

Indonesia's new anarchists

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On the night of 22 March 2011, bricks smashed the windows of a McDonald's branch in Makassar. A note was left by the attackers: 'We are aware of what you multinationals have done to the people of Kulon Progo, Takalar, Bima, and other places. We are angry and we'll do more!' Naming places where farmers have resisted large mining projects, the note and the smashed windows seemed to be an expression of local grievances. Three days later, police in Makassar found a note near a scorched ATM owned by BCA (Bank Central Asia): 'We don't want to hurt anyone, destruction of property is not violence! The state, the military, police and capitalists are the real terrorists!' The note was signed by a group calling itself the 'Got is Tot (sic) [God is Dead, in German] Insurrectionary Front'.

It seems likely that police investigators in Makassar missed the Nietzsche reference, but even without a grasp of anarchist philosophy, the radical political motivations of this direct action were not lost on the provincial police force. 'The perpetrators set fire to the ATM to incite terror', a police spokesperson was quoted as telling the media. 'They broke into the ATM machine and left a letter carrying their message of terror'.

Two weeks later, another BCA ATM was burned in Manado, North Sulawesi. Notes were found in which the 'International Conspiracy for Revenge' claimed responsibility. 'We have become sick and tired of all the standard methods that are never listened to. There is no more reason to remain passive and not counter-attack. This is WAR!' Two months later, in June 2011, police found notes scattered near a torched BNI (Bank Negara Indonesia) ATM in Bandung, with an almost identical message to the Makassar and Manado attacks that concluded, 'with this statement we claim to join the FAI [Informal Anarchist Federation], Indonesian Section.' Insurrectionary anarchism had arrived in Indonesia.

Since the fall of the New Order, anarcho-punk collectives, such as Marjinal and Taring Babi, have become the public face of anarchism in Indonesia. Mostly poor, urban youths flock to these communities in cities like Jakarta, Bandung and Yogyakarta, and anarchist ideas are buried beneath the punk fashion, music and mild social activism they promote. However, for serious anarchists the Indonesian anarcho-punk scene has become far too mainstream. 'Bandung is not like it used to be. The punk-scene became commercialised and everyone 'sold out'', complains one non-punk anarchist. Designing distro (independent label) shirts and throwing concerts in Bogor is simply not the kind of stuff that will bring down the system.

A new breed of Indonesian anarchists views the punk scene as little more than a harvesting ground ripe with angry youths partially socialised into anarchist ideas and symbols. As one such anarchist activist told me, 'most punks are useless, but punk communities provide anarchism with a cultural base which Marxism has lacked since 1965'. While social stigma and an ongoing ban leave Marxism still too hot for the masses, to the rebellious punk-kid, Das Kapital is already stale, something belonging in the 1960s. Anarchism, on the other hand, is exciting, anti-authoritarian, and legal. Those who want to lose the mohawk and get serious about resistance to state and capital can find a guiding hand from more experienced anarchist ideologues who routinely exhibit tables full of alluring anarchist literature to crowds of anarcho-punks at concerts around Indonesia. But increasingly the ideological inspiration comes from further afield.

Indonesia arrives on the global scene

Insurrectionary anarchism arose out of Italy's vibrant anarchist scene three decades ago. Cells sprang up around the Mediterranean during the early 1990s, and later globally, on the back of the anti-globalisation 'black bloc' movements. The designation 'Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI)' has been used since the early 2000s by autonomous cells throughout Europe to identify adherence to a particular form of anarchism that explicitly rejects classical anarchism and Marxist-inspired forms of resistance. But it was the financial crisis that hit Greece in 2008 that blew new life into the movement, all the way to Indonesia.

The FAI and similar groups consider any attempts at organisation, reform or movement-building as counter-productive. When Indonesians protested against the planned reduction of fuel subsidies in June 2013, an Indonesian cell of the FAI issued a communiqué stating that 'we are not at all interested in becoming involved in the wave of mass protest against fuel price hikes.' The group posted its statement on an Indonesian language anarchist blog, but within days it was translated into English and posted on the international counter-information blog 325.nostate.net. The statement condemned as cowards 'those who took to the streets carrying banners and shouting, performing

repetitive and predictable actions, hiding in the terminology of “peaceful protest” to hide their inability to attack the oppressors.’

Instead of organisation, insurrectionary anarchists favour ‘direct action’ as their method, meaning arson, sabotage, and mailing letter bombs. Anarchists in Indonesia have so far been much tamer than their European counterparts, but events in recent years suggest that at least some of Indonesia’s anarchists are eager to lose their innocence.

Billy and Eat

The attention gained by the torching of ATMs in Makassar, Manado and Bandung, stirred into action two aspiring anarchists named Billy Augustian and Reyhard Rumbayan (known as Eat). In October 2011 the pair poured two bottles of petrol into a BRI (Bank Rakyat Indonesia) ATM in Yogyakarta’s Sleman district, setting it alight and destroying it completely. As one of them ran away from the scene, he dropped his wallet and a bag containing incriminating communiqués. Both were arrested within hours.

In court documents, Sleman’s public prosecutor argued that 30-year old Billy and his accomplice, Eat, decided to burn the ATM in Yogyakarta after they were inspired by how the Bandung ATM attacks had drawn attention to the human rights abuses, environmental destruction and capitalist exploitation in Kulon Progo, a land conflict site that has become a cause célèbre for anarchists. But the similarity between the notes left behind in Bandung and Makassar, and those found in Billy and Eat’s bags, along with the fact that Billy is a native of Bandung, suggest a closer connection than mere inspiration.

At first it seemed as if local grievances were the main motives of the series of ATM torchings. The notes Billy and Eat had prepared contained threats against PT Jogja Magaza Iron, a mining company active in Kulon Progo, a district west of Yogyakarta. Since 2005 the Paguyuban Petani Lahan Pantai Kulon Progo (Kulon Progo Seashore Peasant Collective) a self-described ‘informal collective’ of famers has, sometimes violently, opposed plans for a mining project in the region. The collective is hostile to all outside interference from NGOs and leftist organisations, including the high profile and widely-respected Legal Aid Institute (LBH). Their position papers circulating online are heavily tinged with anarchist vocabulary and since 2007 anarchist groups have openly worked in solidarity with the collective. It is possible that the ATM attacks were at least inspired by this collective, if not stemming directly out of its milieu.

Despite these local grievances, the insignia on Billy and Eat’s communiqué made it clear that they were linked to international anarchist networks. New FAI cells adopt names of fellow anarchists, usually of those in jail for their direct actions, as a sign of solidarity. In June 2011 Chilean anarchist Luciano Tortuga was jailed after he lost both his hands when a bomb he was placing near a bank exploded prematurely. Chilean anarchists put out a ‘call for solidarity’ that quickly spread around the anarchist blogosphere. FAI cells around the world sprang into action, smashing windows of a bank in Bristol, and destroying ATMs in Milan. But the greatest act of solidarity for Tortuga came from Indonesia, where Billy and Eat named their cell the ‘Long Live Luciano Tortuga’ Cell of the Informal Anarchist Federation-International Revolutionary (FAI/IRF). Their arrest was about to make them the poster-boys of the global community of insurrectionary anarchists.

Laying charges under the 2002 Anti-Terrorism Law, public prosecutors of Yogyakarta’s Sleman district defined the destroyed BRI ATM as a ‘strategic object’ and argued that by destroying it, Billy and Eat had ‘deliberately used violence with the intention of creating a sense of terror and widespread fear amongst the general public’. Eventually both were sentenced to a lesser charge of arson and jailed for one year and eight months, but the arrest and charges of terrorism had already catapulted Billy and Eat into the spotlight of the international anarchist scene.

In May 2012 the walls of the Indonesian embassy in Manila was splattered with black paint. Leaflets strewn in the area demanded ‘freedom to Eat and Billy, freedom to the victims of state repression, stop the environmental destruction, Indonesian state is the real terrorist’. In June 2012, Tortuga – the Chilean anarchist Billy and Eat had named their cell after – posted a note reflecting on his physical disfigurement and his imprisonment, thanking his ‘dear friend Reyhard Rumbayan (Eat), who with his noble gestures has brought me strength when I was weak’. By late 2012 a 27-page brochure profiling the two ‘urban guerrillas from Indonesia’ was circulating on blogs. It included

letters of praise from other militant anarchist movements, trial updates, letters and poems written by Billy and Eat from prison, and details of solidarity attacks carried out internationally and in Indonesia.

Renewal in Sulawesi

But the 'Long Live Luciano Tortuga' cell was bigger than Eat and Billy. In August 2012, when the pair were in prison, a cell of that name was active in North Sulawesi. An incendiary device left behind by the cell failed to ignite at a power plant in Kotamobagu, around 100 kilometres from Manado. On the night of 31 August, the cell left another incendiary device at a local electricity station in the Manado suburb of Tuminting. In their communiqué, the cell sent their 'greetings with the lights of fire from the streets to our two brothers in struggle, members of the Long Live Luciano Tortuga Cell FAI/IRF; Billy Augustan and Reyhard Rumbayan (Eat).'

Despite claims of solidarity, tensions and divisions can be read between the lines of the Sulawesi cell's communiqué. The statement concluded that 'these actions are also a manifestation of anger and disappointment. Impatience for those rebels who after attacks returned to run and hide.' Eat and Billy expressed similar feelings of abandonment in an open letter to the global FAI movement, written from prison one month after they were caught in late 2011. 'We are truly disappointed that some of our local comrades are inspired by fear and media sensationalism which make them retreat from the front line.'

From these and other blog-posts written by Eat, it appears not everyone in the anarchist community agrees with the methods of direct action. Even those who carry out arson attacks have in statements indicated a rejection of deadly violence. For example, on Guy Fawkes Night (5 November –the date when Guy Fawkes and other conspirators in the Gunpowder Plot had planned to blow up England's parliament at the start of the seventeenth century, recently commemorated by some anarchists) in 2012 the Sulawesi cell placed an incendiary device amongst luxury cars parked at Manado's Red Monkey Karaoke Bar, pointing out in a communiqué that the device was placed deliberately away from possible human casualties.

Although Indonesia's anarchists are still shying away from deadly violence, Eat and Billy's imprisonment has placed Indonesia literally on the map of international insurrectionary anarchism (see photo). By November 2012, an Indonesian cell even took the initiative to issue an 'international call for direct action against all property and symbols of society, eco-destroyers, fascists, military and our enemies.' Three days later, the same cell claimed responsibility for setting alight an elementary school in Paniki, Manado. By January 2013, a FAI cell in North Sulawesi was claiming responsibility for further attacks, but this time identifying itself as the 'Argirou' Cell. While it is possible that a new cell had arisen in North Sulawesi, it is more likely that the same cell was keen to rebrand itself by adopting the name of another international anarchist prisoner. The cell's namesake, Panagiotis Argirou, is a Greek anarchist of the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire group, jailed in 2010 for sending letter bombs to politicians throughout Europe.

The Sulawesi cell was by now deeply socialised into international FAI discourse and with great enthusiasm participated in the 'ongoing dialogue' between global cells. A number of statements even entirely abandoned references to local grievances. For example, a communiqué in January 2013 contains no mention of Kulon Progo or Bima (another land dispute previously frequently mentioned by anarchists). Not even Billy and Eat get a mention, despite having been released from jail only weeks earlier, on 22 November and 14 December 2012 respectively. Rather than local grievances, the communiqué offers salutes to foreign comrades, and brags of its radical ideals. 'Last night we did it once again. Direct action based on our revolutionary values, as nihilists, as individualists and as an expression of the hatred of this society.'

It is unlikely that Indonesia's anarchists have travelled to Europe, Latin America, or even in the region. Indonesia's FAI is a lonely outpost of anarchist insurrection in Southeast Asia. Even so, the Sulawesi cell's words are full of warmth and praise for their fellow revolutionaries overseas. Indonesia's insurrectionary anarchists are increasingly consuming and replicating ideological trends of their European comrades. Six months after issuing their communiqué under the new name, the Sulawesi cell's hat-tip to Argirou got a reply. Posting a letter on another international counter-info blog in June 2013, Argirou himself wrote 'I have a special place in my heart for the comrades of the International Conspiracy for Revenge-FAI/IRF who burned a private vehicle in Indonesia'.

Ideology and strategy after Eat and Billy

The arrest, trial and imprisonment of Eat and Billy – and the discussions and literature produced as a consequence of their international stardom – is likely to have exposed many more Indonesian anarchists to international movements. But unlike their European comrades who have a long history of engaging fascist groups in open street warfare, it will be a long time before anarchists in Indonesia have the numbers or the courage for such attacks. But in a June 2013 statement, an Indonesian cell at least opened the door to such conflict in the future, stating that ‘the paramilitaries who were built by the military and have the same attitudes and behaviours like military are enemies who deserve our attacks.’ A Greek FAI cell recently claimed responsibility for bombing an office of the neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party; attacks against groups like the Front Pembela Islam (FPI – Islamic Defenders Front) or Pemuda Pancasila (Pancasila Youth) by Indonesian cells would be a striking escalation of tactics.

Pembakar ATM Dituntut 3 Tahun

TUDUHAN TERORISME TAK TERBUKTI



Pasal 187
Barang siapa dengan sengaja menimbulkan kebakaran,
ledakan atau banjir, diancam:

1. dengan pidana penjara paling lama dua belas tahun, jika karena perbuatan tersebut di atas timbul bahaya umum bagi barang;
2. dengan pidana penjara paling lama lima belas tahun, jika karena perbuatan tersebut di atas timbul bahaya bagi nyawa orang lain;
3. dengan pidana penjara seumur hidup atau selama waktu tertentu paling lama dua puluh tahun, jika karena perbuatan tersebut di atas timbul bahaya bagi nyawa orang lain dan mengakibatkan orang mati.

Artwork produced in prison by Billy
<http://asimetris.noblogs.org/post/2013/02/23/publikasi-mlebu-zine-3-indonesia/>

The dearth of radical leftist groups in Indonesia robs anarchist groups of their natural anti-fascist allies. Yet at the same time, the absence of a thriving leftist scene grants Indonesia's anarchists an unusually empty ideological space in which to thrive. Indonesian youths who feel alienated by urban life can find in anarchism a sophisticated and trendy critique of consumerism. For those who are more politically minded, anarchism offers a framework with which to critique oppressive state and social structures, from religious fundamentalism in Aceh, capitalist exploitation in Java, and military impunity in Papua. Anarchist ideas, in all their diversity and nuance, have much to offer Indonesia's political and social activists, starved of ideology since the New Order regime tried to eradicate leftist ideas between the mid-1960s and late 1990s.

But their hostility to organisation might hamper them. Attempts at building mass followership, reads one Indonesian FAI communiqué, are 'something which is inherited from the classical anarchist thought with a mixture of Marxism that is really disgusting'. Rather than bringing anarchism into the mainstream of radical politics, insurrectionary anarchism holds an inclination towards violence. The absolute rejection of movement building could even turn young Indonesians away from anarchism, stigmatise anarchism as a violent ideology, and trigger greater state repression against the wider anarchist community. While it seems that no injuries or deaths have been caused by insurrectionary anarchists in Indonesia so far, recent trends indicate that new cells are emerging and targets of arson attacks are diversifying.

On 31 March 2013 the FAI claimed responsibility for its first action in Aceh, where media reported that a 'mysterious group' burned down three buildings owned by Hamdan Sati, the head of Tamiang district. A communiqué described Aceh as 'a region where religious fundamentalists in the past threw 64 punks into a rehabilitation camp'. But the statement went on to say that 'we want to clarify that we aren't Acehnese. We have no citizenship because we are borderless'. Between June and August 2013, cells claimed responsibility for fires at a karaoke bar in Jakarta, a clothing warehouse in West Jakarta and at a police school in Balikpapan, East Kalimantan. The claim of responsibility for the Balikpapan attack ends with a warning. 'Our action is the direct revenge against pigs everywhere, not only in Greece. For every inch in your step that invades our freedom, we will hit you back more violent than before'.

Another sign that insurrectionary anarchism is growing in Indonesia is the appearance of entirely new groups. Between June and September 2013, the internationally active Earth Liberation Front (ELF) claimed responsibility for attacks on a car and shop belonging to the vice secretary of the Democratic Party in South Sumatra, arson attacks against ATMs in Makassar, sabotage of electricity stations in Jakarta, and setting fire to a factory in Bandung producing bullet proof vests. The communiqué states that 'police must be attacked, as hard as possible'. Like the FAI, the ELF subscribes to an 'anti-civilisation' form of insurrectionary anarchism. On 20 August 2013, the ELF claimed responsibility for placing an incendiary device that burned out the third floor of the Institute Kesenian (Arts Institute) in the upscale central Jakarta suburb of Cikini, stating that artists are 'the puppets of civilisation'.

As of September 2013, insurrectionary anarchists have claimed responsibility for arson attacks in Makassar, Bandung, Manado, Yogyakarta, Aceh, Balikpapan and Jakarta. But Indonesian police are increasingly determined to disrupt Indonesia-wide anarchist networks. In April 2012 four anarchists were arrested in Malang in possession of spray cans and solidarity posters for Billy and Eat. During interrogation lasting several days, police extracted information about which groups they belong to, their links to Billy and Eat, and how anarchist cells communicate with each other. Within days of these interrogations, an anarchist counter-information blog by the name of Memori Senja was taken offline.

But increasing harassment by police appears to have also led to a further radicalisation of a small group of insurrectionary anarchists. In an 'open letter' posted in September 2013, the Indonesian Section of the FAI revealed its most sophisticated and radical expression of ideology, goals and method. Billy and Eat's arrest is described as 'the starting point when everything became clearer for us'. In an escalation of rhetoric, the six-page text praises Indonesian Islamist groups for their 'brave choice' in carrying out 'violent jihad', noting that forming informal cells of three to four people was key to the Islamists' 'success'. It passionately denounces the 'social anarchists' who reject violent methods, and it defines as legitimate targets 'the human itself who stands at the side of the society'.

If insurrectionary anarchist cells keep multiplying, and violence leads to deaths or injuries, the police and media will start to pay much closer attention to anarchist ideology, and Indonesia's harmless community of anarcho-punks could lose the relative freedom that they currently enjoy. — (very bad ending for a good essay -ed)

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