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Anarchism, History and Movement in the Philippines

a3yo

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In March 2012, we had the chance to meet some anarchists from the local infoshop and mindsetbreakerpress in manila, the capital of philippines. We talked to them about their general situation and about one campaign against gentrification and squatting in the national park. We publish parts of interviews and background information.

Early history of anarchism in the philippines

(following some parts of the article “Anarchy in the R.P.” from the newspaper “gasea” #1)

The analysis below is a historical rereading of the archipelago based on a non-hierarchical and nonstatist lens. It is an attempt of the editors to see a shared perspective in history.

There is evidence that anarchism was already present in the Archipelago long ago. Primitive communities from coastal to upland flourished and utilized an autonomous and decentralised political system that facilitated proliferation of highly diverse cultures and lifestyles. Our ancestors did engage in local warfare and hostilities, but not to dominate or establish central power to rule the archipelago in uniformity. The spanish forces were defeated by Lapu Lapu, but his victory proved to be temporary. But spontaneous and autonomous resistance ensued; it plagued the 300 years of Spanish occupation.

The incident on the 20th of february 1872 was one of the earliest instances of direct actions in the archipelago. Seven Spanish officers were killed in a mutiny in Cavite Naval Shipyards.

some notes on US politics history

After the Spanish had been driven out of the Philippines in 1898 by a combined action of the United States and the Filipinos, Spain agreed to “cede” (that is, sell) the islands to the United States for \$20 million. But the Filipinos, who had already proclaimed their own independent republic, did not take kindly to being treated like a plot of uninhabited real estate. Accordingly, an American force numbering at least 50,000 proceeded to instill in the population a proper appreciation of their status.

Thus did America’s longest lasting and most conspicuous colony ever come into being. [...]

By early 1950, the United States had provided the Philippines with over \$200 million of military equipment and supplies, a remarkable sum for that time, and was in addition to the construction of various military facilities.

The Philippines was to be a laboratory experiment for this unconventional type of combat. The methods and the terminology, such as “searchanddestroy” and “pacification”, were later to become infamous in Vietnam.

[“Killing Hope U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II”, William Blum, Zed Books London 2003].

The history of diliman commune

The barricade is not only really a physical obstruction but a symbol of protest. The physical barricade could be and was easily destroyed by police forces. The symbolic barricade is not so easily destroyed as its physical counterpart. It is a sign of dissent and discontents.

The Diliman Commune is an uprising led by students, faculty members and residents of the University of the Philippines, Diliman (UPD), together with transport workers, on February 19, 1971, in protest of the three centavo increase in oil prices during the Marcos administration.

The historic protest action was led by the UPD Student Council, the Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan (Democratic Association of the Youth, or SDK) and various fraternities, student organizations, faculty unions and community organizations.

(http://en.wikipilipinas.org/index.php?title=Diliman_Commune)

anarchism in philippines and community building

Transnational connections are important for anarchism. They have always been. After all, a key notion of anarchism is its opposition to the nation state. Solidarity across borders and the desire to eventually eradicate these borders are inherent in the anarchist idea.

Anticolonial community building is necessarily a multilateral affair. It cannot be done by a single party alone. It has to involve everyone. Of course it is of utter importance for activists from the global North to refrain from “leading” this process and to listen very carefully to the wants and intentions of their comrades.

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However, they cannot passively wait for others to singlehandedly make the changes either.

Unjust economic and social relations can only be turned into just economic and social relations if everyone changes. It will never be possible to turn everyone into masters, and it is hardly desirable to turn everyone into slaves the goal must be to abolish both the master and the slave.

(“gasera” #1, article by gabriel kuhn)

interview with anarchists from the philippines

a3yo: Ok, lets start with the interview. What kind of projects and groups exist in then philippines?

MB(1): As far as i know there are two infoshops in the philippines. befor there were three but now only two. The one social centre and infoshop exists close to manila, island of luzon and the other in davao, mindanao is also run by an anarchist.

We have a project right now called “mindsetbreaker” press and distro. we produce and publish anarchist material. The mobile anarchist school is starting this summer in 2012 for spreading information from an anarchist perspective in the local neighbourhood, commu nity and presenting at univer sities.

Another project which is not yet formalised group, but we are trying to work on that, is the copwatch. This is focussing on documenting police vio lence, harrasment and abusion of people. Also it is about confronting the public with these issues and use different actions and demonstrations to rise awareness. Maybe Mindsetbreaker(2) can add something

MB(2): With our project mindsetbreaker, we are focussing on local information and propaganda. It is very important for us to adress alternatives to the people, because we are not so many. We have a journal called “gasera” and reproduce also a magazin called “ecodefence” from our comrades in minda nao. We copy and distribute not only local but also international to some people by mail. We want to encourage locals to claim their rights and want to show, how anarchism works in our local context and what it means to us here in the philip pines.

a3yo: When i talked to you earlier, you mentioned also an anarchist gathering in the philippines recently and a local anarchist network in metro manila. What about these things?

MB(1): There is a informal network called LAN, "local autonomous network" with not only anarchist groups. This network existed some years before, but people went out, so we made a new one.

We try to make common activities and organised a first gathering in december of 2011 and a series of this after. the topic we discussed about was the political history of the philippines and a friend, who wrote a local analysis presented his paper about archipelagic confederation.

The second gathering was in dabao about food not bombs. The third was a workshop with a film about the struggling anarchist communities in indonesia and japan, the fourth about the rise of the postleft.

The fifth will be held here in manila in march 2012 about gender equality. All activities, meetings and discussions orga nised by LAN are an attempt to strengthen the network, to make creative actions and to deepen analysis and to under stand situation locally and internationally.

We hope that the LAN and its different groups will continue to work against the state and corporate domination.

a3yo: what would you say are the most important topics for your daily work and why? you said all ready police brutally is one, what else is going on in your local context?

MB(1): We want also to destroy the totalitarian left and their ideology. because they are really influencial, the statist communist and socialists. We have tree enemies here, the capitalism, the state and the authoritarian left. They are communists, the marxists and maoists, who believe in their communist state and this is very important for us to discuss these things and why to criticize this movement. Not to impose against them but to give information what is wrong. They are doing the same as the state. also the poverty is an important topic and equal distribution of food. we organise food not bombs and also free markets with goods and everything that is for people important, who cannot we organise free market and food and everything important for people who cannot afford. i would say that is my main focus, i want to work on poverty, against police and making some alternatives and confront capitalism, state and the authoritarian left.

a3yo: what about right wing movements, you have maybe also fascists and fundamentalist and religious people, don't you have a struggle against right wing?

MB(2): For me it is not really a topic but for some of us might be. maybe this kind of issue about religious fascist is in other parts of philippines more present. for us, we focus more on these three enemies, the capitalism, the state and the communists.

So the national park development agency gave a permission to the big business and we support the vendors, who have a small livelihood. But it is still their struggle, so they decide how far they can go and how the resistance looks like.

We as local autonomous network support them through our presence at the place. At the moment, the place has allready a wall, constructed by the national park development agency to not directly evict but to make problems to the vendors. Because with the wall in front they cannot sell anything. The vendors are still inside the place but it is hard now because there is a wall. They cannot sell anything and we think the management are killing them slowly. They do not directly evict them, but they make a wall and cut the electricity and water. This tactic is slowly killing the livelyhood of the people. We decided to still be on the vendors side to support them with their struggle so that's it.

a3yo: We are going to meet them so we can talk about this later personally.

a3yo: We are here in the park now to learn about the vendors struggle. What is the conflict about?

vendor: Right now the director of the national park development want to force us to leave this place for his own interest.

And this interest is to commercialize this public place. And this is against the law.

a3yo: When did they started this? I see they put a fence here, things like this?

vendor: I think it is for three weeks, almost three weeks. And they cut our electricity and our water so that we do not have any chance to live.

a3yo: And did they tell you anything, why they are doing this?

vendor: Their reason is to change this area, for the gentrification of the park. They want to force us to go to another location to work as vendors.

a3yo: Ok, so they did not tell you anything, they just came and put a fence?

vendor: They informed us, i think a couple of days before that we have to evacuate this area. After that, without giving a permission to them, they just put the fence.

a3yo: Hmm, and what is your plan right now, what are you doing against them?

vendor: Right now our plan is to make a trial against them, a court battle perhaps, but with ground battle, you know what i mean? Ground battle, we have to go to lawyer, give our reasons and so on. Why we are against their plan to evacuate this area.

a3yo: Ok, i wish you all the best with that. Thank you. D: Thank you, too.

Towards an archipelagic reconfiguration of social space

In a brief online article by Filipino anarchist writer, Bas Umali (2006, p. 5), a startling proposition is made; one calling for the dismantling of the Philippine nationstate and the implementation of an 'archipelagic Confederation' in its place. Umali's (2006) vision is presented as a stateless, anarchist alternative to the state socialist goal of 'National Democracy' as proposed by José Maria Sison, the founder of the Communist Party of the Philippines and principal theorist of the NDM. An archipelagic confederation would, in Umali's (2006, p. 18) words, be 'a structure that connects and interlinks politically and economically every community in the archipelago', without the need for a centralised state. It would consist of networks of autonomous villages (barangays), together comprising regional assemblies in which translocal coordination could take place. These regional assemblies, in turn, would constitute an archipelagowide assembly. Importantly, this vision balances local autonomy with regional solidarity and coordination. The local is not disregarded or deemed subservient to the national, as is the case with the nationstate. The goal is one of constructing heterogeneous affinities between autonomous localities, not one of enforcing homogenous conformity to a higher centralised authority.

from "gasera" #1, Umali, B. (2006, April 26). "Archipelagic Confederation: Advancing Genuine Citizens' Politics through Free Assemblies

the case of the vendors in national park, manila

a3yo: We talked about a project related to housing and vendors.

Maybe you can say in a few sentences what it is about and how the situation looks like?

mindsetbreaker: We have an ongoing campaign against eviction. We support them since some weeks, because a friend of ours asked for help, her family are vendors and involved. Approximately 30 of them will lose their livelihood if this eviction happens.

The local autonomous network decided to support and give solidarity to these people against eviction. The eviction was proposed by the national park development agency, it is a governmental agency, related to department of tourism. This agency wants the vendors to be out of the national park to give priority to the big businessmen to make their business.

a3yo: can you shortly explain, why the communists are very strong in the philippines?

MB(1): why they are strong? because the authoritarian left is influenced by the maoists. you see china is near to the philippines so most of the neighbouring countries like us have a strong maoist communist and marxist movement. because of that 35 years ago, they came to the philippines and since the 70ies they try to destroy the current state and enforce a maoist communist state like china. they are very strong here and they believe in the war, which is one of the strategies of the maoists to make a communist state.

a3yo: another question about your project, the mindset breaker, why did you start it and how does it work?

MB(2): We started and focus on the neighbourhood and try to encourage more selforganisation. also we work with artists and give people access to the infoshop. we raise donations for getting sustainable and be in good contact to locals. one example is the food not bombs group in makati (a city which is part of metromanila) as they started their activities after a young boy had been killed on the street by police while he was taking things from the rubbish. Because of this shocking situation they concentrate now on the topic of police brutality and mindsetbreaker is there to help them to network. It is not only about anarchism but more open. we try to reflect on how to build networks. Other initiatives like students, artists and musicians and some cultural and environmentalists keep contact to us and it is a very good development for us as a struggling collective. They can not only be in touch with theoretical concepts, but experience how anarchism works in daily life. I want also to be clear that you have to live anarchism and no system can do that for us. It is about how we organise and how our practice looks like, a very political but also personal thing. for starting alternatives we get really involved in discussions and organising workshops and events but we aim later on for a space we can decide on and on sustainable economy and we are critical about the environment, too. This is connected to our issue to raise awareness. Not much people in the philippines are thinking seriously how to address the daily oppression by sexism, racism and homophobia. Also disability and ageism is not very much reflected, but all these things are important to us. Other issues are the poverty and the ecological destruction. we confront these things. did i get your question? that is our work and why we are here. to organise and to inspire and motivate other people and help them participate and selforganise.

a3yo: you told me something about a project called mobile school, can you say something more about that?

MB(2): the mobile anarchist school project is how we call it, we just started it. it is an attempt to give awareness to the people. we will make workshops in universities that we have contact and also in the local anarchist network in general in the philippines and in the communities in taguig where our food not bombs makati is organising free markets. we have good contacts there in squatters communities and made friends there.

a3yo: taguig, is this close to manila?

MB(2): yes, taguig city is part of manila, maybe one hour from the centre. The people there squat for living and they are very poor, collecting things from the rubbish to sell.

Food not bombs and local anarchist network is in good contact with squatters there and organising. Recently, since some months we started regular cooking there and we made art workshop for the kids there with our friends who are artists. We also organised free market and asked friends around to collect used material and clothes for the ones who need it. We give it to our friends, the squatters. The squatters are very happy about our actions and then they want us to come allways. That is one of our ideas for the infotour we start in august or september at the universities and communities in taguig and sokak, which is also a part of manila close by, where we have contacts to people and where our documentary team is based, which is part of our project. So that's the thing.

From august to december we make the infotour and we prepare four papers for that about the local situation on anarchist basis. We think that this, as noncompromising anarchists, who do not want any mediation of any parties and personals, very important to publish our own material. we will publish some about history, radical economy, radical ecology and one about gender. This is the project for now until july.

a3yo: ok, you said something about this squatting communities, for european it might be interesting, are there lot's of squatters communities here in philippines, is it very common to squat or is this community you have contact to very special and single?

MB(2): Yes i think squatters is very common, but the squatters are all doing it because of the housing. And all of this spaces are squatted because the people get deprived from their home because of the state or companies have plans to remove their houses and then they squat. Especially in manila and the cities. Or they come from the rural areas because they have been deprived there and move to the city to find a better life and these are the main reasons for people to squat. Maybe related to the squatters in europe, i heard there are lot of them very politicized and making there own houses and social centres and that. Not here, the people just take what

they need for their housing and for the accomodation of their children and family. The political consciouse level is not that strong. But when we went to squatters communities and help them and make friends with them they are also surprised and want to know about social issues and they also think that we are also a kind of charity programm. And then we said to them, we are not, we are anarchist and we just came to show solidarity, like that. So that's the squatters here in the philippines. And a lot of people are homeless, not only squatters but in general a lot of people.

a3yo: so my last question is about general view on society. Where is your perspective, where are the next steps to change society? For the next years or something?

MB(2): About the society. From my personal perspective our main struggle is to connect with society and inform and reach out. To reach out about the critical thinking. That's our first thing and how society and management of capital, colonisation and process of the problem was going. I cannot really say how we can manage to change society, it is just a matter how to get in contact to other people. And how we can inspire them and confront them with our ideas. There is no clear utopia or this is good and this is very good. I think at this time, we as anarchists have internal discussion how to do changes and practically speaking we make this mobile school to make propaganda and maybe to make next year kind of alternative structure like making a farm, living in the forest or a cooperative but it is really a hard struggle for us, we do not have much. And all our capacities, we have to inform people and all our activities we make the daily stuff and further on it is still a question. I just think positive.

a3yo: Yes, ok. Thank you very much.

Mindsetbreaker Press

Mindsetbreaker Blog (Old): <http://mindsetbreakerdistro.blogspot.de/>

Mindsetbreaker Blog (New): <http://mindsetbreakerpress.blogspot.de>

About anarchism on the philippines: <http://325.nostate.net/?s=philippines>