UTOPISTIC JOURNEY OF POETRY AGAINST HEGEMONIC CORRUPTION
A study on the cultural movement of Indonesian poets resisting against corruption through poetry

RB. Edi Pramono
University of Technology Yogyakarta
pramboenz@gmail.com

Abstract
Hundreds of Indonesian poets have declared a cultural movement to resist against hegemonic corruption through poetry. Poetry is believed to be powerful and thus must have didactic, moral, and utilitarian functions to change society. As Horace said “dulce and utile”, literature is supposed to enlighten people and persuade society for a better life. This paper is intended to present the struggle of Puisi Menolak Korupsi (PMK) cultural movement during this 4-year journey and what it has gained. 6 anthologies have been published. 47 road shows have run in the entire country to both disseminate the idea and persuade more people to rebuff corruption, and it is still counting. Gauri Viswanathan explained hegemonic control by showing how the humanistic functions traditionally associated with the study of literature can be vital in the process of sociopolitical control. Indonesia was ranked 90 in corruption index 2016 among 176 surveyed countries in the world. Corruption seems to be a hegemonic control to this country, from the top until the bottom level. Corruption becomes hegemonic since it has power and is powerful. The massiveness of hegemonic corruption tends to make this cultural movement of resistance utopistic journey. Faith and spirit are the keys to keep persisting the movement.

Keywords: poetry against corruption, cultural movement, utopistic journey, hegemony of corruption, resistance

Introduction
Literary works especially poetry are not merely a matter of beauty but also a matter of function. This can be for personal interest or social interest depending on the intention of the poets composing their poetry. When the interest comes up with a group of poets in similar concern, common experiences, and solidarity, a collective identity emerges (Owen Whooley, 2007). Hundreds of Indonesian poets declared this collective identity with the name Puisi Menolak Korupsi or Poetry Against Corruption to marshal a moral and cultural movement to educate people to arouse their awareness against corruption. In his inauguration speech, John F Kennedy said, “When power leads man towards arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man’s concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corruptions, poetry cleanses. …art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth” Kennedy, the former president of USA, believed in the power of poetry since poetry is a form of truth. Sosiawan Leak, the leader of the movement, wrote in the foreword of the fourth anthology saying “Lewat perspektif kebudayaan hal itu juga merupakan ekspresi sosial yang merepresentasikan kebenaran moral untuk merebut kembali rasa keadilan rakyat dalam wujud laku kreatif yang bermuatan data, etika, dan estetika” (Puisi Menolak Korupsi 4, 2015) ‘through the perspective of culture, poetry is a social expression representing the moral truth to regain the folk justice through creative works underlying data, ethics, and aesthetics.’
What Kennedy says through his clause “poetry cleanses” indeed is not understood as the way of a disease instantly cured by medical treatment afterwards, rather, this may start from the very early age of education as Leak also says, “Agar secara filosofis dan edukatif turut mewaspadai munculnya mental korupsi sejak dini, serta mencegah perilaku korup yang lebih akut” (suaramerdeka.com, 2014) ‘that philosophically contributes to educating people to be as early alerted as possible towards the emergence of corruptive mentality, and to preventing a worse corruptive behavior.’ Road shows become one of the ways to sound this movement to the entire country. Today, this moral and cultural movement has run for four years since initiated by a poet lecturer Heru Mugiarso, with 6 (six) poetry anthologies produced and 47 road shows organized in a whole country.

Corruption has already been legally declared as an extraordinary crime for it does not only harm the state finances, but has also been a violation of the social and economic rights of the community. The status extraordinary crime attached to corruption shows clearly that this sort of action can be considered as hegemonic domination. In high level corruption, the corruptors may not only be persuasive but also be oppressive to other parties. This occurs because power is in their hands. Jose Ugaz, Chair of Transparency International, even says that “in too many countries, people are deprived of their most basic needs and go to bed hungry every night because of corruption, while the powerful enjoy lavish lifestyles with impunity” (Transparency International Secretariat, 2017). Again hegemony appears here obviously.

The government has run many policies and issued many regulations to eradicate or at least lessen the octopus of corruption, and PMK (Poetry Against Corruption) through its moral and cultural movement takes part to support the policies and regulation. Anyhow, poets have nothing but words. Only through words and writing do poets give contribution in the battlefield against corruption, says Hilda Rumambi (Kompasiana, 2014). Sosiawan Leak further accentuates that “Gerakan Puisi Menolak Korupsi berbasis moral dan bergerak dalam ranah kebudayaan. Sebagaimana namanya, gerakan ini melakukan aktivitasnya dengan puisi (anak kandung kebudayaan) sebagai sumber ekspresinya. Maka, ia tak akan pernah bisa lepas dengan hal-hal yang terkait dengan puisi (menulis puisi, membaca puisi, mencetak puisi, menerbitkan puisi, mementaskan puisi, merayakan puisi, mendiskusikan puisi dll) selama puisi-puisi tersebut mengolah tema korupsi”. (Hilda R, 2014)

Realizing that poetry is not as strong as other devices to eradicate corruption, the poets even feel encouraged to rally the road shows for the sake of planting the values of anti corruption among public beings. Enthusiastic passion to give effects through the movement overwhelms the atmosphere of the poets. Social change, especially upon the awareness of society towards corruption, can be said as the ultimate goal of this movement. “Uncommitted observers may regard these goals as illusions, but to the members hopes
that are quite capable of realization,” says RH. Turner and Neil J. Smelser. (www.britannica.com/topic/social-movement, 1998) An illusion or a utopia thus seems not to be a great deal for this movement.

Methodology
Gauri Viswanathan explained hegemonic control by showing how the humanistic functions traditionally associated with the study of literature – for example, the shaping of character or the development of aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking – can be vital in the process of sociopolitical control. (Nasrullah Mambrol, 2017) According to Gramsci hegemony means “the supremacy of one group or class over other classes or groups; it is established by means other than reliance on violence or coercion” (Fontana, 1993). To engage in a complex understanding of power applied in hegemony, “there must also be a focus on resistance, and to see how this operates we must elaborate the nexus of subalternity and common sense to now include power” (Howson, 2003).

The collective identity of the poets in Puisi Menolak Korupsi (PMK) or Poetry Against Corruption is in its progress of cultural movement to resist the hegemonic corruption. In its resisting actions, the bond gets stronger, the togetherness among the poets gets closer, and the similar passion and goal among the poets get more harmonious. This collective behavior is no longer a liquid gathering; rather this goes into a solid one. Collective behaviour in crowds, … are of brief duration or episodic and are guided largely by impulse. When short-lived impulses give way to long-term aims, and when sustained association takes the place of situational groupings of people, the result is a social movement, (www.britannica.com, 1998), and in this framework, PMK or PAC marshal a social movement against perpetuated hegemonic corruption.

PMK realizes that marching alone against massive hegemonic corruption will come to nothing. It holds common people, the folk, to engage into the movement as what has been said by Gaury previously i.e. “the shaping of character or the development of aesthetic sense or the disciplines of ethical thinking”. Thus, PMK may become the embodiment of common folk values in thinking of corruption. Corruption is worth reducing because it demoralizes the human spirit and it wastes opportunity, energy, and resources. (Roberta, 2004) Since corruption is hegemonic to mass folk in a negative side, PMK or PAC shall also be hegemonic to mass folk but in the opposite way, the positive side.

Finding and Discussion
Journey
The journey of PMK or PAC to resist corruption is very hard, winding, and windy as well. Four years have passed since its emergence in 2013 along with its first poetry anthology publication. During this 4-year journey of fighting against massive corruption in Indonesia, PMK has run 47 road shows in the whole country. As the movement aims to fight against corruption, all the road shows must be absolutely clean from any corruptive elements. Budget or fund is one of the obstacles drive the movement into one big action of all the poets in one time. This does not mean that it is difficult to get funds from various institutions, but it is more a cautious behavior to stay away from any aroma of corruption within the money. Even in one of the places holding the road shows, the budget for the event came out only from the event coordinator. He says in his report, “Seluruh biaya penyelenggaraan road show seperti konsumsi, penginapan, spanduk, dan lain sebagainya saya tanggung secara pribadi. Karena itu saya tidak mencatat secara rinci apa saja jenis dan jumlah pengeluaran. Tidak ada sponsorship dari pihak manapun.” (in Leak, 2017) ‘All the expenses for holding the
road show such as refreshments, inn, banners, and others were my money. Therefore I did not make any notes on the detailed expenses. Sponsors were none.’

A coordinator of another road show wrote in his report that the budget was completely gained from personal donation, books selling, and registration fee for poetry reading competition. (Wage Tegoeh Wijono et.al., in Leak, 2017)

Commonly, poetry does not give wealth to the life of the poets. Thus, a lot of poets cannot afford to catch up all the road shows especially the ones in islands other than Java. Therefore, even though there are hundreds of poets gathered in this movement, none of the road sows can collect all the PMK poets at the same time. Hence, it is a hard journey for the party, but spirit and faith of the poets are still over the hardness of the journey.

In some regions, the authority of the local government came to show their support on this movement. Some of them even read poems from the anthology. In one side, this burnt the spirit and the passion of the poets in upholding the faith on the movement. However, recently there has been news spreading that a regent who once read PMK poem, is now custody of KPK (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi / Corruption Eradication Commission) because of committing corruption.

Here are some notes on corruption in Indonesia. Indonesia was ranked 90 in the corruption index 2016 among 176 surveyed countries in the world (www.transparency.org). There are already 266 cases with 587 suspects during the first 6 months within 2017. The note on previous year shows that 755 cases were halted during 2016, much higher than the 453 corruption cases in trial in the same year. In 2015, according to Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW), there were 550 corruption cases in trial with 1.124 suspects, however, the police admitted that there were 927 cases. The phenomenon of iceberg may be applied to this matter so that the record actually shows only the tip of the corruption iceberg. This then accentuates the questions proposed by Sunaryo Broto, one of PMK poets, “Apakah puisi bisa memberantas korupsi? Apakah puisi bisa melawan korupsi? (in Leak, 2017) ‘Can poetry eradicate corruption? Can poetry fight against corruption?’

PMK is a moral movement carried out by Indonesian poets to disseminate anti corruption attitudes to societies through poetry anthology publishing, poetry reading contest, poetry-in-music contest, films play, discussions, seminar, cultural oration, and poetry reading performances in which those rely on the theme of anti corruption. (Sunaryo Broto, in Leak, 2017) No matter how hard is the journey, in this point of view, Horace was then right saying that poetry shall also be “utile”, useful for others. Art is for a betterment of society.

Hegemonic Corruption
However, hegemony overwhelms the elites of this country, especially indeed, hegemony of corruption. “Hegemony means supremacy of a group over other groups through force, persuasion, and even oppression.” (Pramono, 2009) The malignant hegemons apply “the translation of hegemonic ideology into everyday practice so that it infiltrates the habitual spaces of ordinary experience” (Herzfeld in Tzanelli 109). Hegemony can thus be in any kind of forms. It can be in the form of attitudes, rules, values, and other material things to coerce the ruled people to obey or conduct established norms.

The elite people in society have power, through which they have knowledge and through their power and knowledge they create the dominant culture. When holding such a dominant power embodied within a culture, these elite people try to maintain this
privilege of authority. Thus, hegemony and domination are linked to each other and inseparable in which they, thus, create a new culture for the ruled ones to carry out. Hence it makes sense that Gramsci stressed in particular “the role of culture is central to hegemony” (Webster, 1996). Raymond Williams furthermore said that hegemony is “a saturation of the whole process of living; it is a lived system of meanings and values” (Webster, 1996). In term of corruption, the above explanation and quotations accentuate the proposal of this discussion in that corruption is hegemonic since it also has power or at least closely linked to power. Moreover, corruption seems to be a culture, a strong culture that instead of getting rid of it, people embrace it as a new norm running commonly among societal and governmental operations, “a systemic and sophisticated behaviors of corruption” according to Leak (2017). Thus, it is a hegemonic corruption.

Utopia
Utopia, or the idea of the ideal society, is an integral part of political theory. It is concerned with the critique of existing society and its improvement. (Ivor Sarakemsky, 1993) Meanwhile, Claeys says that utopian theory is essentially concerned with conceptualizing the ‘ideal commonwealth’, which inherently expresses a ‘psychological aspiration of hope for a better state of existence in this life or elsewhere, notably in the form of the quest for “community”’ (in Ruitinga, 2011). A fight against corruption is timeless, a worldwide issue, and involves all elements either within society or government. Leak also states that PMK cultural movement is to complement other elements’ movements against corruption. (2017) Penuell Maduna, the South African minister of justice and constitutional development, boldly declared to a global audience, “It is now widely agreed that corruption, wherever in the world it is occurring, is one of the greatest challenges societies face as we enter the third millennium” (qtd in Roberta, 2004). Realizing the massive and vast battle field that PMK’s soldiers have to jump into, and the global reactions towards corruption, skepticism sometimes plays in mind as what is said in the previous page quotation, “Can poetry eradicate corruption?” It is essential to see the reality that the law enforcement is still far from most people’s expectation. Injustice reveals itself so plainly that even dumb people may obviously see and have similar judgment as do smart people. TV channels, online media, social media, radio, and other offline media pour the people’s mind with bunches of various cases concerning corruption. Thus, where is the place of PMK among the jungle of corruption? 4 years have passed. 6 poetry anthologies have been published. 48 road shows have run and are counting. Hundreds of discussions concerning resistances to corruption, even in collaboration with KPK/CEC, have been fulfilled. Corruption goes on and increases from time to time, still. Corruption does not get lesser.

Another reality proves that literary works, especially poetry, is not up to the present time the concern of the government or especially state officers to be their one of sources to significantly consider. Thus they are not yet touched by poetry and driven to get rid of corruption. Various kinds of news from various sources mostly disseminate information that the sentences are too low for the corruption convicts. Even in some trials, the real convicts are free while the subordinated innocent ranks receive verdicts of what they do not even taste. A road show in Wirogunan prison, Yogyakarta disclosed some indefinite helpful information for the poets to learn more especially in framing the movement. Yet, the echo of almost every road show did not last long.

However, despite the uncertain future of the movement and its significant effect, poets are
passionate and thus tough enough to hold up their struggle even with sacrificing their life in time. Rendra says through his poem entitled Rajawali ‘The Eagle’: sebuah sangkar besi/ tidak bisa mengubah rajawali/ menjadi seekor burung nuri… ‘an iron cage/ cannot change an eagle/ to be a parrot…’ Rajawali terbang tinggi/ membela langit dengan setia/ dan ia akan mematuk kedua matamu/ wahai, kamu, pencemar langit yang durhaka. ‘The eagle flies high/ faithfully shields the sky/ and he will peck your both eyes/ alas! Ye the rebellious traitors of the sky.

Conclusion
With limited resources except the human inner potencies in PMK (Poetry Against Corruption) and social, political, and personal hindrances, PMK is a miracle for being able to survive up to this present time. Yet, the journey is still long and hard while the future is neither bright nor dark except the faith and spirit that enliven the march of PMK troops. What the realities present and what the poets dream and hope are metaphorical to uniting water and oil. Time will determine who the winner is: the utopia of the poets or the hegemonic corruption.

Di sisi jalan si kecil lelap
Menelan debu dan asap knalpot
Menjadi penghias taman taman kota
Yang ditata miliaran rupiah
Berhias slogan calon kepala daerah
(RD Kedum – Lubuklinggau)

References