

# Beyond the Graveyard Gates: A Tale of Resilience, Hope and Solidarity

## The Unconventional Home

In the heart of Jakarta's bustling capital city, tucked away from the glimmering skyscrapers and busy streets, lies an extraordinary community that few know about—a slum nestled amidst the shadows of a Chinese graveyard. Here, where the living coexists with the memories of the departed, three young girls, Maria, Siti, and Rani, (names changed to hide their true identity) weave a remarkable story of optimism and resilience.

The families of Maria, Siti, and Rani were part of the rural exodus from various corners of Indonesia to Jakarta, seeking the allure of better opportunities and a brighter future. However, as the city's promises



Figure 1: Tomp stone outside the houses.  
Image courtesy of NSD.

remained unfulfilled for many, they found themselves trapped in the cycle of poverty and desperation. The Chinese graveyard, a gift from a benevolent Chinese foundation to the slum dwellers, became an unlikely sanctuary—a place to call home amid the graves.

To the outside world, the graveyard is a somber reminder of mortality, but to Maria, Siti, and Rani, it held a different meaning. They see it as more than just a final resting place—it is a land of possibilities. Amidst the tombstones and crumbling graves, they envision a dancing floor, a playground, and a sanctuary of hope.

## Understanding the Jakarta Urban Poor.

As a team from the Nusantara School of Differences, we had the privilege of spending time with these residents residing at the Chinese grave yard as this was part of our activities on the NSD schedule, this is how I and my friend Dhia met these exceptional young girls. Walking hand in hand with them through the narrow pathways of the slum, we ventured into the depths of their dreams and aspirations.

Maria, a bright and compassionate soul, dreamed of becoming a doctor. Her heart overflowed with the desire to heal the sick and bring comfort to the suffering. Siti, adorned with creativity and skillful hands, aspired to be a talented tailor, weaving stories through her fabrics. Rani, the youngest of the trio, was a spirited and courageous dreamer. She envisioned herself as a bold policewoman, determined to uphold justice and protect her community.

Their dreams extended beyond the boundaries of the graveyard, reaching out to the world beyond. Learning English has become a focal point for them as they recognized its power in connecting with people from diverse backgrounds. They saw language as a bridge to a better future and dedicated themselves to mastering it. They both shared to me and my friend that they scored each 80% in English.

## Solidarity with The Community

The graveyard community, once fractured by adversity, was now bound together by hope and shared aspirations. This was also because of the effort of a local organization by the name Sanggar Anak Akar.

The organization played a pivotal role, linking the community to opportunities like education and health and nurturing the dreams of the children. Here, education is not just a pursuit of knowledge but a lifeline to a better tomorrow. They change community from children perspective.

Despite the harsh realities of poverty, the families in the slum have refused to succumb to despair. Their pride and dignity shone through as they embraced hard work and resilience. There were no outstretched hands asking for charity from us, but rather, a collective determination to build a brighter future.

As our time in the day drew to a close, we left the graveyard community with nothing but a story to share and a different perspective towards life. The story of Maria, Siti, and Rani is a celebration of life amidst death—a powerful reminder that optimism and hope can flourish even in the most unexpected places.



*Figure 2: Maria, Siti and Rani showing us the larger graves where they do their dancing and teenage plays.*

*Image courtesy of NSD*

### **Embracing the Half-Full Lens**

Being an Asset-Based Community Development consultant, I admired the story of these three girls, Maria, Siti, and Rani. Their journey revealed the extraordinary strength of the human spirit. Their unwavering optimism and dreams taught us that adversity need not define us. Instead, it can serve as fertile ground for boundless aspirations to take root.

Their story transcends the confines of the slum and touched our hearts and I hope it can touch those beyond borders. Through their eyes, we learn to see beauty where others might find despair. They showed us that a graveyard could be a home, a dance floor, and a sanctuary of hope.

As we carry their story with us, let it be a reminder that life's challenges can be faced with courage and resilience. We, too, can choose to see the half-full glass and paint a future adorned with the colors of optimism and hope. Maria, Siti, and Rani are not just girls from a graveyard community; they are beacons of inspiration, guiding us to embrace the beauty of life in all its complexities and differences.

### **The Clever Ways to Construct Ideas (Inspired by G.W.F. Hegel's Philosophy)**

In his seminal work "Philosophy of Rights," G.W.F. Hegel delves into the exploration of rights, morality, and ethical systems through the lens of objective truth, presenting a comprehensive system based on meticulous exposition. Hegel's method involves presenting a thesis, followed by its contradiction, or antithesis, and then synthesizing the two opposing ideas into an innovative new perspective.

During our time spent with Maria, Siti, and Rani, we were struck by their clever and insightful way of thinking. We observed them engaging in a game where they divided themselves into two groups, one called "Fried Rice" and the other "Satay." Remarkably, they approached everything with a commitment to see things from different perspectives, engaging in debates while sitting on tombstones.

An intriguing example of their creative thinking emerged during one of these debates when the Fried Rice Group expressed their dislike of being objects in photography, while the Satay Group preferred to be photographed. Unconsciously, the girls started building an argument titled "the downside of photography versus the benefits of photography." They passionately debated this topic for days on end, never arriving at a definite conclusion. Instead, they would continue the debate each time they met again.

In Hegel's book of thought, these remarkable girls exhibited the traits of creative thinkers. Their approach to debating and exercising their minds mirrors the constructivist thinking of university students. In essence, they were creating a university within the graveyard community.

### **In the lens of Differences**

From the history of the community and when they began living at the grave yard, it was very clear that the Chinese graveyard community had made the cemetery a home and they were not intending to move out anytime soon, in fact their worry was what would happen if the graveyard is repossessed back by the Chinese foundation. From the community response, it's no longer merely a place to survive, it becomes a place to thrive—a forever home where dreams came to life.

The once-dilapidated houses on the graves were now vibrant and welcoming, a testament to the resilience and resourcefulness of the families. The graveyard, once seen as a place of sorrow, was now a symbol of hope and triumph over adversity.

The impact of culture and differences extends beyond the boundaries of the graveyard. The children, like Maria, Siti, and Rani, are provided with a safe haven to not only embracing their uniqueness but also exploring their passions freely. Here, the children are not restricted by their backgrounds or beliefs; instead, they are encouraged to pursue their dreams without fear of judgment.

The graveyard continues to provide a safe haven for children to embrace their uniqueness and explore their passions. Its impact extended beyond academics, nurturing emotional intelligence and cultivating empathy among the students.



As Maria, Siti, and Rani enter their teenager hood, they carry their dreams and optimism with them. Their journey is not only transforming but also in another sense they are inspiring the community in countless other ways.

The best thing we can do as outsiders is to be in solidarity with them. To feel the oneness of humanity and see ourselves in them unless otherwise we are activists who have come to provide them a better home beyond the graveyard.

*Figure 3: The unused graveyard land where more people are planning to occupy as the numbers continue increasing at the graveyard.*

*Image courtesy of NDS.*

## **A Legacy of Hope**

The story of Maria, Siti, and Rani lives on as a beacon of hope in the hearts of those who are fortunate enough to be a part of their journey. Their resilience, optimism, and determination has taught us an invaluable lesson about the power of dreams and the strength of the human spirit.

Their story reminds us that even in the darkest of places, hope can bloom, and dreams can take flight. It is a celebration of the human capacity to overcome challenges and create a brighter future for ourselves and others.

Beyond the graveyard gates, the legacy of Maria, Siti, and Rani lives on—an enduring reminder that no matter where we come from or the obstacles we face, we have the power to turn our dreams into reality. Their remarkable journey continues to inspire us all to see life through the half-full lens, embracing optimism and hope as we navigate the complexities of existence.

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