research design is incorporated in the present study. I will use, mainly and mostly, Freire's (1970) educational framework to analytically examine IMM's educational framework. I begin with comprehending the influence of Freire to IMM, then I proceed with the discussions in the following topics; human ontology, the ultimate goal of education and the teaching approach.

The analysis based on the phenomenal book titled *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* (Freire, 1970). The book is widely acknowledged among critical pedagogy scholars and has been the key literature for critical pedagogy research and practices. The analysis will target two sources. Firstly, the official documents of IMM, such as *Sistem Perkaderan Ikatan*. Secondly, the books authored by the alumni of IMM such as Sani (2011) and Khaidir (2006). Both authors were the leaders of IMM in the national board level.

To systematically analyze the IMM's critical pedagogy framework, three areas are investigated and discussed separately. The areas of investigation are the correlation and the influence of Freire (1970) to the IMM's educational frameworks, the ontological views, the pedagogical objectives and the conceptualization of critical pedagogy strategies.

III. Result and Discussion

A. Freire's influence to IMM's educational framework

IMM is a unique Muslim student movement. Although it is an under bow of one of the largest Islamic organizations in Indonesia, which is Muhammadiyah, IMM combines the ideology of the left movement and Islam's theology of liberation. According to Rosyad Saleh (as cited in Ahmadi & Anwar, 2014), one of the IMM's founding fathers, IMM was established in 1960s amidst the hegemony of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI). PKI was very powerful and influential because it appeared to be the only Indonesian Party that paid attention to the Indonesian majority which consists of poor farmers. IMM attempted to challenge that by using the same color of PKI, which is red, rather than the color of Islamic organizations, which is green. Khaidir (2006), once the national president of IMM from 2001 to 2003, writes that IMM is an analogy of a watermelon because IMM is green (Islam) on the outside, but it is red (left) on the inside. Consequently, left ideas, books, activists are relatively easy to resonate with IMM's movement. However, among many left books or activists, IMM has developed a special relation with Paulo Freire.

As shown in Sani (2011), IMM has developed and adapted Freire's educational framework through two channels. First, from Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of The Oppressed* that also has been one of IMM's four compulsory readings since 2001 (Khaidir, 2006), and second, from Indonesian Muslim Freirean educators such as Mansour Fakih, Moeslim Abdurrahman, Ahmad Syafi'i Maarif and Kuntowijoyo (Johnson, 2006; Nuryatno, 2005). The different is, however, IMM places greater reception on the concept of transformative education that has been 'reinvented' by these Muslim educators from Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy* while IMM also encourages its members to read the *Pedagogy* directly. Thus, Freire's educational framework is highly influential in IMM.

B. Freire and IMM Human ontological views

Freire (1970) sees humans are originally free beings that in this capitalist world has to surrender their freedom (p. 32). This capitalist world imprisons humans into divisions.

Humans are fundamentally 'white' or 'black'. In this sense, humans are either the oppressor or the oppressed, the conqueror or the conquered, the possessor or the possession. These divisions are forced through various forms of violence by mean of establishing the oppressor-friendly world (Fanon, 1963). Freire's dualistic view of humans has been problematized by many as an oversimplification (Beckett, 2013; Glass, 2001; Schugurensky, 1998). While others justify Freire by demonstrating that it is evidence of such dualism of the oppressor and the oppressed in Freire's original context of liberation (i.e., Chile and Brazil) (Betz, 1992; Holst, 2006), it indicates that different contexts demand different analysis that stems from the historical reality of the context. Since IMM is working in the Indonesia context, it is natural that IMM sees humans or the form of the oppression differently.

Differ from Freire, IMM conveys that humans are not completely free (Sani, 2011). As in Islam, humans are spiritual beings with obligations to God rather than their individuality (Quran 2: 21-22). The fundamental doctrine in Islam, which is Tawhid or God's oneness, refers to the understanding that God is only one, which is Allah (Quran 19: 65). As a consequence, Muslims believe that humans are all equal because there is no human can match the superiority and have the right to order except God. Further, this spirit of Tawhid is interpreted by IMM as the *raison de'être* for human liberation from exploitations. Epochs such as the struggle between David and Goliath or Moses and the pharaoh or Muhammad and the Arab oligarchs are some examples of human liberation that is guided by the Tawhid. David, Moses, and Muhammad fought to eliminate the exploitations by other humans in their time. Likewise, IMM spots a similar structure of exploitations are established in the present time and, therefore, IMM has to fight them.

Some might argue that IMM's human ontology can simultaneously be beneficial and detrimental. Since the majority of Indonesians are Muslims, this makes the IMM's movement easier to recruit a large number of members. This human's ontology is in the mind of most Muslims, therefore, IMM is attractive for them because it holds the same view about humans. However, this human's ontology can make IMM exclusive. For example, it can be difficult for IMM to collaborate with individuals or organizations that hold dissimilar human's ontology such as non-believers (e.g., agnostics, atheists, secular). IMM's human ontology can also be dangerous because it creates division between God and humans in the mind of IMM's members. Some members can project this division to other humans and justify oppression as a natural phenomenon that is designed by God. Thus, it is important for IMM to resolve this 'distorted view of God' (Freire, 1970, p. 48) by the understanding that while God has a plan, humans are given the power to change it (Quran 13:11).

C. Freire and IMM's fundamental educational objective

Freire suggests that education should allow humans to fully regain their humanity that is to be free individuals (Freire, 1970). Oppressions alienate humans from their

genuine ontological vocation by implanting the oppressed mind and the aspiration to be the oppressor. While the mind of the oppressed is the mental pull that withdraws human from liberating themselves, the latter is the mental push that drives human to embrace the images of being future oppressors. Liberation can never be pursued by humans, "as long as they live in the duality in which to be is to be like and to be like is to be like the oppressor." (p. 33). This is because liberation requires the rebirth of human which, "viable only as the oppressor-oppressed contradiction is superseded by the humanization of all men." (p. 33) and, "as long as their ambiguity persists, the oppressed are reluctant to resist, and totally lack confidence in themselves." (p. 50). Freirean education, therefore, serves to reconcile this duality of mind.

The fundamental objective of IMM's education is to shape genuine Muslim intellectuals' (Khaidir, 2006; Sani, 2011; Sustanti et. al., 2011). The 'genuine Muslim intellectuals' are defined as individuals that have intellectual capital, social sensitivity, and the intention to engage in social transformation. Unlike other Islamic organizations, IMM sees ritualistically discipline Muslims are insufficient to be 'genuine Muslim intellectuals'. Genuine Muslim intellectual are Muslim 'radicals' that are driven by God's command instead of the intention to free themselves. This statement also shows that IMM's fundamental educational objective is an extension of its Islamic human ontology. It seems that the same benefits and shortcomings in the previous sections can be repeated in here. However, it is important to notice that to this point, IMM has successfully conduct a 'cultural synthesis' between Freire's educational framework and its own. By doing so, IMM can avoid of communicating using, what Freire called as, 'alienating rhetoric' and successfully reinvent a libertarian education through a cultural synthesis where "leaders and people are reborn in new knowledge and new action". (p. 183).

D. Freire and IMM's Libertarian education

Freire suggests that education is necessary in liberation (see chapter four in Freire, 1970). Liberation cannot take place without full participation of libertarian comrades as a communion of Subjects (Freire, 1970, pp. 120-121). Libertarian leaders should proceed to fight for liberation with libertarian comrades, and not for libertarian comrades (p. 33). Thus, it is necessary to educate the libertarian comrades before, during and after a liberation struggle takes place. Education for liberation is education that proceeds with the appreciation of humans as dialogue capable beings, the recognition of their existential dissonance, and the understanding of a just relation of all actors in the process of education. This type of libertarian education is called problem-posing education.

Freire suggests 'problem posing education' is the key for liberation. Freire (1970) defines this type of education as a dialogue-based education that positions both students and teachers as co-learners (p. 56). It comprises of, "a constant unveiling of the reality... for the emergence of consciousness and critical interventions in reality." (p. 65). The

emergence of consciousness can take place when the co-learners are facing reality, 'reading the world', and dissecting it layer by layer in order to unveil oppressive structures which maintain the status quo. This emergence of consciousness is called conscientizacao (p. 101). Subsequently, Freire's problem posing education leads to the second state of mind, praxis, or the dyadic communication between contemplation and action to transform the world (p. 75). Only by continually engaging with these two states of mind, humans can be reborn as radicals (p. 37), or the sincere partners of the humanization or liberation agenda.

For IMM, problem-posing education is the primary educational approach. IMM considers problem-posing education is very effective to stimulate students' critical consciousness, which is imperative for commencing a social transformation (Sani, 2011; Sustanti et al., 2011). Problem-posing education is also incorporated by IMM because it is flexible. Problem-posing education, for IMM, is not a prescribed set of teaching procedures but it is more like a teaching philosophy. IMM interprets problem-posing education as teaching with four important values: facilitator-student equal relationship, dialogue based, critical appraisal to subjectivity and reality, and encouragement to engage in a social transformation (Sani, 2011).

Since IMM's informal training is the central element and the most time-consuming educational program in IMM, the problem posing-education is incorporated in this type of training. This type of training usually means critical dialogue in night coffee-shops where IMM members blend in to engage in dialogue about any political issues. They are free to question, to argue, to challenge any view. This 'coffee shop dialogue' often becomes the starting line for many initiatives such as long-march planning, social advocacy and other activities.

However, some members dislike this teaching approach because it feels unsystematic. Often, there is no boundaries for which political topics to discuss with and how long the dialogue takes place. The fact that a problem or exploitation is interconnected to other problems/exploitations makes it nearly impossible to strictly limit the time and focus. It is almost the same with Freire's experience that Freire, "had to beg the peasants to stop" (Holst, 2006, p. 248). Similarly, some members are reluctant to come in the dialogue since they have to spend hours every night while, as a university student, they have so many assignments or exams in the morning. Perhaps, there should be a dialogue skeleton/plan that can be made prior to a dialogue so that the dialogue can be more focused and shorter in time.

IV. Conclusion

This study sets out to critically examine the IMM's educational framework by using Paulo Freire's (1970) educational framework as the comparison. It has shown that while

IMM adopts Paulo Freire's educational framework, it has developed or invented its own authentic educational framework that can be seen to be very different compared the Freire's educational framework. The comparison of both education frameworks in three areas has demonstrates that IMM's educational framework is systematic and appropriate for its social context.

However, while IMM's educational framework appears to be beneficial because it helps communicate with the majority masses in IMM's context, it can also be harmful because it potentially makes IMM's movement exclusive to the Indonesia Islamic agenda and lose the sight of the global structure of exploitation. However, IMM can amplify its liberation agenda through collaborations with other Muslim movements in other countries. This is with the understanding that 'Islam' can mean differently in different places and IMM's task is to inspire these movements to invent their Islamic educational framework of liberation that is relevant to their context.

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