

# **Anarchism in the Archipelago**

**Historical Backgrounder**

Indokumentado

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Anarchism is a political idea invented by the people not out of abstraction. This is developed through actual interaction of the people among themselves and with ecological systems that can be traced during prehistoric age.

In our context, the oldest Homo sapiens based on fossilized evidence are about 10,000 years old uncovered in Tabon Cave in Palawan. Based on records, primitive people occupied this cave in three periods: 47,000; 31,000 and 16, 000. Archeological, anthropological and other scientific findings imply that our ancestors utilized non-hierarchical social relations.

Aside from primitive tools and technology invented and adopted by primitive peoples around the world; Mutual-aid is the most effective tool of human being; they able to sustain themselves in various situation and ecological settings by working collectively. Their ability to work together to attained common goal through voluntary and free associations increased their chance of survival in ever-changing environment.

Our ancestors had their contribution to the development of humanity; they developed particular culture through indigenous processes and able to established traditions and practices generally influenced by Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian culture.

Unfortunately, our own identity is covered with thick layer of synthetic belief and ideologies. Our sense of self-determination is altered and exaggeratedly Eurocentric. Actually, the very foundation of nationalism that regard by many people of today as their highest identity was reinforced and continuously reinforce through coercive processes that aimed to erased and replaced our roots; to the detriment of our communities while favoring the imperialists.

## **Defense of Autonomy and Early Resistance**

Barangganic was the set-up when Spaniards came, social stratification was already in placed; there were chiefs such as *datu* and *sultan*; *timawas* represents free people who are not obliged to provide services to chiefs. Slaves were two kinds: *namamahay* refers to slaves that has no property and probably enslaved due to raids. Due to debt, one can become a slave; he/she could regain his/her free status if debts are settled. Slaves can be promoted to higher social strata if he posses prowess in raids and defense; or able to gain wealth or through marriage.

Magellan's forces were massacred by Lapu-Lapu's group in order to defend the autonomy of their community. But this success was proved to be temporal; the Spaniards managed to exploit indigenous network and able to control strategic trading points. These two were important achievements in establishing centralized political power.

Barangganic has plenty of imperfections but imperialism of Spain and the US are worst. It brought havoc to our culture, ecology and self-determination. It introduced the corrupt systems that taught us to dominate, it replaced our value systems and we turned to hate our roots and glorify ideas and things which are alien to us.

Records of resistance of indigenous communities flooded the historical archives of Spanish administration. Many achieved short term success which later crushed.

## **The non-Katipunan view of the archipelagic revolution**

It is wrong to assume that resistance in the archipelago is all about Katipunan. Yes it able to organized a large scale uprising, but the nature of the corrupt centralistic government-based

method of organizing people showed its manifestations. It could have withstood the mighty force of the US if not the betrayals and power-hungry attitude of some who want to dictate the uprising.

Re-focusing our lens would open historical horizons we missed in our academic curriculum or authoritarian leftist literature. The indigenous resistance is generally toward regaining their traditional belief and life-style that friars and Spanish statisticians want to eliminate. Since late 1500s up to the last years of occupation of Spain, they were infested by various rebellion and resistance from different parts of the archipelago.

The records of Spanish authorities showed that resistance took place through out the archipelago were intended to regain their autonomy. A common knowledge that we failed to pay attention carefully. We are overwhelmed of the nationalistic story of Katipunan, to its centralized structure and influential figurehead that are vying to establish their own authority to the communities that used to live independently.

To sight some instance, in 1621, Tamblot with his 2000 followers revolted, they burned down all churches and statues of saints in the entire area of Loboc and Baclayon in Bohol. This revolt spilled over to Leyte; Bankaw and his follower holed up deep in the forest to freely practice their old-lives to avoid interference of external authority, upon the order of the Spanish priests, a military force was organized to crash the rebellion; hundreds of children and women who wore traditional dress for their rites were brutally killed.

Much more, direct action is not new to us, our ancestors did this on January 20, 1872 were 200 people including soldiers, shipyard workers and residents went on strike in Cavite. Captain General Izquierdo suspected that the *international* was behind this extra ordinary event. Many people were arrested but could not identify a common leader.

In 1896, the planned uprising of the Katipunan untimely broke-out; but prior to this, Isabelo de los Reyes was arrested. He is no part of any revolutionary group during that time but his name consistently appeared in newspaper attacking colonial administration. An activist from the countryside (Ilocos region) he was journalist, a profession which gave him the opportunity to plant his revolutionary ideas effectively.

After he was freed, he wrote a letter calling people to take arms and launch guerilla war, a letter adopted and issued by Katipunan as official communiqué signed by Emilio Aguinaldo as a president.

Isabelo was re-arrested and this time sent to prison cell of Montjuich in Barcelona, a grave mistake for Spanish authorities because he got connected to various radical people including anarchists in the likes of Ramon Sempau.

Spain that time was already highly influenced by anarchism. Few years back, Bakunin's comrade Guiseppe Fannelli went to Spain to organize workers which after several years, workers able to grasped profound understanding of anarcho-syndicalism. If Jose Rizal (considered national hero by the Philippine Republic) went to universities in Europe; Isabelo joined workers in the streets and learned the anarcho-syndicalist ways.

He went back to the archipelago in 1901 bringing with him interesting literatures written by Kropotkin, Malatesta, Voltaire, Proudhon, Darwin, Marx, Aquinas and among others. He organized printers and marginalized communities; they staged colorful and lively demonstrations and protests to the amazement of U.S. authorities. He helped organized Union Obrera Democratica (UOD), the first militant labor union in the archipelago that fiercely attack U.S. imperialism.

Authoritarian left started to gain influence during 1930s, which later dominated the radical movement in the archipelago. The Marxists-Leninist ideology of the Bolsheviks proliferated and

they became relatively strong that they even fought the Japanese imperialists during World War II.

During 1960s, the Maoists took the stirring wheel. Maoist from student sector joined the armed groups from the old party and they established Communist Party of the Philippines that adopted people's war designed for a long and strategic arms resistance. It became strong especially during Marcos dictatorship but outmaneuvered by the local elite during the EDSA uprising. After the so-called bloodless uprising, the elite took over leaving the communist party quarreling with their mistakes.

In late 1990s, the most influential leftist block which is the National Democratic Front shook by internal dispute; the differences over military tactics later developed into ideological conflict. Thus, the fragmentation of the movement commenced; initially a major split: rejectionist, the group who questioned the basic principles and ideological foundation of the movement which later called RJ. They are basically influenced by authoritarian insurrectionary ideas and practices.

The people and groups remained in mother organization reaffirmed the basic tenets and ideology which is now called RA. RJ suffered more splits that produced smaller formations. Many of them thrive in Non-Government Organisations and so-called progressive and traditional politicians as well.

Naturally, anarchism will not thrive in an authoritarian environment, it's influence started to re-surfaced in a rather strange venue. Punk culture came in the Philippines during 1980s from the west carrying with it anti-authoritarian intonations. It initially criticize the conservative culture of the Philippines, but during 1990s especially after the ministerial meeting of the World Trade Organizations, autonomous activists and collectives became active.

Since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, activist groups and collectives who identify themselves as anarchists are sprouting like wild mushrooms in the Philippines. Though, their historical background didn't take root from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century anarchism but rather from the 80's punk phenomena.

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INDOKUMENTADO is a section of the Onsite Infoshop devoted to research and publication, it seeks to explore anarchism as distinctly practiced in the archipelago through the multi-disciplinary approach of science, social sciences, folklore and actual practices. We are interested to trace this tradition of Philippine anarchism from the Pleistocene era to establish our basis for asserting non-hierarchical politics. We also want to learn from our prehistoric past, proto-history and documented history to regain our "own" self and identity. From the wisdom of our primitive social relationships we can conceptualize development that upholds equality and forge a society free from patriarchy and ecology friendly.

Indokumentado as a pioneer in this kind of undertaking requires systematic processes; research plays a vital role in our work. We need to conduct systematic investigation to be able to strengthen our assertion and claims.

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