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Introduction

Global capitalist expansion has resulted in intensive dispossession and exploitation of rural areas across the world (Bernstein, 2010). This process affects peripheral regions in the capitalist core and new frontiers in the Global South. Dynamics in the latter have been particularly visible in recent decades, where various forms of agrarian dispossession and resistance against it emerge, often in a dramatic manner.

This is also true in Indonesia, a middle-income economy with long history of rural contentions. Developmentalist policies in the 1980s and the neoliberal shift in the 1990s (Lucas & Warren, 2013; Robison & Hadiz, 2004) have triggered the explosion of land conflicts and the broader struggle for rural social justice. More recently, the post-authoritarian climate of electoral democracy (1998-present) has provided new opportunities for the rural dispossessed and activists to advocate for agrarian justice.

Despite the shrinking size of rural producers and economic activities, the rural world continues to exert influence on politics and development in contemporary times. For example, in the United States, regions affected by deindustrialization and free trade became the social basis for Trump's rise in 2016 (Edelman, 2021). In Indonesia, oligarchic exploitation of rural resources has hijacked democratic processes in recent years (Jaringan Advokasi Tambang, 2019).

Much of the debate on this phenomenon revolves around causes and consequences of capitalist penetration in the countryside. This includes different types of rural resistance – or non-resistance – from below. The same pattern also appears in recent academic and activist discourses on Indonesian politics, which focus on oligarchic domination and material inequality in democratic politics.

Though appreciated, this conversation overlooks a major question, the elephant in the room: what are the appropriate socio-economic strategies to significantly mitigate, if not challenge, the impacts of rural commodification? In other words, *what are the alternatives to agrarian capitalism*? Going beyond the preoccupation with politics surrounding open agrarian conflicts, this article examines recent experiments with solidarity economy in contemporary rural Indonesia. Solidarity economy can be defined as an amalgam of alternative economic visions and practices that prioritizes democratic participation, community interests, and equality over profit motive and seeks to transform capitalism (Kawano, 2009; 2021). It can be broadly described as an anti/post-capitalist economic project.

By looking at select case studies, this article analyses the limits, achievements, and analytical ramifications of solidarity economy practices in Indonesia. This article proceeds as follows.

First, it addresses shortcomings in two lines of inquiry: agrarian political economy in Indonesia and solidarity economy literature. In the next section, I describe my research methods, case studies, and justification for their selection. Further, I provide a yardstick to assess the performance of selected solidarity economy experiments. Then, the bulk of the article is dedicated to discuss three types of solidarity economy institutions: cooperatives/co-ops, credit union, and community-based school system based on findings from North Bengkulu District, Serdang Bedagai District, and Ciamis District. Finally, the article concludes by reflecting on the extent to which the Indonesian experiment with rural solidarity economy can pave the way for a post-capitalist future.

Analytical Lacunae and Framework

Studies in political processes and agrarian political economy in middle-income countries, including Indonesia, tend to focus on the contour of political and economic domination of the ruling elites. One line of inquiry highlights the oligarchic hijacking of democratic processes (Robison & Hadiz, 2004; Winters, 2011). Others detail the global trend of land and resource grab and the exclusionary mechanisms enabling such processes (Hall, et al., 2011; White, et al., 2012). These conversations resonate with the Indonesian context. Academic and civil society discourses in Indonesia are replete with references to "oligarchy," "land grabbing," and other related terms.[1]

Peasants and a variety of rural actors, such as rural workers, fishers, and indigenous peoples, have forged a vibrant resistance against this project of class domination for decades (Borras, 2009, p. 11). Indonesia too has been part of this rejuvenated wave of agrarian activism since the 1980s (Author's published book chapter). The literature on this topic, however, overemphasise the contentious expressions of rural activism. What is lacking is a deeper elaboration of *non*-contentious forms of activism against agrarian capitalism.

In this regard, the growing scholarship on solidarity economy can present a meaningful intervention to the oligarchy- and dispossession-centred discourses on agrarian capitalism and resistance against it. A way out of this politico-intellectual impasse is possible. For starter, two interrelated notions need further clarification: solidarity economy and economic democracy. As mentioned previously, solidarity economy or social solidarity economy is an alternative, democratic economic philosophy-cum-practice against both market capitalism and authoritarian statism (Kawano, 2009; 2021).[2] Quite similarly, economic democracy refers to a similar paradigm. To put it simply, economic democracy refers to the democratization of profit-making, workplace relations, and economic resources. It seeks to expand democratic spheres beyond formal political democracy and civil liberties.

Existing studies have underlined varied aspects of economic democracy. This includes democratic control of the market by the lower classes (Archer, 1995; Panayotakis, 2011), workers' control and ownership of firms (Azzellini & Ness, 2011; Wolff, 2012), the trinity of

[1] For some representative examples on Indonesian language debates on this matter, see Bachriadi and Wiradi (2011) and Mudhoffir and Pontoh (2020).

[2] For a brief conceptual history of solidarity economy, see Miller (2009).

extensive welfare regime, compensation for women's work, and capital restriction (MacEwan, 1999), and the promotion of alternative institutions such as co-ops and credit unions (Jossa, 2018; Malleson, 2014).

Since macroeconomic policies such as welfare regime, taxation, and capital restriction since these policies are generally implemented and influenced by capital controllers and power holders, I therefore focus on solidarity economy or economic democracy initiatives practices by rural social movements *at community level,* especially the *internal dynamics* of these initiatives.

As stated earlier, the scholarship on solidarity economy offers necessary correctives to the oligarchy- and dispossession-centric discourses in Indonesia's agrarian politics. This is done in two ways. First, it shows possible ways to dismantle the *economic* power of oligarchs and other elite actors benefitting from appropriation of rural resources and labour, including flexible blueprints or models for anti/post-capitalist economy. This complements existing scholarly and activist debates on *political* strategies to tame oligarchy and its supporting elites. Secondly, owing to its political sympathy, the literature on agrarian activism in Indonesia tends to give too much focus on contentious forms of rural resistance.[3] This approach, unfortunately, neglects the diverse expressions of solidarity economy experiments and how they push for agrarian justice.

To evaluate the achievements and limits of rural solidarity economy in Indonesia, I develop a set of criteria based on crucial works by Erik Olin Wright (2010) on post-capitalist transition, Tom Malleson (2014) and Bruno Jossa (2018) on economic democracy, and Silvia Federici (2020) on the centrality of housework or unpaid care work by women in modern capitalist economy. Using Wright's typology of social transformation, Indonesia's solidarity economy experiments can be categorised as *interstitial* transformations which advances lower-class empowerment by building alternative social institutions as opposed to *ruptural* transformations which aspires to create "new institutions of social empowerment through a sharp break" often via revolutionary or insurrectionary methods (Wright, 2010, p. 303).

This "long march through the institutions" should satisfy, ideally, the following conditions: 1) a democratic arrangement of workplace relations, communal ownership, and profit allocation, through which members of an economic unit participate as *independent workers* rather than employees under traditional firms, 2) a conscious economic vision to challenge capitalist market hegemony in cooperation with relevant social movements, 3) the establishment of a network of alternative economic institutions capable of challenging the capitalist class, and 4) socialisation of care work (Federici, 2020; Jossa, 2018; Malleson, 2014). To this I would also add another requirement: the ability to maintain production of economic enterprises or operation of social institutions at a sustainable level. In short, these are the criteria used to evaluate the trajectories of Indonesia's solidarity economy endeavour.

[3] One notable exception is Edwards's (2013) work on Indonesia's organic agriculture movement.

Methods and Case Selection

In this article, I employ several methodological strategies. First, I provide a general picture of solidarity economy initiatives in post-authoritarian Indonesia. Then, I look at several case studies to analyse the origins, internal dynamics, and performance of the three types of solidarity economy institutions. Subsequently, I put these case studies in the broader context of agrarian justice struggle and in conversation with similar local experiments in Indonesia. These case studies are selected as illustrative lessons to highlight the gains and challenges of solidarity economy experiments. Strategically utilising these illustrative or critical cases allow us to make an informed generalization based on a limited number of diverse cases (Flyvbjerg, 2001, pp. 77-80).

My district case studies are as follows: 1) a peasant co-op initiative by the Serikat Tani Bengkulu (STaB) – Bengkulu Peasant Union – in North Bengkulu District, 2) a fisher co-op called the Koperasi Serba Usaha (KSU) Muara Baimbai in Serdang Bedagai District and 3) a school system in Ciamis District (West Java) established by the Serikat Petani Pasundan (SPP) – Pasundan Peasant Union. Each category of solidarity economy experiments was initiated by local peasant or fisher unions. Interview and observational data for this article are based on fieldwork and trips conducted between May 2016 to July 2017 and October 2018 to July 2019 in these districts and Jakarta. My fieldwork allows me to unveil different forms of class politics, in this case community struggle via solidarity economy, through concrete examples (Mezzadri, 2021, pp. 6-7). Relevant secondary materials, such as media and NGO reports, are consulted to supplement the primary materials.

These experiments stemmed from the same background, namely the struggle for community rights and livelihood. However, they produced different results. Fishers in Serdang Bedagai have been able to maintain a profitable, democratic, and sustainable operation of their co-op and its associated businesses. Peasant communities in Bengkulu, on the other hand, face more challenges to achieve the same level of economic sustainability. Lastly, community schools in Ciamis have shown a possibility for organizing a collective form of care work namely basic education.

Agrarian Capitalism and Countermovement In Indonesia

The development of agrarian capitalism in Indonesia has engendered a variety of responses from the rural populace. Paraphrasing Albert Hirschman's classic argument (1970), different strata of rural producers have three options: "exit" (escaping the interference on their lives), "voice" (express open dissent against it), and "loyalty" (staying within the status quo). However, as the degree of dispossession and exploitation intensifies, voicing socio-economic grievances has become the preferred option for the rural population, especially smallholders and workers in the farming and fishing sectors. In recent decades, this countermovement (Polanyi, 1957) or resistance against the onslaught of market society has emerged to the fore and taken varied forms.

During the long reign of Dutch colonialism, various groups and actors resisted the negative impacts of colonial capitalism. The shift from the highly extractive, plantation-oriented Cultivation System (1830-1870) to a more liberal form of colonial governance called the

Ethical Policy (1870-1942) spurred the growth of anti-colonial movements of different ideological persuasions.[4] A major agenda in their platforms was the emancipation of the peasant masses, then a majority of the Indonesian population. This was implemented through public rallies, cultural strategies, the construction of co-ops and mutual aid societies, and open revolts (Karsono, 2013, pp. 136-137; Kartodirdjo, 1973; Shiraishi, 1990).

In the post-independence period (1945-1965), peasant activism was pursued through a three-pronged strategy: electoral engagement, mass mobilization, and alternative social institutions. The Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI) – Communist Party of Indonesia – was at the forefront of electoral and political struggle for the rural poor. Its two affiliated organizations, the Barisan Tani Indonesia (BTI) – Indonesian Peasants' Front – and the Sarekat Buruh Perkebunan Republik Indonesia (Sarbupri) – Plantation Workers' Union – led the mass struggle for land and worker rights (White, 2015). What is often overlooked was PKI's attempt to create an alternative society through cultural, educational, and economic institutions. One example of that was the elaboration by the party's General Secretary, D.N. Aidit (1963), on the role of producers' co-ops in building socialist economy.

The rise of the developmentalist New Order regime (1966-1998), which started with a bloody anti-communist purge, led to a volte-face in Indonesia's rural development philosophy. The regime replaced populist agrarian policies with state-sponsored, corporate-driven capitalist expansion in agricultural, plantation, and forestry sectors (Bachriadi, 2010, p. 39). This was coupled with the promotion of Green Revolution-style modernization. In response to the excesses of this developmental program, activists of the 1960s generation started their own version of non-socialist, reformist community development projects and entrepreneurship in the countryside, with varying degrees of success (Karsono, 2021).[5]

A new wave of agrarian activism emerged in the 1980s, when a number of development projects benefitting the New Order elites and their allies, such as Kedung Ombo Dam in Central Java and Cimacan golf course in West Java, threatened people's livelihood in affected rural areas (Aditjondro, 1998; Lucas, 1992). In the 1990s, after a long period of tight state control over rural politics, independent local peasant unions started to organize their respective communities (Bachriadi, 2010).

Indonesia's democratization in 1998 opened up opportunities for rural communities and activists to advocate for agrarian justice, especially land rights. Another catalyst for the post-authoritarian agrarian activism was the neoliberal commodification of rural resources in Indonesia, which often materializes in a coercive manner (Hirsch, 2020).[6] This dual political and economic liberalization triggered the mushrooming of national and local peasant unions

[4] The Cultivation System (*cultuurstelsel* or *tanam paksa*) forced local peasants to spare a portion of their land and/or labor time for export-oriented colonial plantations. The introduction of the Ethical Policy regime, the Dutch version of *mission civilisatrice,* ended this practice. For an overview of this shift, see Fasseur (1992).

[5] The early phase of this initiative, which centred around the Lembaga Penelitian, Pendidikan, dan Penerangan Ekonomi dan Sosial (LP3ES) – Institute of Economic and Social Research, Education, and Information – was funded by the German social liberal foundation, Friedrich Naumann Stiftung.

[6] Neoliberalism can be defined as a faith in unrestrained free market as the governing principle of public life through privatisation, deregulation, and financialisation (Harvey, 2007).

and agrarian coalitions (Bachriadi, 2012). To a lesser extent, these changes also facilitated the rise of fishers' groups and movements (author's online article).

Relatedly, a number of rural social movements have advocated and promoted various solidarity economy experiments, most notably co-ops, as alternatives to conventional economic institutions and much-needed additions to traditional unions, community organizations, or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). For example, the Serikat Petani Indonesia (SPI) – Indonesian Peasant Union, the Aliansi Petani Indonesia (API) – Indonesian Peasant Alliance, and the Konsorsium Pembaruan Agraria (KPA) – Consortium for Agrarian Reform have been active in promoting the value of peasant co-ops and providing institutional assistance for local co-ops. [7] Some local communities and organizations have also experimented with organic farming as a sustainable livelihood strategy (Edwards, 2013). Taking one step further, the Komunitas Swabina Pedesaan Salassae (KSPS) – the Salassae Rural Self-Governing Community – in upland Sulawesi have utilized organic farming as a way to lessen the grip of big agribusinesses on local communities.[8] Within the fisher movement, Puspita Bahari, a fisher organization in Demak, Central Java, is recognized as a key advocate for fisher co-ops (Isnawati, 2021).

However, solidarity economy remains as an afterthought for many actors in peasant and fisher movements. One long-time community organizer even claims that it was not until 2010 that solidarity economy building became a key concern for agrarian justice advocates.[9]

The Dynamics of Local Solidarity Economy Experiments

Though the ideational inspiration of solidarity economy can be traced back to the anti-colonial period, its contemporary practices in Indonesia are a rather recent invention. From a critical political economy perspective, these practices can be divided into two categories: productive and social reproductive institutions.[10] The former generates surplus from labour process done by smallholders and rural proletariat, whereas the latter provides the necessary environment for surplus generation. Here, I focus on one type of productive institution –co-op and credit union– and an example of social reproductive institution – community-based school system. These local experiments emerged, in one way or another, as responses to changing conditions of rural political economy and local resource conflict against state and corporate authorities. Using the evaluation criteria outlined in the analytical framework section, the following sections assess the performance of these alternative institutions.

STaB's Co-op Experiment in North Bengkulu

By zooming in into the experience of STaB in North Bengkulu, this discussion presents the numerous internal challenges in initiating and maintaining sustainable operation of a

[7] Personal observations of SPI's public discussion on peasant rights, 27 April 2016 and KPA's public discussion on rural co-ops, 7 April 2017. On API's role, see Aliansi Petani Indonesia (2018).
[8] See also Interview with Armin Salassa, a KSPS organizer, 15 June 2016.
[9] Interview with Anwar "Sastro" Ma'ruf, a senior social movement activist, 19 July 2017.
[10] For extensive discussions on the connection between productive and social reproductive labor, see Bhattacharya (2017) and Wolff (2012, pp. 123-138).

democratic smallholders' co-op. Though the union is well-known for its success in winning struggles for land rights and concessions, it has struggled to convince its members to establish a co-op.

To understand the impetus behind the co-op experiments in Bengkulu, it is important to look at its local agrarian and political contexts. As a resource-rich province, Bengkulu has a long history of agrarian conflicts and rural resistance, dating back to the colonial era and the first two decades of the Indonesian republic (Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 1977; 1983). Under the New Order regime, following the national trend in the 1970s and 1980s, Bengkulu witnessed a worrying rate of commercial exploitation of forest and land commodities for elite and corporate interests.[11]

This development propelled the rise of agrarian coalition between middle-class activists and peasants. Indonesia's democratization in 1998, coupled with the increasing militancy of local activists and peasants and continuing agrarian dispossession, eventually led to the formation of STaB and renewed zeal for agrarian activism in Bengkulu.[12]

In post-authoritarian Bengkulu, land conflict and rural poverty remain rampant. Plantation companies, for example, continue to control vast areas of land (Gunawan, 2003, p. 2). To date, Bengkulu continue to become a playground for local and national elites with vested interests in forest and plantation sectors.[13]

In response to this crisis, STaB advocated for land rights and political representation using direct actions (land occupation and mass protest) and political advocacy (policy lobbying and electoral engagement). The union attempted to establish co-ops in its area of operation as a way to secure communal land ownership and control after winning local land rights struggles.

One of the major episodes of this struggle unfolded in North Bengkulu, where STaB peasant members were able to win 1,265 hectares (ha) of land title that they have controlled through occupation of the disputed plantation estates owned by PT Sandabi Indah Lestari (SIL), a local palm oil company whose partners include Wilmar, a Singaporean agribusiness giant.[14] The source of this conflict was the emergence of absentee estates, when two plantation companies, PT Tri Manunggal Pasifik Abadi (TMPA) and PT Way Sebayur, cultivated their estates in the 1980s and then abandoned their estates in 1994 and 2000 respectively since the companies no longer had financial resources and capacity to run the estates.[15] Seeing this as an opportunity, local peasants, many of them are land-hungry Javanese migrants, started to occupy these estates, a move supported by STaB.[16] But this tranquillity was soon interrupted in 2009 the occupiers head about the planned PT SIL's takeover of the unproductive estates.[17]

[11] Interview with Akar Foundation activists, 1 June 2017.
[12] Interview with Marhendi, STaB's former secretary general, 26 May 2017. See also Bachriadi (2010, pp. 328-335).
[13] Interviews with activists from Akar Foundation, 1 June 2017 and Wawan, a former STaB activist, 26 Mei 2017.
[14] Further details about PT SIL can be found on its company website http://www.sandabi.co.id/
[15] STaB's official letter No. 1/STAB-B-BU/U/01/2014 and interviews with STaB members and activists in North Bengkulu, April 2017. See also Bachriadi (2010, p. 323).
[16] Interview with Suparno, a local STaB peasant leader, 13-15 April 2017.
[17] Interview with Haryono, a local village head, 15 April 2017.

A series of peasant protests eventually erupted in 2012.[18] Multiple demonstrations in North Bengkulu's city centre and negotiations with the local parliament and district head finally led to meaningful concessions from PT SIL. On September 28, 2013, a meeting between representatives from the local community and PT SIL was facilitated by the then district secretary, the late Said Idrus Albar, in which both parties agreed that a promised enclave totalling 1,265 ha located inside PT SIL's estates would be provided for the peasants.[19]

Some leaders, members, and activist supporters of STaB whom I met were aware that the union needs to answer the question of what to do to prevent the commercialization of hard-won land after successful land occupation.[20] STaB had experimented with several solidarity economy efforts, such as producing organic fertilizers and rubber sheet as well as collective cacao farming. But co-op was chosen as the main solidarity economy strategy so that peasants can sell their products – rubber in North Bengkulu – directly to factories, effectively bypassing middlemen. Moreover, co-ops will allow peasant communities to manage a portion of their land – say, 5-10 ha in each community – to fund organizational expenses and significantly limit, if not entirely prohibit, land transactions with corporations or big private buyers. This proposal is not entirely new – even before STaB's formation, migrant peasant households in Bengkulu have implemented such practices with varying degrees.

The union, however, had less success in establishing a functioning co-op, for a variety of reasons. First is the combination of bad timing and the lack of attention given to solidarity economy initiatives. STaB started its co-op experiments across Bengkulu Province in 2007 and received support and training from other organizations, such as API and KPA, but this attempt only lasted until 2008.[21] The fact that the union prioritized its activities for land rights advocacy and campaign to build a new social movement-based party, Partai Perserikatan Rakyat (PPR) – People's Confederacy Party – around the same period explained why its endeavour to build sustainable co-ops did not really take off.[22]

Second, the renewed interest in co-op after the success of land rights struggle in North Bengkulu in 2013 was overshadowed by the aspiration to return to normalcy after years of struggle. Though some participants in the North Bengkulu struggle were eager to experiment with the co-operative arrangement in production, distribution, and profit-sharing of rubber, others were less enthusiastic, preferring to maintain the autonomy of individual households in processing and selling rubber products.[23] Some union members also rejected the proposal to allow STaB to withhold the distribution of their land title certificates so as to avoid large-scale selling of land to companies or rich buyers. Tugiran, a former student activist-turned-STaB community organizer, describes such hesitation in this way, "we proposed that the union keeps the certificates, but the members did not like the idea, so in the end it did not go

[18] Interview with Suparno, 13-15 April 2017.

[19] I obtained a copy of the official meeting minutes signed by the attendants and the district secretary. See also the aforementioned STaB's letter.

[20] Interviews with STaB members and activists, mid-April–mid-June 2017. This paragraph is based on these interviews.

[21] Interviews with Suparno, 13-15 April 2017 and Hari Patono, the incumbent chairperson of STaB, 5-6 May 2017.

[22] On PPR, see Bachriadi (2010, pp. 348-349).

[23] Interview with Suparno, 13-15 April 2017.

through."[24] All in all, economic organizing remains as an afterthought for STaB and its members, eclipsed by what they saw as the more pressing concerns, namely land rights advocacy and party building.

Using this article's analytical lens, it is safe to say that STaB's effort to establish a peasant co-op has been largely unsuccessful. To be fair, the union has been able to instil a populist economic ethos, a notion of land for the tillers and smallholders, among its members and develop a network of alternative political institutions, thanks to its years of land right struggle, popular education, and alliance building. Nevertheless, the actual work of building a peasant co-op was put in the backburner. STaB's unprecedented rise in politics, marked by its sustained peasant mobilizational power until 2013 and successful attempt to assist one of its leading activists, Muspani, in winning a seat in the Dewan Perwakilan Daerah (DPD) or the national senate in 2010, and the subsequent failure to establish PPR left the union's leadership and rank-and-file members exhausted and demoralized.[25] Consequently, the union had little energy to revitalize its co-op project. As mentioned above, conflicting economic preferences regarding the proposed "collectivization" of land title certificates made it even more difficult to bring the project to fruition. STaB's leadership and its activist supporters wanted to push a collective management of land won after a long struggle, but this required the union to have a stronger control over its members' land certificates. This idea did not resonate with the union members since they preferred to maintain a guaranteed livelihood through individual land ownership, especially when there was no guarantee that the co-op experiment, at least in its initial stage, would generate enough profit for all participating members. The once-mighty union had shrewdly utilized its network for its political goals, but found it difficult to transform such network for its solidarity economy endeavour. Recently, STaB held a congress in December 2021 after a period of inactivity (Sahlin & Agustam, 2021).[26] We will see whether the union will revisit its co-op project.

KSU Muara Baimbai in Serdang Bedagai

In contrast to STaB's experience, traditional small-scale fishers in the village of Sei Nagalawan in Serdang Bedagai District, a centre of fisher activism in the district, are more successful in transforming their contentious political struggle into the creation of sustainable and profitable economic democracy via co-op. Formed by the local fishers, KSU Muara Baimbai has been recognized widely as a success story.

The genesis of this co-op began with local struggles for coastal livelihood and resources experienced by the fishers. In the 1980s, the New Order government heavily promoted and invested in the large-scale farming of Asian tiger prawn. As a result, parts of traditional fishing areas in many coastal communities in Sumatra, including Sei Nagalawan, was converted into prawn farms by the government (Adela, et al., 2019, pp. 20-21). Lured by this boom, Sei Nagalawan residents started their own small farms or worked at bigger farms. Alas, the loss from this investment outweighed its profit and benefits for the local community, as the boom

[24] Interview with Tugiran, a former general secretary of the North Bengkulu branch of STaB, 11 June 2017.
[25] Interviews with STaB members and activists, mid-April–mid-June 2017.
[26] As a matter of fact, STaB was rather inactive during my fieldwork.

dwindled and eventually busted. In the words of Sutrisno, a local fisher leader, "we lost our resources and most of the profit went to the rich people."[27]

Another unintended consequence of this unsustainable prawn boom was the rapid loss of mangrove forest and coastal abrasion in the 1990s (Adela, et al., 2019, p. 21). This shocked Sutrisno, his wife Jumiati, and other fishers and motivated them to take matters into their own hands by starting their own community-based mangrove preservation in 1993.[28] Slowly but sure, this initiative became the seed for a vibrant associational life in the village.

The 1998 democratization, which opened up new democratic spaces in North Sumatra Province, afforded new opportunities for Sei Nagalawan residents. In the early years of the democratic period, the residents started to form networks and alliances with middle-class activists and NGOs in Medan, the provincial capital, and other social movements.[29] This led to the formation of Serikat Nelayan Sumatera Utara (SNSU) – North Sumatran Fisher Union – where Sei Nagalawan fishers played an active role.[30] Around the same time, the community started to face other problems, namely the rise of big trawl boats in the fishing industry that deplete fish products and catchment areas for traditional fishers as well as rampant poverty and dependence on high interest moneylenders (Adela, et al., 2019, p. 21; Arrazie, 2020).

Driven by these concerns and rising political consciousness, Jumiati then founded the Muara Tanjung Women's Co-op to democratically manage the production of mangrove-based food products and provide small loans for its members while conserving the forest in 2005.[31] This was a breakthrough after Kayuh Baimbai, a SNSU-affiliated co-op for male fishers in Sei Nagalawan founded in 2000, did not really take off (Adela, et al., 2019, pp. 24-25). Jumiati saw a strong connection between household domestic needs and the larger community interests.[32] Muara Tanjung's early years were though, since members had to rely on their own labour, resources, and money. But over time, community members gradually embraced this initiative and the cooperative now produces a range of mangrove-based snacks, such as chips, tea, syrup, and sweets (Saragih, 2017). This allows women in the village to financially support themselves and their families without depending on their husbands' income.[33]

But a major expansion in the economic operation of the coop came years later. Motivated by the opportunities from beach tourism, Sutrisno, supported by his neighbours and assisted by his NGO friends, decided to try his luck by submitting a proposal for eco-tourism to a social business case competition organised by the British Council in Jakarta.[34] He won this competition and received a grant of IDR 100 million (approximately USD 7000) to develop the eco-tourism business in 2011 (Onrizal, 2016, p. 7). This grant provided the initial capital for the business without financially burdening the community.

[27] Interview with Sutrisno, co-founder of KSU Muara Baimbai, 5 February 2019.
[28] Interviews with fishers in Sei Nagalawan, 5-6 February 2019.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Interview with Sutrisno, 5 February 2019.
[31] Interview with Jumiati, co-founder of KSU Muara Baimbai, 6 February 2019. See also Adela, et al. (2019, p. 25).
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Interview with Sutrisno, 5 February 2019.

In response to the expanding operation of the co-op and community economic activities in the village, the two existing co-ops – Kayuh Baimbai and Muara Tanjung co-ops – were reconstituted as KSU Muara Baimbai in 2012 (Saragih, 2017). As of 2018, KSU Muara Baimbai had 84 members representing female and male fishers (Pusat Inovasi Pelayanan Publik, 2018). To date, the reconstituted co-op has been able to democratically organize its business units and allocate their profit among participating members.

The performance of KSU Muara Baimbai has been impressive, as indicated by its achievements. From its humble beginning as a co-op catering to the daily needs of its members, KSU Muara Baimbai now has five business lines: seafood products, mangrove-based snacks, mangrove conservation, savings and loan, and beach eco-tourism (Saragih, 2017). These units are well-connected with each other, but from my limited observation, the eco-tourism business unit is the most popular and visible among them.[35] These businesses are staffed and operated by the co-op members and their fellow neighbours. For instance, the co-op members maintain the operation of parking area for the beach visitors, organize beach tours for students in cooperation with different schools, and serve as tour guides.[36]

Some statistics show KSU Muara Baimbai's performance in numbers. Thanks to additional income and assistance from the co-op, 40 households had paid off their debts to moneylenders in 2018, freeing them from financial dependence (Ucu, 2018). Furthermore, thanks to the co-op's economic activities and mangrove conservation efforts, the average household income for residents, and not just co-op members, in Sei Nagalawan had increased from IDR 30,000 per day in 2005 to IDR 100,000 per day in 2018 (Arumingtyas, 2018). The co-op's most profitable business unit, eco-tourism, brings in "up to IDR 1000 million per month, resulting in an average of between IDR 4-9 million per month in dividends...as of 2016" for its members (UNDP Indonesia, 2018). Another business line, mangrove leaf chips production, has been able to maintain a steady production rate of 50 kilograms of chips per month (Pusat Inovasi Pelayanan Publik, 2018). For this performance, KSU Muara Baimbai has been invited to give training to other coastal communities, such as training on mangrove food processing for coastal communities in Eastern Aceh (Zemi, 2015), and received technical assistance from activist allies such as academics from the University of Sumatera Utara (USU) and activists from the Jaringan Advokasi Nelayan Sumatera Utara (JALA) – Advocacy Network for North Sumatran Fishers (Onrizal, 2016).[37]

One might be tempted to see KSU Muara Baimbai as another example of neoliberal social entrepreneurship, but I would argue that the co-op represents a local success story of solidarity economy for the following reasons. First, to date, the co-op has been run on a democratic basis. Co-op members are independent small-scale fishers who operate its business units and share the dividends based on democratic deliberation among them.[38] The

[35] Interviews with fishers in Sei Nagalawan and personal observation of the village's economic activities, 5-6 February 2019. A quick google search on the eco-tourism business will reveal the popularity of this community enterprise and media attention towards it.

[36] Ibid. A major market for the eco-tourism business is schools in Medan, the biggest city in Sumatra.

[37] Sei Nagalawan community also works with the Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan (KIARA) – People's Coalition for Fishery Justice – a major fishers' rights NGO.

[38] Interviews with fishers in Sei Nagalawan, 5-6 February 2019.

co-op also facilitates community control over external capital such as the British Council grant. Second, the Sei Nagalawan fishing community remains connected with contentious political struggle, particularly anti-trawl fishing campaign (Arrazie, 2020). In fact, Sutrisno and the Sei Nagalawan residents played a vital leadership role in a massive anti-trawl fishing mass demonstration in Medan in 2018 and fishers' rights advocacy under a new fisher union, the Aliansi Nelayan Sumatera Utara (ANSU) – North Sumatran Fisher Alliance.[39] Sutrisno even attempted to run for a seat in the district parliament to deepen political representation of fishers in Serdang Bedagai in the 2019 general elections, though he did not win.[40] This means that the solidarity economy struggle in Sei Nagalawan is connected to the broader struggle for fishers' rights. Third, from an economic perspective, the co-op has been able to maintain a profitable operation, partner up with various institutions, and slowly expand its network.

Last but not least, the co-op has been able to centre the crucial role of women's work in productive economic activities and care work. This is important because women's contributions to fishing communities is often underappreciated despite the fact that they contribute around half of income of fishing families in Indonesia and work long hours in fishing activities and at home (Koalisi Rakyat untuk Keadilan Perikanan, 2015). By taking women's work seriously, KSU Muara Baimbai has been able to overcome the tensions between productive labour and unpaid care work and by extension gender inequality in the community. Women play a key role in the management and operation of the co-op.[41] Saniah, a female member of the co-op, claims that "through the organization [co-op] I could gain a lot of knowledge and experience....[it] has been successful in changing the mindset of the fisherwomen from relying on their husband's income to generating incomes by themselves" (Umar & Dewy, 2017, p. 14). One could argue that the active participation of female fishers and residents in the co-op's experiment in Sei Nagalawan is one of the key factors that explain its success.

SPP's Community Schools in Ciamis

SPP's activism in Ciamis represents another successful example of solidarity economy endeavour. But instead of a peasant co-op, SPP builds a middle school and an agricultural high school for its members and local peasant families in Ciamis. These schools are part of the larger school system that the union builds in its mass base in the three districts of Eastern Priangan region – Garut, Ciamis, and Tasikmalaya. This initiative can be seen as a way to collectivize or socialize education as care work.

Like many other areas, the roots of agrarian discontents in Eastern Priangan can be traced back to the past. Under colonialism, the Dutch policy of developing the region as export-oriented plantations was met by rebellions by the local peasantry (Aji, 2005, p. v; Bachriadi, 2010, p. 296). In more recent times, the main source of agrarian dispossession in Eastern Priangan was the expansion of corporate plantations, especially that of the Perum Perhutani or State Forestry Corporation (SFC), under the New Order dictatorship (Supriadi, et al., 2005, pp. 14-

[39] Ibid. Essentially, SNSU is reconstituted as ANSU. On the 2018 anti-trawl fishing protests, see Simarmata, (2018).
[40] Interview with Sutrisno, 5 February 2019.
[41] Interviews with female fishers in Sei Nagalawan and personal observation of their mangrove leaf chips production activities, 6 February 2019.

15). After the 1998 democratic transition, this state-backed corporate control of land and forest resources in Eastern Priangan remains powerful (Bachriadi, 2010, p. 297).

Moved by this crisis, local university and high school students started to make an "agrarian turn" and connect peasant concerns with the broader struggle for political and economic reforms in the late 1980s (Aji, 2005, pp. 5-17). This rising political consciousness led to the formation of local student movements in Garut, Ciamis, and Tasikmalaya. This populist politics, coupled with the peasants' demand for agrarian justice and land rights, culminated in the establishment of SPP in 2000.

SPP quickly made a reputation as a leading advocate for land rights in Eastern Priangan. In this context, Ciamis became a major area of agrarian struggle. This was unsurprising, since the majority of peasants in Ciamis who joined SPP were smallholders owning less then 0.5 ha per household (Bachriadi, 2010, pp. 297-298). By 2005, there were 10,000 SPP-affiliated households across villages in Ciamis (Aji, 2005, pp. 35-36; 71-72). In 2006, the union organized a land occupation campaign in almost 8,700 ha of plantation estates across the district (Bachriadi, 2010, p. 294). After some time, this direct action was met by state repression. In mid-2008, the West Javanese Police Force, supported by the provincial government and the regional military command, expelled the peasant occupiers from the plantation estates (Rachman, 2011, pp. 127-130; Tata, 2010).[42]

But this protracted struggle eventually brought a local victory. In 2016, the National Land Agency (NLA) distributed 600 land cerfiticates covering 131 ha of land to peasants in Ciamis and the neighbouring Pangandaran District (Hermansyah, 2016). Additional 495 ha of certificates are scheduled to be issued in the near future (Mongabay, 2019). By 2019 some peasant families in Ciamis have received their certificates, though others were still struggling to get theirs.[43]

The proposal to build a community school system grew out of this context. There was a growing concern regarding the need to train future SPP cadres and provide basic education for children of SPP's members.[44] The SPP community school was created to answer both challenges. This proposal received a wide support from peasants across Eastern Priangan. Starting from early 2000s, SPP started to establish a series of elementary, middle, and high schools in its districts of operation, including Ciamis.[45]

Somad (2021) in his reporting documents the struggle of SPP members in Ciamis to establish their schools. Initially a group of peasants in Pasawahan Village suggested that the union should build a middle school on the ex-plantation land that they have occupied and reclaimed as theirs. The peasants complained that the nearest middle school at that time was not only expensive but also too far away, around 20 kilometres (km) away from the village. In 2004, a makeshift classroom with 20 students from Pasawahan and the neighboring communities was

[42] However, in Banjaranyar Village, the residents were able to negotiate a relatively peaceful settlement with PT Mulya Asli, a rubber company that abandoned its estates, effectively transferring the ownership of 69.59 ha of land to the residents (Ekowati, et al., 2010, pp. 97-98).
[43] Interview with SPP's peasant members, 25-27 June 2019.
[44] Interview with Isak Ramdani, a member of the leadership board of SPP's Ciamis branch, 25 June 2019.
[45] Interview with SPP's peasant members, 25-27 June 2019.

founded, with community organizers and student activists as its teachers. This marked the beginning of SPP-run middle school in the community, but the school only received its official permit of operation in 2005, after the union convinced the Ciamis District Educational Board that the school was a legitimate community initiative. The union then expanded its initiative by building a vocational high school specializing in agriculture in 2007. Both schools are still in operation until now.

A closer look at how both schools operate reveals why this alternative educational system can be considered as a functioning solidarity economy institution. First, the schools have been governed on a democratic basis. SPP and its members have been involved in the operation of the schools since their inceptions and there was a strong support from members in Ciamis to create a community school system.[46] Secondly, most of the schools' resources come from within the Pasawahan residents, who reap the most benefit from this free educational service. The schools received some funding for their initial operation from civil society grants and some sympathetic donors, such as KPA and several agrarian scholar-activists, but for the most part financing and staffing for the schools comes from SPP members.[47] The school budget comes from the union and voluntary donation from union members and local residents and its teaching staffs are consisted of its own graduates who went to college and became teachers and other teachers. Lastly, the schools have been able to operate sustainably since their humble beginnings, with a steady stream of local students, who will then serve as union organizers once they enter college. Teachers come from both inside and outside of the community and both schools provide decent facilities and programs for their students, such as farming laboratory and scouting. In brief, the schools show the possibility to socialize or collectivize a form of care work – in this case, basic education – in a democratic manner.

Community testimonies and vignettes from my visit to Pasawahan illuminate the schools' social impacts and democratic nature. Members of SPP's student wing in Ciamis, the Forum Aspirasi Rakyat dan Mahasiswa Ciamis (FARMACI) – Forum for Students' and People's Voice in Ciamis – told me how the schools played a crucial role in their personal-cum-political trajectories: they went to SPP-run schools, entered college, and then serve as community organizers for SPP.[48] Through their personal milieus as childrens of farmers and political education that they received at schools and from FARMACI, they became politically conscious. Moreover, in one community meeting in Pasawahan that I attended, I witnessed how local SPP members discussed and debated the direction of local land rights struggle and school management. In fact, the vocational school principal, who was still in his 20s, openly disagreed with a community elder, who happens to be his father.[49] These examples demonstrate how the schools provide free and quality education, encourage democratic culture, cultivate an intellectual and political climate among its students and surrounding community, supply a steady stream of new, younger union organisers, and thereby contribute to the union's political struggle.

[46] Ibid.

[47] I have not really explored and confirmed the initial funders of the schools, but it is not a wild guess to speculate that these funders come from the agrarian movement network in Indonesia.

[48] Interviews with FARMACI activists, 25-27 June 2019.

[49] Personal observation of a community meeting in Pasawahan, 26 June 2019.

Situating The Case Studies in The Broader Context

The three case studies have shown multiple trajectories of local solidarity economy experiments in North Bengkulu, Serdang Bedagai, and Ciamis. As shown in the previous section, local communities and social movements in Serdang Bedagai and Ciamis are more successful, compared to their counterparts in North Bengkulu, in establishing and maintaining their respective solidarity economy institutions – co-op and schools.

But several notes are worth mentioning. Let us revisit the analytical yardstick employed earlier. First, so far, both communities in Serdang Bedagai and Ciamis are able to maintain a democratic arrangement of workplace relations, ownership, and profit or benefit allocation of their respective institutions. However, as the size of these experiments grows, maintaining their democratic nature and operation will become more challenging. The often-cited example of Mondragon co-op in northern Spain indicates this dilemma: as Mondragon expands and globalizes, the number of its non-member workers, who have less rights compared to its regular members and are more likely to be laid off, grows substantially, reaching more than half of the total number of workers in the co-op and its businesses (Malleson, 2014, pp. 56-65). The scales of operation of KSU Muara Baimbai and SPP schools in Ciamis are definitely much smaller than Mondragon, but Mondragon's experience should serve as a cautionary tale for the Indonesian experiments. The fact that there is a degree of class differentiation even among rural producers in Java and Sumatra (Habibi, 2022; Pincus, 1996) – the same regions where this article's case studies are located – suggest that the future benefits of solidarity economy projects might be distributed unevenly if local social movements are not attentive to the plight and labour of the most exploited classes in the countryside.

Secondly, while it is true that the Indonesian agrarian movement is generally inspired by an anti-capitalist spirit (Vu, 2009), there might be conflicting ideas and organizing methods in translating the anti-capitalist economic vision into local practices. Recall KSU Muara Baimbai's experience of receiving a British Council grant. Without a conscious commitment to reject donor dependence and intervention and an awareness to use donor funding for merely instrumental purposes, for example, local activists and communities can easily get swayed by various types of donor-driven social entrepreneurship schemes. Fortunately, KSU Muara Baimbai has remained faithful to its principles to date. But future development of solidarity economy experiments in Indonesia requires more than just a vague anti-capitalist populism.

The third point is the question of scaling up these local experiments. So far, KSU Muara Baimbai has developed an effective network of partners, stakeholders, and customers that supports its operation. Effectively, the co-op has created a niche market for itself. SPP's community school in Ciamis has also expanded its operation successfully and becomes part of the larger SPP school system in Eastern Priangan. But the next challenge would be whether these institutions can expand the size of their activities beyond their current areas of operation or connect with similar experiments in other regions.

Fourth, SPP's stalled co-op experiment shows that numerous internal challenges in starting and committing to a solidarity economy project might derail the implementation of such project even in the absence of serious external challenges. During its heydays, STaB had all the

resources and momentum to kick start a co-op project. Alas, much of its energy went to its political experiment, with a mixed result.

The three case studies show that local solidarity economy experiments have yielded some visible and sustainable gains. It remains to be seen, however, whether these experiments can serve as a foundation for an alternative economic system capable of challenging market and oligarchic domination in the Indonesian economy and, in the long run, promoting a post-capitalist social transformation.

Fortunately, these local pockets of solidarity economy are expanding, and there are success stories from other regions as well. In Blitar District, the Paguyuban Petani Aryo Blitar (PPAB) – Aryo Blitar Farmers Association – founded the Pawartaku Credit Union in 2013 as an alternative to the conventional banking system for its members and a way to continue its struggle for agrarian justice after winning its land redistribution struggle. The result has been fantastic. Starting with IDR 50 million as its community-funded initial capital, the co-op had a total fund of IDR 400 million at its disposal and, combined with its members' monthly instalments, a total of IDR 3.8 billion, most of which were circulating among its 786 members in loans as of 2019 (Hasani, 2019). In Demak District, Puspita Bahari has recognised for its success in running a fisher co-op for women fishers in the district since 2008 (Isnawati, 2021). These are just a few of successful solidarity economy experiments in other regions.

Lastly, I would argue that sustainable local solidarity economy efforts seem to combine, to use Wright's (2010, pp. 303-305) typology, interstitial and *symbiotic* transformation strategies. Wright (2010, p. 305) defines symbiotic transformation as a set of strategies that extend and deepen "the institutional forms of popular social empowerment" while helping "solve certain practical problems faced by dominant classes and elites," akin to the reformist strategies in democratizing an authoritarian developmentalist state or promoting social democratic policies in a liberal capitalist state. This is the path pursued by KSU Muara Baimbai, for example, by combining its expansion as a co-op and engagement with the business sector, such as the state-owned PTPN IV for its mangrove conservation program (Nuh, 2021) and the privately-owned PT Aquafarm Nusantara for a tilapia processing training for its members (Simarmata, 2018). Keep in mind, however, that these two-tier tactics, ultimately, are backed by the mobilizational and disruptive power of Sei Nagalawan residents – its ability to conduct contentious politics or quasi-ruptural strategies. In other words, a three-pronged strategy for social and economic transformation.

Concluding Remarks

As I have discussed extensively in the previous sections, the vibrant local dynamics of solidarity economy experiments provide a new vantage point to discuss about agrarian politics in contemporary Indonesia. It is hoped that the findings I share in this article can provide an addition, an intervention, and even a corrective to the dispossession- and oligarchy-centred conversations on political processes and rural development in post-authoritarian Indonesia.

The experience of communities and movements in North Bengkulu, Serdang Bedagai, and Ciamis shows the divergent trajectories of local solidarity economy experiments in areas with a relatively similar background, that is, areas where rural resource conflicts and struggles for

social justice emerged. Though external challenges to the livelihood of these communities do matter, local agency matters too. When solidarity economy and the broader economic democracy goal are not put as a main agenda for rural transformation, that the chance for local solidarity economy projects to survive is rather slim. This explains STaB's lack of success in establishing a peasant co-op in North Bengkulu. In contrast, KSU Muara Baimbai in Serdang Bedagai and SPP-run schools in Ciamis show that a conscious, committed effort to build solidarity economy institutions will address the needs of their mass base and local communities and pay off in the long run. These contrasting trajectories also show that rural social movements have to see both political advocacy and solidarity economy works as integral, interconnected parts of their overall political project.

Several themes concerning studies on solidarity economy and economic democracy have not been fully explored and discussed in this article. This includes the centrality of collective care work for any viable conception of solidarity economy and economic democracy, the intersection between solidarity economy and other types of liberation projects, such as women's liberation and indigenous people's rights, and the solutions that solidarity economy projects can offer to counter the lure of market citizenship, for instance. The last point is particularly relevant, since in the absence of economic alternatives, as Tania Li (2014) has warned us, smallholders will be willing to take part in capitalist commodity transactions despite the possible risk of dispossession through market exchange. Future research should take up these topics.

Finally, lessons from the Indonesian experience will enrich the ongoing debates on solidarity economy, economic democracy, and post-capitalist transitions. I hope this article can provide a different portrait of solidarity economy experiments in the Global South, go beyond a preoccupation with examples in the Global North, and integrate a decolonial sensibility in the study of solidarity economy.

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