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Mobilisations of Philippine Anarchisms

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September 2021

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September 2021

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Introduction

The current Philippine anarchist milieu is a relatively recent phenomenon dating from the 1990s, but there have been precedents dating from the precolonial period before the arrival of the Spanish, the American colonial period, and the First Quarter Storm (the militant period before the Marcos Dictatorship). Despite the influences anarchism has had on the radical history of the Philippines, it remains an under-studied subject, especially in social movement studies. My objective with this article is twofold: (1) to locate the niche that Philippine anarchism occupies in the radical history of the country, and (2) to investigate the factors that have contributed to the mobilisation of Philippine anarchism and its precedents. Through this, I hope to provide a panoramic perspective on the place Philippine anarchism occupies in the radical history of the archipelago.

My methodology involves surveying currently existing literature about Philippine anarchism—which is at times written by Filipino anarchists themselves—to sketch its emergence in the country. Of course, this opens up the study to the issue of bias, in that published literature is privileged over oral or more informal traditions. This is an acknowledged bias and limitation to this review. What is reviewed here is limited to the literature published by and about the Philippine anarchist milieu. I recognize that what is written and published may not necessarily be representative of the totality of what Philippine anarchism represents—if such a totality can even be represented at all. Despite these limitations, I think it is important to review what is currently available. While the literature bias prevents us from making generalisations on the entirety of Philippine anarchism or something representative of it, it may still inform us on the tendencies of Philippine anarchism that manifest into published literature. In terms of the history of the milieu, published literature proves to be quite fragmented. I first sketch what we do know before I suggest avenues of investigation for what we do not yet know. I see this study as information gathered for a review of literature and history that can be a starting point for a deeper and more comprehensive survey that includes oral and practical traditions.

With these methodological limitations covered, keep in mind that while I may claim that Philippine anarchism has certain features, these may not be representative of the beliefs and politics of every anarchist in the milieu.

So, what is Philippine anarchism? I adopt the conceptual framework of Franks, Jun, and Williams (2018) to identify what is anarchism or a precedent of it in the Philippines. Anarchism itself is a commonly used set of ideas, practices, and

actions shared between those who call themselves anarchists.¹ We anarchists share an opposition to hierarchy, a commitment to freedom, prefiguration, and agency, use direct action, and share a revolutionary outlook.² Philippine anarchism is an anarchism adapted to the Philippine context and locally articulated by anarchists in that context. Philippine anarchism adopts the core concepts of international anarchism—the opposition to hierarchy, commitment to freedom, prefiguration, and all that—and adopts adjacent concepts relevant for the Philippine context. Tendencies in Philippine anarchism tend to adopt concepts such as decolonisation, indigenisation, and ecology.

In a literature study of anarchist histories across Bolivia, the United Kingdom, Czechia (the former Czechoslovakia), Greece, Japan and Venezuela,³ identify factors that contribute to the mobilisation of anarchist movements across different countries. They identify political, economic, and cultural factors that lead to mobilisation, and find that certain international and domestic phenomena can either mobilise or demobilize anarchist movements.⁴ In turn, anarchist mobilisations are encouraged by international interaction and dissemination of anarchist ideas, the popularisation of punk, a militant labour movement, and disillusionment with the old Left.⁵ Factors that demobilize anarchists include Bolshevism and state repression.⁶ However, some factors of mobilisation in certain countries can also serve to demobilize in other countries, such as how state repression was a mobilising factor in Czechia and Greece but a demobilizing factor in Japan.⁷ With this in mind, we have to take into consideration that even if a certain factor mobilised or demobilized anarchists in one context, this may not be necessarily applicable in the Philippine context.

So like other anarchisms in the global anarchist movement, we see similar patterns of mobilisation in Philippine anarchism. As we shall see, the mobilisation and popularisation of Bolshevism and later Marxism-Leninism would demobilise anarchist or anarchist-inflected tendencies in the Philippines, while factors like punk culture and the delegitimisation of Marxism-Leninism in the wake of the

ing those dissatisfied with National Democracy, but who still want to organize. It is unfortunate that the post-leftism of Philippine anarchism tends towards anti-organizationalism, thus alienating potential comrades. The future is still unwritten, and Philippine anarchism can still diversify into new political niches. Perhaps a political organization will be founded in the future. As for the possibility of a reabsorption into Philippine Marxism, I find the chances of that unlikely as long as the Philippine left continues on its current course, with National Democracy weakened after the crisis and purge, and Rejectionists still fragmented as ever. If not proletarian niches, perhaps Philippine anarchism can enter into unoccupied niches. For example, there is not yet a police and prison abolitionist movement, but there is a crisis in policing. It is possible that Filipino anarchists can adopt that framing.

What will also encourage future mobilisation of Philippine anarchism is the continuing mobilisation of anarchism in other countries which disseminate these ideas, frames, and practices across the world. The existence of other libertarian projects like the Zapatistas in Chiapas or Rojava in Syria can also continue to inspire alternatives. Important as well is that there is no socialist superpower that subsidises Marxism-Leninism. Anarchism is currently at a level playing field with Marxism-Leninism and Maoism in terms of international relations with no major powers supporting either. The People's Republic of China, that darling of Dengists the world over, cares very little for the subsidisation and development of communist parties since the capitalist restoration in China while the Russian Federation cares about fascists, neo-Nazis, and National 'Bolsheviks' more than Marxists.

The world is still very much in crisis with civil unrest and political violence reaching new levels, if the years of 2019–2021 are any indication. Anarchism reemerges as one of the tendencies in this new age of new (anti-)politics. With the growing resurgence and popularisation of anarchism worldwide, it is my hope that this study can contribute to an understanding of the emerging political landscape.

¹ Franks, Benjamin, Nathan J. Jun, and Leonard A. Williams, eds. 2018. *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

² Franks, Jun, and Williams 2018, 7–8.

³ Williams, Dana M., and Matthew T. Lee. 2012. "Aiming to Overthrow the State (Without Using the State): Political Opportunities for Anarchist Movements." *Comparative Sociology* 11 (4): 558–93

⁴ Williams, Dana M., and Matthew T. Lee. 2012, 571–81.

⁵ Williams, Dana M., and Matthew T. Lee. 2012, 572.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

the 90s. However, the SDKM emerged after 1968 when anarchism experienced a small revival due to the May '68 events in France and the global unrest that followed. Perhaps the anarchism of '68 and of the emerging New Left factored into the anarchism of the SDKM through international interactions? Perhaps primary sources from the SDKM can prove illuminating. Furthermore, much of the history of the Philippine anarchist milieu remains unwritten. I am curious about the oral histories of those emerging from the original RA–RJ schism who moved towards anarchist frames. Who were those discovering anarchism while still deep in the paradigms of the Communist Party? What happened to them, and where did they end up? Popular Democracy and other tendencies like it later formed part of a Green tendency. The Greens in the Philippines retain a certain libertarian bent; perhaps there is some cross-fertilisation between the Greens and those brandishing black flags? I recognize that some Green ideas such as social ecology, deep ecology, and biocentrism form tendencies within Philippine anarchism. Cuevas-Hewitt (2016) does some work in their dissertation to connect the Green and Black. More might be found with further study.

Another fruitful avenue of study would be to survey the political and anti-political positions in the Philippine anarchist milieu. D. M. Williams (2017) does an excellent review of tendencies in the anarchist milieu of North America, and perhaps something similar can be done for the Philippines and Southeast Asia. From my personal observations, post-leftism dominates the mindscape of Philippine anarchists. I suspect that this dynamic is due to the peculiar experience of Filipino anarchists with the left. Ecological ideas also predominate. However, it is clear that there is not yet an anarchist political organisation in-country, rather, there are affinity groupings, small collectives, and a broad and loose network called the Local Autonomous Network. Neither is there an anarchist presence in the labor movement, nor an insurrectionary tendency. Why is it that the anarchist milieus of Bangladesh and Indonesia are able to develop labor organisations but those of the Philippines have not? A comparative analysis of various anarchist milieus across countries might be able to provide insight. Perhaps the presence or absence of a large left grouping like National Democracy can explain some peculiarities.

How about the future of anarchist mobilisation in the Philippines? I would think the slow demobilisation of National Democracy and the Communist Party is a continuing political opportunity for those outside the umbrella of both groups. However, this is not a clear win for anarchists, as there are other Rejectionist groupings that are better organised with political organisations—something Philippine anarchism lacks. These political organisations are better capable of absorb-

collapse of the USSR and her satellites helped encourage anarchism in the Philippines, just as it did elsewhere.

This study next discusses political opportunity structures, which are the factors that facilitate or inhibit mobilisation. Thereafter, we deal with the prehistories of Philippine anarchism. By understanding how Philippine anarchism situates itself in the radical history of the archipelago, we may better understand the niche that anarchism fulfils in the Philippines. From there, we shall look into what is currently known about the history of Philippine anarchism in its emergence in the late 20th century, before tackling the factors of mobilisation in the contemporary anarchist milieu.

Political Opportunities for Anarchists

Political opportunities are structures that constrain or encourage mobilisation and form the opportunities and threats where contention takes place.⁸ McAdam (1996)⁹ and Tilly and Tarrow (2015) outline various factors that influence political opportunity in the structures/environments that most social movements operate under:

- whether the institutionalised political system is open or closed to new actors, otherwise known as access to political participation;
- whether the regime has a 'multiplicity of independent centres of power within it';
- whether the political alignments among elites are in flux, stable, or unstable;
- whether actors can find influential allies and supporters among the elite; the capacity and propensity for state repression or facilitation of claim-making by actors; and
- whether there are any definitive changes in any of the previous factors.

⁸ Tilly, Charles, and Sidney Tarrow. 2015. *Contentious Politics*. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 20, 59.

⁹ McAdam, Doug. 1996. "Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Direction." In *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, edited by Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, 1st ed., 23–40. Cambridge University Press, 27.

While anarchist social movements generally benefit from some of these political opportunities such as civil liberties which increase access to political participation,¹⁰ these political opportunity structures were specifically designed for social movements that are reformist and state-oriented.¹¹ For example, anarchists are not likely to appeal to the support of elites for their causes,¹² considering that access to elites has a tendency to produce reformism rather than radicalism.¹³ In order to analyse the mobilisation and demobilisation of anarchist social movements,¹⁴ modify political opportunity theories to better fit the particularities unique to anarchist milieus. In their analysis of historical accounts of anarchist movements written by anarchists themselves,¹⁵ find the following factors that influence the mobilisation and demobilisation of anarchist movements:

- international interaction between anarchists and activists of different countries which allows anarchist ideologies to disseminate;
- the dissemination and growth of punk which functions as a safe space for the propagation of anti-authoritarian and anarchist ethos and culture;
- the presence of anti-capitalism based on experiences of relative deprivation and poverty;
- the presence of radicalised labour unions whose militancy dovetails with anarchist militants and ideologies;
- whether a country is at war where anarchists are able to join anti-war mobilisations to mobilise in turn;
- whether anarchists make use of propaganda-of-the-deed—a tactic of using terrorism and assassinations to pursue political ends—which triggers fierce repression on anarchist militants and their organisations thus demobilising them;
- the mobilisation of Bolshevism, which has the potential to demobilise anarchists;

¹⁰ D. M. Williams 2017, 114–15; D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 561–62.

¹¹ D. M. Williams 2017, 115–16; D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 562–64

¹² D. M. Williams 2017, 116; D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 563

¹³ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 563.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Later mobilisations in Occupy Wall Street in the United States would again have ripples in the Philippines. Umali ([2011] 2020) would connect the struggles of Occupy in the United States to the Philippines in an ‘Occupy Luneta.’ Though Occupy Luneta did not develop into a significant Occupy on the scale of other Occupies, we still see the mechanisms of diffusion and Kuhn’s transnational community building play out.¹³⁶

An emerging but understudied mechanism as well is the use of online communication to develop mobilization. Online and print publications are evermore platforming voices from the global South, while publications based in the Philippines continue to develop new translations of anarchist work written abroad. Likely this new republic of letters will play a role in the mobilisations to come. Further study will be needed on these matters.

Mobilizations Past and Future

In this essay, I have sketched how Philippine anarchism roots itself in the indigenous traditions of the archipelago known as the Philippines, and in the country’s radical history. We have seen how international interactions factored into the mobilisation of the ‘anarchism that almost was’ during the American colonial period, and in the contemporary anarchist milieu that emerged in the 90s. In the first part of this essay, we have also seen how the two precedents of Philippine anarchism in the ‘anarchism that almost was’ and of the First Quarter Storm were totally absorbed into the Marxist milieus, leaving almost no trace afterwards. However, we have also seen that when the Marxist milieu went into crisis and fragmented, anarchism found space to reemerge as a distinct tendency. We also saw how punk rock and *punkista* subculture factored into forming this anarchist tendency.

However, there are still many unanswered questions. There is still not yet a definitive study on either the extent of anarchist ideology during the American colonial period or of the Chinese anarchists based in Manila in the first two decades of the 1900s. Perhaps a study of primary sources would reveal deeper anarchist international cooperation than what the current literature suggests. As noted in earlier sections, the question of whether the Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan Mendiola (SDKM) really was anarchist is still in the air. If they were anarchists, we do not know where this anarchism came from. It was too early for anarchism to have been disseminated by punk which came to the country in

¹³⁶ Umali, Bas. (2011) 2020. “Social Revolution Is the Solution.” Alimpuyo Press. <https://bandilangitim.noblogs.org/2020/05/30/social-revolution-is-the-solution/>.

A crucial moment in the alter-globalization movement was the ‘Battle of Seattle’ in 1999, where concentrated opposition to the World Trade Organization (WTO) summit in Seattle, Washington, gave birth to a network that would become the alter-globalization movement today. In addition to punk, the Battle of Seattle is noted to have an effect on anarchism in the Philippines. As Umali says:

‘The [Philippine anarchist] movement attracted an increasing number of individuals, especially after the anti-WTO riots in Seattle ignited by the black bloc—the “propaganda by the deed” of our time. ... Numerous collectives have formed since then in the National Capital Region (NCR), Davao, Cebu, Lucena, and other cities.’ (Umali in Pairez, Umali, and Kuhn¹³³)

The very visible opposition to the WTO’s neoliberalism in Seattle became a signal point to others elsewhere, diffusing anarchist ideas. In an essay in the Philippine anarchist journal *Gasera Journal*, Gabriel Kuhn (2011) terms this diffusion as ‘transnational community building’, and notes the influence of the anti-neoliberalism in the development of transnational connections between the global North and South:

‘In the context of the Philippines, it appears that the 1999 Seattle anti-WTO protests—which, despite a notable presence of comrades from the global South, were dominated by activists from the global North—provided major inspiration for the islands’ contemporary anarchist movement. At the same time, the Seattle protests drew a lot of inspiration from struggles of Southern communities. This only confirms the important multilateral aspect of the anti-privilege struggle.’¹³⁴

In this, Kuhn notes the multilateral nature of transnational community building with events and actors from both the global north and south factoring into each others’ mobilisations. Interesting as well in Kuhn’s account is that he first interacted with Philippine anarchism through its diaspora with Filipino migrant workers in Japan,¹³⁵ mirroring similar international interactions by de los Reyes and Kotoku in their exiles.

- the presence of fierce state repression which in some cases such as in Czechia and Greece can mobilise anarchism, but can also demobilise anarchists, as was the case in Japan;
- the presence of liberal democracy where public space is open for radical ideologies to mobilise;
- disappointment and disillusionment with the old left, as exemplified by international backlash to the Soviet suppression of the Hungarian revolution of 1956.¹⁶

These political opportunities inherit McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow’s focus on political participation, alignments that may aid anarchist mobilisation.

In terms of mobilisation, I identify international interaction and the presence of radical labour unions as factors that led to the mobilisation of anarchist principles in the American colonial period with the interactions with anarchists by Isabelo de los Reyes in exile and later his labour militancy in his return. For the anarchy of the First Quarter Storm in 1970, there is not enough information on the mobilisation of the anarchist SDKM, but its demobilisation is known. Of these identified factors of demobilisation, I identify the mobilisation of Bolshevism as a demobilising factor for anarchists in the Philippines. Indeed, this was the fate of the anarchisms of the American colonial period and of the First Quarter Storm.

After my own review of the Philippine anarchist literature available, there are four factors that I identify as mobilising factors for contemporary Philippine anarchism. The first factor is the crisis of authoritarianism in the socialist and communist milieus in the post-Marcos period (after 1986). This crisis of authoritarianism and its manifestations in events like the murderous purge by the Communist Party resulted in radicals reassessing authoritarian paradigms and looking for new ideological frames. The second factor is the collapse of the Soviet Union, which delegitimised Marxism-Leninism and state socialism. If the victory of Marxism-Leninism leads to the defeat of anarchism, then the reverse potentially holds true.¹⁷ The third factor is the dissemination of punk, or *punkista* as it is known in the Philippines. Punk and anarchism have historically developed together,¹⁸ and we see this pattern again in the Philippines. The fourth factor is the international mobilisation of the anti-Neoliberal “alter-globalization” movement, with anarchists leading the charge. As we shall see, successful mobilisations

¹³³ Pairez, Umali, and Kuhn [2010] 2020, 17.

¹³⁴ Kuhn 2011, 14.

¹³⁵ Kuhn 2011, 14.

¹⁶ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 571–81.

¹⁷ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 572–79.

¹⁸ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 580; L. Williams 2007, 297.

elsewhere factor into mobilisations in the Philippines. In turn, this factor of international mobilisation is related to the collapse of the Soviet Union, which allowed new ideological frames to take root. Additionally, international interaction among anarchists and anarchist mobilisations elsewhere has been previously noted to aid in anarchist mobilisations on a local level.¹⁹

In the following sections, I situate the niche in which Philippine anarchism finds itself, together with the history of the precedents of the contemporary milieu.

Prehistories of Philippine Anarchism

While contemporary Philippine anarchism is a relatively recent phenomenon, anarchists in the Philippines see themselves as descended from and related to Indigenous and anti-authoritarian struggles in the archipelago (See^{20,21}). While not a Filipino anarchist, the Black anarchist Roger White (2005) suggests that we must understand post-colonial anarchisms ‘in relation to the centuries-old struggle against arbitrary power’ and to view these post-colonial anarchisms ‘as the newest member of a global family that includes numerous historical and present day communal societies and struggles against authority.’²² This is not unprecedented; Mbah and Igariewy (1997) for example, situate African anarchism in ‘anarchistic precedents in Africa’ and anarchic and communalist elements in traditional African society.²³ Black anarchism as an international tradition also roots itself in historical Maroon and slave uprisings (See Saint Andrew 2021,²⁴). Similarly, the Indigenous Anarchist Federation (n.d.) roots their Indigenous anarchism in the practices by Indigenous peoples in the Americas before European colonisation and also notes that anarchism in Latin America has been shaped by Indigenous struggles. In the same vein, some Filipino anarchists like Bas Umali see anarchism as deeply rooted

¹⁹ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 572–75.

²⁰ Gamera Journal. 2011. Gamera Journal. Vol. 1. 1. Mindset Breaker Press.

²¹ Pairez, Jong, Bas Umali, and Gabriel Kuhn. (2010) 2020. “Anarchism in the Philippines: Interview with Jong Pairez and Bas Umali.” In Pangayaw and Decolonizing Resistance: Anarchism in the Philippines, by Bas Umali, 12–23. Oakland: PM Press.

²² White, Roger. 2005. “Post Colonial Anarchism.” In Post Colonial Anarchism: Essays on Race, Repression and Culture in Communities of Color: 1999–2004, 10–34. Oakland CA: Jailbreak Press. https://archive.org/details/jailbreak_2005_post_colonial_anarchism_book.

²³ Mbah, Sam, and I. E. Igariewy. 1997. African Anarchism: The History of a Movement. Tucson, Ariz: See Sharp Press.

²⁴ Saint Andrew. 2021. “What Is Black Anarchism?” <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/saint-andrew-what-is-black-anarchism>.

In all of these examples, we see that the dynamics that punk played in the mobilisation of anarchism elsewhere also plays out in the Philippines. However, much of the history of these dynamics remains oral. The anonymously written history of anarcho-punks in Davao by Tanex & Lander (2020) is a rare record of the various oral histories of anarcho-punk. A more systematic examination of the manifestations of punk and anarcho-punk in the Philippines is still yet to be written.

International Interaction and Mobilization

The final factor that has mobilised Philippine anarchism is international interactions with anarchists abroad. For example, the relationship between the exiled Japanese anarchist Kotoku Shusui and other anarchists such as Peter Kropotkin facilitated the dissemination of anarchism in Japan, with Kotoku acting as translator and mediator.¹³⁰ In the Philippines, we see Isabelo de los Reyes interacting with Spanish anarchists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, leading to the mobilisation of socialist and anarchist ideas in the Philippines. Upon his return, de los Reyes facilitated the dissemination of socialist and anarchist ideas, as concretely manifested in books like Malatesta’s *Dalawang Magbubukid* and *Banaag at Sikat*.

Similarly, international interactions in the late 20th and early 21st century helped mobilise anarchism in the Philippines. Part of this interaction was framed through the lens of the ‘alter-globalization’ movement which opposed the expansion of neoliberal institutions.

As a movement, the alter-globalization movement tended to have—as Epstein (2001) argued—an ‘anarchist sensibility’ oriented towards direct action, anti-authoritarianism, equality, and democracy.¹³¹ Rather than simply a sensibility, Baverel (2017) argued that anarchist values and practices were present in the alter-globalization movement, Occupy, and the Arab Spring.¹³² This libertarian sensibility and the movement’s already anti-authoritarian nature allowed for anarchist ideas and practices to permeate. This in turn mobilised anarchism globally.

¹³⁰ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 575.

¹³¹ Epstein, Barbara. 2001. “Anarchism and the Anti-Globalization Movement.” Monthly Review 53 (4): 1. doi:10.14452/MR-053-04-2001-08_1.

¹³² Baverel, Clifford. 2017. “Modern Anarchism in Social Movements: From the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street Movement.” Emulations — Revue de Sciences Sociales, no. 19 (March): 71–88. doi:10.14428/emulations.019.002.

We see the same dynamics play out in the Philippines. The *punkista* scene provided a place for ‘unity and equality for all,’ as one punk explains.¹²⁶ That punk provides an environment in which anarchist politics is articulated is also noted by Filipino anarchists:

‘Once it had become popular, punk rock represented the dissatisfaction of the Filipino youth with conservative Philippine society. What, in the beginning, seemed like just another musical upheaval, very apolitical in nature, later developed into a radical challenge of authority. Youth into punk rock started to explore the politics of DIY and anarchism that were associated with it. (Pairez in Pairez, Umali, and Kuhn¹²⁷)

‘Kasi dati, yung mga 1980s na punk, mas cultural ‘yun eh. ... Sex Pistols na anarchy ‘yun. Karamihan sa kanila, mas na-o-organize pa ng Left... Pero mga 1996, diyan na nagsulputan na nililina ng mga indibidwal na ito na hindi sila Marxist, hindi kami leftists, kami ay mga anarchists.’ (Umali as told to Ladrado¹²⁸)

[Back in the day, the 1980s punk was more cultural. ... It was anarchy of the Sex Pistols. Many of them organized with the Left... But by 1996, there were individuals who clarified that they were not Marxist nor leftists, but rather, anarchists.]

In these examples, the rooting of punk laid the groundwork for later anarchist identities. Interesting to note is also the mechanism of reaction to the political dynamics in Philippine society, similar to what we saw in the previous section. In Umali’s quote in particular, we see the articulation of an anarchist identity, as opposed to Marxist or Leftist identity.

In another example in the anarchist milieu of Davao, the history of punk and anarchism cannot be separated. The Davao Anarchist Resistance Movement (DARM) explicitly emerged from punk and hardcore bands and partook in projects such as ecological campaigns like Kinaiyahan Unahon [Nature First] and community kitchens such as Food Not Bombs.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Kohl, Jess, dir. 2018. Anarchy in the Philippines. Dazed. Philippines: Dazed. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BtSZL_KeiGU&t=5s.

¹²⁷ Umali, and Kuhn [2010] 2020, 18.

¹²⁸ Ladrado, Portia. 2017. “The Anarchists Making a Difference in Philippine Society.” News. CNN Philippines. September 28. <https://cnnphilippines.com/life/culture/2017/09/06/anarchists-making-a-difference-in-Philippine-society.html>.

¹²⁹ Tanex & Lander. 2020. “Brief History of Punk, Hardcore, and DIY Scene in Davao City, Philippines.” Distroka Sistema. <https://sea.theanarchistlibrary.org/library/tanex-lander-brief-history-of-punk-hardcore-and-diy-scene-in-davao-city-philippines-en>.

in the stateless Indigenous communities and stateless political arrangements prior to colonisation:

‘In my view, since time immemorial, anarchism has been present in the archipelago; primitive communities from coastal to upland areas flourished and utilized autonomous and decentralized political patterns that facilitated the proliferation of highly diverse cultures and lifestyles.’²⁵

However, stretching the concept of anarchism to retroactively encompass the entirety of stateless history and society is not without problems. While the concept of *anarchy*, anarchist principles and concepts, and anarchic ways of doing things have been well prefigured since ancient times,²⁶ *anarchism* as a set of cohered political and ideological tools associated with anarchists emerged in the 19th century. There is value for post-colonial and Indigenous anarchists to root their struggle and historical consciousness in autonomous and anti-authoritarian histories, but I think it is a disservice to historical actors to ascribe them an *ism* they simply did not subscribe to. As such, for the purposes of this essay, I term these anti-authoritarian and anarchistic precursors and episodes that Philippine anarchism situates as part of its history as “prehistories” of Philippine anarchism, while I term past anarchisms that did not survive to influence the contemporary anarchist milieu in the Philippines “precedents” to Philippine anarchism.

As exemplified by the likes of Bas Umali, Philippine anarchism does situate itself in precolonial and Indigenous histories in the archipelago. Barclay even includes the Ifugao Indigenous community in his book *People without Government*, itself an ‘anthropology of anarchy.’²⁷ Indeed, the carving of the mountains in the Banaue Rice Terraces without the use of governments or states by the Ifugao does improve the case that states are unnecessary for highly complex organisation. However, I am equally critical of anarchist equivalents of a “noble savage” trope, as I am of a search for a “pure” indigeneity unsullied by the State that decolonisation can return to. David Graeber for example, points out that we cannot equate

²⁵ Umali in Pairez, Umali, and Kuhn [2010] 2020, 14

²⁶ Kropotkin, Peter. 1995. “‘Anarchism,’ from ‘The Encyclopaedia Britannica.’” In Kropotkin: ‘The Conquest of Bread’ and Other Writings, edited by Marshall S. Shatz, 1st ed., 233–47. Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139170734.023.

²⁷ Barclay, Harold B. 1990. *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchy*. Completely revised edition. London: Kahn & Averill.

‘indigenous’ with ‘egalitarian’: “There were hunter-gatherer societies with nobles and slaves, there are agrarian societies that are fiercely egalitarian.”²⁸

With this in mind, I think it is still viable to situate a Philippine anarchism in, as White says, a family of communal societies and struggles against authority.²⁹ Like the African anarchism of Mbah and Igariwey, Philippine anarchism and their practitioners in the archipelago situate themselves in the communal and anarchic traditions and practices already existing in its context.³⁰

Included as well in the Philippine family of struggles against authority are insurrectionary episodes where insurgents practiced direct action. This family includes the *indokumentado* or undocumented natives that resisted state legibility and Spanish colonial authority, instances of tribes relocating to escape state authority, and open rebellions like the Dagohoy Rebellion and Bonifacio’s insurrection. Lapu-Lapu imagery and the celebration of Lapu-Lapu’s victory over Magellan also factors heavily in the imagination of some tendencies in Philippine anarchism,³¹ suggesting a focus on indigeneity. In looking for the predecessors of Philippine anarchism, Umali and Barbin also include the Cavite Mutiny as a direct action movement.^{32,33} Ironically enough, the Spanish General Rafael de Izquierdo noted in 1872 of the Cavite Mutiny that ‘the [First] Internationale has spread its black wings to cast its nefarious shadow over the most remote lands,’³⁴ but when de Izquierdo said that, there was not yet an anarchist or socialist presence in the county.

Another episode in the prehistories of Philippine anarchism is in the Philippine national hero Jose Rizal who was mentored by Francesc Pi y Margall, a Spanish socialist-republican and a Proudhonian.³⁵ While Rizal himself never proclaimed himself as an anarchist like his mentor Pi y Margall, the mutualism of Proudhon was still evident in the revolutionary nationalist organization Rizal founded, La Liga Filipina (the Philippine League). La Liga Filipina was explicitly con-

²⁸ Graeber, David. 2004. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm; The University of Chicago Press.

²⁹ White, Roger. 2005.

³⁰ Mbah, Sam, and I. E. Igariwey. 1997

³¹ See for example Umali 2020, 38–40, 52, 89

³² Pairez, Umali, and Kuhn [2010] 2020, 15.

³³ Barbin, Taks. 2018. “Ang Food Not Bombs sa Kapuluan.” Safehouse Infoshop.

³⁴ Anderson, Benedict. 2013. *The Age of Globalization: Anarchists and the Anticolonial Imagination*. 3rd ed. London: Verso, 58.

³⁵ Aseniero, George. 2013. “From Cádiz to La Liga: The Spanish Context of Rizal’s Political Thought.” *Asian Studies: Journal of Critical Perspectives on Asia* 49 (1): 1–42. <https://asj.upd.edu.ph/index.php/archive/24-asian-studies-49-1-2013>, 1–2

globalisation’ movements helped mobilize anarchism in the Philippines through diffusion.

Punkista as Mobilization

Punk and anarchism have a long history that spans nations. A new type of anarchism emerged in the 1980s, such that punks in the late 70s started referring to themselves as anarchists.¹²⁰ The strong anti-authoritarian and confrontational sub-culture that punk rock brought about naturally dovetailed with anarchist politics, and anarcho-punk bands spread anarchism throughout the entire world.¹²¹ In some cases, like in the former Czechoslovakia (the current Czechia and Slovakia), punk was a particularly strong influence on the reemergence of anarchism in those countries (Slaček 2002 quoted in D. M. Williams¹²²). In other cases like in Venezuela, anarcho-punk is the ‘most consolidated and publicly visible source of anarchist ideas,’ and it is a more popular tendency than other traditions (Nachie 2006 quoted in D. M. Williams¹²³). In a study of anarcho-punk scenes in the United Kingdom, Indonesia, and Poland, Donaghey (2016) noted multiple ‘sites of connection’ between punk and anarchism such as in anarchist-inspired lyrics, personal expression of anarchist politics by punks, punk gigs benefiting anarchist groups, overlap between punks scenes and anarchist activist milieus, and the role of punk in politicising people towards anarchist politics.¹²⁴ In terms of the mobilisation of anarchism, punk is a ‘cultural’ opportunity rather than a strictly political opportunity because of the use of cultural rather than political factors. Still, punk acts like a political opportunity for mobilisation through the safe spaces that punk cultivates for anti-authoritarian and DIY (do-it-yourself) politics, together with the shared counter-culture, which allows values such as anti-racism, feminism, ecology, and veganism to grow.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Williams, Dana M. 2017. *Black Flags and Social Movements: A Sociological Analysis of Movement Anarchism*. Contemporary Anarchist Studies. Manchester: Manchester University Press, p.133; Cf. Donaghey 2016.

¹²¹ D. M. Williams 2017, 133.

¹²² D. M. Williams 2017, 134.

¹²³ D. M. Williams 2017, 134.

¹²⁴ Donaghey, Jim. 2016. “Punk and Anarchism: UK, Poland, Indonesia.” Dissertation, UK: Loughborough University. [https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/punk-and-anarchism-uk-poland-indonesia\(67005cb4-5890-4e6b-82bf-b04426a715d2\).html](https://pure.qub.ac.uk/en/publications/punk-and-anarchism-uk-poland-indonesia(67005cb4-5890-4e6b-82bf-b04426a715d2).html), 2016, 41–42.

¹²⁵ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 580–81.

is Umali's influential text 'Archipelagic Confederation,'¹¹⁶ which lays the groundwork for an anationalism grounded in the history of indigenous resistance in the Philippines. It also contains jabs at National Democracy. He says:

'A confederation offers an alternative political structure based on a libertarian framework, i.e., nonhierarchical and non-statist, which is doable and applicable. It is doable compared to the thirty-five-year-old struggle of the CPP-NPA-NDF [the Communist Party and its united front], which, after taking tens of thousands of lives, has not delivered any concrete economic and political output for the Filipino people. Moreover, the alternatives being proposed by mainstream leftist groups outside the NDF [National Democratic Front; an organization that the CPP chairs] offer no substantial difference, for they all adhere to the state and to capturing political power—an objective that cannot be realized in the near future.'¹¹⁷

This simultaneous rejection of the state-centred paradigms of both the camps of National Democracy and of the Rejectionists captures the moment Philippine anarchism finds itself. That there is a flowering of anarchist literature emerging after the crisis of authoritarianism is suggestive that this crisis factored into the mobilization of anarchism.

Internationally, the collapse of state socialism also led to a resurgence of anarchist ideology world-wide. D. M. Williams and Lee (2012) noted that the collapse of the Soviet bloc was the 'most important political opportunity' that enabled the remobilisation of anarchism in the 1990s.¹¹⁸ In the Philippines, the Soviet collapse also factored into the crisis in the Philippine left.¹¹⁹ This sort of crisis of faith in state socialism happened all over the world and allowed for the mobilization of anarchisms, especially in the Americas and Europe.

This international mobilisation also factors into mobilisation in the Philippines through international interaction. Anarchists elsewhere would interact with Filipinos looking for their radical footing and the ideas and tactics would diffuse through interactions. As we shall see later, anarchists in the anti-neoliberal alter-

structed as a mutualist association in its statutes where members have duties to assist one another and provide interest-free mutual lending.³⁶ However, despite its Proudhonian and mutualist influences, La Liga Filipina was *not* an anarchist organisation as it was also a highly secretive 'conspiratorial' organizational and had more in common with Leninist vanguards than with anarchist political organisations.³⁷ Elsewhere, Rizal was inspired by the episodes of anarchists practicing propaganda-of-the-deed while living in Europe and would integrate propagandist-of-the-deed and insurrectionary elements in the character, Simon, and the lamp bomb plot in his second novel *El Filibusterismo*.³⁸

These prehistories of struggle and autonomy from the *indokumentados* to the Cavite Mutiny suggest that while anarchism is a useful ideological lens used to frame struggles against authority, struggles against authority have always existed in the archipelago. These prehistories factor into how the current milieu sees itself, suggesting its niche in Philippine society.

The Anarchism that almost was

If there were anarchistic tendencies in the country that would become the Philippines before colonialism, where does *anarchism* as a body of ideological tools and practices then intersect with Philippine history? There are indeed episodes where anarchist ideas and practices *do* intersect with Philippine history but which do not have historical continuity with the contemporary anarchist milieu in the Philippines, simply remaining as precedents. The first precedent of what I would call the 'anarchism that almost was' centred around the return of Isabelo de los Reyes, who brought anarchist and Marxist books to the Philippines to seed the first, anarchist-learning, socialist milieu in the country.^{39,40} I term this milieu as 'anarchist-leaning' because the milieu did not identify as anarchist but was still influenced and oriented towards anarchist principles. The second precedent is the (supposed) anarchist wing in the Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK; Federation of Democratic Youth) as claimed by the historian Joseph Scalice, who believes anarchists were among the most militant in the SDK and participated in

¹¹⁶ Umali 2020, 35–51.

¹¹⁷ Umali 2020, 36.

¹¹⁸ Williams, Dana M., and Matthew T. Lee. 2012. "Aiming to Overthrow the State (Without Using the State): Political Opportunities for Anarchist Movements." *Comparative Sociology* 11 (4): 558–93. doi:10.1163/15691330-12341236. p.579.

¹¹⁹ Bello 1992, 170.

³⁶ Aseniero 2013, 32–36.

³⁷ Aseniero 2013, 37.

³⁸ Anderson 2013, 104–22.

³⁹ Scott, William Henry. 1992. *The Union Obrera Democratica: First Filipino Labor Union*. Quezon City, Philippines: New Day Publishers.

⁴⁰ Anderson 2013, Chapter 5.

insurrectionary episodes such as the Diliman Commune of 1971.⁴¹ Again, as far as I have been able to ascertain, there is no historical link between the currently existing anarchist milieu in the Philippines and the two precedents of Philippine anarchism outlined here.

In ‘the anarchism that almost was,’ the Ilustrado and folklorist Isabelo de los Reyes was deported to Spain and imprisoned in the infamous Montjuich Castle under charges of insurrection and separatism,^{42,43} It was in the dungeons of Montjuich that de los Reyes encountered the anarchist Ramón Sempau who, along with other anarchists, then tutored him on anarchist and socialist theory and smuggled radical literature for de los Reyes to read.^{44,45} After his release, de los Reyes was an active figure in the Spanish anarchist milieu as a Filipino anti-imperialist propagandist and even acquainted himself with the anarchist pedagogue Francisco Ferrer.⁴⁶ It is important to note however, that while he fraternized with anarchists, there is no indication that de los Reyes identified as one.

At the end of his exile and his return to the Philippines, Isabelo de los Reyes brought with him a library containing books by Proudhon, Marx, Kropotkin, and Malatesta, which became the first known Marxist and anarchist books sent to the Philippines.⁴⁷ In the Philippines, de los Reyes attempted to start various nationalist and socialist political projects, the most fruitful being the Union Obrera Democratica (UOD; Union of Democratic Workers), the very first labour federation in the country, and the first labour union founded on explicitly socialist principles.^{48,49} The UOD and the early Philippine socialist milieu was grouped around radical printers who had the means to translate the Marxist and anarchist books brought by de los Reyes into Tagalog, such as Errico Malatesta’s bestselling pamphlet, *Between Peasants*, which was translated as *Dalawang Magbubukid*.^{50,51} Anti-authoritarian ideas permeated into the consciousness of the Filipino working

⁴¹ Scalice, Joseph. 2017. “Crisis of Revolutionary Leadership: Martial Law and the Communist Parties of the Philippines, 1957–1974.” Unpublished. doi:10.13140/RG.2.2.32960.58887, pp. 343–44, 573, 726, 729; 2018, 500, 511

⁴² Scott 1992, 13–14.

⁴³ Anderson 2013, 197–98.

⁴⁴ Scott 1992, 13–14.

⁴⁵ Anderson 2013, 200–201.

⁴⁶ Scott 1992, 15–17.

⁴⁷ Anderson 2013, 225–26.

⁴⁸ Scott 1992.

⁴⁹ Anderson 2013, 228–29.

⁵⁰ Scott 1992, 74.

⁵¹ Malatesta 1913.

of the authoritarianism within his own organisation as well. For this reason, he began gravitating in an anarchist direction.¹¹² As Leon himself recalls:

‘If we wanted to organize our own local struggles at that time, they would always say, “Oh, coordinate it with the national committee of the student sector.” We always had to ask permission; that’s how it works. So yeah, eventually I got pissed off with this kind of authoritarian tradition, and I saw a different mode of expressing politics in the [Metro Manila Anarchist Confederation]... They’re very dynamic; they don’t need to have a party.’ (Leon, recounted to Cuevas-Hewitt¹¹³)

Because the crisis of authoritarianism was felt in both the Reaffirmist and Rejectionist camps, activists like Leon gravitated towards more libertarian and anarchist frames. It is in statements like Leon’s that we see that Philippine anarchism is also partly a reaction to and a disillusionment with the politics of the mainstream left of both RA and RJ camps.

This reaction and rejection of mainstream left politics is further corroborated in other accounts as well. For example, a popular Philippine anarchist text by Cuevas-Hewitt (2007) (the same Cuevas-Hewitt who wrote the dissertation) argued that the framework of National Democracy is ironic in that:

‘despite their purported goal of liberating themselves from western cultural hegemony and political control, they arguably have yet to decolonise themselves of western imperialist logics; for example, those Enlightenment-derived logics pertaining to the transcendence of reason, the human, and the nation-state.’¹¹⁴

This is *anationalism* and a rejection of the nationalist framing of the Philippine left. One justification for anationalism given by Bas Umali is that the ‘flourishing modernist ideas from the West, such as nationalism, reinforced statist thinking among the locals.’¹¹⁵ Anationalism here connects nationalism to the project of the nation-state, which an anarchist conceptual framework rejects. Important as well

¹¹² Cuevas-Hewitt 2016, 292.

¹¹³ Cuevas-Hewitt 2016, 297.

¹¹⁴ Cuevas-Hewitt 2007, 240.

¹¹⁵ Umali, Bas. 2020. *Pangayaw and Decolonizing Resistance: Anarchism in the Philippines*. Edited by Gabriel Kuhn. Oakland: PM Press.

in their building of counter-institutions and their efforts to cooperativise all that capitalists would wish privatised and that statists would wish nationalised.¹⁰⁸

We have to keep in mind, however, that Serrano's Popular Democracy really is disclaimed as 'not anarchist.' Despite this, there is a clear libertarian bent in its reinvention of anti-statism and horizontalism as principles that aligns with the conceptual framework of anarchism.

Serrano was not the only one re-inventing anarchism, either. As early as 1986, there were communist cadres questioning Party orthodoxy.¹⁰⁹ In one oral history provided by a former New Peoples' Army (NPA) guerrilla and cadre, 'Edwin' recounts how he and his comrades in the cadre arrived upon anarchism after being derogatorily called as 'anarchist' by senior cadres:

'In 1986, we were still good Maoists, loyal Maoists at that time... but we were already reading [Paulo] Freire. And the senior cadres were discrediting us for reading Freire... I think after three years, they got tired of us... They simply severed us and that was the end. After that, some of us started discovering [György] Lukács and [Antonio] Gramsci... [and the] postmodernist writers. And then the senior cadres were branding us as anarchist, but we didn't even know what anarchism was... So we started reading up on anarchy and anarchism and realised: "Yeah, we're anarchists! They're right!"' (Edwin recounted to Cuevas-Hewitt¹¹⁰)

In this passage, we see Edwin and his comrades in the cadre independently coming upon anarchist conclusions. Edwin would later become part of an anti-statist current in the milieu of Popular Democracy after leaving the Party.¹¹¹

These accounts from Bello, Garcia, Ka Barry, Serrano, and Edwin all suggest a deep crisis of authoritarianism in the milieu of the Communist Party. However, this crisis of authoritarianism was not restricted to the Communist Party and National Democracy. It was also present in the Rejectionist milieu. In one case, Cuevas-Hewitt interviewed 'Leon' who was formerly a militant socialist in the Rejectionist milieu, who eventually moved towards anarchism because of the authoritarianism experienced in his socialist organization. Cuevas-Hewitt noted that Leon 'was taught to scorn the RAs for their authoritarianism, but grew tired

¹⁰⁸ Cuevas-Hewitt, Loma. 2016, 294.

¹⁰⁹ Cuevas-Hewitt, Loma. 2016, 297.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Cuevas-Hewitt 2016, 295.

class with novelist and former UOD leader Lope K. Santos writing both an anarchist character and anarchist theory into his novel *Banaag at Sikat*, later considered a "bible" of the working class Filipino.⁵² Anarchist ideas also permeated the Filipino peasantry through the socialist and anarchist literature smuggled by Isabelo de los Reyes and Dominador Gomez, with peasant unions such as the Aguman ding Maldang Talapagobra (AMT; League of Poor Workers) being inspired by anarchism.⁵³

On this account, we see how international interactions between anarchists and budding radicals like Isabelo de los Reyes factored into the mobilisation of anarchist principles in the Philippines. Later on in de los Reyes' return to the Philippines, there already existed militant laborers who helped further mobilise anarchist-leaning principles through printing and the setting up of the UOD. These two factors, international interaction and radicalised labour unions were political opportunities that mobilised anarchist principles in the country.

However, while *anarchism* was present in the early Philippine socialist milieu in the form of ideas and literature, there were no Filipino *anarchists*. Lope K. Santos, Isabelo de los Reyes, and Pedro Abad Santos all never explicitly aligned with anarchism nor called themselves such. The Filipino anarchist character Felipe in *Banaag at Sikat* is ahistorical, in that the author Santos wrote an entirely fictional character not based on any Filipino anarchist. This is because—as far as I can ascertain—there were no self-identifying Filipino anarchists during the American and Commonwealth periods who left behind literature and historical records of their existence. The closest we have to a Philippine anarchism that almost was are the books *Banaag at Sikat* and *Dalawang Magbubukid*, and organisations influenced by anarchist principles such as the UOD, AMT, and the Socialist Party of Pedro Abad Santos, which emerged from the same milieu as UOD and AMT. The books *Banaag at Sikat* and *Dalawang Magbubukid* by themselves are not proof of the existence of an anarchist milieu, especially with the lack of self-identified anarchists. Perhaps a review of the literature produced by the AMT, the radical printers, and the early Socialist Party may reveal suggestions of the presence of radicals who explicitly did call themselves anarchist or aligned explicitly with anarchism.

⁵² Santos, Lope K. 1906. *Banaag at Sikat: Nobelang Tagalog*. 1st ed. Manila: S.P. <http://digitalibrary.ust.edu.ph/cdm/ref/collection/section5/id/90023>.

⁵³ Fegan, Brian. 1982. "The Social History of a Central Luzon Barrio." In *Philippine Social History: Global Trade and Local Transformation*, edited by Alfred McCoy and Ed de Jesus. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 107.

On that note, there is also some literature suggesting the existence of a Chinese anarchist cell in Manila during the American colonial period. This group, originating in the 1919 May Fourth Movement in China, published anarchist books and newsletters in Chinese.^{54,55,56} These Chinese anarchists in the Philippines supposedly even sent a representative to the League of Eastern Anarchists.⁵⁷ What we do know from Yong is that a network of Chinese anarchists and socialists did exist across East and Southeast Asia, and in Malaysia this radicalism factored into later Malayan communism.⁵⁸ But even if such a Chinese anarchist cell existed, we do not know if this anarchist cell interacted with the early socialist milieu, or if the ideas of this anarchist cell factored into the ideologies of the early Philippine socialists. We do not even know what happened to these Chinese anarchists in Manila, whether they were absorbed into a diaspora bureau of the Chinese Communist Party, returned to China during the reinvigorated Chinese Revolution, or simply faded into obscurity. More historical research has to be done to understand the extent of the permeation of anarchist ideology in the Chinese-Filipino and Philippine socialist milieus during the American Colonial period and if there was international interaction between the Chinese and Filipino milieus.

What we *do* know is that the anarchism ‘that almost was’ of the American colonial period and Commonwealth was subsumed into the Philippine communist movement, from the Socialist Party to its merger into the old Communist Party (PKP-1930), the Huk guerrilla resistance to Japanese fascism, and later against the newly independent Philippine government.^{59,60} This pattern of anarchist demobilisation in reverse proportion to Bolshevik mobilisation after the success of the 1917 Russian Revolution was a phenomena across Southeast Asia and all over the world.^{61,62} Indeed, the ‘victory of Bolshevism led to anarchist decline.’⁶³ How

⁵⁴ Yong, C. F. 1997. *The Origins of Malayan Communism*. Singapore: South Seas Society.

⁵⁵ Fernandez, Erwin S. 2009. “Anarchism, Philippines.” In *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, edited by Immanuel Ness, 1–2. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. doi:10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp0068.

⁵⁶ Damier, Vadim, and Kirill Limanov. 2017a. “Anarchism in Indonesia.” Libcom.org. <https://libcom.org/library/short-essay-about-history-anarchism-indonesia>.

⁵⁷ Fernandez 2009.

⁵⁸ Fernandez 2009.

⁵⁹ Fernandez 2009.

⁶⁰ Anderson 2013, 229.

⁶¹ Damier and Limanov 2017a, 2017b.

⁶² D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 572.

⁶³ D. M. Williams and Lee 2012, 572.

‘We challenge the notion that tends to reduce revolution to capture of state power. We are not anarchists, but we believe strongly in social empowerment. It is possible that revolutionaries could come to power without completely capturing or smashing the state machinery. In such a scenario, society would be stronger than the state which, to us, is more desirable.

We reject the monopoly power substitution that happened in nearly all communist-led revolutions. We are for dispersing power across the social spectrum. Even the communists themselves stand to gain more in strengthening, rather than undermining, civil society.¹⁰³ [...]

We cannot wait for the natural withering away of the state. We are committed to create the basis for such a process here and now. That is why the bias of our activity is toward social empowerment.’¹⁰⁴

In these passages, we find a clear reinventing of anarchist principles albeit using the framework of Popular Democracy, despite the disclaimer, ‘we are not anarchists.’ There is a clear call towards a ‘greater democracy’ than what the so-called actually-existing socialisms have offered so far. Serrano championed ‘people’s sovereignty,’ where decisions are done on ‘lower’ levels, and even explicitly challenges the equation of revolution to the capture of state power. This is similar in comparison to Grubačić’s ‘Anarchism, as I learned it from my comrades, was about taking democracy seriously and organizing prefiguratively.’¹⁰⁵ The practice of direct democracy itself is not an exclusively anarchist idea, but it is one closely associated with the conceptual framework of anarchism, albeit combined with anti-authoritarian politics and non-hierarchical practice.¹⁰⁶ Serrano additionally says that ‘we cannot wait for the natural withering away of the state.’ This recalls the common anarchist critique of the Marxist notion of the dictatorship of the proletariat.¹⁰⁷ Cuevas-Hewitt similarly argues that ‘Serrano re-imagined revolution as a process rather than an event; more an undercutting than an overthrowing’ and that this ‘is the precise approach taken by present-day anarchists

¹⁰³ Serrano, Isagani. 1994, 80.

¹⁰⁴ Serrano, Isagani. 1994, 81.

¹⁰⁵ Franks, Benjamin, Nathan J. Jun, and Leonard A. Williams, eds. 2018. *Anarchism: A Conceptual Approach*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

¹⁰⁶ Franks, Benjamin, Nathan J. Jun, and Leonard A. Williams, eds. 2018, 105.

¹⁰⁷ McKay, Iain, Gary Elkin, Dave Neal, and Ed Boraas, eds. 2020. *An Anarchist FAQ*. Version 15.4 (17-Mar-2020). 2 vols. The Anarchist FAQ Editorial Collective. <http://anarchistfaq.org/afaq/index.html>.

Congress implies that a rubber-stamp assembly simply affirmed what was already becoming standard procedure.⁹⁸

The crisis of authoritarianism and its relation to Philippine anarchism is explicitly dealt with in a dissertation by Loma Cuevas-Hewitt,⁹⁹ who collated oral histories of Philippine anarchism in chapter 10 of their dissertation. In this chapter, Cuevas-Hewitt narrated the development of a crisis of authoritarianism experienced in the Philippine radical milieu in the post-Marcos period. This was experienced within the Communist Party of the Philippines and outside of it. Part of their argument is that the schism and crisis in the Communist Party of the Philippines ‘precipitated a flowering of feminism, environmentalism, and anarchism in the Philippines, all of which had been held in check by the Maoists’ hegemony over the Left.’¹⁰⁰ Some Rejectionists sought to undo the ‘distortions’ in Marxism done by Mao Zedong and Joma Sison to articulate non-Maoist forms of Marxism (*ibid.*), while others articulated other ideological frames such as environmentalism and anarchism.

One of the frames Cuevas-Hewitt identifies as an example is a text by Serrano,¹⁰¹ ‘Re-imagining Philippine revolution,’ that essentially re-invents anarchist principles through the framing of Popular Democracy. Serrano argues,

‘There is no blueprint as yet, only preferred principles. Socialist here means greater democracy than what both capitalism and socialism have offered so far. The stress is more on society rather than the state. We favor the strengthening of the people’s sovereignty over resources and decisions. The lower the decision center is in the power ladder, the better; we have no illusion about the centralized and top-down nature of both the state and corporate institutions. We are set to build accountability safeguards from the social side of the power equation. This task extends to disempowering and bringing down unaccountable institutions.’¹⁰²

Interesting here is that Serrano mimics the anarchist adage, ‘there is no blueprint for a free society,’ and that Serrano explicitly discounts state-mediated mechanisms. Serrano continues:

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Cuevas-Hewitt, Loma. 2016. “Re-Imagined Communities: The Radical Imagination from Philippine Independence to the Postcolonial Present.” Dissertation, Perth, Australia: The University of Western Australia. https://api.research-repository.uwa.edu.au/portalfiles/portal/9794911/THE-SIS-DOCTOR-OF-PHILOSOPHY-CUEVAS-HEWITT-Marco_2016.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Cuevas-Hewitt, Loma. 2016, 293.

¹⁰¹ Serrano, Isagani. 1994. “Re-Imagining Philippine Revolution.” *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 10 (2): 71–81. <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/kasarinlan/article/view/885>.

¹⁰² Serrano, Isagani. 1994, 75.

many anarchist ideas survived into the communist period of the old PKP-1930 still remains to be learned.

The Anarchy of the First Quarter Storm

The next we hear of anarchism in the Philippines is the First Quarter Storm in 1970, the period of militancy leading up to the dark days of the Marcos Dictatorship. The historian of Philippine communism Joseph Scalice notes that, in the fringe of the initially anti-authoritarian Samahan ng Demokratikong Kabataan (SDK; Federation of Democratic Youth) there existed ‘openly anarchistic groups,’ such as the Mendiola chapter of the SDK (SDKM) led by Jerusalino “Jerry” Araos.⁶⁴ The SDKM waved the black flag with the words ‘*Inang Bayan o Kamatayan*’ (Motherland or Death) on its black field, the design being based on a Cuban revolutionary flag.^{65,66} Furthermore, Scalice calls the SDKM as an ‘avowedly anarchist’ faction within SDK.⁶⁷ The SDKM was insurrectionalist in that they carried with them explosives (called pillboxes) and a certain tendency for violence that earned them a reputation for having *utak pulbura* (gunpowder brains). They even set up underground assembly lines for explosives in urban poor areas they had an influence in.^{68,69} The SDKM were highly visible actors in the First Quarter Storm, and they infamously rammed a commandeered fire truck onto the Mendiola gate and claimed to have had members in almost every barricade^{70,71} including the Diliman Commune.⁷²

The student insurrection of 1971, called the Diliman Commune, also factors as a precedent of Philippine anarchism and as a part of the country’s libertarian history. Nobleza and Pairez (2011) wrote the primary study of the Diliman Commune through an anarchist lens. They found that, despite being ideologically influenced by National Democracy (the political line of the Communist Party), the Diliman Commune contained anarchistic elements. For example, they argue

⁶⁴ Scalice 2017, 343–44.

⁶⁵ Araos, Jerusalino (Jerry). 2008. “SDKM.” In *SDK: Militant but Groovy: Stories of Samahang Demokratiko Ng Kabataan*, edited by Soliman M. Santos Jr., 74–77. Pasig: Anvil, 74.

⁶⁶ Scalice 2017, 343–44.

⁶⁷ Scalice 2020, email correspondence.

⁶⁸ Scalice 2017, 344.

⁶⁹ Araos 2008, 76.

⁷⁰ Scalice 2017, 344 note 67.

⁷¹ Araos 2008, 76–77.

⁷² Scalice 2018, 500–511 note 17.

that the Diliman Commune was a spontaneous insurrection that was not directed by a vanguard party, and that students and faculty intuitively used anarchistic principles such as direct action and popular general assemblies.⁷³ It is important to note, however, that the historiography of the Diliman Commune as a spontaneous episode is disputed by Scalice (2018), who argues that Stalinist cadres had been looking for a pretence to stage street battles to further the programs of their party, and thus agitated for the use of insurrectionary barricades across the student milieu.⁷⁴ While not anarchist itself and while the historiography of spontaneity is in doubt, the Diliman Commune still did have features of direct action and open assemblies that anarchists do champion. Thus, it is for these reasons that there are tendencies in Philippine anarchism that point to it for inspiration, historiographical controversies and all.

The historical question of whether the SDKM was specifically and explicitly anarchist is also in doubt. Waving black flags and carrying an insurrectionary mindset is not enough to call a group anarchist. After all, Daesh (the so-called “Islamic State”) and the Daesh-aligned Maute group also flew black flags and were insurrectionary, albeit for entirely different reasons and motivations. The deciding factor to determine if the SDKM really was anarchist would be to consult the literature they produced and the oral histories by alumni. Should a review of the SDKM’s literature reveal a program that is simultaneously anti-statist and anti-capitalist, and should the literature found be comparable to the conceptual approach to anarchism in Franks, Jun, and Williams (2018), then that would lend credibility to the hypothesis that the SDKM was specifically anarchist. As it turns out, Jerry Araos (2008) *did* in fact write about the SDKM in a collection of essays by SDK alumni, but his brief entry said nothing about anarchism. Araos even mentions that the ‘SDKM was a rekindling of our KM-led [Kabataan Makabayan; Nationalist Youth] nationalist spirit and anti-imperialist sentiments.’⁷⁵ The Kabataan Makabayan, of course, is aligned with the Communist Party as its youth wing, not exactly anarchist material. Nationalism and anarchism have intersected

⁷³ Nobleza, Randy, and Jong Pairez. 2011. “Ang Potensyal na Anarkistang Tendensiya ng Diliman Commune: Konsepto ng Kapwa sa ’71 Diliman Commune: Mga Level ng Pakikipagkapwa-tao at Sikolohiyang Pilipino sa Karanasang Diliman Commune.” *Gasera Journal* 1: 4–9.

⁷⁴ Scalice 2018, 508.

⁷⁵ Araos 2008, 75.

and Politbur.⁹³ Ka Barry decried the way the Party document ‘Reaffirm,’ which had been signed by Armando Liwanag (the pen name of CPP founder and chief ideologue Joe Maria Sison), was disseminated. This resulted in the questioning of whether the rectification campaign advocated by ‘Reaffirm’ was the decision of the Central Committee, the Politburo, the Executive Committee, or just Liwanag himself.⁹⁴ Ka Barry contended that there was not enough democracy in the party, and that the ‘rectification campaign’ was a call for a purge.⁹⁵ Ka Barry opposed this purge:

‘The call for a purge is a sign of desperation. It seems that when people cannot be convinced through democratic discussion and debate, extreme organizational measures are being conjured to resolve the issue.

A purge would have disastrous consequences on the Party and the revolutionary movement. It would divide the Party or cause large-scale resignations. It would discredit the Party to a lot of its national and international allies. Any attempts to conduct a purge should therefore be vigorously opposed and resisted.

The Party faces the threat of authoritarianism, a form of one-man rule that recognizes only one set of views—its own, that considers all others as “erroneous” or “muddleheaded,” and that brooks no criticism and uses extreme measures against those who criticize.⁹⁶

Notable in this excerpt is Ka Barry’s foresight, in that the Party was indeed discredited and divided through mass resignations. Ironically, Ka Barry ends their polemic by calling for a new Party congress to address the burning issues of the day, but the Second Party Congress would not be held until 2016.⁹⁷ The late assembly of the Second Party Congress suggests that the party elite only allowed the congress to occur when they were sure they could control its outcome, perhaps proving Ka Barry’s fears quite valid. Indeed, the communiqué of the Second Party

⁹³ Ka Barry. 1992, 158.

⁹⁴ Ka Barry. 1992, 159.

⁹⁵ Ka Barry. 1992, 164–5.

⁹⁶ Ka Barry. 1992, 165.

⁹⁷ CPP. 2017. “Communiqué: Second Congress Communist Party of the Philippines.” *Politics*. National Democratic Front of the Philippines. March 29. <https://ndfp.org/communique-second-congress-communist-party-of-the-philippines/>.

‘Critical thought had always been trained outward but seldom inward. [...] Submissiveness and obedience being the implicitly favored traits, cadres who faithfully carried Party directives were more easily promoted. Mavericks and dissenters were often criticized as troublesome. This resulted in a population of cadres who are more efficient in accomplishing tasks and facilitating implementation down the line of command than scrutinizing their nuances and merits.’⁸⁸

For Garcia, these factors created a catastrophic conclusion, where orders were not questioned, faithful communists were tortured and murdered⁸⁹ and—as Bello suggests—paranoia was the rule of the day.⁹⁰

This crisis of Left authoritarianism was also one of the issues in the Reaffirmist-Rejectionist Schism, or the Second Great Rectification, as it is known in the Communist Party. To briefly introduce the matter, the so-called ‘Rejectionists’ or ‘RJs’ are so-called because they rejected the reaffirmation of Maoist doctrines within the Communist Party of the Philippines and then split from the party because of this disagreement. Those that stayed with the Party and their line are called ‘Reaffirmists’ or ‘RAs,’ because they uphold the 1991 Party document known as ‘Reaffirm Our Basic Principles,’ or simply “Reaffirm.” Rejectionists are ideologically diverse, ranging from de-Stalinised forms of Marxism-Leninism, Fourth Internationalism, and democratic socialism. The Rejectionists are not a coherent bloc, and are also prone to factionalism and schisms. In contrast, the Reaffirmists are also called National Democrats or NatDems/NDs because they form an ideologically-tight tendency following the political line of National Democracy (in other words, they believe that a socialist revolution is impossible without a democratic revolution first; this is the theory of the Two-Stage revolution officially adopted by the CPP. See Pabico 1999 for a more comprehensive summary⁹¹).

Against ‘Reaffirm,’ a document was distributed among the milieus commenting on the document ‘Reaffirm,’ entitled ‘Resist Authoritarian Tendencies within the Party! Let a Thousand Schools of Thought Contend!’⁹² In it, the anonymous author signed as ‘Ka Barry’ or ‘Comrade Barry’ criticised how theoretical and strategic documents were put out and then retracted by the Central Committee

⁸⁸ Garcia, Robert Francis B. 2018, 105.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Bello, Walden. 1992, 172.

⁹¹ Pabico, Alecks P. 1999. “The Great Left Divide.” I, The Investigative Reporting Magazine, April–June. <https://web.archive.org/web/20110624004753/pcij.org/imag/specialreport/left.html>.

⁹² Ka Barry. 1992. “Resist Authoritarian Tendencies Within the Party! Let a Thousand Schools of Thought Contend!” *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 8 (1): 158–65. <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/kasarinlan/article/view/303>.

in the past, such as in the case of Korean and Black anarchisms^{76,77} so it may not be outside the realm of possibility that the SDKM could be simultaneously anarchist and nationalist. However, the fact that ‘nationalist’ is name-dropped in Araos’ account but ‘anarchist’ is not tends to lend more credibility to the hypothesis that the SDKM was not anarchist. While there are some recollections of an insurrectionary attitude, there was nothing in Araos’ account about opposition to the paradigms of states, hierarchies, or cadres—the usual tropes that exemplify the presence of anarchist ideology. Again, an insurrectionary framework and black flags are insufficient to make a definitive judgment. The closest we have as proof is the anti-authoritarian outlook and even anarchistic streak of the SDK and SDKM that differentiated it from the Kabataan Makabayan,⁷⁸ and of course, the infamous black flag of the SDKM—since black flags have been a staple of anarchist heraldry since the Russian and Ukrainian Revolutions.

We have to also keep in mind that the question of whether the SDKM and Araos were anarchist is not the primary concern of the dissertation of Scalice (2017). These concerns were only mentioned in passing, and a more comprehensive study of the SDKM has yet to be written. We cannot ask Araos outright what the politics of the SDKM was because Araos has since died. Other SDKM alumni may still be alive, such as Bani “Bunny” Lansang, who Araos mentioned as the “ideological guru” of the SDKM.⁷⁹ The ultimate proof will be written literature such as pamphlets and fliers that explain the program and ideology of the SDKM, particularly their orientations toward authority, the State, or hierarchy. A future study of the SDKM must take to task both surviving oral histories and literature to determine the group’s ideological outlook.

If the SDKM was actually anarchist, it is odd that Nobleza and Pairez (2011) do not mention the SDKM in their account of the Diliman Commune. The oral history of Philippine anarchism narrated by Cuevas-Hewitt (2016) does not mention the SDKM either.⁸⁰ It seems quite likely these omissions of the SDKM were simply because they were not aware of the SDKM. After all, Scalice only made his

⁷⁶ Hwang, Dongyoun. 2009. “Anarchism, Korea.” In *The International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest*, edited by Immanuel Ness, 1–3. Oxford, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. doi:10.1002/9781405198073.wbierp0063.

⁷⁷ Alston, Ashanti Omowali. 2002. “Beyond Nationalism But Not Without It.” ONWARD. <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/ashanti-alston-beyond-nationalism-but-not-without-it>.

⁷⁸ Scalice 2017, 343–44.

⁷⁹ Araos 2008, 76.

⁸⁰ Cuevas-Hewitt, Loma (Marco). 2007. “Sketching Towards an Archipelagic Poetics of Postcolonial Belonging.” *Budhi: A Journal of Ideas and Culture* 11 (1): 239–46. <https://journals.ateneo.edu/ojs/index.php/budhi/article/viewFile/438/433>.

claims about the SDKM in his doctoral dissertation completed in 2017, more than a decade after the earliest version of the study of Nobleza and Pairez (2011) was circulated in 2006 (initially entitled ‘Anarki in UP’), and a year after the dissertation of Cuevas-Hewitt (2016) was completed. That Nobleza and Pairez (2011) or Cuevas-Hewitt (2016) do not mention the SDKM is suggestive of the fact that there is no historical continuity between the anarchism of the SDKM and contemporary Philippine anarchism (assuming the SDKM was anarchist). Like the ‘anarchism that almost was’ before it, the anarchism of the First Quarter Storm was demobilised and absorbed into communist vanguards, now in the form of the new milieu of Marxist-Leninist-Mao Zedong Thought (later Marxist-Leninist-Maoist). The SDK and SDKM were later absorbed into the communist milieu⁸¹ and Araos would later join the New People’s Army (NPA, the armed wing of the Communist Party of the Philippines) before retiring as an artisan and an artist.^{82,83} This mirrors the trajectory of the ‘anarchism that almost was’ of the American and Commonwealth periods. In these two fragmentary histories of anarchism in the Philippines, almost nothing

While contemporary anarchists in the Philippines may point to these fragmentary histories as inspirations, there is no discernable continuity between these fragmentary histories and the contemporary anarchist milieu in the country. In the years after the fall of the Marcos Dictatorship, anarchism would reemerge once more, partly reinvented by concrete experiences of authoritarianism and partly invigorated by anarchists and punks.

The Philippine Left in Crisis

If the anarchisms of the earlier period were totally demobilized, what then are the roots of the contemporary anarchist milieu in the Philippines today? I observe four factors involved in the mobilisation and emergence of the contemporary anarchist milieu in the Philippines. These are:

- the disillusionment with the authoritarianism of the left;

⁸¹ Scalice 2017, 726–29.

⁸² Scalice 2020.

⁸³ Lapeña, Carmela G. 2012. “They Left Us in 2012, Filipinos Who Made Their Mark.” GMA News Online, December 31. <https://web.archive.org/web/20190704083826/https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/lifestyle/content/288312/they-left-us-in-2012-filipinos-who-made-their-mark/story/>.

- the collapse of the Soviet Union and of its satellites;
- the dissemination of punk; and
- the international mobilisation of anarchism as part of the anti-neoliberal “alter-globalization” movement.

This section deals with the first two factors. The disillusionment with authoritarianism among the left led to introspection by activists and radicals, in turn encouraging experimentation with different new ideas. The collapse of state socialism in the Soviet Union also factored into the crisis of the Philippine Left, leading to the questioning of old ideas about state socialism.

There were two major events in the crisis of authoritarianism within the socialist and communist milieus in the post-Marcos period of 1987 onwards: the bloody purge within the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), which saw the torture and murder of hundreds of communist cadres and guerrillas; and the Reaffirmist–Rejectionist Schism (or the RA–RJ split), which split the communist and progressive movement. Within the Communist Party and those that follow its political line, this fracturing is known as the Second Great Rectification.

On the purge, Walden Bello⁸⁴ noted that it ‘contributed significantly to setting back the movement,’ such that political work was suspended and many lives were lost due to murder and other militants to disillusionment, with devastating results: ‘the morale of hundreds if not thousands of people in the movement [...] directly or indirectly contributed to their leaving or lying low.’⁸⁵ In reflecting on the experience of the purge as a victim, Robert Garcia⁸⁶ noted the ‘skewed power relations’ and hypocrisy that prevailed in the party:

‘The revolution thrives in its critique of iniquity and the hierarchical distribution of wealth, power, and decision-making in society. But the movement itself is patently hierarchical. The whole Party structure is vertically organized and all major decisions are done at the top. What makes this worse is the air of infallibility and finality that accompany such decisions.’⁸⁷

Garcia also noted the authoritarian tendencies in the political culture of the Party, which resulted in the ‘demise of critical thought’:

⁸⁴ Bello, Walden. 1992. “The Crisis of the Philippine Progressive Movement: A Preliminary Investigation.” *Kasarinlan: Philippine Journal of Third World Studies* 8 (1): 166–77. <https://journals.upd.edu.ph/index.php/kasarinlan/article/view/304>.

⁸⁵ Bello, Walden. 1992, 175.

⁸⁶ Garcia, Robert Francis B. 2018. *To Suffer Thy Comrades: How the Revolution Decimated Its Own*. Revised edition. Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing.

⁸⁷ Garcia, Robert Francis B. 2018, 104.