



TAN MALAKA'S TRACK RECORD IN TANAH DELI: A CASE STUDY OF SENEMBAH MAATSCHAPPIJ (1919-1921)

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the transformation of colonial education into an instrument of class resistance by Tan Malaka on the Senembah Maatschappij plantation, Deli (1919-1921). Using a micro-historical approach and triangulation of primary sources (Tan Malaka's autobiography, Leiden archives, Benih Merdeka newspaper) and secondary sources (historiography, critical pedagogy studies), this study reveals pedagogical strategies based on the synthesis of Marxist principles, especially the critique of capitalist exploitation and Islamic values of social justice ('adl). The results of the study show three mechanisms of curriculum decolonization: integration of teaching materials with structural realities (low wages, poenale sanctie), substitution of authoritarian teaching with reflective dialogue, and the elimination of physical punishment as resistance. The conflict with the plantation elite represents the dialectic of colonial hegemony (Ethical Politics) versus educational counter-hegemony. Multi-ethnic interactions in the classroom strengthen Tan Malaka's vision of internationalism which would later be realized in PARI (1927) and the Jakarta Manifesto (1945). This study contributes to the affirmation of education as a locus of resistance that is often neglected in Indonesian historiography, the synthesis of Islam-Marxism as a framework for epistemic decolonization, and the relevance of pedagogy based on socio-historical reality to dismantle contemporary inequality. Its practical implications offer a critical-transformative education model as a liberation praxis.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Historical studies not only aim to reconstruct past events, but also analyze social, political, and cultural dynamics through critical examination of primary and secondary sources (Jayanti & Eriyanti, 2022). In the context of Indonesian historiography, the narrative of the struggle for independence often focuses on military and political aspects, while the role of education as an instrument of resistance has received less attention (Kartodirdjo, 1987). This phenomenon is clearly seen in the context of Tanah Deli, where the structure of colonial capitalism was colored by the cruel exploitation of the Senembah Maatschappij plantations. Through the Koeli Ordonnantie and Poenale Sanctie, policies that legitimized forced labor and oppression of contract coolies (Sulindo, 2024), Senembah Maatschappij became a symbol of colonial repression. In the midst of this structural inequality, colonial education, which was designed to produce

obedient workers, was actually used by Tan Malaka as a medium of resistance who was later remembered as a National hero (Indonesia, 1963).

Previous studies such as Apriadi (2024) and Poeze (2000) have examined Tan Malaka's role in education and political thought on a macro scale, but have not touched on the micro-historical dynamics of his interactions with contract coolies in the direct colonial space. Meanwhile, Rofiqi (2017) focused on the synthesis of Islam-Marxism without connecting it to its implementation in Tan Malaka's pedagogical practice. Based on this theoretical gap, this study adopts a micro-historical approach to reveal the concept of hierarchy in Tan Malaka's pedagogical practice as an assistant school supervisor (1919–1921). This framework allows for the analysis of three key dimensions: teaching strategies at Senembah Maatschappij, ideological friction with plantation rulers, and the formation of revolutionary consciousness through the classroom, using the lens of critical and counter-hegemonic pedagogy.

Theoretically, this study builds a conceptual framework by combining critical pedagogy (Freire, 2020) as a lens for analyzing emancipatory practices, the concept of counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 2013) to read the transformation of school space into a field of resistance, and the synthesis of Islam-Marxism (Rofiqi, 2017) as a strategic lens that analyzes Tan Malaka's struggle. Through the triangulation of this framework, the study answers two fundamental questions: first, How did Tan Malaka's involvement in Senembah Maatschappij shape his awareness of social exploitation and colonial domination? Second, How did his active role in defending the rights of contract coolies reflect his commitment to social justice? The findings reveal three decolonial pedagogical strategies implemented by Tan Malaka, namely changing the colonial curriculum by replacing the hierarchical-obedient teaching model with critical dialogue based on the reality of contract coolies (according to Freire's Pedagogy of Liberation); transforming the classroom into a counter-hegemony laboratory (Gramsci) where technical knowledge is linked to awareness of exploitation; and the synthesis of Islam-Marxism in building cross-ethnic solidarity through Sarekat Islam which shows the integration of theory-practice.

The main contribution of this study lies in mapping the process of decolonization of small-scale education which proves two things: subversive education at the local level can be a trigger for revolutionary consciousness, and the combination of critical-counter-hegemonic pedagogical theory is relevant to studying the history of colonial education. Academically, this study enriches Indonesian historiography with a micro-historical perspective that raises the marginal narrative of colonial education. Methodologically, the integration of Marxist theory, criticism of colonialism, and analysis of primary sources offers a multidisciplinary framework for understanding power relations in educational institutions. Practically, reflection on Tan Malaka's struggle is relevant for contemporary education in dismantling structural inequality. Thus, this study not only reconstructs fragments of local history, but also emphasizes that social transformation often begins with small, courageous actions in the heart of a repressive system.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a micro-historical case study to examine the socio-political dynamics of colonial education on the Senembah Maatschappij plantation in the period 1919–1921, when Tan Malaka served as an assistant school supervisor. Primary data sources include Tan Malaka's works (*Dari Penjara ke Penjara*, *Madilog*, *Semangat Muda*), Senembah Maatschappij company archives (including digital maps from Leiden University Libraries), and the contemporary newspaper *Benih Merdeka*. Secondary sources include macro studies of Tan Malaka, colonial education history, critical pedagogy, and semi-structured interviews with North Sumatran plantation historians to enrich the local context.

Data analysis was conducted systematically through four main stages. First, source criticism was applied to evaluate authenticity and potential bias, especially in Tan Malaka's autobiography which is full of ideological content. Second, contextual interpretation was carried out to place the data in the socio-economic landscape of the Dutch East Indies, highlighting the character of colonial capitalism and racial issues. Third, the findings were grouped through categorization into main themes: class resistance, Islam-Marxism synthesis, micro-politics of colonial education, and traces of internationalism. Fourth, interpretive analysis traces the pattern of ideological resistance through Tan Malaka's educational practices and political thought, using the lens of Gramsci's concept of hegemony to read colonial education as an instrument of domination and Tan Malaka's practice as a form of counter-hegemony.

The validity of the findings is significantly enhanced through triangulation, namely by comparing and confirming evidence from various primary sources (Tan's works, archives, newspapers) and secondary sources (literature, interview results). Further validation is carried out through discussions (member-checking) with colonial historians, while transferability is maintained through detailed contextual descriptions of the socio-economic structure in Tanah Deli.

The theoretical framework of the study integrates the historical materialism of Marx and Engels to analyze class power relations, as well as Freire's critical pedagogy as a lens to understand Tan Malaka's emancipatory approach. Despite limited access to the unclassified internal archives of Senembah Maatschappij, the triangulation strategy and the use of complementary sources successfully helped overcome data gaps. This micro-historical approach ultimately succeeded in reconstructing Tan Malaka's key role in the movement to decolonize knowledge and enriching understanding of the dynamics of resistance in the context of colonial education.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Class Resistance in Colonial Education

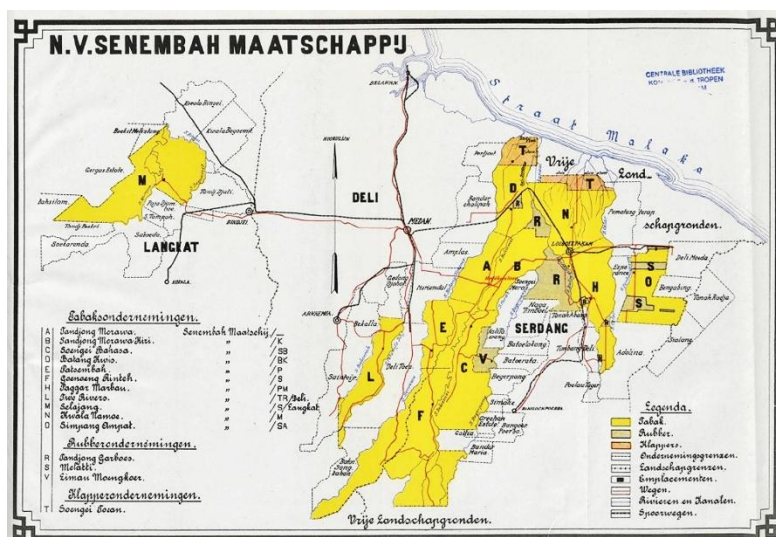


Figure 1. Maatschappij Prayer Concession Map for 1928/1929

Source : Centrale Bibliotheek Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij, Amsterdam)

Senembah Maatschappij as one of the largest plantation companies in Tanah Deli, with a concession area in 1889 of 31,563 bahu, increased in 1897 through the acquisition of land covering an area of 50,994 bahu, which was divided into the Serdang Sultanate area of 40,340 bahu and 10,654 bahu located in the Deli Sultanate area (Janssen, 1939). Through a forced labor system legalized through the Koeli Ordonnantie and Poenale Sanctie (Ghani, 2016), thousands of contract coolies were trapped in exploitative work spaces. Not only adult men but women and children also became victims of this system. As in his autobiography criticizing the plantation system that turned coolies into production machines without the right to education (Malaka, 2014). Tan Malaka's presence as a teacher and school supervisor at Senembah Maatschappij in 1919–1921 (Poeze, 2000) must be understood within a micro-historical framework, namely seeing how individuals with certain ideological backgrounds responded to colonial power in a small, complex social space. Rather than simply carrying out administrative tasks, Tan Malaka directly deconstructed the function of schools that were previously structural tools into initial steps towards social change. He witnessed firsthand how education functioned to form skilled but submissive contract workers, through a curriculum that emphasized discipline, technical skills, and obedience (Badrudin, 2019).

In his notes *From Prison to Prison*, Tan Malaka recorded how the conditions of the contract workers he encountered were due to the structured colonial system. He wrote a picture that not only signified social inequality, but also oppressive racial issues (Malaka, 2014). This is where the micro-historical approach becomes important: small narratives like this become a window for understanding how colonial power works deeply within the body of society. In *madilog*, Tan mentioned that Dutch school education did not add, even killed (Malaka, 2019).

Armed with a synthesis of Islam and Marxism, namely social justice and class resistance, Tan Malaka began to intervene in the Senembah Maatschappij school curriculum. He rejected education as a form of control, and instead encouraged learning towards emancipation to sharpen intelligence and strengthen the will, refine feelings and take a direct approach to the homes of coolie children to understand reality. However, the plantation owners could not allow crafts lessons such as planting, caring for plants, hoeing, to be separated from this teaching system so that the coolie children who after school could continue to work as ready-to-use contract coolies (Pulungan, 2012). According to Tan Malaka, technical education controlled

by the Dutch did not meet its objectives because it only produced workers for the interests of the plantation, not to free the mind.

These efforts show the character of Tan Malaka's struggle. He did not separate thought and action. In the process of supervising schools, he planted the roots of equality, fighting ignorance as part of the teaching material to reject the colonial hierarchy. This strategy is parallel to the critical pedagogy approach that positions education as a tool for the emancipation of the oppressed class (Freire, 2020). The teaching process that links emotional closeness to the concrete conditions of contract coolie life forms a political influence that reaches far beyond the classroom. Education becomes a means of ideological consolidation that slowly raises revolutionary consciousness (Hambali, 2021).

However, these steps did not go without obstacles. The conflict with the large plantation owners of Senembah Maatschappij, emerged as a representation of the clash of two educational ideologies (Poeze, 2000). Janssen, as the implementer of ethical politics, introduced educational reforms that on the surface looked progressive. On the other hand, for Tan Malaka, the program was merely cosmetic like a thin layer of colonialism that tried to disguise structural inequality without really changing the root of the problem. In his view, ethical education was a manifestation of cultural hegemony that actually subtly strengthened colonial domination. By combining the Islamic values he learned in the Minangkabau land and the influence of Marxism that was developing while he was studying in the Netherlands, Tan Malaka formed a vision of education that was not only oriented towards cognitive knowledge, but also towards social justice and the liberation of the oppressed class (Rofiqi, 2017). For Tan Malaka, this synthesis was not just a theory but a continuity that he called for at the fourth international communist congress "We are Muslims as Islamic as possible. In facing capitalists, we are Marxists as Marxist as possible." (Hartono, 2024). The dialectic between Islamic teachings and Marxism produces a learning approach that emphasizes critical thinking about social change.

This micro-historical approach shows how schools can be transformed into spaces of resistance. Schools under Tan Malaka's supervision did not just teach, but also equalized education without class. This became the foundation for his involvement in the revolutionary movement later on, both in the Red Islamic Union and in the internationalism network (Utomo, 2020).

Within the framework of colonialism, Tan Malaka's actions were a form of progressive struggle. He created a different curriculum like that of Mr. W, who was Tan Malaka's colleague at Senembah Maatschappij, making education an articulation of class equality. This is a form of epistemic decolonization, an effort to dismantle the dominance of colonial knowledge and replace it with a narrative rooted in the involvement of the oppressed people (Freire, 2020).

Tan Malaka's educational project is an articulation of Islamic-Marxist praxis in a colonial context. He made schools a space for liberation, not a production factory; as a field of resistance, not just adaptation; and as a starting point for revolution, not an instrument of colonial development. As Tan Malaka's written goal of education is to create a way of education that suits the needs and aspirations of the impoverished people! Which is a big and hard effort to achieve Indonesian Independence.

Education initiated by Tan Malaka is proof that class equality and ideological resistance can thrive even in the heart of colonial power itself. As he reflected, "the need to know the nature, will and inclination of each child.. with the need to be able to with their parents" (Malaka, 2014). Thus, through a micro-historical approach to Tan Malaka's involvement in Senembah Maatschappij, we can understand that ideological resistance in the form of critical education can be the embryo of change in the midst of colonial domination.

Micro-politics of Education in the Maatschappij

Schools in the Senembah Maatschappij plantation area were basically not real spaces for access to education, but rather part of a colonial system that worked within the framework of hegemony and reproduction of social structures. Under Dutch colonial control, schools were designed not to produce free people but to produce skilled and obedient contract workers (Lubis, 2025). The colonial curriculum was designed to instill values of obedience, discipline, and economic productivity solely for indoctrination to serve the sustainable interests of the Senembah Maatschappij plantation in particular (Eva, L., 2016)



Figure 2. Ibrahim Datoek Tan Malaka, in Amsterdam 1922
Source: Leiden University Libraries Digital Collection (KITLV 17800).

Tan Malaka, as an education supervisor, understood very well that the colonial school curriculum of *Senembah Maatschappij* was a form of power that infiltrated through the method of European moral values, a teaching method that emphasized obedience and social hierarchy. He intervened in the school space through a holistic education strategy that emphasized class equality and the exploration of the realities of the lives of contract workers and their children as a basis for learning. In his notes, Tan Malaka criticized the colonial education system as being more focused on seeking long-term productivity profits while ignoring the realities of people's lives (Malaka, 1987b). The micro-politics of education carried out by Tan Malaka took the form of critical pedagogical praxis (Freire, 2020). Education, in this perspective, is no longer a one-way process of knowledge deposition from teacher to student (banking system), but rather a dialogue that opens up space for awareness of conditions of oppression. As emphasized by Tan Malaka in (Malaka, 1926), education must be a weapon to free the mind, not a chain that binds the soul, so that the children of contract laborers are no longer passive objects, but critical subjects in the learning process (Freire, 2020).

This makes schools a place to form free humans, not just skilled workers. This action is not without risk. Tan Malaka's efforts to change education based on equality were considered a threat to the stability of colonial plantations. Small reforms in teaching methods such as changing the teaching and learning system, encouraging open discussion, or freeing children from direct physical punishment were considered a form of threat (Badrudin, 2019). The strict supervision of the plantation owners over native schools shows how education is in the grip of repressive power (Afandi et al., 2020). This concern is in line with Tan Malaka's statement that schools that open the eyes are a threat at any time to colonialism (Malaka, 1987b), because they turn slaves into free humans. This explains why his efforts were considered subversive by the colonial rulers. In fact, it illustrates the fear that Tan Malaka's closeness to the students will foster a collective consciousness that has the potential to trigger resistance in the future (Malaka, 2014). This concern reflects the colonial rulers' fear of education that raises critical awareness.

The colonial classroom, in Marxist analysis (Marx & Engels, 2023), is the meeting point between the formation of ideology and class resistance, where cultural hegemony can only be fought through counter-hegemony (Gramsci, 2013). With this theory, Tan Malaka's actions can be understood as an effort to disrupt the reproduction of dominant ideology by creating a counter-hegemonic space, namely a school that not only teaches skills, but also class consciousness. This is in line with his view that colonial education is a weapon containing poison to lull and weaken the heart (Malaka, 2000), emphasizing that education is a field of ideological resistance.

The Dutch ethical policy, which was touted as an effort to enlighten the natives, proved to be more of a strategy for co-opting the lower classes. According to (Afandi et al., 2020), this program was designed to create ready experts, not critical people. Tan Malaka in (Malaka, 1987a) explicitly called ethical politics a mask to hide economic exploitation and political oppression of indigenous people, so that his efforts to reverse the function of education into a tool for decolonization were a form of systematic resistance. However, in Tan Malaka's hands, colonial education was reversed in function: he made it a tool to dismantle the falsehood of ethical politics and reveal hidden structures of oppression.

Thus, the school space in *Senembah* is not just a physical space, but a political space where the ideological struggle between colonialism and decolonization took place. Through Tan Malaka's intervention, this space was transformed into a laboratory of consciousness, where the children of contract coolies learned without distinction of class and social status. For Tan Malaka, education is an effort to free humans and their nation from ignorance, oppression, and misery (Dandy, 2023)

Early Traces of Internationalism

Tan Malaka's involvement in Senembah Maatschappij cannot be understood as just a small fragment in his biography. Behind his role as a school supervisor. In fact, it was from these small spaces that Tan Malaka honed the proletarian ideas that later became an important foundation for his struggle in the Asian and world realms. Senembah became a kind of early political laboratory for Tan Malaka's ideological formation and revolutionary practice, which later merged with International Communism (Comintern) and the Asian left movement (Rokhim et al., 2019). Here, he not only taught but also witnessed complex social dynamics, as he wrote, "Potemkin school to please the Idealist, ethist Herr Dr. Janssen." (Malaka, 2014). This statement emphasizes that his educational activities in Senembah were a manipulative part of an ethical political project. In the classroom and social interactions on the plantation, Tan Malaka witnessed firsthand the cross-racial and national exploitation that characterized colonial capitalism. Javanese, Indian, Chinese contract coolies etc. experienced the same oppression in the Koelie Ordonnantie regulatory system such as setting low wages and cruel poenale sanctie punishments.

This situation provided an empirical basis for Tan Malaka to formulate the view that colonial capitalism was global, and therefore resistance against it must also be international (Syaifudin, 2012). He bitterly described "The class that toils from early morning until night, the class that only gets enough wages to fill their stomachs and cover their backs, the class that lives in the barn like a goat in its pen... known as contract coolies. Garden coolies, male or female, usually have to wake up at 4 am... they only arrive home at 7 or 8 pm. The salary according to the contract is f 0.40 a day..." (Malaka, 2014). This depiction reflects that the colonial system is so cruel and strengthens his belief that the struggle must be international, across nations and classes. Senembah shows that the struggle for education cannot be separated from the political struggle. For him, colonial exploitation knows no racial boundaries; shared suffering became the basis for the growth of awareness of class equality. In his later movement, Tan founded the Indonesian Republic Party (PARI) in 1927 in Bangkok, with a line of anti-imperialist struggle and people's revolution (Malaka, 1987a). His internationalist vision reached its peak in his work, the Jakarta Manifesto, which initiated the formation of the Asia-Africa and Australia Federation (ASLIA) as a form of solidarity between oppressed nations (Malaka, 1945).

This spirit was not merely an adoption of European Marxism, but grew from his direct involvement in Tanah Deli. In his autobiography, he explained that the Deli area was an area of the Indonesian nation in the sense of modern nationalism and a true proletariat area as well (Malaka, 2014). Tan Malaka's involvement in the Medan Branch of the Islamic Union (SI) in 1919 in his appointment as general secretary (Azhari, 2023) became an important chapter in the expansion of his political network. SI in Medan, as an early inclusive movement organization, gave him the space to test the idea of cross-religious and ethnic solidarity against the cruel system of Dutch capitalism. He emphasized, "Just adding ontevreden people who are not happy, and just adding members of Sarekat Islam." (Malaka, 2014). His appointment in SI shows his ability to transform micro experiences in Senembah into an organized movement, while bridging education with direct political action.

Furthermore, his involvement in the international movement cannot be separated from his intellectual relations with figures such as Semaun, Alimin, and international left figures whom he knew through the network of the Indies Communist Party to the Comintern (Malaka, 2014). However, Tan Malaka's global orientation actually started from a local point—from the schoolroom, the coolie barracks, the SI meeting. That's where the dialectic between the micro and the macro, between education and revolution, was formed. As he wrote, "Let us remember the crimes committed in Deli." (Malaka, 2000). This statement confirms his vision of international solidarity rooted in local experiences in Deli. Senembah, therefore, is not a remote place in the history of the global movement. It is a small node in the world network that produces big ideas. From Senembah, Tan Malaka built a logic of resistance based on coolie solidarity, class equality. His intellectual awareness that dismantled the colonial dialectic through counter-narratives, built a revolution from the periphery of the empire (Said, 2010). Tan Malaka himself asserted, "cities and villages on the coasts and mountains of vast Indonesia are ablaze to demand rights and independence, so no enemy in the world is able to withstand the waves of revolutionary storms." (Malaka, 1987a). From Deli, this small idea spread, knitting the fate of contract laborers on plantations for the global class struggle.

Thus, rereading Tan Malaka's involvement in Senembah enriches our understanding of Indonesian and Asian Historiography. He was not just an international Marxist, but formed a real small step into a global movement. In his words, "For someone who lives in thoughts that must be spread, both with pen and mouth, a sufficient library is needed. A craftsman will not be able to build a building, if his tools such as cement, bricks and others are not there. A writer or orator, needs notes from the books of enemies, friends

or teachers.” (Malaka, 2019). From this belief, proletarian internationalism found its roots and wings to fly further.

Local Memory For Cultural Heritage

Tan Malaka's footsteps in Tanah Deli, especially in the Senembah Maatschappij environment in the period 1919-1921, is an important chapter in the history of education and social movements in Indonesia. In this situation, Tan Malaka was trusted to teach the children of contract laborers while also becoming an assistant supervisor and teacher at the school owned by Senembah Maatschappij, which is now known as SD Negeri 101878 Kanan I in Buntu Bedimbar Village, Tanjung Morawa, Deli Serdang.

The existence of SD Negeri 101878 Kanan I is physical evidence of the colonial legacy as well as a representation of Tan Malaka's role in integrating education with social awareness for plantation workers. The school building, which still stands strong with typical Dutch architecture, consists of four main classrooms, and is deliberately maintained in its original form. This effort was made so that the current generation can remember the history of the educational struggle that took place in that place. At the school gate, it is written "Sekolah Deli Maatschappij Zaman Belanda", marking the historical identity of this school. The determination of the school as a cultural heritage by the Deli Serdang Regency Government in 2023, through Regent Decree Number 574 of 2023 (Deli Serdang Regency Government, 2023), referring to Law Number 11 of 2010 Articles 5 and 7, emphasizes the value of age, history, and association with national figures such as Tan Malaka. This decree was issued based on the recommendations of the Deli Serdang Regency Cultural Heritage Expert Team and legal considerations such as Law No. 5/2017 concerning Cultural Advancement and Deli Serdang Regency Regulation No. 3/2022 concerning the 2023 APBD for preservation funding (Deli Serdang Regency Government, 2023).

Awareness of the historical value of this school has grown stronger thanks to the efforts of teachers and the community to introduce the figure of Tan Malaka through oral storytelling to digital publications. The story of Tan Malaka's struggle is routinely told as part of the preservation of collective memory. Stories passed down from the surrounding community state that Tan Malaka used education to raise critical understanding of colonial injustice. One of the descendants of alumni said that this school taught practical skills while opening their eyes to social realities, where Tan Malaka encouraged his students to think independently and critically.

The curriculum implemented in this school not only included basic lessons such as reading, writing, and carpentry (according to the Ambachtsschool concept), but also humanist values that were relevant to the conditions of society at that time. In *Dari Penjara ke Penjara*, he wrote, "The purpose of education for coolie children is primarily to sharpen intelligence and strengthen the will and broaden the feelings of the student, as is intended for the nation's children and whatever group they are in" (Malaka, 2014). This view rejects colonial education that only produces skilled workers without raising social awareness, and is in line with the ideals of critical education that later developed in Indonesia.

A study (Eva, L., 2016) from Unimed strengthens the position of this school as a symbol of the struggle for education in Tanjung Morawa. The determination of cultural heritage status is based on the age of the building which is almost a century old, the colonial architectural style, and its connection to national figures. The local community also maintains collective memory through the term "baskul school" (Ambachtsschool), which reflects the school's historical roots as a center for carpentry skills. Efforts to preserve the building were carried out by maintaining its original structure, such as double-leaf windows, colonial-style wooden doors, and geometric ornaments (Eva, L., 2016). With its cultural heritage status, SD Negeri 101878 Kanan I is now not only a place of formal education, but also a historical education site for the younger generation and academic study material (Nasution, 2025). Tan Malaka's legacy in Deli strengthens the narrative that education is not merely a means of reproducing labor, but rather a means of liberation and the formation of critical character for oppressed communities. The values of courage, independence, and social awareness taught by Tan Malaka remain relevant to building the nation's character. As he wrote, "Education is a tool to free humans from all forms of oppression, not just to earn a living" (Malaka, 2019). Thus, Tan Malaka's track record at Senembah Maatschappij 1919-1921 is an eternal inspiration for the struggle for education and liberation in Indonesia, and is relevant for contemporary critical educational reflection.

4. CONCLUSION

This study definitively proves that Tan Malaka's decolonial pedagogical strategy in Senembah Maatschappij (1919-1921) through the deconstruction of the colonial curriculum by replacing authoritarian teaching with reflective dialogue based on the reality of contract coolie exploitation (Koeli Ordonnantie/Poenale Sanctie), the transformation of the classroom into a counter-hegemonic space

(Gramsci) by linking technical skills and class consciousness to dismantle the cultural hegemony of Ethical Politics, and the synthesis of Islam-Marxism as an epistemic framework that combines the critique of capitalist exploitation (Marx) with the principle of Islamic social justice ('adl) which has transformed schools from a tool for the reproduction of obedient labor to an axis of resistance. These micro-historical findings not only answer the research question about Tan Malaka's revolutionary consciousness and the articulation of social justice, but also confirm micro actions such as the elimination of physical punishment and teaching in coolie barracks as a breaker of the chain of reproduction of colonial ideology.

Theoretically, this study makes a double contribution: filling the gap in Indonesian historiography by positioning education as a neglected field of cultural resistance while shifting the focus from macro to micro narratives, and establishing the Islam-Marxism synthesis as a model of epistemic decolonization through a combination of historical materialism and critical pedagogy (Freire). The contemporary implications are prescriptive: this socio-historical context-based educational model becomes an operational framework against neoliberal injustice, where critical-transformative pedagogy functions as a liberatory praxis to dismantle contemporary structural inequalities. Although limited access to the internal archives of Senembah Maatschappij limits the analysis, triangulation of primary sources (autobiography, Leiden archives, contemporary newspapers) has strengthened the reconstruction of this resistance narrative. In essence, Tan Malaka's track record in Deli is eternal evidence that social change begins from the micro space at the heart of repression, a paradigm that education based on class consciousness and local solidarity remains relevant as a weapon against hegemony, both in 20th-century colonialism and 21st-century neoliberalism.

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