

Understanding Anti-Authoritarian Strategy in the Apocalyptic Era

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“Don’t ask us for that formula that opens worlds, just a few twisted syllables, dry as a branch and gaunt. Today the only thing that we can tell you is what we are not, and what we do not want.”

— Eugenio Montale

If, for example, we are faced with the question of how should we respond to the environmental damage caused by the Bakrie Group with its Lapindo mud scandal¹, then the simplest answer is to provide political awareness to the public about the destructive consequences of the capitalist system and its state apparatus. According to the anti-authoritarian perspective, there are at least two commonly used ways of building this kind of awareness. The first is done by building two-way communication that puts forward non-hierarchical organizing methods, free from political parties, participatory, and formal— although there are informal methods that tend to emerge from this pattern, both are more characterized by their inclusive methods. The second uses confrontational or insurrectional methods with more or less the same principles as the first, only the second emphasizes individual and organizational spontaneity that is temporal, informal, and non-compromising. Through these two ways, the community is expected to be able to take the initiative to respond directly to any losses and exploitation related to their lives.²

The first organizing pattern, broadly speaking, is interpreted as an inclusive form, namely a form that can empower various lines of society into a new alternative to the structure of social movements. Methods like this are quite common and simple to be applied to social spaces and have been carried out—although still quite rare and relatively small in Indonesia, only a few exceptions are social experimentation in some areas such as the urban poor community of the Urban Poor Consortium and smaller experiments that are more informal networks such as the Food Not Bombs network—by various new social movements that emerged after the Cold War (or for the Indonesian context, post-New Order), which marked the end of the ideological feud of Soviet communism with western capitalism. Post-Cold War is where various social movements began to emerge in their new forms—or what is termed the New Social Movements—which broaden participation without any narrow ideological tendencies.

The second pattern is more likely to refer to ideological tendencies—in this case anarchism. The insurrectional approach puts forward a direct confrontation with the socio-economic structure of capital, thus this kind of organization tends to be exclusive in practice, because it requires the participation of individuals who have similar interests and understandings. Insurrectional practices have not become common in the history of the resistance movement in Indonesia. However, acts of violence committed by fundamentalist Islamic elements cannot be equated with anarchist insurrectionalism, because their epistemological references are completely different. The difference between the insurrectional pattern and the first is only at the level of method, both have more or less similar perspectives on how the economic and social order should be organized. Some examples of local insurrection such as the resistance of the Papuan people to Freeport and

¹ Refers to an environmental disaster caused by the company PT Lapindo Brantas. There is a basic overview of it on wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sidoarjo_mud_flow

² Distinguishing inclusive strategies as ways to reach the masses with insurrectional strategies I do not do to say that one tends to be social and the other is not. Both, in my opinion, are based on social liberation. What needs to be considered is how we understand the potential of each of these ideas in reality, from here we can only map the characteristics of each movement. Points, including the divisions they make (individual versus social, social versus environmental, etc.), will greatly influence their practice and the direction in which social liberation will lead.

the Indonesian state apparatus, the resistance of the urban poor who were evicted in Pandang Raya and the actions of the Bojong community that occurred several years ago, or the rampage of freelance miners in Bangka Belitung in mid-2007, can be considered closer with the insurrectional principle because it indicates a contradiction to capital.

Nevertheless, the insurrectional pattern is not an approach to violence, even though various insurrectionist practices are almost always synonymous with violence. This pattern that tends to directly challenge people's way of thinking can also be applied to a conventional cultural reshuffle. As was done by anti-art groups such as the Provos in the Netherlands and the Motherfuckers in America in the 60-70s, or by the early punk movement, which aimed to nullify the bourgeois lifestyle and norms by bringing with it the impulses of anti-capitalist struggle in modern society.³ Imagine Bakunin retorting to Situationist International, **"the creative desire of destruction to uncover the beauty behind the city walls!"** Insurrectional impulses are more aimed at – to borrow Wilhelm Reich's term – individual orgasms to create a direct disconnect from the overall domination of power. Whether it's the rejection of the dominant culture or the expropriation of the right to life, it can be done with or without violence, individually/small groups or in large scale mass movements.

So far, which method is more effective to use, if we are faced with a case like the Lapindo mudflow? Each of the above methods, I believe, has its own strengths and weaknesses when we consider effectiveness. Building a mass organization base, in the first way, takes time and a long-term program and is not an easy job. This way of organizing can lead the movement to a more constructive development. On the one hand, the long span of time required has allowed this case to be simply forgotten and the public, by the time it reaches this stage, are tired of forum meetings, demonstrations, and fruitless negotiations. Meanwhile, financiers and bureaucrats can arbitrarily move to a new exploitation area after destroying the previous one. This kind of situation can often be easily blunted when the compensation fund demanded by the community can be met. Insurrectional patterns, on the other hand, can sharpen contradictions and take movements to more dramatic levels in a short span of time. However, this kind of pattern is also more risky in practice, not to mention the public reaction due to bourgeois media propaganda that will discredit confrontational actions. It is not an easy choice whether we will take the first or the second way when considering cases like Lapindo and the threats of environmental damage in the future.

With the increasing threat of global warming, followed by climate change due to environmental damage, increasing global poverty, and the alienation of various directions generated by the globalization of capital, new creative and non-homogeneous ways to respond are needed. We can no longer rely on overly realistic apologies ("the society is not ready"), although a confrontational approach is also not something that can be used flexibly. What needs to be seen clearly

³ The Motherfuckers formerly known as Black Mask, a Dadaism-inspired group formed by the painter Ben Morrea and the poet Dan Georgiakis. The group declares that art "is an integral part of life, as it was in primitive society, and not a means to wealth". In the events of May 1968, the Group changed its name to 'Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers' and began going underground. Groups that describe themselves as 'street gangs with analysis' contributed a lot to the counterculture movement in New York City, especially the live actions on the Lower East Side. They set up shelters, provide free food, and help radicals connect with doctors and lawyers. The group is known for its reluctance to follow the rules at any political demonstration. Abbey Hoffman characterized them as "a middle-class nightmare...an anti-media phenomenon simply because their names cannot be printed." – Provos was a countercultural movement in the Netherlands in the mid-1960s by provoking a violent response against the authorities through non-violent bait. The group was founded by two anarchists, Roel van Duyn and Rob Stolk.

is how these two ways can be used to build the infrastructure of a social movement and at the same time bring it into direct confrontation with capital and the state. Below I will try to discuss, in a fairly short and limited way, the advantages and disadvantages—and dissection of ideas—of the two approaches.

The Insurrectional Approach: One Hit!

This kind of approach is not something that was born in post-industrial capitalism. The Age of Propaganda By Action (translation note: more commonly referred to in the English-speaking world as the era of Propaganda of the Deed)⁴ in the 19th to early 20th centuries, was perhaps the origin of the inspiration for the insurrectionist pattern. By resurrecting Bakunin and Stirner, the era of advanced capitalism justifies most of the followers of this school to re-breathe individual spontaneity in a society consumed by mass culture and such a powerful control system. The critical points of the insurrectionists rest on:

1. Permanent (large) organizational disapproval
2. Homogenization refusal
3. Rejection of reformist tactics
4. Rejection of industrial society values (wage work, division of labor).

The first point is very close to the principles of the anarchist-individualist movement and some communist tendencies – which are classified as anti-organizationalist factions – in the 19th century. Both emphasize individual initiative as the most revolutionary manifestation to crush the domination of power. There are some principal differences between the two, although these differences are more in response to different situations and times as well.

The intensity of the 19th century insurrectional activity responded to the conditions faced by the anarchist movement and international workers after the Paris Commune of 1871. His rejection of organization—from its syndicalist to collectivist forms—was drawn from Max Stirner, the originator of the individualist movement, which prioritized the union of Egoists (individual) as a dismantling of every aspect of power relations which, he believes, is a legacy of the era of the Enlightenment and Humanism to construct ‘individuals’ based on certain power interests. The anti-organizationalist faction completely rejected formal forms of organization. Luigi Galleani, one of the inspirational Italian insurrectionists who combined Kropotkin’s communism with Stirner’s individualism, took a slightly different position. Galleani still views individual spontaneity as a precondition for an anarchic social order. However, the ideas and practices that he propagated were very close to those of the individualist schools of the time. Galleani in his

⁴ The era of ‘*Propaganda By Action*’ lasted from the late 19th century to the early 20th century. Although acts of violence against the bourgeoisie were mostly carried out by individualist factions of the anarchist movement, the campaign was also carried out by figures such as Kropotkin and Malatesta, who in fact declared themselves communist anarchists. This era became a bloody conflict between the anarchist movement and the rulers of every country with the occurrence of various murders and terrors on kings, presidents, and the bourgeoisie. This is also the era in which journalists have begun to identify anarchism with violence. Many anarchists regret this era because the ideas they promote are distorted by the propaganda of journalists who take examples of certain random acts of violence.

regular publication, *Cronaca Sovversiva*, never backs down from proposing 'actions of violence against the bourgeoisie' by glorifying every action carried out individually or in groups. His emphasis on such actions led him to be rejected by many social anarchists such as Kropotkin, Malatesta and Emma Goldman.

Broadly speaking, this flow aims to create a moment where individuals can escape the isolation and powerlessness of life in one beat by reclaiming their autonomy. The idea of a renunciation of work, of permanent organization in which individuals occupy subordinate positions, of a non-compromising character, sometimes has a far more threatening liberating effect than the reformist practice of confirming the powerlessness of society by negotiating with the rulers, but they also have the potential to isolate the 'few' liberated individual' from his reality. Instead of trying to focus on individual starting points that will lead to social liberation, the insurrectional pattern often focuses on only a handful of individuals who share the same understanding. Stirner played a lot of influence here. The Union of Egoists (or gathering of individuals), according to him, can only occur if the individual really wants it, which will then put his interests ahead of the interests of other individuals. To bring individuals into the domination of organizations in the name of their interests, or the interests of the people, means positioning individuals into the pyramid of subordination to their 'external interests'.

The thoughts of philosophers such as Foucault, Deleuze-Guattari, are often associated with insurrectional practices that have a rhizomatic and anti-control character. The closeness of these thinkers lies in Max Stirner's idea of power (or Nietzsche in the academic tradition). Deleuze views Max Stirner as the predecessor of Nietzsche. According to him, Stirner's central question as to whose interests and what mechanisms of domination lie behind the 'universal idea of man' is an attempt to uncover the hidden interests of power. Stirner's operation closely resembles Nietzsche's attempt to dismantle the Enlightenment-era narrative by exposing every antagonism and discontinuity that is hidden within it. His critique of Feurbach and Hegel, indicates an 'epistemological cut' from the era of the Enlightenment and Humanism. He considered that the Human Idea that was born from that era, namely humanism, was just a concept of God reborn in a different form. For him, this concept is spectral, something unreal but persistently haunting, forcing the individual to adhere to normative ideas that he cannot live with. Nevertheless, Stirner, is a figure who is hardly reckoned with by contemporary academics, many of whom view Stirner as a poor relation of Nietzsche.

Contemporary insurrectionism was given its practical foundation by the Italian anarchist, Alfredo Bonanno. He combined the insurrectionist concepts of his predecessors with an overarching critique of the post-industrial order of society. Bonanno borrows Stirner's ontology to reveal the relationship of rationality (morality), which is the inherent values of capitalistic society, with the post-industrial project of social liberation. Rationality, he argues, is 'a language agreed upon by the oppressor and the oppressed'. Rationality or the Idea of Man is seen as a bourgeois morality, serving as a cloak for new co-optation techniques that most of the movements born of this idea are not aware of. Therefore, movements with a background in the ideas of the Enlightenment era and Humanism tend to take a reformist and non-contradictory approach, including anarchist variants born from that era. Bonanno views the insurrectional project as an inevitable demand of the post-industrial era. He further differentiates the realities of the industrial era from those of the post-industrial: 'industrial reality, as is well known, rests on capital, on the concept that is at the center of production, namely investment, and that investment must be considered. Today, with new programming techniques, a change from capitalist production is not difficult

to understand. It is simply a matter of alternating computer programs.’ This programming, the sublimation of these messages, is what Bonanno understands to be the breakdown of communication between the oppressed. A communication breakdown that is manifested in a vertical language, so that contradictions evaporate and the project of liberation becomes a process of reconciliation with capital.

The process of reconciliation with capital or a reformist strategy, Bonanno considers as something that plunges, because it is part of a vertical language. Therefore, according to him, the anarchist movement must throw away the desire to reach the masses through political channels. Bonanno puts forward a temporary organization that can sharpen contradictions through the practice of insurrection. This organization, too, is not an organization in the general sense, but an organization that functions to carry out specific goals desired by the individuals in it. Organizations must function according to individual interests and not the other way around. What should be noted is that Bonanno fully positions the insurrectional project as a strategy of mass struggle: ‘What will this project look like? That is by organizing together with those who are ‘marginalized’, without relying on an ideological basis, without relying on exclusive reasons derived from the ancient concept of class struggle, but on a basis that is directly related to reality, with different realities. There must be situations around your area where tension is being raised. Get in touch with such situations, but if it is still done on an ideological basis, it will tear you apart. Relationships have to be done in a different way, organized but different.’

The method used by the insurrectionist movement is indeed full of individualism, but it is inappropriate to view it as merely an escapist or purely individualistic lifestyle. The dynamics of insurrectional liberation rejects singleness in motion, direction and purpose; reject all central command; reject any kind of subordination to the hierarchy; reject all forms of representational politics and mediation. The goal is maximum plurality. Fundamentally, this resistance construction is related to the liberation of contemporary life. It is not a messianic horizon that promises redemption, not a political machine, which in order to achieve its goals (later) will sacrifice the present. He is the vehicle of humanity, which wants to stand on the current conditions; who want to transcend the alienation of everyday human life (hierarchies, representative identities, separation between everyday life and desires) by promoting confrontation—abandoning contradictions.

Inclusive Strategy: “The Mass Is Everything!”

The inclusive strategy is based on the possibility to achieve broad mass participation, and its general character is mass organization. Many mass-based organizations today, at least—although it must be admitted that they are still very rare, given the fairly thick and historical tradition of Marxism-Leninism as an example of a blueprint for social movements in Indonesia—have anti-authoritarian tendencies. But in many respects the logic of this kind of organization almost always resembles that of traditional political organizations.

Mass organizations always rely on the assumption that the ‘masses’ have not been awakened, therefore it is very important to bring awareness step by step through specific approaches and long-term programs. In other words, a good mass organization must use the normative language of the people in order to create a positive impression of struggle and can gain wider sympathy.

This is the reason why many social movements tend to take the line of political struggle. Political struggles usually try to focus on one issue. Issues that later become specific demands (such as an increase in labor wages, subsidies for the poor, or compensation funds for Lapindo mudflow victims) are expected to be resolved through political bargaining with those in power. As a result, the formal logic (the logic that is shared by the community) is that if those in power cannot fulfill these demands, they must be replaced. We all understand where this kind of political struggle for disassembly is headed.

Mass organizations also tend to create a separation between ‘who makes the idea’ and ‘who will carry it out’. They tend to specialize in roles among the masses they pastor. Although social movement forums often involve the community to determine the direction of the struggle, on many occasions this kind of forum has determined where it will lead. Social movements that rely on efficiency will tend to make organizations and masses into separate entities. The masses who have not been awakened are represented by those who are awakened, so it is not surprising that the individuals involved in it also have social awareness in stages.

In many ways this kind of struggle is difficult to lead to a form of social movement that is autonomous and participatory. This kind of political struggle can only be fruitful if the goal is the seizure of state power. Because with this kind of political strategy the logic of the people has not changed: the most likely change according to them is to replace a more honest and just ruler – or the jargon of PRD (Papernas) activists, PRP or PRM ‘a government that favors the poor’. This kind of logic blatantly makes people accept their subordinate position in the class pyramid by making them believe in rules and laws that are completely foreign to them, and at the same time making them distrust their own potential.

Although inclusive strategies can appear quite heterogeneous, they are often very homogeneous in nature. Based on the ideology of ‘progress’, he tends to divide the levels of organization into different strata (students, urban poor, and workers), but leads to a similar strategy. Again, progress is closely related to efficiency, and both are born as a consequence of the capitalist mode of production. The dominance of this homogeneous strategy makes social liberation synonymous with capitalist production: emphasis on quantity, repetitive labour, divisions of labour/specialization, and restraint of individual initiative—automation. Many people’s negative reactions to social movements are caused by their rigid and homogeneous nature. As a result, many people feel discriminated against simply because social movements tend to classify certain social strata as worthy of fighting for their lives.

However, it would be more unfair to equate all tendencies of inclusive strategies as the points above. Classical anarchism does tend to adopt the same pattern, though not completely. What needs to be considered here is the situation (including history and geographic location-territory) will greatly affect the effectiveness and way of organizing. Taking advantage of the situation does not mean falling into it, but to understand what potentials can be provoked from the situation. Sometimes the potential is already there but hidden because of strong historical factors, in this case the language that is understood. Ideas such as cooperation, complementarity, direct participation, and self-management are not exclusive contributions of anarchism, but practices that can be found in people’s daily spaces as an inevitable consequence of social relations. Therefore, an inclusive organization should have the potential to take these ideas to a more general level by challenging people’s way of thinking, namely promoting new alternatives of social relations. An inclusive approach is a vital strategy for social movements to lead to more concrete situations.

The Path to Simplification Is the Hardest Path

When during a mass demonstration demanding that Lapindo meet the compensation funds for its victims, suddenly someone shouted: 'People unite, destroy Lapindo!' The listeners would immediately think that the person who shouted was insane or worse, a provocateur.. Left politicians and NGO activists will find it irrational or not strategic. Economists see it as an impossibility for the country's economic growth. It would make more sense, for the protesters, if the shouts were: 'Fulfill our demands, O Lapindo', or, 'Mr. President, listen to the demands of the underprivileged.' This is the dominant logic understood by most people. On the one hand, extreme demands that are rushed do tend to cause negative reactions. What needs to be understood is that the needs of the lives of the victims are also something that must be responded to. Destroying Lapindo can create a certain cathartic moment, ignite the consciousness of the masses, but it can also be an excuse for the corporates involved in it to escape their responsibilities. Taking legal action is often a futile endeavor. Remember the case of PT. Newmont in Buyat Bay, the legal route does not make the exploiters caught and fully responsible for the damage and even death they cause. Thousands of Buyat villagers have lost their homes and livelihoods, while natural organisms are damaged by mercury waste. Can we rely on legal mechanisms to bring things back to how they used to be? Not. On the other hand, is destroying the responsible apparatus (including exploitation tools) a solution? Of course not. But resistance, materializing the cry "no! we will not take all these actions for granted" into action, can be an inspiration to address similar tendencies in the future. By creating 'real' conflicts, contradictions will come to the fore. At this stage it will be quite difficult for the government and the corporate media to cover the issue and normalize it. It will also be easier for people in other areas to respond to the same thing in their environment.

The two approaches that I discussed earlier are still quite foreign to alternative social movements in Indonesia. But the reality, in my opinion, says otherwise. To address the threat of environmental damage and global poverty by the state and capital, we can no longer rely on the logic of political movements as usual. Institutions that take advantage of social unrest are often too close to capital. How many times has the people's struggle against corporate tyranny been represented by NGOs and then shared with the authorities, lobbied the public to follow the mechanism and not act outside the law? Who exactly is acting off track? And who actually makes the boundaries of the (law) path? If we can answer all these questions, we will all understand which side is the real enemy of the social movement.

In a book entitled *Defending The Earth*, which contains a transcript of the direct debate between two practitioners and proponents of the radical environmental movement in America, Murray Bookchin and Dave Foreman, there is an important dynamic of the perspective of the eco-radical movement. Bookchin represents saving environmental conditions through libertarian social reconstruction. The concept of the environmental movement Bookchin seeks to connect the relationship between human needs and environmental ecosystems. According to him, the environmental movement must be community-based, non-hierarchical and decentralized, a concept he calls libertarian municipalism. By building alternative infrastructures from the workings of capitalism and the state, libertarian municipalities function as social infrastructures that can balance human needs by taking into account the capabilities and sustainability of the natural environment. Foreman, on the other hand, puts forward a biocentric view that refers to the thinking of deep ecologists. Foreman's approach is based on the objective conditions of the biosphere and natural resources, which according to him are in a fairly critical condition. Overpopulation,

industrialization, and natural exploitation as a result of commodifying activities of biodiversity—capitalism or capitalization of human needs, according to Foreman, are acute anthropocentrism that will create apocalyptic moments for Earth's inhabitants in the future. The threat of scarcity of natural resources and the loss of biodiversity, builds Foreman's skepticism to wait for the biosphere to be saved through social struggle. The starting point for Bookchin's social struggles was influenced by classical Anarchism and Marxism, while Foreman came from conventional environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club and later founded Earth First!. Earth First live action practice! such as sabotage, civil disobedience, to actions such as hunger strikes aimed at minimizing environmental damage by corporations and the state. Bookchin together with the Institute for Social Ecology provide an overview of infrastructure and practices that are quite beneficial socially and environmentally. Despite the ideological intrigue and incoherence of the views of the two camps of the eco-radical movement, both provide perspectives and practices worthy of consideration to address the multi-directional crisis of advanced capitalism.

The insurrectional approach pierces the logic of our thinking by exposing power relations. Social organizations unite the aspirations of individuals who want to fight for their lives. I am not offering a synthesis or standard program of the two approaches. Synthesis tends to be rigid and cannot develop dynamically. It takes two sides or various sides of life to make things work not statically, as well as social movements. Because a living organism's motion needs to continue to flow like a flux. Just as water, as a liquid, wriggles in the crevices of a solid, freezes (becomes a solid) and then expands, widening the cracks. The ice then evaporates into a gas. Repeated. Plants begin to shade the gap. The solid which is then made more brittle by dynamic modulation (change in stability) opens itself up to H₂O molecules. A movement obsessed with identity, organization, bureaucracy, and unity will be sluggish and ineffective (not to mention its boring and uncreative tendencies).

The above example may look like a disjointed fragment of what was discussed and discussed earlier. But this is what deserves attention. It is quite difficult for all of us to find a common thread between one issue and another. Such as, for example: between Lapindo and the issue of poverty, between mass culture and labor struggles, between conflicts in the Middle East and the consequences of horizontal conflicts within the country, between social and individual liberation. Whether social issues are more important than environmental issues is not an easy question so we will immediately answer it using a narrow approach. The common thread lies in the relation of capital which becomes the separation from every real activity of living things and their consequences for life. Therefore, a multi-directional approach is needed to be able to explain the relationship of each of these contradictions and divisions. Through this we can understand that 'man' is only one part of 'nature'—this separation doesn't really exist—where one is not superior to the other. Like Benedict Spinoza saw God not in a separate realm, but always 'exists' everywhere. This concept is suitable for radical movements, especially anti-authoritarians, to understand the reality in the era of globalization of capital. To critically understand every root of hierarchy and domination and capture a vision of equality with radical differences, in order to carry out a new strategy towards a life free from the shackles of capital and the state.

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