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RESEARCH ARTICLE

From Teacher to Revolutionary: Tan Malaka's Pedagogical Strategy for Indonesia's Liberation in 1919-1943

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Abstract
Scholars have extensively examined Tan Malaka's role in political, ideological, and revolutionary movements aimed at liberating the Indonesian people from colonial domination and global capitalism. However, the pedagogical dimension of Tan Malaka's thought—particularly its function as an integral component of his broader project of political and national liberation—has received limited scholarly attention. Using historical methods through a critical reading of Tan Malaka's major intellectual works, this study reconstructs how his pedagogical experiences shaped his political worldview and strategic approach to Indonesia's independence struggle. The analysis draws on key concepts from Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy to examine Tan Malaka's educational strategies, as well as Antonio Gramsci's ideas of cultural hegemony and organic intellectuals to position him as a politician-educator who cultivated mass consciousness within the framework of national struggle. The findings reveal that Tan Malaka's pedagogical experience was not merely a professional background, but a foundational element that informed his political vision, emphasizing class consciousness and education as a strategic instrument for self-reliant national liberation. In works ranging from Naar de Republiek Indonesia to Madilog, Tan Malaka articulated revolutionary ideas closely intertwined with popular education and intellectual emancipation. This study broadens Tan Malaka's historiography by highlighting his dual role as a revolutionary thinker and pedagogue.

Keywords: Indonesian history; national liberation; pedagogical strategy; Tan Malaka.

Abstrak
Para sarjana telah banyak mengkaji kiprah Tan Malaka dalam ranah politik, ideologi, dan perjuangan revolusioner untuk membebaskan rakyat Indonesia dari penindasan kolonial dan kapitalisme global. Namun, kajian mengenai dimensi pedagogis Tan Malaka sebagai bagian integral dari proyek politik dan pembebasan nasional yang ia rancang masih relatif terbatas. Dengan menggunakan metode historis melalui pembacaan kritis terhadap karya-karya intelektual Tan Malaka, penelitian ini bertujuan merekonstruksi bagaimana pengalaman pedagogisnya secara historis membentuk pandangan politik dan strategi perjuangan kemerdekaan Indonesia. Analisis dilakukan dengan memanfaatkan konsep pedagogi kritis Paulo Freire untuk menelaah strategi pendidikan Tan Malaka, serta gagasan hegemoni budaya dan intelektual organik Antonio Gramsci untuk memposisikannya sebagai figur politikus-pendidik yang membangun kesadaran massa dalam kerangka perjuangan nasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pengalaman pedagogis Tan Malaka bukan sekadar latar belakang profesi, melainkan fondasi utama visi politiknya yang menekankan kesadaran kelas dan peran pendidikan sebagai strategi pembebasan nasional berbasis kemandirian. Dalam karya-karyanya, mulai dari Naar de Republiek Indonesia hingga Madilog, Tan Malaka merumuskan gagasan revolusioner yang erat terkait dengan proses mendidik dan mencerdaskan rakyat. Temuan ini memperluas historiografi dengan menempatkan Tan Malaka sebagai tokoh politik sekaligus pedagog.

Kata Kunci: Pembebasan nasional; sejarah Indonesia; strategi pedagogis; Tan Malaka.

INTRODUCTION

"The powerful crushes, the weak is fodder for the strong, the foolish is fodder for the clever"
– Tan Malaka, Madilog.

For some time now, Tan Malaka has increasingly become the focus of discussions regarding his role in the political dynamics of Indonesia's independence movement. A comprehensive study by Harry A. Poeze shows that Tan Malaka—whose role and thoughts were systematically removed from the nation's collective memory during the New Order era—was actually a vital figure in the Indonesian revolution (Poeze, 2019); (Nordholt, Purwanto, & Saptari, 2008). This marginalization led to his intellectual and strategic contributions receiving less attention in official historiography. The resurgence of academic interest in Tan Malaka not only revives debates about his position in the Indonesian revolution but also opens the way to re-examine the intellectual foundations that shaped his political strategy.

At its core, Tan Malaka's political activity was national liberation. He was a nationalist who prioritized Indonesia's independence above any ideological interests, including international communism. Unfortunately, his independent thinking and commitment to total independence were often misinterpreted as a form of defiance (Jarvis, 1987, p.54).

Rudolf Mrazek (1972) notes that Tan Malaka's distinctive political attitudes and behavior were inseparable from his experiences as a young Minangkabau man. The concept of rantau and the dynamism of adat allowed for the incorporation of new ideas to perfect the 'nature' of his homeland without losing its original character. The combination of Minangkabau philosophy and new values Tan Malaka gained from his international experiences resulted in political ideas that were original and contextual for the struggle for independence. From here, Malaka saw himself as an enlightened teacher whose responsibility is to bring home virtue and knowledge from his rantau experience for the renewal of his community.

Tan Malaka's orientation towards educating the Indonesian people is one of the most consistently visible elements shaping his political struggle. Malaka spent half of his life, including his 20 years of exile, to revolutionize the proletariat to rise as the mass power and seize independence (Tempo Team, 2010, p. 27). He dreamed of educating his nation and raising awareness to fight against the oppressive system. Not a few researchers know that before entering the political arena, Tan Malaka first studied pedagogy and began his career as a teacher for indigenous children. However, questions such as to what extent this pedagogical background influenced Tan Malaka's political actions have rarely received attention.

The examination of previous studies indicates that analyses of Tan Malaka generally focus on his political and ideological dimensions as a revolutionary figure. McVey (2006) examined Tan Malaka's role in the development of early communism in the Dutch East Indies. Jarvis (1987) highlighted his ideological ambivalence within the context of international communism. Poeze (1988, 1999, 2019) compiled an in-depth biography mapping Tan Malaka's life journey and political struggles, while Mrazek (1972) explored the structure of his political experience and rationality as an intellectual. Recent studies by Crawford (2019) show that the foundation of Tan Malaka's political thought was a synthesis of various ideas circulating around him, ranging from Marxism, Islamic morality, and Minangkabau adat.

Among these writings, none have attempted to examine the pedagogical foundation underlying Tan Malaka's revolutionary strategy. Although some recent research has discussed Tan Malaka's educational ideas (Syaifudin, 2020; Utomo, 2020), these studies tend to limit their analysis to the context of Tan Malaka's early career as a teacher, especially in relation to his political activities in Sarekat Islam. Consequently, they tend to overlook how Tan Malaka's pedagogical background and vision continued to shape his revolutionary thought and strategy in subsequent periods.

To examine this, this paper utilizes the lens of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed (2005), Freire emphasizes that education is a dialogical process to foster conscientização—critical consciousness that enables individuals to understand oppressive structures and act to change them. This process involves two main principles: dialogue, where educators and learners jointly build understanding, and problem-posing, which is learning that stems from concrete experiences and real problems. This approach positions education as an integral part of political struggle. Thus, education is not understood merely as a transfer of knowledge, but as a practice of liberation.

In addition, Antonio Gramsci's ideas about cultural hegemony and organic intellectuals provide a framework for understanding Tan Malaka's position as a politician-educator who built popular consciousness to dismantle colonial hegemony. According to Gramsci, hegemony works through the domination of values,

norms, and culture that make the ideology of the dominant class accepted and normalized by subordinate groups. Therefore, the dominated class needs organic intellectuals who can function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong. In this regard, education can become a battleground for hegemony where organic intellectuals representing the dominated group can become agents of resistance and change. This process is part of a "war of position," which is the struggle to seize hegemony through organization, education, and the production of alternative discourse (Gramsci, 1971); [Rodriguez & Smith, 2013].

By utilizing the approach described above, this article aims to open up a new analytical space in Tan Malaka studies by tracing his transformation from a teacher to a revolutionary figure during the period of 1919-1943, and how his pedagogical experience historically shaped his political views and strategy for national liberation. This research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Tan Malaka, not only as a political figure but also as a pedagogue who made education the core of his revolutionary praxis.

METHOD

This article uses the historical research method to critically test and analyze past records and relicts to compile an accurate and logical historical narrative (Gottschalk, 1986, p. 32). This method is comprised of five steps: determining the research topic, collecting historical sources (heuristics), collecting critiques of the sources (verification), interpreting the sources to obtain historical facts, and compiling verified facts into a narrative (historiography) (Kuntowijoyo, 2013, p. 69).

As emphasized by Louis Gottschalk, history as a branch of study requires sources ideally from direct accounts of the historical actors themselves (Gottschalk, 1985, p. 53). In this, written works of Tan Malaka on his efforts in 1919-1943 are used as the primary source. The research timeframe was chosen to illustrate Tan Malaka's transformation process from a teacher into a revolutionary figure, allowing us to trace the evolutionary development of his revolutionary pedagogy. The year 1919 was chosen as the starting point because in that year Tan Malaka returned to his homeland after studying in the Netherlands and began to apply his pedagogical knowledge to indigenous children. The year 1943 is when Tan Malaka gave birth to his magnum opus, Madilog, which marks the most mature phase of his pedagogical and ideological ideas.

Malaka's texts produced within this period used in this research are SI Semarang & Onderwijs in the Soeara Ra'jat newspaper in October and November 1921 and Malaka's original works, such as Naar de Republiek Indonesië, Massa Actie, and Madilog. Malaka's autobiography, Dari Penjara ke Penjara, is also used as a primary source in determining Malaka's personal perspective and analyzing the temporal context. The search for historical sources was carried out using physical documents and digital documents obtained from various internet sites, such as dhelper.nl

In the verification stage, the author applies external criticism to obtain the authenticity of historical sources and internal criticism to obtain the credibility of historical sources. The historical sources used are analyzed based on their physical condition and the content within them, by analyzing the document's form, language, and sentence structure, to determine whether they align with the context of their era. Contemporary archives written by Tan Malaka can be used as primary sources in this research because they meet these criteria. In addition to being written by the direct actor, Tan Malaka's writings contain information about his perspective, particularly in the critical, rational, and pro-subordinated pedagogical arena, which is relevant to the discussion of this research.

Next, the author proceeds to the interpretation stage. In this stage, the historical facts are interpreted according to the substance contained in the verified historical sources. The interpretation process is carried out by placing Tan Malaka's ideas within the context of his era, considering the dynamics and struggles of political and educational ideas as tools for his struggle. The results of the interpretation will be presented in a historiographical narrative.

At the historiography stage, all findings are processed into an analytical historical narrative emphasizing how Tan Malaka's role as a teacher became the initial foundation for his revolutionary political strategy.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Early Formation of Tan Malaka's Pedagogical Thought

The roots of Tan Malaka's vision for intellectual empowerment can be traced from several main sources: his Minangkabau cultural background and his academic and professional experiences in the field of education. This chapter aims to further examine one underexplored aspect of Tan Malaka's life, namely how the interaction between these two spheres produced the

initial configuration of pedagogical ideas that would later become the foundation for Tan Malaka's political orientation.

Tan Malaka was born and raised in Nagari Pandan Gadang, West Sumatera with the name Ibrahim. The name Tan Malaka was an honorific he gained in adulthood when he returned from his study, one year before he took the final exam in the Fort de Kock's teacher training school. Malaka's birthdate was not clearly recorded. Djamaluddin Tamin, Malaka's colleague, was the only person who noted Malaka's birthdate: June 2, 1897 (Tempo Team, 2010, p. 67).

As an indigenous Minangnese, the cultural values and customs of Minangkabau were deeply rooted in Malaka and shaped his behavior and mentality (Mrazek, 1972). Raised in a respected and religious family, Tan Malaka showed extraordinary intelligence from a young age. This intelligence garnered much sympathy, especially because education held an important role within the Minangnese people. Traditional village leaders were willing to send him to the rantau to pursue his studies, with the hope that he would make a positive contribution to his homeland (Malaka, 2021); (Abdullah, 1971).

Education and rantau, which are part of the Minangnese tradition, shaped Malaka's way of life. Both forged Malaka into an intellectual activist. It was no surprise that Malaka's first effort towards improving life in his nation was through his role as a teacher. Although he changed his path of struggle in the middle of the journey, his calling as a "teacher" who brought goodness from rantau to improve his nation remained at the core of Tan Malaka's struggle and spirit from his time at Fort de Kock until his death (Mrazek, 1972, p. 15).

1. Ideological Shaping during the Teacher Training School Period

Tan Malaka was one of the few indigenous people who were lucky enough to receive education in a period when education was strictly limited under the Dutch colonial system. Malaka, aside from informally studying Islam in mosques, also studied in the second-grade school, which was a type of school for indigenous children, in Suliki in 1903-1908. Based on recommendations of his teachers and support from his family, Malaka began his first voyage by studying in the state teachers' school (kweekschool) in Fort de Kock (modern day Bukittingi) (Poeze, 1988, p. 15).

The Kweekschool in Fort de Kock, known as Sekolah Raja, was the only secondary school for Indonesians in Sumatra, with a very strict selection process (Malaka, 2021, p. 39). Tan Malaka's selection marked his intense exposure to European educational curricula and culture. At the Kweekschool, he not only encountered lessons in Dutch but also participated in various social and cultural activities that shaped his experience as a student. One of his favorite activities was he joined the school's music orchestra as a cellist (Poeze, 1988, p. 21).

At this phase, Tan Malaka began to present himself as a product of the colonial education system, intimately familiar with European intellectual traditions and possessing outstanding intellectual capacity. His intelligence soon captivated his Dutch teacher, Mr. Horensma. It wasn't long before Tan Malaka managed to build a warm personal relationship with this Dutch teacher, who called him 'Ipie'. This closeness opened up opportunities for Tan Malaka to experience a more humanistic education, distinct from the dominant colonial practices. Tan Malaka's views on the teacher-student relationship were reinforced. He found a true teacher in the real sense, one capable of recognizing a student's potential, educating and encouraging their progress, and sincerely sharing knowledge regardless of skin color or social status (Malaka, 2021, p. 117).

Since early on, Malaka had shown a strong talent in pedagogy. Malaka had the ability to inspire and guide others, as well as the interest in knowledge and teaching the novel. For example, in the holidays after finishing the teachers' school final exam, Malaka often socialized with children and, on his own volition, taught them various skills, such as line of march (Poeze, 1988, p. 23).

Horensma managed to see that Malaka had a significant potential to become an educator. After finishing teachers' school in 1913, Horensma advised Malaka to continue his studies in the Netherlands to further sharpen his skill as a teacher. Horensma then recommended Malaka to P.H. van der Ley, a director of Negeri Harleem teachers' school, to accept him as a student because Horensma saw an immense talent worthy of fostering in Malaka (Poeze, 1988, pp. 25-26).

Upon the collateral of Tan Malaka's family assets, Tan Malaka was finally registered on January 10, 1914, as the first Indonesian to be accepted at the Rijks Kweekschool Haarlem, Netherlands (Malaka, 2021, p. 34). In this context, the repeated support from the Suliki indigenous community and Tan Malaka's readiness to travel further reflect the dynamism of Minangkabau adat, which positions education and knowledge from outside as a means to broaden experience to later become a teacher for Alam. While living in the Netherlands, Tan Malaka lived in a very different environment. However, at the level of thought, as noted by Mrazek, this characteristic quality of

Minangkabau perantau actually strengthened and shaped the way he interpreted his life (Mrazek, 1972, p. 6).

Upon his arrival in Haarlem, Tan Malaka faced difficult socio-economic conditions and a new environment that demanded quick adaptation. Financial limitations affected the quality of his housing and nutrition, while the unfamiliar European climate exacerbated his health, leading to an attack of pneumonia in 1915 (Tempo Team, 2010, pp. 73-74). This decline in health made it difficult for Tan Malaka to keep up with his studies, and he even failed his school principal exams repeatedly. These physical and psychological challenges formed a tough context for Tan Malaka's educational journey to obtain his Dutch teaching certificate.

In his academic journey, Tan Malaka felt a mismatch between the education he received in Bukittinggi and the curriculum in Haarlem; much of the material was studied reluctantly and deemed irrelevant for prospective teachers. He also strongly opposed the memorization learning method, which he considered ineffective. Malaka regarded his hate towards memorization as strongly as his hate towards the unfair comparison between the Dutch and the Indonesian people (Malaka, 2021, pp. 39-41). The unpleasant experience with this rote learning method would later become one of the main principles in his teaching method. For Tan Malaka, the rejection of rote learning was not merely a matter of learning technique, but a drive to cultivate intelligence (Malaka, 2024, pp. 17-18).

Since his relentless difficulties, Tan Malaka began to question his educational orientation. This doubt was exacerbated when Malaka met Snouck Hurgronje, in which Malaka's desire to gain the rights as a teacher for Dutch children faded. Through knowing Hurgronje, an orientalist and an expert in Islamic studies, prompted Malaka to realize he could not become a good teacher for Dutch children due to the differences in language, nation, and soul (Malaka, 2021, p. 41).

This reflection marked the beginning of Tan Malaka's political awakening. Tan Malaka's studies began to be sidelined as he became more preoccupied with other activities outside of his lessons. During this time, Tan Malaka associated with radical-revolutionary figures. Through his roommate, Herman Wouters, a Belgian immigrant, and his landlady, Mrs. Van der Mij, who was also a laborr, Tan consumed socialist-oriented newspapers and engaged in lively discussions. Meanwhile, the essence of oppression and revolution that he discovered through the book De Fransche Revolutie, given by his teacher Horensma during their farewell in Teluk Bayur, began to direct his life's purpose (Malaka, 2021, pp. 45-46).

Finally, the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917 further spurred Tan Malaka's consciousness. He spent money to read all the political literature he could find. Tan Malaka devoured Nietzsche and Carlyle, before finally discovering the works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Kautsky. All the enlightenment he understood as a result of seeking answers about the world around him, combined with the experience of living in a poor proletarian family's home, opened his eyes to the social chasm between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and ultimately led his thoughts towards Communism (Malaka, 2021, pp. 45-46); (Crawford, 2018, p. 12).

In 1919, Malaka managed to finish his studies in the Netherlands, though he failed to obtain the certificate of head teacher. Malaka decided to return to Sumatra due to the ballooning debt towards the village elders and Horensma, as well as Malaka's promise to his parents. This return became the starting point of Malaka's dreams to change his nation's fate. Malaka's six years of experience in the Netherlands has shaped his political convictions, which were tested and shaped through direct practice in the Dutch East Indies (Poeze, 1988, p. 85).

2. Formulating an Educational Model as an Anti-Capitalist Strategy

Though he studied in the Netherlands and graduated with the same status as European teachers, Tan Malaka did not put himself on a pedestal. Malaka decided to plunge directly into educating his own nation. Malaka openly expressed his sympathies for the Bolsheviks. Instead of securing a position in a state school, Malaka opted to teach "proletariat" children of workers in the Senembah Maatschappij farm in Tanjung Morawa, Deli (Crawford, 2018, p. 12).

Malaka received the offer to teach from Dr. C.W. Janssen, the director of Senembah farm. Janssen was a Dutch capitalist, but supported ethics and was concerned with improving the health and education of his indigenous workers. Janssen requested Malaka and a Dutch teacher, de Way, who was a former student of Malaka's Malay language classes in the Netherlands, to support his plans in providing education for the children of his workers (Malaka, 2021, p. 79).

While working at Senembah farm, Malaka was paid f 350 per month and received other facilities, such as housing, water, electricity, and transportation. Malaka was also treated as equals with the Europeans. From the financial perspective, Malaka's pay would greatly help

with his debts to the village elders and his former teacher Horensma. More importantly, however, Malaka's job brought him the chance to study the circumstances in Deli, known as the 'land of gold' for capitalists. Additionally, Malaka could also socialize with the contract workers, which represented some of the poorest, most exploited, and most discriminated in his nation. In this, Malaka would kill two birds with one stone (Malaka, 2021, p. 55). The Deli farm was the first field in which Malaka could actualize his pedagogy knowledge after finishing his studies. At this period, Malaka found the ideal place to act as the teacher following his own ideology and life goal. Malaka was content with directly teaching the children of his nation, as he expressed in his autobiography:

> " My job teaching Indonesian children was still one of my holiest and most important work then and now" (Malaka, 2021, p. 47).

According to Malaka's perspective, Deli was the perfect example of the relationship within the colonizers and the colonized, as well as the actual proletariat region. From here, Malaka directly witnessed how capitalism exploited natural resources and labor from his own nation. Malaka saw how the workers were kept obtuse and bound to their desires deliberately provoked by the system in order to keep them chained to the system. The workers had no awareness of their condition, so they merely resigned to their fate (Malaka, 2021, p. 80).

A determination arose within Malaka, as if he was carrying an important mission to uplift the status of the workers. As the teacher and supervisor of Senembah school, his momentary aim was to find the ideal formula to teach the children of the workers. Senembah school did not receive funding because Janssen refused to follow the education plan from the government and had already formulated his own curriculum. Malaka then needed to develop the curriculum by having direct discussion with the students and their parents to determine their education needs (Malaka, 2021, p. 80).

The goal of Senembah school was not only to eradicate illiteracy, but also to increase passion for work. Here, education was not aimed to create intelligent graduates not suited for manual labor. Janssen's curriculum matched the needs of the farm, where school would educate the children to surpass the skills of their parents. Even so, Malaka believed that education for the children of the workers would not only sharpen their technical skills, but also increase their intelligence and awareness, strengthen their will, and enlighten them, as education from any nation would (Malaka, 1921, pp. 83-86).

While formulating the curriculum, Malaka was at odds with de Way. Malaka disagreed with de Way's method of travelling around other schools and writing a report at the end of the week. Malaka believed formulating a curriculum for Senembah school should be done through observing and understanding the condition of his students. Because of his proximity to the workers, the Dutch plantation elites mistrusted and suspected Malaka. To the Europeans, educating the children of the workers was a waste of money. People in the colony were segregated based on their nationality. Tan Malaka strongly experienced the white racial superiority embodied by the Dutch plantation elites, an atmosphere he had never encountered, not even during his years in the Netherlands (Malaka, 2021).

While in Senembah farm, Malaka wished for more than just to be a teacher; he championed the workers' rights. In this period, he made contact with ISDV and began to write for the press. In 1920, Malaka was known as the author for several articles for Het Vrije Woord (literally 'The Free Word'), a Dutch-written Bolshevik newspaper published in Semarang. Malaka's first work was titled Armoedeland (Land of Poverty) (Jarvis, 1987, p. 42). In Armoedeland, Malaka illustrated how ironic that the poverty and hunger among the people of the Dutch East Indies were prevalent in a land abundant with resources. Malaka regarded that the only way to eradicate capitalism was to organize and educate the proletariat (Het Vrije Woord, September 27, 1920).

The capitalism and racism Malaka experienced in the Senembah farm overwhelmed him. Malaka received pressure from two directions at once. The elites of the colony disrespected and distrusted the educated indigenous people, while not all workers trusted Malaka. The freedom Malaka had when he studied in the Netherlands was gone. The circumstances had given Malaka little room to express his new ideas (Anderson, 2018, p. 271). In the Senembah farm, Malaka experienced heavy societal and moral pressure as a teacher within a discriminative system. The situation strengthened Malaka's desire to leave the Senembah school. Malaka strongly desired to build his own academy from a populist foundation in order to fight colonialism and capitalism.

In February 23, 1921, Malaka decided to migrate from the Sumatra Island to the Java Island, a region he deemed as the center of the movement, in which it would be possible for him to secure a position as a teacher with the freedom for him to progress politically (Jarvis, 1987, p. 42). In Yogyakarta, Malaka wrote a proposal on the people's school, which eventually found its way to the hands of Semaun, a figure in Semarang's Sarekat Islam (SI) and the chairman of Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI). Malaka's ideas of the

people's school and his courage to participate in the debates on party disciplines in a congress of SI in 1921 intrigued Semaun. Malaka was then recruited to the communist SI in Semarang and was responsible to manage the academy for the children of Semarang workers (Malaka, 2021, p. 92).

Semarang became the choice for Malaka to implement his revolutionary vision through education. Semarang was a red city and the center of the left socialist movement of Java in the colonial period. Semarang was also the place for Malaka to meet like-minded colleagues, work independently, and facilitate his dreams of building the people's school (Malaka, 2021, pp. 91-93).

Malaka's school, Sekolah Sarekat Islam (SI School), was established in June 1921 in SI Semarang's meeting place with Malaka as its manager. SI School acted as an alternative non-profit school providing an affordable but fine education for the proletariat children of Semarang (Soeara Ra'jat, October 1, 1921). Education was a rare commodity under the Dutch East Indies colonial government. The colony's system, based on racial and social discrimination, prevented the majority of the indigenous people to access modern education and sciences.

SI School was presented as an alternative option due to Malaka's curriculum design, which differed from the state school. Some ideas Malaka first developed when teaching in Deli were still applied in SI School (Poeze, 1988, p. 119). In SI Semarang and Onderwijs, first published in Soeara Ra'jat's October-November 2021 edition, Malaka expressed that SI School did not aim to create clerks, as in the gouvernement schools, but to educate the people to compete under capitalism and to assist the movement of the people (Malaka, 2021, p. 94).

Skills such as reading, writing, arithmetic, and language were taught to the students as tools to help them in the job market (Soeara Ra'jat, October 1, 1921). SI School also supported and accommodated female children seeking education by providing female assistant teachers from Kartinischool. As far as August, SI School had more than 120 students, which signaled the high enthusiasm from the people. Furthermore, SI School also taught the Dutch language, which further increased enthusiasm (Soeara Ra'jat, August 16, 1921).

By teaching Dutch to children of lower social status or even proletarian, Malaka was considered a pioneer, as Dutch was considered an exclusive language used only by those of high social standing at the time. For Malaka, fluency in Dutch was an important aspect in socializing within the Dutch East Indies period. Dutch was not only a means of communication, but also a symbol of colonial and capitalist domination. Hence, fighting the colonials and capitalists began at learning their foreign language (Soeara Ra'jat, October 1, 1921).

The design of Tan Malaka's curriculum can be interpreted as a form of education that is inherently political. In line with Freire's idea that political action on the side of the oppressed must be pedagogical action. In this case, liberating political action can only occur if education is able to help the masses understand and change the dominant structures that oppress them (Freire, 2005, pp. 66-67). Opening access to the Dutch language and choosing subjects that equip lower-class children to compete in the capitalist world was Tan Malaka's way of providing them with the tools that would enable them to become critical subjects capable of understanding the colonial world that constrained them.

Unlike the structured state school, Malaka emphasized a flexible curriculum following the needs of the people and the local context. Malaka's education approach centered on the students, where they were given freedom to study according to their personal rhythm. The students were facilitated to form groups (Vereeniging) to train their interpersonal skills. Within the groups, students can learn how to socialize, agree on common rules of engagement, and courageously voice their opinions. SI School students deemed mature enough would be invited to follow SI's vergadering (assembly) and encouraged to give speeches in public. The students gained the attention of vergaderting participants due to their courage to speak with an independent air while wearing sashes and singing Internationaal, which would often create a touching atmosphere (Soeara Ra'jat, October 1, 1921).

The participation of SI School students in the SI's vergadering integrated contextual learning to connect students with their social reality. More than simply listening to long speeches from their teachers in classrooms, students could learn faster from what they observe in their immediate environment. Malaka taught children within the context of the environment around them. By involving students directly in SI's vergadering discussions, they would feel a sense of camaraderie with the oppressed and colonized so they would then sense the responsibility to help in the economic and political efforts (Soeara Ra'jat, November 1, 1921).

This approach is related to Freire's concept of problem-posing, where concrete experience is the starting point for reading the world rather than merely memorizing information. The teacher-student relationship is built through dialogue that encourages

students to question and interpret the reality that shapes their lives. Students' engagement with real problems also strengthens the connection between reflection and action, as understanding is born not only from theory but from critical conversations with the world they experience daily (Freire, 2025, ch. 2).

In developing his teachings, Malaka firmly held egalitarianism. The simplest knowledge was presented without condescension to the handicraftsmen or manual labors. In SI School, Malaka taught that hygiene was not only important, but was a responsibility for everyone. SI School had no custodian; instead, the students took care of the school together. Malaka did not agree with the concept of servitude (jongos); he instead emphasized that custodial work was not a lower-class work done only by particular groups. Malaka criticized the separation of manual and cognitive work in state schools. Children in rural villages were used to manual labors with their parents, but were kept distant from manual labor in schools, and even regarded manual labor as a lower-class work. To Malaka, this would only separate educated individuals with the majority of people doing manual labor and living in poverty.

By combining manual and cognitive work, Malaka would sharpen the students' critical reasoning and empathy on the state of their nation, so they would then push for social changes. This was what Malaka meant by formulating education to help the Indonesian political movement. Education was not something that would create a separate class used by the colonial power to oppress, but something to create educated individuals contributing and improving the living conditions of the people (Soeara Ra'jat, November 1, 1921).

Though socialism and Marxism were the foundation of the curriculum, Malaka never aimed for his education as tools of ideological indoctrination, as Lenin and Stalin had done. Malaka's education prioritized in building critical awareness in his nation to increase the spirit of fighting colonialism of the imperial-capitalist powers, both foreign and indigenous (Syaifudin, 2020, p. 189).

Malaka's model of school for the people achieved massive success due to the high demand of access to Western-style education from the people, which had realized was a practical method to ensure a better future for their children (McVey, 1990, p. 6). The spread of this model was not only within the Java Island, but also other islands in Nusantara. Malaka's success of his school was still strongly tied to his pedagogical qualifications and experience from the Netherlands to Deli. This was the strong impression Malaka left in Semarang (Mrazek, 1972, pp. 9-10).

The colonial government soon closely observed Malaka's movements, especially due to his success with the "disruptive school" in Semarang, which indirectly supported PKI's previously stagnated movements. Malaka's prestige within politics also skyrocketed due to his first efforts within education. Semaun gave Malaka roles within the labor union. Not long after, Malaka became Semaun's most logical successor for the chairman position when the latter left Indonesia in October, 1921 (McVey, 2006, p. 119).

As chairman of PKI, Malaka was active within publication efforts and labor demonstration, which increased attention from the Dutch government and police (Shiraishi, 1997, pp. 322-323). Malaka's involvement in politics was full of risk, which vindicated an advice Malaka once received from an SI figure: Malaka should first pay more attention to his education efforts. Malaka's political career would soon forbid him to continue manage his school in Semarang, as he was exiled to the Netherlands by the Governor General in March 1922 (Malaka, 2021, pp. 97-101).

Cognitive Liberation for National Emancipation

After his exile by the Dutch colonial government, Malaka became an international fugitive, especially because his role within the international communist network, which was deemed dangerous for the agenda of the imperialist-capitalist countries. Malaka's period of odyssey became an important part in the evolution of his pedagogical ideas, surpassing even the experience from managing SI School in Semarang. For about 20 years, Malaka journeyed from country to country. Malaka was an excellent polyglot, which made it easy for him to move countries with his language skills. From the Netherlands, Germany, Russia, the Philippines, and even China, Malaka's international journey helped enrich his perspective on cognitive empowerment and liberation of the Indonesian people from colonization and injustice.

In his autobiography, Malaka clearly illustrated his sense of loneliness while on the run. Having to constantly change identities meant Malaka only had a small community with his comrades and within Indonesia's political movement (Malaka, 2021). Though exile was seemingly a sad affair for Malaka, this phase actually became his chance to seriously ruminate on the needs of his nation. Malaka used his time in exile to develop and contemplate on his ideas without the distraction of daily political activities. In other words, Malaka managed to turn his difficult fate into a productive time to think and write (Mrazek, 1972, p. 13).

Due to his uncertain conditions, Malaka decided to continue teaching without a formal school to channel his pedagogical spirit (Syaifudin, 2020, p. 193). Malaka's formal teaching days might be over, but his writings produced as an effort to stay involved within the Indonesian political scene maintained the presence his education formula within the people of Indonesia as a means of liberation.

Through Naar de Republiek Indonesia, written in 1924 in China, Malaka managed to communicate with the liberation movement to strategize the revolution and the desired society. The worsening economic crisis in the Netherlands further convinced Malaka that the Dutch East Indies would sooner or later dissolve. In turn, Malaka imagined the fair and prosperous Republic of Indonesia through socialism taking place (Malaka, 1987).

To Malaka, education was an important aspect of the strategy in the independence efforts. Malaka strongly criticized the colonial education system that deliberately kept the people in an obtuse state, reluctant to think critically, and eager to fulfill the Dutch agenda (Malaka, 1987). In the Gramscian framework, hegemony is always pedagogical: the dominant class maintains power not only through state coercion but through civil society institutions—including schools—that produce 'spontaneous consent,' which is the willingness of subordinate groups to accept domination without compulsion because they have come to regard the values and perspectives of the ruling class as natural (Gramsci, 1971).

Malaka wished to formulate an alternative education system based on the needs of the people of Indonesia. Malaka urged an equally distributed education for all people without discrimination because education is a basic right for all children. Therefore, Malaka recommended that all children must receive free education until the age of 17 without discrimination of social status and class (Malaka, 1987).

In 1926, while staying in Singapore, Malaka wrote another work explaining the bitterness of his nation. In Massa Actie, Malaka expressed his concern that feudalism, along with colonialism, had conditioned the people of Indonesia to live under poverty, to be exploited, and to act as slaves. This was exacerbated by the irrational way of thinking, filled with mythologies and superstitions. Instead of becoming aware of their discrimination and solving it, the majority of Indonesians back then had the tendency to think less logically and put their hopes in mystical powers. Malaka saw this as a significant roadblock in creating a populace for the independence efforts. Hence, the first thing Malaka wanted to change was the structure of thought. From here, Malaka strongly emphasized the importance of the populace aimed with the awareness brought by education as the foundation of the revolution (Malaka, 2008).

When the war between China and Japan broke, Malaka tried to run away to the south. In 1937, Malaka arrived in Singapore. There, Malaka's Chinese friends gave him the job of teacher in a lower-to-middle school in the Nanyang Chinese Normal School. Even when he had to survive under difficult conditions as a political fugitive, Malaka still passionately participated within the education field (Anderson, 2018, p. 319).

In 1942, when Japan invaded the Dutch East Indies, Malaka finally had the chance to return to his homeland after years of living in exile. Under the rule of the new colonizer infamous of its violence and restrictions, Malaka decided to stay hidden under disguise. Malaka understood his name had been spread and propagandized by the Japanese to gather support for Japan (Malaka, 2021:451). Reality was actually not as it seemed. Malaka despised the actions of the Japanese within the colony and vehemently disagreed cooperation (Malaka, 2021, pp. 496-470). In this period, Malaka tried to build relations with the youth to secretly strategize for the revolution. For Malaka, independence must be taken, and was not merely a gift from Japan (Poeze, 2019, p. 2-3).

Back then, Malaka had predicted Japan's loss While waiting for the end of the war, Malaka searched for a suitable place to write and study the nation he had left for a long time (Malaka, 2021, p. 474). After weighing his options from Sumatra to Java, Malaka chose Rajawati Village, a village at the outskirts of Jakarta. There, Malaka rented a 5x3m lodging (pomdok) with walls made of bamboo. In his simple living space, under the new but more brutal colonizers, disappointed by the movement leaders who opted to collaborate with the colonizers, Malaka wrote and brought forth a cognitive formula for Indonesians: Madilog, which is an acronym of materialisme (materialism), dialektika (dialectics), and logika (logic). Madilog was finished in 1943 (Malaka, 2024).

Malaka witnessed the public sentiment towards the Japanese colonizers further illustrated the political and economic demand. To Malaka, the Indonesian Republic could no longer be a theory. The number and power of the Indonesian proletariat were enough to seize independence. However, the Indonesian proletariat

lacked education and comprehension of how the power structure was not fated, but was something they themselves could change (Malaka, 2024, p. 11).

Through Madilog, Malaka offered a cognitive formula which combined the scientific principles with the spirit of independence as the primary means of national liberation. Madilog's three core concepts differed from the common Western concepts because Madilog was the result from the conceptualization of Western workers' philosophy into Indonesia's concrete circumstances. Though Malaka used Marxist-Leninist terminologies in his work, the primary idea was how thinking through madilog would provoke social progress, instead of depending on the dynamic power from class conflict. The strength of Malaka's ideas existed in the mutual interest, where education was his life mission (Mrazek, 1972, p. 18).

The connection among Madilog's three core concepts proved that reality was not a supernatural phenomenon, but a material one. In Malaka's conception, materialism focused on humans who intellectually explored their immediate environment with a realistic and pragmatic method. Those thinking with materialism would perceive problems based on concrete, relevant, and verifiable evidence. Materialism became the foundation of Madilog's other core concepts and the first step in the evaluation process of reality (Malaka, 2024, p. 26).

Dialectics, Madilog's second concept, was formed by Malaka to overcome passive cognition previously aimed with dogmatism. The dogmatic way of thinking, which Malaka understood came to be due to the strong belief of Indonesians in the supernatural powers, caused the weakening of belief in intellectual exploration and the human ability to change the material world. This, in Malaka's perspective, caused the subjugation of the East by the West. Through dialectics, Malaka illustrated how everything in this world was not merely a fixed collection of facts, but a part of a constantly changing, moving, and intertwining process. With the use of thinking and by refusing the narrow understanding of how everything was final, dialectics would act as a guide through the complexities of life, including the fight towards change (Malaka, 2024, pp. 139-147). In this, dialectics must be accompanied with logic. As a nation whose supernatural belief was not easily eroded, the cultivation of logic would act as an important first step towards a scientific way of thinking (Malaka, 2024:26). In Madilog's framework, logic acted as the law for rational thinking to maintain an orderly, by-the-book, and coherent reasoning (Malaka, 2024, pp. 214-215).

With the method of thinking offered in Madilog, Malaka hoped to provide a means of the growth of critical thinking and problem-solving skills highly required in a nation struggling to break free of ignorance, retardation, passivity, and oppression. The intelligent and rational colonizers could manipulate the public faith on nonsensical beliefs to maintain their power. In turn, an intelligent mind would be the weapon for Indonesia to strategically utilize its own natural resources for the overall prosperity of its people (Malaka, 2008, p. 116). Specifically, Malaka wrote:

> "(….) If a nation is rife with resources, but weak in spirit, intelligence, unity, and independence, then this nation will be the bait or fodder for a powerful nation" (Malaka, 2024, p. 28).

In his political process leading up to the writing of Madilog, Tan Malaka found himself passionately committed to intellectual awakening. Although many consider Madilog a difficult work to understand, from the outset, Tan Malaka's goal was precisely to make this work a guide for empowering reason that could be easily understood by the masses. While Madilog taught rationality as the basis for collective action, Tan Malaka sought to shift society's 'common sense' towards a critical thinking framework, a step to form counter-hegemony at the cultural level (Gramsci, 1971).

Tan Malaka was part of Indonesia's intellectual class—a product of Western education—who was capable of critical thought without reproducing class or elitist hierarchies born from hegemony. He emerged as a politician-educator who restructured the way the masses thought, a position that, in Gramsci's terminology, can be called an organic intellectual. For Gramsci, organic intellectuals hold a very important political-pedagogical role. They are directly involved in working with the masses to guide and organize them, not merely to be orators (Gramsci, 1971); (Pizzolato & Holst, 2017, p. 7). In this context, Madilog can be understood as the culmination of Tan Malaka's pedagogical vision. This work serves as a tool for revolutionary pedagogy that enables cognitive liberation as an important prerequisite for the birth of collective political action for national liberation.

COUNCLUSION

The examination of Tan Malaka's intellectual works and practical track record shows that his transformation from a teacher into a revolutionary figure was rooted in pedagogical experiences that shaped his perspective on colonialism-capitalism and the project of national

liberation. His direct encounter with colonial realities fostered the belief that colonization was not only based on political power but also on backward ways of thinking. It is here that pedagogy became the starting point that guided his awareness that social change would not be achieved without a transformation in people's ways of thinking.

Tan Malaka's pedagogical experience then became the intellectual and practical foundation for formulating the strategy of national liberation. Education, in his view, was a weapon capable of igniting class consciousness and encouraging intellectual empowerment to dismantle the feudalism of thought that prevented the people from understanding their position within the structure of global colonialism and capitalism. This formulation of thought culminated in Madilog, as the manifestation of his revolutionary pedagogical strategies aimed to create Indonesians equipped with scientific, critical, and transformative way of thinking.

Thus, reading Tan Malaka's political strategy from a pedagogical perspective reveals a dimension that has so far received less attention in historiography. The Indonesian Revolution designed by Tan Malaka was deeply rooted in systematic efforts to enlighten the people. This approach posits education not merely as a medium for knowledge transmission, but also as an arena for ideological struggle to form independent Indonesian individuals capable of sovereignty over their homeland and their own future. Through this perspective, Tan Malaka's historical contribution is understood not only through his political role and militancy, but also through the pedagogical project that formed the intellectual foundation of the revolutionary strategy he designed.

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