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**The Pedagogical Labor of “Development from the Margins”: Education, Labor, and Infrastructures in Indonesia**

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**BACKGROUND**

In light of one of this panel’s key goals to offer theoretical and methodological considerations to the development of anthropology of education within the Indonesian context, this paper centralizes one of the core tensions in the subfield by asking: how do we define “education” and what, in turn, “counts” as objects of study for anthropologists of education?

In the United States, “education” is increasingly equated with “schooling,” despite the fact that many anthropologists of education have shown that schooling is only a subset of the education that occurs in everyday life (Pollock & Levinson 2011; Varenne 2008). An overarching goal of this paper is thus to denaturalize this association and offer one approach to anthropologically study processes of education outside of the context of schooling. I ground this discussion in a working concept that I have termed “pedagogical labor” in my research on infrastructures, education, and labor in contemporary Indonesia. First, I describe the research context and questions within which this concept is situated. Next, I discuss the two bodies of literatures that this concept is built upon: (1) the social practice theory of learning and (2) phatic labor and the social infrastructures of communicative channels.

**Research Context**

Since 2014, the Indonesian central government has engaged in ongoing efforts to “develop Indonesia from the margins” (*membangun Indonesia dari pinggiran*), a national development motto that centralizes the longstanding issue of regional disparities between the core island of Java, where most of the country’s population and economic activities are concentrated, and the small islands of its historically marginalized eastern periphery. In an effort to stimulate economic
growth in outer-Indonesia, the government has identified key “economic potentials” (potensi ekonomi) for sectoral development across the eastern provinces. The government has additionally sought to invest in “connectivity infrastructures” (infrastruktur konektivitas) in the forms of inter-island transportation systems, regional development growth centers, and the expansion of the digital economy.

Despite recognizing the existence of high economic potentials at Indonesia’s margins, however, development experts have identified a severe education-to-workforce skills gap in the country’s outer islands, where the quality of education consistently ranks lowest (World Bank 2014). They further cite studies that suggest working-age youth are moving away from the peripheries and toward Indonesia’s center (Malamassam 2016). The government’s goal of “develop[ing] Indonesia form the margins,” these experts conclude, can only be met if education quality improves in the outer islands; and if “educated” and “skilled” outer-Indonesian youth are enticed to remain at and provide labor within their own “peripheral” communities. These technocratic concerns are being heard at the top. Re-elected president, Joko Widodo, has widely stated that the main focus of his second term will be human resource development (sumber daya manusia or SDM). “Infrastructure is already running [and] can be left (alone),” he has been quoted saying, “we are shifting to human resource development” (Kompas 2019).

In light of these issues, my research seeks to understand how an “educated” and “skilled” labor force is being produced at the margins of Indonesia. This inquiry is notably less concerned with the process through which formal training and preparation of an objectively more educated and skilled labor pool is taking place than with the everyday social and semiotic practices that go into making workforce “at the margins” legible and investible. By calling this everyday work “pedagogical labor,” I seek to draw specific attention to the ways in which teachings about what outer-Indonesia is, could, or even should be is both ubiquitous and essential to workings of the economic endeavors of “developing Indonesia from the margins.”

Conceptualizing “Pedagogical Labor”

Two bodies of literature centrally inform my theorization of “pedagogical labor”: (1) social practice theory of learning (Lave 1996, 2009); and (2) emergent theories on social infrastructures (Elyachar 2010).

First, I draw on the social practice theory of learning whereby learning (and by extension teaching and education) are considered ubiquitous in everyday activities. This theory of learning has grown out of a group of anthropologically-trained education scholars’ felt need to challenge cognitive theories of learning which dominate the field of education. Against the dominant understanding of learning as an individual process of knowledge acquisition that takes place in the minds of learners and in the decontextualized settings of schools, scholars of social practice theory of learning argued that there is no distinct process of “learning” but only changing participation in the culturally designed settings of everyday life (McDermott 1993; Lave 2009). In the words of Lave (1996), “wherever people engage for substantial periods of time, day by day, in doing things in which their ongoing activities are interdependent, learning is part of their changing participation in changing practices” (150). This body of work has pushed a subset of educational studies to move beyond the boundaries of schools to consider how students of various kinds learn through participating in everyday life. It has also pushed researchers to focus on mundane practices and relations among person, activity, and situation.
A second key body of literature that my theoretical framing of “pedagogical labor” draws on is Elyachar’s (2010) recent work on “phatic labor,” social infrastructures of communicative channels, and the economy. Within the context of Cairo, she shows that everyday communicative practices of sociality between Cairene women, resembling what Malinowski (1936) had once observed and termed as “phatic communion,” transmitted information loaded with economic value that crucially shaped how men in their communities pursued economic decisions. Given this observation, Elyachar argues for the need to incorporate these forms of everyday, “phatic” talk between women into our understandings of the economy. Specifically, she argues that through their everyday “phatic labor,” women are producing a network of communicative channels that function as a social infrastructure upon which more classic forms of economic activities can take place. These social infrastructures, she contends, are as essential to the economy as physical infrastructures like roads, bridges, or telephone lines.

Bringing these two bodies of literature together in my research on education and workforce development at the margins of Indonesia, I find immense productivity in the concept of “pedagogical labor.” Through the lens of social practice theory of learning, the kinds of educational processes that I am interested in are those that involve people of any age learning and teaching others to organize behavior in any social setting (Pollock & Levinson 2011). The “pedagogy” employed to build an “educated” and “skilled” labor force at Indonesia’s margins is thus understood to take place far beyond the confines of the school; it is instead made up of everyday practices of numerous individuals in various settings who all carry out the educational work of “developing Indonesia from the margins.” Then to consider Elyachar’s (2010) discussion of the relationship between “phatic labor,” social infrastructures, and the economy, I am additionally interested in the ways in which these mundane pedagogical activities shape outcomes of the economy, specifically those relating to the workforce. To understand how an “educated” and “skilled” workforce is being built at the margins of Indonesia, I turn to the questions: How do different social actors at national and local levels engage in daily practices that recast the role of outer-Indonesia in the nation’s development? What social ideas about the margins (pinggiran) and its human resource (sumber daya manusia) emerge from these activities? What material effects result from people’s subsequent uptake of these social ideas?

**Keywords:** “pedagogical labor”; social practice theory of learning; social infrastructure; outer-Indonesia

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


AN ETHNOGRAPHIC AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SCIENCE EDUCATION IN ISLAMIC SCHOOLS IN THREE JAVANESE REGENCIES: A PRELIMINARY REPORT

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According to the TIMSS survey in 2011, Indonesia is one of the countries with the lowest level of scientific literacy in the world. Even though Indonesia’s economic growth continues to be robust (between 5-7% per year) and reading skills for both boys and girls are nearly 100%, in mathematics and science, Indonesia ranks near the bottom. Among the poorest performers are students in traditional, and underresourced, Islamic boarding schools or pesantren.

Islamic education in Indonesia has a long and complex relationship to science. While some of the earliest scientific discoveries were made by Muslims, many Indonesian Muslims adhere to a variety of Islam that does not regard scientific learning as obligatory. In the last 15 years, however, in an effort to better serve their students, increasing numbers of Islamic schools in Indonesia have adopted some or all of the national curriculum, a move that requires the teaching of science to all students.

This paper reports on preliminary results of a 3 year, National Academy of Science-funded experimental study of an innovative, Islamic themed curriculum unit implemented in 18 Islamic schools in three regions in Java (Yogyakarta, Malang and Lamongan). Ethnographic video, interview and achievement data were compared with Islamic schools receiving the “standard fare” science curriculum units. The results provide not only valuable quantitative information, but also an interesting and rare glimpse of student experience in a world that remains poorly understood. By examining transcriptions of video and audio data of actual student interactions in classrooms, we compare these with recordings of more traditional modes of Islamic pedagogy and evaluate their implications for an understanding of Indonesian Islamic education.