Integrated Islamic Schools as Sites of Everyday Cultural Resistance: An Ethnographic Study of Urban Muslim Education in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines Integrated Islamic Schools (Sekolah Islam Terpadu, SIT) as sites of everyday cultural resistance in urban Indonesia. Drawing on a year-long school ethnography at SIT Nurul Fikri Depok, this research applies James C. Scott's framework of everyday resistance to analyze how cultural boundaries and moral orders are produced through routine institutional practices. The findings show that cultural resistance is enacted not through overt confrontation but through the disciplined organization of school environments, behavioral norms, and symbolic practices. The study identifies three interconnected mechanisms through which this resistance operates: strategic parental school choice, the internalization of discipline through the moral environment and staff formation, and the cultivation of a coherent Islamic habitus through repeated practices and shared moral reasoning. These mechanisms demonstrate how schools function as arenas of cultural formation where identity, authority, and moral boundaries are negotiated in everyday life. By foregrounding micro-level practices, this research contributes to the sociology of education and Islamic studies by clarifying how cultural resistance is embedded in routine institutional life. The study highlights the significance of schooling as a site where broader ideological projects are translated into lived social realities within contemporary Muslim societies.

Keywords: *Integrated Islamic Schools; Everyday Resistance; School Ethnography; Hidden Curriculum; Habitus*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji Sekolah Islam Terpadu (SIT) sebagai arena resistensi kultural sehari-hari dalam konteks masyarakat urban Indonesia. Berdasarkan etnografi sekolah yang dilakukan selama satu tahun di SIT Nurul Fikri Depok, studi ini menggunakan kerangka resistensi sehari-hari James C. Scott untuk menganalisis bagaimana batas-batas kultural dan tatanan moral diproduksi melalui praktik-praktik institusional yang rutin. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa resistensi kultural tidak diwujudkan melalui konfrontasi terbuka, melainkan melalui pengorganisasian lingkungan sekolah secara disipliner, pembentukan norma perilaku, dan praktik simbolik. Studi ini mengidentifikasi tiga mekanisme yang saling berkaitan dalam proses tersebut, yaitu pilihan sekolah strategis oleh orang tua, internalisasi disiplin melalui

lingkungan moral dan pembentukan staf, serta pembudayaan habitus Islam melalui praktik yang berulang dan penalaran moral bersama. Mekanisme-mekanisme ini memperlihatkan bagaimana sekolah berfungsi sebagai arena pembentukan kultural, di mana identitas, otoritas, dan batas-batas moral dinegosiasikan dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Dengan menyoroti praktik-praktik mikro, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada kajian sosiologi pendidikan dan studi Islam dengan menjelaskan bagaimana resistensi kultural tertanam dalam kehidupan institusional yang rutin. Studi ini menegaskan signifikansi pendidikan sebagai ruang di mana proyek-proyek ideologis yang lebih luas diterjemahkan ke dalam realitas sosial yang hidup dalam masyarakat Muslim kontemporer.

Kata Kunci: *Sekolah Islam Terpadu; Resistensi Sehari-hari; Etnografi Sekolah; Kurikulum Tersembunyi; Habitus*

A. Introduction

The global resurgence of religion in public life has been widely recognized as a defining feature of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This development has reshaped the relationship between faith, citizenship, and modern institutions, including education. One significant expression of this shift is the expansion of faith-based schooling, where educational institutions function as strategic arenas for negotiating modernity while safeguarding religious identity.[1] Across diverse national contexts, faith-based schools frequently emerge in response to perceived secularizing pressures within state-led education. These institutions do not merely introduce religious subjects; they also embed religious norms into everyday learning, discipline, and community life, thereby producing distinctive moral environments and patterns of belonging.[2]

In Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country, this broader dynamic is evident in the rise of Integrated Islamic Schools (*Sekolah Islam Terpadu*, SIT), which have expanded rapidly since the early 1990s. SITs position themselves as alternatives to public schooling and, in many cases, as distinct from earlier Islamic educational forms by promising academic achievement alongside systematic moral and religious formation.[3] A central claim

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[1] Robert W Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton University Press, 2007), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7rqjj.

[2] Raihani, "Report on Multicultural Education in Pesantren," *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 42, no. 4 (July 30, 2012): 585–605, https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.672255.

[3] Noorhaidi Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia," *RSIS Working Paper*, 2009, https://dr.ntu.edu.sg/entities/publication/dea21aad-0262-4983-afea-bced26fa4744; Robert W. Hefner, ed., *Making Modern Muslims* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824832803.001.0001.

within the SIT discourse concerns the need to overcome what is perceived as an epistemological division between "religious" and "secular" knowledge. Consequently, SIT institutions emphasize the integration of general subjects with Islamic values through curricular design, teacher authority, and disciplinary routines, framing this integration as both educationally necessary and morally urgent.[4]

Scholarship on Islamic education has long emphasized that schooling involves more than the transmission of knowledge. Educational institutions also function as sites for producing public culture, cultivating moral subjectivities, and organizing boundaries of community membership.[5] SITs offer not only Islamic curricular content but also a particular configuration of institutional authority and everyday practices through which religion becomes teachable, repeatable, and socially consequential. Starrett's[6] concept of "functionalization" is particularly useful for understanding this process. This framework explains how religion is translated into a practical repertoire that can be mobilized through curricular and disciplinary forms, enabling learners to navigate modern social contexts while reaffirming religious commitments.

Within Indonesian scholarship, SITs have frequently been associated with broader projects of Islamizing formal education through modern organizational and pedagogical strategies. Earlier studies have also traced the movement's ideological roots to the *Tarbiyah* milieu.[7] Related research on Islamic schooling and middle-class piety projects suggests that schools can become arenas where competing definitions of "the good Muslim" are advanced through everyday practices, institutional legitimation, and moral authority.[8] This analytical lens is important because SIT expansion is often interpreted as a straightforward expression of religiosity or as a neutral educational preference. Such interpretations may overlook the cultural work performed by schools, particularly the processes through which specific moral dispositions are normalized while alternative orientations are framed as problematic or incompatible with institutional visions of Islamic life.[9]

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[4] Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia."

[5] Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*.

[6] Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (University of California Press, 1998).

[7] Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia."

[8] Karen Bryner, "Piety Projects: Islamic Schools for Indonesia's Urban Middle Class" (Columbia University, 2013), https://doi.org/10.7916/D8V69RR7.

[9] Bryner; Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia."

Despite these contributions, existing discussions of SITs often prioritize institutional development, curriculum design, or generalized accounts of religiosity. Less attention has been given to how cultural projects are produced, stabilized, and defended through everyday school life. This gap is analytically significant. Public debates about Islamic schooling in Indonesia frequently focus on academic performance, discipline, or organizational effectiveness. A narrow emphasis on these dimensions risks obscuring how schools actively shape boundaries of belonging, define what constitutes a "proper" modern Muslim, and cultivate everyday habits that position students and families in relation to wider public culture.[10] Furthermore, recent studies indicate that the language of "integration" may be contested, negotiated, or unevenly realized in practice, highlighting the need for closer examination of how institutional ideals are enacted within daily routines.[11]

This article approaches SITs not only as pedagogical institutions but also as cultural projects with broader social implications. To develop this argument analytically, the study draws on James C. Scott's[12] framework of everyday forms of resistance. Scott's work redirects attention from overt confrontation to routine, small-scale practices through which social groups protect identity and contest dominant norms. In this study, resistance does not refer to explicit political opposition. Instead, resistance is understood as the cumulative cultivation of disciplined moral practices and symbolic boundaries that respond to what participants interpret as secular-hegemonic expectations in public culture.[13]

This conceptual framework allows everyday school practices to be interpreted in a more analytically precise manner. Institutional regulations and routines can be understood as mechanisms of boundary-making that gradually produce a distinctive moral community. Through repeated practices of social interaction, moral instruction, and behavioral regulation, students and families are oriented toward a particular vision of Islamic personhood designed to remain coherent within modern urban contexts.[14] In this sense, the school becomes a site where

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[10] Witriani Witriani et al., "Negotiation Identity and Religious Expression in Early Childhood: A Case Study of SDITs in Lombok, Indonesia," *Al-Jami'ah: Journal of Islamic Studies* 62, no. 2 (December 30, 2025): 277–303, https://doi.org/10.14421/ajis.2024.622.277-303; Suyatno Suyatno, "Sekolah Islam Terpadu; Filsafat, Ideologi, Dan Tren Baru Pendidikan Islam Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 2013): 355, https://doi.org/10.14421/jpi.2013.22.355-377.

[11] Ahamad Abdul Qiso et al., "Reconstructing the Integrative Paradigm of Islamic Education: A Critical Analysis of Integrated Islamic Schools in Indonesia," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 23, no. 1 (June 30, 2025): 49–61, https://doi.org/10.35905/alishlah.v23i1.13625.

[12] J C Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Yale University Press, 1985); James C Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990).

[13] Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

[14] Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt*; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

cultural repertoires are cultivated, embodied, and maintained. Participants learn to interpret wider social environments through categories of moral responsibility, moral risk, and religious propriety.[15]

Based on a year-long ethnography at SIT Nurul Fikri Depok, this article asks: How do Integrated Islamic Schools function as arenas of cultural resistance among Indonesia's urban Muslims? This study argues that resistance is embedded in ordinary institutional structures, including teacher–student interactions, parental involvement, and the formation of a distinctive Islamic habitus. Practices such as modest dress, standardized forms of greeting, and selective participation in public celebrations are therefore interpreted not merely as expressions of discipline but as cumulative cultural strategies that sustain moral boundaries and collective identity.[16]

B. Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in school ethnography. Ethnography is particularly suitable for examining cultural processes because it enables sustained engagement with everyday practices, routines, and interactions that are often inaccessible through survey-based or purely document-centered approaches.[17] Given that this article seeks to understand how cultural resistance is embedded in ordinary school life, an ethnographic approach allows close attention to the lived experiences, behavioral norms, and symbolic practices through which institutional values are enacted.

The research was conducted as a single-site ethnography at SIT Nurul Fikri Depok, one of the prominent institutions within the Integrated Islamic School (SIT) movement in Indonesia. The selection of this site was based on purposive considerations. SIT Nurul Fikri represents a well-established SIT institution with a clearly articulated integration model, structured religious programs, and active parental involvement. These characteristics make the school analytically relevant for examining how cultural projects are organized and sustained in everyday educational settings. The single-site design enables analytical depth by prioritizing contextual richness and internal coherence rather than cross-site comparison.[18]

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[15] Bryner, "Piety Projects: Islamic Schools for Indonesia's Urban Middle Class"; Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia."

[16] Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia"; Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*; James C. Scott, *Moral Ekonomi Petani* (Jakarta: LP3ES, 1983); Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

[17] Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography*, 3rd ed. (4 Edition. | New York : Routledge, 2019. | Revised edition of the authors' Ethnography, 2007.: Routledge, 2019), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315146027.

[18] Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings About Case-Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 2006): 219–45, https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363.

Data collection was conducted over approximately one year through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Prolonged engagement within the school environment enabled the researcher to observe routine activities, disciplinary practices, classroom interactions, and institutional rituals. Observations focused on everyday practices that structure school life, including teacher–student interactions, behavioral regulations, moral instruction, and symbolic forms of communication. This sustained presence is essential for identifying patterns that might otherwise appear incidental or purely administrative.

The study involved 25 participants selected through purposive sampling. Participants were chosen to capture multiple institutional perspectives and roles within the school community. They included school leaders, teachers, parents, and students. This selection strategy reflects the ethnographic emphasis on understanding social processes through the viewpoints of actors directly involved in institutional life.[19] Interviews explored participants' interpretations of school norms, educational objectives, disciplinary practices, and moral expectations. Rather than seeking statistical representation, sampling prioritized analytical relevance and variation across institutional positions.

In addition to interviews and observations, document analysis was conducted to contextualize institutional practices. These materials included school regulations, curricular guidelines, policy documents, and publicly available institutional narratives. Document analysis supports ethnographic interpretation by clarifying how formal institutional discourses relate to observed practices.[20] This triangulation strategy strengthens analytical credibility by integrating multiple sources of evidence.

Data analysis followed an inductive qualitative procedure informed by grounded theory principles.[21] Analysis proceeded through iterative stages of coding, categorization, and thematic development. Initial coding focused on identifying recurrent patterns in practices, interactions, and participant narratives. These codes were subsequently organized into broader conceptual categories reflecting institutional routines, moral regulation, and boundary-making processes. The analysis emphasized the relationship between everyday practices and the study's theoretical framework, particularly Scott's notion of everyday resistance. This procedure allows interpretation of routine institutional practices as culturally meaningful rather

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[19] Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*.

[20] Lindsay Prior, "Repositioning Documents in Social Research," *Sociology* 42, no. 5 (October 1, 2008): 821–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038508094564.

[21] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: Introducing Qualitative Methods Series* (Thousand Oaks: Sage publications, 2014).

than treating them as isolated behavioral rules. Throughout the research process, reflexivity was maintained to account for the researcher's positionality and interpretive role. Ethnographic knowledge is inherently relational, requiring continuous reflection on how access, interaction, and interpretation shape the production of data.[22]

C. Results and Discussion

This study shows that SIT Nurul Fikri operates as a site of cultural resistance through ordinary institutional practices that accumulate into a durable moral order. Following Scott, the resistance documented here should not be read as overt political confrontation, public protest, or direct opposition to the state. It is better understood as everyday boundary-making that protects a moral identity while contesting what participants perceive as secular-hegemonic expectations in public culture.[23] In this ethnography, resistance becomes visible through three interconnected mechanisms. The first is strategic school choice by urban middle-class parents, which functions as a defensive cultural project and a form of selective separation from mainstream youth culture. The second is the internalization of discipline through the school's moral environment, which organizes self-regulation among teachers and students. The third is the cultivation of an Islamic habitus through routine practices that normalize a distinctive moral community. Together, these mechanisms demonstrate how resistance operates through the practical organization of time, space, interaction, and moral language, rather than through explicit ideological polemic.

1. Strategic School Choice as Class Project and Cultural Defence

The ethnographic data reveal that parents' choice of SIT NF is a deliberate act of cultural positioning. The case of "Ibu Heni," a mother who meticulously scrutinized schools for her only son, provides a powerful illustration of this calculated strategy. Her narrative goes beyond seeking academic quality. It reveals a deep-seated anxiety about cultural assimilation and a conscious project of moral preservation.

> "I was searching for a school for my only child… you know how it is with an only child; I was terrified of making even the slightest mistake, especially a fatal one like choosing the wrong education… So, I scouted many schools, ma'am. I loitered in each school's canteen, observing what the children were snacking on, what they talked about, whether they were 'bourgeois' or not, their shoe styles, their hijab styles, and their wallets. I paid attention to everything. I listened to their conversations. There are some who, after

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[22] Hammersley and Atkinson, *Ethnography*.

[23] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*; Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen, "Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework," *Critical Sociology* 42, no. 3 (May 12, 2016): 417–35, https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920514524604.

school, dash off to hang out at the mall, making plans right there in the canteen. The canteen reveals its true character. At the NF elementary school canteen, I just listened to them talking. Wow, 500 Rupiah ($0.03) was still useful; you could still buy a snack. Moreover, the kids were also unpretentious, not wearing fancy shoes or bags, and certainly not discussing plans to hang out. At School G (a private school in Jakarta), elementary kids make plans to go to Cilandak Town Square after school. I thought, this is the right school. The children are simple, and during breaks, boys and girls are separated… it is perfect."[24]

Ibu Heni's "canteen test" is a revealing ethnographic moment because it shows how "quality" is read through cultural signals and peer-world cues rather than formal academic indicators alone. The canteen becomes a diagnostic space where consumption patterns, leisure aspirations, and styles of interaction are interpreted as markers of a school's moral character. What she evaluates includes children's snack practices, talk about after-school leisure, and the moral meanings attached to simplicity, modest dress, and gender separation. These cues are treated as evidence of what will become normal in everyday student life, particularly seen through the contrast between "500 Rupiah is still useful" and the immediate normalization of mall-going plans.

Her criteria, namely simplicity "500 Rupiah is still useful", gender segregation, and the avoidance of mall culture, are not merely about discipline. They are about identifying an institution that will replicate and reinforce a specific classed and religious habitus that is positioned against consumerism and liberal social interaction. This represents what can be termed a defensive class project of the urban Muslim middle class. Parents are not rejecting modernity outright. Instead, they are actively constructing a protected social sphere to navigate what they perceive as moral dangers associated with modern urban youth culture. This reading is consistent with Scott's concept of everyday resistance, which highlights how cultural contestation is often enacted through ordinary practices that reorganize daily life, rather than through overt political confrontation.

Furthermore, Ibu Heni's subsequent transformation highlights the school's role as a catalyst for a broader familial religious project. She describes how her son began to correct her religious practice, reminding her of a hadith when she got angry and instructing her on proper hijab. This led to her own religious awakening, as she attended *liqo* (study circles) and was influenced by other pious mothers.

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[24] Interview results on 8 August 2024

"Imagine, I get angry, and out comes a hadith… my son kept reminding me… I became interested in religious studies… I have a strong desire for my child and my family to be *selamet dunia akherat* (safe in this world and the hereafter)."[25]

This evolution demonstrates that the school's influence extends beyond the student and effectively reshapes the family unit. In analytical terms, the choice of SIT NF is not only an educational decision. It is the initiation of a comprehensive lifestyle project that seeks to secure otherworldly salvation through worldly boundary-making. The school's routines and moral language circulate into domestic life through children's everyday moral talk and through structured parental programs, making the project durable because it is distributed across both school and home. In Scott's framework, this durability is a key feature of everyday resistance because it operates through repetition, normalization, and shared moral common sense rather than explicit ideological struggle.[26]

This dynamic also aligns with Bourdieu's concept of social reproduction, although here it appears with a critical twist. The parents' project is a conscious effort to accumulate and transmit a distinct form of religious cultural capital that they deem essential for success in both this life and the hereafter.[27] Within the broader context of Islamic education and middle-class piety projects in Indonesia, such cultural positioning has been identified as a significant mechanism through which schools become arenas for shaping moral subjectivities and reproducing value-laden distinctions.[28] In this ethnographic case, resistance is therefore visible not as a direct protest against a secular order, but as the construction of an alternative moral community through selective separation, disciplined peer environments, and the reorganization of family practice around the school's religious-moral framework.

2. The Internalization of Discipline and the Formation of the Piety Habitus

The power of SIT NF's project lies not only in its impact on students and parents, but also in its ability to reshape the adults tasked with its implementation. The experience of Ibu Reni, a teacher who underwent a significant personal transformation after joining SIT NF, illuminates the force of the school's hidden curriculum and its subtle disciplinary mechanisms. Her journey from mainstream aesthetics to the school's norms of modesty was not the result of

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[25] Interview results on 8 August 2024

[26] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

[27] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, ed. Pierre Bourdieu (SAGE Publications Ltd, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *Arena Produksi Kultural: Sebuah Kajian Sosiologi Budaya* (Yogyakarta: Kreasi Wacana, 2016).

[28] Bryner, "Piety Projects: Islamic Schools for Indonesia's Urban Middle Class"; Hasan, "Islamizing Formal Education: Integrated Islamic School and New Trend in Formal Education Institution in Indonesia"; Hefner and Zaman, *Schooling Islam: The Culture and Politics of Modern Muslim Education*.

coercion, but of environmental pressure, as she noted: "if no one else is wearing makeup, then what is the point of me wearing it alone".[29] This statement exemplifies Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where norms are internalized through diffuse, panoptic-like surveillance. Individuals then self-regulate their behaviour in order to conform to communal standards. This process of internalization was further articulated by another teacher, Ibu Sari, who described the institutional framework guiding this transformation:

> "We have a structured mentoring program, Bina Pribadi Islam (BPI), for all staff. It is not just about rules; it is about nurturing our inner state (*rohani*) to align with the school's values. We are encouraged to reflect and grow together."[30]

Analytically, the BPI program functions as a formalized technology of the self, in Foucauldian terms, through which individuals actively work to transform themselves toward an institutionally valued mode of being. The school does not merely demand compliance. It provides a structured pathway for the internal re-engineering of teachers' identities, positioning them as living embodiments of the piety habitus the school aims to cultivate.

The success of this disciplinary project is evidenced by its outcomes. Ibu Reni's personal transformation became a pedagogical resource that allowed her to teach modesty from a place of lived experience. She explained: "My experience, I use it to teach about modesty... the benefits... I share my personal journey, and it resonates more with the students."[31] This demonstrates how internalized discipline completes a full cycle. The teacher, once an object of the school's normalizing power, becomes its agent. She no longer follows rules in a purely external sense, but actively reproduces the school's values, using her transformed subjectivity to instil the same habitus in her students effectively. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which the environment continuously reinforces the disciplinary logic that created it, solidifying the school as a powerful site for forming a modern, yet distinctly pious, Muslim identity.[32]

3. Cultivating a Counter-Hegemonic Moral Universe

The student perspective reveals the success of this project in creating a subjectively experienced "moral universe" that stands in stark contrast to the perceived chaos of public schools. This universe is not built on explicit polemics but on a shared sense of moral and psychological safety, cultivated through a pedagogical and discursive strategy. The foundation of this universe is a sense of refuge. Students like Salma explicitly chose SIT NF to escape the social anxieties associated with mainstream schools.

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[29] Interview results on 12 August 2024
[30] Interview results on 8 August 2024
[31] Interview results on 12 August 2024
[32] Interview results on 12 August 2024

I graduated from an Islamic boarding school, so I was terrified of going to a public high school. There is much bullying, and the teachers do not pay as much attention to us as they do at NF. I was terrified... I am really comfortable here... It is really chill here.[33]

This "chill" and secure environment is actively manufactured through a pedagogy of avoidance that favors internalized understanding over simple prohibition. The school's approach to non-Islamic cultural practices is indicative of this hegemonic strategy.

For things like Christmas or New Year's, not really, Valentine's too - we are never really forbidden. It is just that we follow the Student Activity Guide (PANTAS)... well, for Valentine's, we were taught its history, so we already know it is not in accordance with Islamic teachings. It seems like it is more about us understanding it for ourselves.[34]

This method replaces confrontation with a process that leads students to voluntarily reject certain practices based on a provided religious framework. This creates what Scott would recognize as a "hidden transcript," namely a shared understanding among students and staff of belonging to a moral community defined in opposition to a dominant, secular "other". Furthermore, the school employs a sophisticated discursive strategy to frame its moral boundaries. Instead of using secular terms like "*pergaulan bebas*" (free association), the discourse is rooted directly in religious texts, which carry a higher, unquestionable authority.

We are never explicitly told 'do not engage in free association,' but the teachers here focus more on teaching us, such as Al-Isra 32 [the warning against approaching zina]. That is repeated very often here. By grounding its moral code in divine imperatives, such as the Quranic verse "*jangan dekati zina*" (and do not approach adultery), the school naturalizes its behavioral norms not as arbitrary school rules, but as eternal truths. This effectively shields the school's value system from secular critique and solidifies its identity as a counter-hegemonic space. The result is a quiet but resilient moral community where resistance to the dominant culture is experienced not as a struggle, but as a settled, common-sense reality.[35]

This cultivation of a "common-sense reality" through discursive strategies and the internalization of divine imperatives exemplifies a fusion of Scott's "hidden transcripts" with Gramscian hegemony theory. Scott helps us see the covert nature of this resistance, particularly the shared understandings that remain offstage from the dominant culture. At the same time, the school's success in making its Islamic worldview appear as self-evident truth demonstrates a counter-hegemonic project in the Gramscian sense. The SIT does not merely create a hidden space for dissent; it actively builds a rival hegemony from within.[36] By replacing the secular logic of "free association" with the divine logic of "*jangan dekati zina*," the school engages in

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[33] Interview results on 26 August 2024
[34] Interview results on 26 August 2024
[35] Interview results on 26 August 2024
[36] Marcos Aurelio Saquet, "A Perspective of Counter-Hegemonic Analysis and Territorial Transformation," *Geographica Helvetica* 73, no. 4 (November 20, 2018): 347–55, https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-73-347-2018.

a "war of position," contesting the terms of moral legitimacy and naturalizing an alternative symbolic universe.[37] Thus, the "moral universe" of SIT NF is not just a refuge but a potent, self-sustaining ideological system that secures consent for its norms by framing them not as a choice, but as the only conceivable reality for its members.

4. Everyday Practices as Sites of Resistance

The cumulative effect of these practices is the naturalization of a specific Islamic habitus. These are not just rules; they are the "weapons of the weak" in Scott's terms, namely the mundane, everyday acts through which a counter-hegemonic worldview is sustained and reproduced.[38] This process is perhaps best articulated by the institution itself. As Mr R, the Operational Director of Nurul Fikri Education Center (NFEC), explicitly stated, the most potent pedagogical force is not the formal curriculum but the cultivated environment:

NFEC tries to write with the motto "*Sholeh, Muslih, Cerdas, Mandiri, Terampil*" (SMART), and we even break it down into every teacher's lesson plan and syllabus... However, there is a habit that is stronger in integrated Islamic schools, and that is the environment, not the classroom. We never write in our curriculum that children must pray orderly or must pay on time, but because we do that. We educate them, we teach them, so it becomes formed. It is the environment that shapes them, so the Islamic greeting (*salam*) becomes customary, and smiling becomes a common practice.[39]

This testimony validates the theoretical frameworks of the hidden curriculum and disciplinary power.[40] The director consciously distinguishes between the "*semu*" (superficial) accountability of academic metrics and the internalized accountability to communal norms fostered by the environment. His description of engineering the "*REFRESH*" culture (Respect, Friendly, Honesty) illustrates a deliberate, top-down effort to structure a social space that automatically produces disciplined, pious subjects. Each prescribed behavior, including "*salam, senyum, menjaga kebersihan*," operates as a small, often unnoticed act that reinforces a different cultural logic. Therefore, SIT NF does not loudly protest the secular order; it quietly builds a parallel one, brick by brick, through this engineered environment and the disciplined

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[37] Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*; Johansson and Vinthagen, "Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework."

[38] Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance.*

[39] Interview results on 30 August 2024

[40] Michael W Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2018), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429400384; Michel Foucault, "Discipline and Punish," in *Social Theory Re-Wired* (New York: Routledge, 2023), 291–99, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003320609-37; George Spindler and Louise Spindler, *Fifty Years of Anthropology and Education, 1950–2000: A Spindler Anthology* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2000).

dispositions it produces. Mr R.'s account confirms that this is not an accidental byproduct but the very essence of the school's project, namely a silent, persistent, and effective form of cultural resistance aimed at creating the "*Muslim yang diinginkan*" (the desired Muslim) for urban Indonesia.

5. Theoretical Implications

This ethnographic study has demonstrated that SIT Nurul Fikri is far more than an educational institution. It is a dynamic arena where a modern urban Muslim identity is actively forged through daily, mundane practices of cultural resistance. By applying Scott's framework of everyday resistance, this study moves beyond macro-level political analyses and reveals the infrapolitics of Islamic education. In this view, the cultural work of building a counter-hegemonic social order takes place through quiet, persistent, and cumulative practices that become ordinary and self-evident in school life.

The theoretical contribution of this research is threefold. First, it bridges the macro–micro divide in the study of religious movements. It demonstrates how a broad ideological project, such as the *Tarbiyah* movement, is enacted not through grand declarations but through the microphysics of school life. This is evident in small, repeatable practices that organize conduct and shape dispositions, including standardized greetings, embodied modesty norms, and students' own moral reasoning for avoiding certain celebrations.[41] This contribution speaks directly to a recurring sociological concern that large-scale ideological structures are not always sufficiently connected to the everyday practices that sustain them.[42]

Second, the study refines the concept of everyday resistance by showing that it is not merely reactive. It can also be proactive, generative, and highly organized as a project of cultural formation. In the SIT case, resistance is not limited to refusing dominant cultural forms. It also involves systematically producing an alternative moral order through institutional routines and collective discipline. This dynamic resonates with the formation of counter-publics and alternative social imaginaries, where communities cultivate shared norms and interpretive frameworks that differ from mainstream cultural expectations.[43] In this sense,

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[41] Foucault, "Discipline and Punish."

[42] Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Polity Press, 2004); Deborah Hall and William H Sewell, "Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation," *The History Teacher* 39, no. 4 (August 1, 2006): 555, https://doi.org/10.2307/30037093.

[43] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Public Space Reader* (Routledge, 2021), 34–41, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351202558-6; John Rothfork and Charles Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries," *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 60, no. 1 (2006): 157, https://doi.org/10.2307/4143907.

"quiet resistance" does not imply weakness. It signals the strategic strength of institution-building as a long-term cultural practice.

Third, by integrating Bourdieu and Passeron's concept of habitus with the theory of the hidden curriculum, this study clarifies how resistance becomes embodied and durable. The hidden curriculum is not a secondary layer of schooling. It is a powerful social apparatus that transmits values through unwritten rules, patterned interaction, and the organization of time and space around rituals.[44] These implicit messages normalize a specific moral orientation and make it feel natural to those who inhabit it. Recent sociological discussions of social reproduction further support the relevance of this approach for understanding how schooling shapes dispositions and forms of distinction across generations.[45] The SIT case shows that cultural reproduction operates through disciplined routines that convert moral commitments into embodied dispositions.

Finally, Scott's theory of everyday resistance provides an overarching framework that connects these micro-level practices to broader cultural politics. Scott's concepts of "weapons of the weak" and "infrapolitics" redirect attention from overt confrontation to routine practices through which communities maintain cultural autonomy. Although Scott developed his theory through studies of peasant communities, subsequent scholarship has demonstrated its value for analyzing non-confrontational resistance in contemporary settings where boundary-making is sustained through everyday institutional life.[46] Read through this lens, SITs engage in sustained cultural work that contests secular hegemony not by direct political struggle, but by organizing a parallel moral universe through disciplined repetition.

The implications of this research extend beyond the Indonesian context. It offers a comparative model for understanding faith-based schooling movements globally, particularly those navigating modernity and religious authenticity through strategic engagement rather than isolation. Studies of religious education show that many communities develop conscious

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[44] Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*; César Peña-Sandoval and Tatiana López Jiménez, "Ideologias Curriculares Y Concepciones Sobre Diversidad Y Justicia Social," *Cadernos de Pesquisa* 50, no. 177 (September 2020): 738–57, https://doi.org/10.1590/198053147086; Spindler and Spindler, *Fifty Years of Anthropology and Education, 1950–2000: A Spindler Anthology*.

[45] Diane Reay, "'The More Things Change the More They Stay the Same': The Continuing Relevance of Bourdieu and Passeron's *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*," *Revista Española de Sociología* 31, no. 3 (June 24, 2022): a116, https://doi.org/10.22325/fes.res.2022.116.

[46] Johansson and Vinthagen, "Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework"; Fatmanur Parlak and Mozharul Islam, "Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcript," *Selçuk Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 47, no. 47 (June 15, 2022): 367–72, https://doi.org/10.21497/sefad.1128744.

responses to secular modernity by creating schools as protected niches for identity formation.[47] Research on evangelical Christian schools in the United States similarly demonstrates how schooling can function as a counter-public that cultivates alternative social imaginaries and moral authority.[48] Comparative work from other contexts, including South Asia, further suggests that such institutions may practice non-confrontational resistance through the creation of "sovereign educational spaces" that protect doctrinal autonomy while engaging modern systems.[49] The SIT case therefore provides a valuable lens for analyzing how religious communities worldwide negotiate modernity through education.

D. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that Integrated Islamic Schools function as significant sites of cultural resistance enacted through everyday institutional practices. In the case of SIT Nurul Fikri, resistance does not operate through overt confrontation but through the disciplined organization of routines, moral environments, and symbolic boundaries. The findings show that cultural resistance is sustained through three interconnected mechanisms: strategic parental school choice, the internalization of discipline, and the cultivation of a coherent Islamic habitus. These mechanisms illustrate how schools can construct alternative moral orders that become durable through repetition, normalization, and institutional design.

The implications of this project for Indonesia's plural society remain contingent rather than predetermined. While the SIT model may reinforce strong in-group identities and protected moral boundaries, it also represents a strategy of engaging modern educational structures from a position of religious confidence. The broader societal impact therefore depends on how this confidence is enacted, whether as a closed form of boundary maintenance or as an open disposition compatible with participation in plural settings.

This study concludes that Integrated Islamic Schools should be understood not merely as educational alternatives but as arenas of cultural formation with broader social significance. By foregrounding everyday practices, this research highlights how cultural resistance and

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[47] John Eade, "Religion, Home-Making and Migration across a Globalising City: Responding to Mobility in London," *Culture and Religion* 13, no. 4 (December 5, 2012): 469–83, https://doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2012.728142.

[48] Melani McAlister, "American Evangelicals, the Changing Global Religious Environment, and Foreign Policy Activism," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17, no. 2 (April 3, 2019): 1–12, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2019.1608652.

[49] Ayesha Fakhar Naeem and Esha Momena Yousaf, "Case Study: The Concept of 'Religious Tolerance' in the Socio-Religious Construction of Islamic Schools in India," *Idarah (Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Kependidikan)* 7, no. 2 (December 31, 2023): 149–64, https://doi.org/10.47766/idarah.v7i2.1773.

identity construction are embedded in routine institutional life, offering a framework for understanding similar educational movements in contemporary societies.

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