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AFTERWORD

Cultivating Futures with Radical Hope

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Throughout Indonesia, educational experiments have become a prominent part of social life. From community learning spaces and feminist leadership schools to Islamic boarding schools adapted for digital economies, and from international nature schools to homeschooling networks of globally mobile families, various groups are rethinking not only what education could teach but also what kinds of futures it might cultivate. In these spaces, participants do more than transmit knowledge – they nurture relationships, skills, and moral sensibilities, planting seeds of radical hope that imagine lives and worlds that do not yet exist. Education thus becomes a practice of both experimentation and care, where the futures we hope for are cultivated patiently, attentively, and collaboratively.

The phrase "radical hope" draws its resonance from the Latin root *radicalis*, meaning "of the roots." Hope, in this sense, is not a fleeting optimism but something deeply grounded: rooted in fellow-feeling, in the soil, water, and cycles of the earth, and in the shared aspirations, utopias, and imaginative capacities of those who nurture it. At the same time, radical hope entails courage and creativity: the ability to see beyond despair, to imagine alternatives to entrenched forms of suffering and limitation, and to act in ways that bring new modes of blossoming into being. It is both relational and visionary, anchored in the everyday care of people and environments, yet oriented toward futures that are not yet realised but remain possible through collective effort and imaginative experimentation.

Indonesia has long been fertile ground for educational experimentation. During the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–1998), schooling served as a key instrument of state-building, shaping disciplined citizens aligned with the regime's moral and developmental ideals. Civic education and national curricula aimed to cultivate obedient subjects whose roles within family, society, and the nation were carefully prescribed. In the decades after the political shifts of 1998, however, the educational landscape became much more diverse. Civil society organisations, religious groups, activists, and transnational networks began creating new pedagogical spaces that challenged or complemented state-led schooling models. More recently, the Indonesian government itself has embraced the language of educational transformation through initiatives such as *Merdeka Belajar* ("Freedom to Learn"). While framed as an effort to foster creativity and student-centred learning, this discourse circulates alongside broader neoliberal reforms that emphasise flexibility, entrepreneurship, and individual responsibility. Education thus becomes

a terrain where competing visions of freedom, citizenship, morality, and economic aspiration intersect.

At the same time, contemporary youth movements increasingly articulate critiques of formal education itself. The recent protests associated with the *Indonesia Gelap* movement – literally "Dark Indonesia" – have brought students and young activists to the streets to express broader frustrations about economic precarity, democratic decline, and shrinking horizons of possibility. Within these protests, universities and schools have become symbolic sites where young people question whether existing educational institutions still provide meaningful pathways toward dignified livelihoods and political participation. Such critiques do not necessarily reject education as such; rather, they highlight the widening gap between the promises of schooling and the lived realities many young Indonesians encounter after graduation. Yet these critiques, like alternative pedagogical initiatives, are rooted in a desire to imagine and enact better futures – they are expressions of radical hope in action.

Against this backdrop, the contributions to this special issue invite us to examine alternative education not merely as pedagogical innovation but as a social and political field in which different futures are being cultivated. Anthropology offers a particularly valuable perspective for such an inquiry. Rather than evaluating educational initiatives solely in terms of policy effectiveness or learning outcomes, ethnographic research attends to the everyday practices, relationships, and moral imaginaries through which education shapes persons and worlds. Seen from this perspective, movements such as Indonesia Gelap and the alternative educational initiatives discussed in this special issue should not be understood as separate phenomena. Rather, they form part of a broader landscape of youth-led critique and experimentation around what education should enable in the present and the future. While protest movements expose frustrations and structural limitations, alternative pedagogical projects attempt to cultivate new possibilities within and beyond those constraints. Both gestures – critique and experimentation – signal a shared concern with the conditions under which meaningful futures can be imagined and enacted.

Three analytical threads run through the contributions assembled here: subject formation, social reproduction, and future-making.

Subject Formation. Bangkit's ethnography of Sanggar Kanigara examines how educational freedom is negotiated within loosely structured learning environments, highlighting the tension between autonomy and collective responsibility. Satya's study of a digitally oriented pesantren shows how Islamic pedagogical practices are reconfigured to produce entrepreneurial "Muslim Winner" subjects, revealing how moral and religious discipline is translated into professional credibility while simultaneously generating new dependencies. Across these examples, we see radical hope in practice: learners are encouraged to imagine themselves as agents capable of shaping lives and communities beyond existing constraints.

Social Reproduction. Fischer and Fitzpatrick focus on how alternative schooling intersects with global inequalities. Fischer's analysis of nature-based schools in Bali shows how ecological care coexists with the reproduction of transnational privilege, while Fitzpatrick highlights how homeschooling and worldschooling families depend on parental labour and infrastructural support, revealing the hidden structures that sustain supposedly liberatory educational practices. Even here, radical hope is cultivated modestly: participants experiment with equity, care, and sustainability while negotiating the social and economic limits within which they operate.

Future-Making. Hartoto and Wulan Dari examine the cultivation of imaginative and participatory futures. Hartoto's study of the *Sekolah Kepemimpinan Feminis* demonstrates how feminist pedagogies enable young women to reinterpret personal experiences within broader structures of gendered power. Wulan Dari's work on participatory filmmaking shows how visual pedagogy can open spaces for collaborative learning and collective expression while simultaneously raising critical questions about authorship, representation, and power. These practices exemplify radical hope: futures are envisioned not as fixed goals but as ongoing experiments that grow through care, collaboration, and imagination.

In my own ethnographic work on permaculture learning in Timor-Leste, I have approached similar initiatives through the notion of "minor utopias" and "emancipated aspirations" (Stodulka, 2020; 2024; 2026; Stodulka and Lemos, 2026). Rather than grand revolutionary rhetoric, these are modest yet powerful attempts to experiment with alternative ways of living and learning within the constraints of existing social worlds. Studying and learning with permaculture school gardens and permayouth camps, I have explored how translocal networks of educators, activists, and communities collaboratively adapt and localise ecological pedagogies. Through processes of translation and experimentation, ideas about sustainability, food sovereignty, and communal learning travel across borders, seas, and mountain ranges, becoming embedded in specific social and ecological contexts.

Radical hope is present in these spaces, practised through hands in the soil, shared labour, and collective decision-making, demonstrating that futures are cultivated one careful, intentional action at a time.

The resonance of commoning and alternative education becomes particularly visible when viewed alongside contemporary youth mobilisations, refusals, and protests. While the initiatives described in this special issue explore alternative pedagogical spaces, the grievances voiced in the streets remind us that many young Indonesians continue to experience formal education as increasingly commodified and disconnected from their aspirations and struggles. Here, radical hope takes a dual form: it is expressed both in critique and in the experimental, creative work of education. Together, they signal a persistent desire to imagine and enact more just and meaningful futures.

Seen in this light, alternative education becomes less a finished model than an ongoing practice of cultivating possibilities with radical hope. The futures imagined within these spaces remain fragile, partial, and contested. Aspirations for autonomy may generate new dependencies; projects grounded in care may reproduce exclusion; efforts to escape institutional constraints may remain entangled in broader structures of power. Yet these tensions reveal the deeply social and profoundly hopeful nature of educational experimentation. Even in uncertainty, education remains a field where people actively and courageously plant seeds for more just, liveable, and meaningful futures.

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