

# **Free the Islands**

**Palayain Kapuluan!**

Laya

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## The Archipelago

We live in an Archipelago of 7,641 islands, alongside a colorful and diverse tapestry of languages, peoples and cultures whose common ground for contact has been the sea. The sea connects people and their identities together, forming concrete, intersecting relationships of varying degree. Our histories, both recorded and unwritten, are defined by these connections and our mutual differences. We are not defined by a flag or any other symbol, we were simply bound to *each other*. We also cherish to live free and peaceful lives and our history is marked by many upheavals which sought to remove these injustices of authority: Dagohoy, Hermano Pule, Tamblot, Silang, Bonifacio.

But are we free? *Are our lives truly our own?* Do we really have a say in how we should run ourselves?

You might look around and see outright that this is not so. There is poverty everywhere. There are police abusing their power all over the news. People are intimidated from challenging authority and the government holds our lives hostage in their management of a crisis that they themselves ignored at the start. It is fine to feel like you cannot do anything; it is a human thing. But we have had our better days before. Many people have tried to fight for theirs, and we can, too.

We just have to make them.

## What Freedom really is

Growing up, we were taught that we have freedom. As an individual and together as groups, we have the right to think whatever we want, believe whatever we want, and do anything (as long as it is legal). We take things for granted, we do things that are dumb. It is a free country, as they say. We can live as we please.

But what is *freedom*?

The freedom being described at the beginning is one of two definitions of liberty. *Positive liberty* is the freedom *to do* whatever you please, while the other, *negative liberty* is the freedom *from* others bothering or trying to do something to you. Both look valid, but at the same time it seems you can not have one without the other — if we can do whatever we want, we can step on each other because we are free to do so, but if we are free to be left alone, then other people can not step on our freedom.

Positive liberty and negative liberty are two ends of the same pole. To truly seek freedom and have it is to *understand* it. We have to realize what freedom really means. Of course, agency — the capability of ours to make choices — involves us knowing what our choices are.

Let us not treat freedom as a thing that is given to us, like a pass in which we agree with the terms of those who make the rules. Rather let us treat freedom as something that we own. In one sense, a person's liberty ends where another begins. To be free, is to be *sovereign* — to rule oneself and nobody else — not to simply leave all of our inhibitions and stop considering about other people. To be free is to enjoy a vast space of possibilities in which we exist, to have as much choices in life as possible. To chart our own course! To enter and leave in things as we please! To be anything!

To be truly free — to be liberated of constraints — can only mean to have more branches in our paths of life. It means to not be confined within some arbitrary box or a bubble of our own isolation, but radiating ever outward into the world. Freedom is openness. Rather than thinking of every person as an island, we are together an archipelago where we all sink and rise in the same tides, connected in a vast sea in which we can swim or sail to others and simply stay in ours as we wish. The sea belongs solely to no one and everyone at the same time. Our freedom is interdependent with others and is bound up together. We will be free when we regard our fellow siblings as equals and free.

To be free is to be capable of living as ourselves, as individuals and as with others. And when we help others to be one, we call it *liberation*.

## **Freedom and Hierarchy**

Many people consider themselves “free” and in control of their own lives. In some cases this is true. You can believe whatever you want to believe. You can go into whatever career you want to get involved with. And you get to decide what to do with your time. But, if all of that were true, why would so much talk about “work and life balance” and “fighting for your dreams” even happen if it were really all that easy?

That is because the “freedom” we have all been taught is the freedom for the very few, the freedom to do anything and everything one wants to do, because they can. And the freedom of these very few, defined by the subjugation of the many is no freedom at all. This is *hierarchy*, placing the interests of only one section of humanity above the rest. All those not part of this elite club are forced to just follow along.

The freedom we want to put forward here is a more radical — literally going to the root of the matter — form of freedom: *Freedom from the domination of hierarchy*, in whatever form it takes.

Freedom to express yourself? What about freedom from persecution because of your religious or sexual identity? Freedom from discrimination, sexism, and transphobia?

Freedom to choose your career path? What about freedom from having to participate in an economic system designed to grab as much work out of you for the least pay possible? What about freedom from precarious living arrangements that force people into the most convenient, short-term occupations?

Freedom to love? What about freedom from toxic relationships, not only in a moral sense, but also a material one? Most domestic abuse goes unreported because the victims can not find any other places to go in the event of an incident, instead choosing to stay and receive more abuse.

George Orwell wrote of power in his book *1984*: “imagine a boot stomping on a human face — forever.” The freedom we are taught today is the freedom to step on other people. The freedom we present to you is the freedom from that boot — freedom from the power of another. *Freedom from hierarchy itself*.

## **Authority: The Inverse of Freedom**

The fuel that keeps hierarchy going is *authority*.

We have seen *authority* defined as a “power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior,” or authority as “people who command.” By these definitions, authority at its most basic is when people impose their will upon others. Ever had a boss power-tripping just because?

Domineering “friends” insisting they know what is best for everyone? Or parents actively trying to force you into a path you have no stake in? Or someone holding your money hostage just to get you to do something you do not want?

These things do not have no good reason to exist and exist only out of the personal desire of the person wielding that authority. People bothering you to be something, or forcing you to follow along what only *they* want. They are everywhere! Eventually, it just becomes a fact of life, something we are used to, to the point that we stopped even thinking about questioning the problem here.

So from these grounds, authority maintains hierarchy and restricts ones freedom. So what happens when authority extends to something wider?

## **The State**

The state, as political theorist Peter Kropotkin defines, is a territorial concentration of power in the hands of a few situated above society. In another perspective, sociologist Max Weber defines the state as a group or an institution that maintains a “monopoly on violence” –in that only they have the structural power to do anything to everyone. Basically, the state is *power* excluding society at large. This applies to all governments, whether they answer to a king, a president, or a dictator. It may be an elite class, a vanguard, an oligarchy, or any other happy few who act in the name of *something* or *someone*. A state is necessarily a concentration of power, else it would not be a state. The few of which power is concentrated into use coercion to maintain its own power through the use of apparatuses of violence like the military or police. To the state, this use of violence is legitimate and will use this violence to wage war against its own people in order to reproduce their rule.

Under the current republic in the archipelago, it would seem as if people have some control over the state. After all, we are told to “vote wisely.” But do not you notice that it is always the same names, the same families and same parties? Choosing from whoever the few people with the real power have chosen is no choice at all. Not only is this choice an illusion, so is the supposed “control” our votes have on “our” representatives. The extent of our acceptable participation in politics is restricted to voting and “running” for office – and it is a rare occasion for someone without influence, patronage and the resources to be taken seriously by those established.

These established elected officials are the ones who make the rules that shape the rules that dictate how we should exist. The actions of government seem arbitrary and serve only their own interests.

Is it not absurd, that the representatives of the state have the final say on:

- Divorce (Civil Code, Art. 15),
- Who we should marry (1987 Family Code Title 1, Ch. 1, Art, 1),
- Our privacy invaded and ourselves unrightfully arrested for anything that looks “suspicious” (Anti-Terror Act 2020),
- How much we should pay them for doing this to us (taxation laws such as E-VAT and TRAIN Law),
- What to say and express publicly in fear of police action (Joshua Molo), and

- When things involve laws that protect our rights and the well-being of people, they disregard it for their own interests as we saw in the drug war killings, and extrajudicial killings!

With this, we pin our little hopes to people who sell us sweet promises of uplifting our lives only if we elect them. We swoon for public officials doing the bare minimum in a crisis because the alternative is those who only care about their own interests. A progressive president, mayor, or governor is in an uphill battle — it is not just a question of managing things, they also have to contend for their lives with an elite who see them as a threat to their own interests. We have seen progressive figures be invited to serve in the largest echelons of state but are rejected by the apparatus themselves. And if we seize power, we will have to keep it from being taken from us — that means we will have to repeat the same cycle of hierarchy, coercion, suffering, and death that the last rulers have so comfortably sat on.

If we finally succeed in a revolution and decide to replace the government with another government, with a new army and a new police and a new everything, what changes then? Will we fare better in five years? Ten years? Fifty?

## **Capital**

There is a lot of talk about Capitalism as a “free economy,” if not the “freest.” Of course, it would seem obvious. Capital has been seen as the main driver of progress and personal prosperity. There is a logic where, you own something and you make use of its resources, you sell and make a lot of money out of it, grow your operations and then be able to afford Netflix after that. If you are unable to do so, you may render your services to others and make a living of it. Money flows, everyone wins!

But if that was the case, why do so many people starve, in many cases right outside of large fast-food restaurants and supermarkets? Why do so many parents work themselves down to the bone to make ends meet? Why do so many mothers live with the anxiety of getting evicted from their own homes? Why are there so many new condominiums and residential developments but still so many people living in shanties or homeless? Why do we live in apparent abundance while at the same time living with scarcity?

How much do the rank-and-file workers of any enterprise get, compared to the value they make for the business? Leaving the workforce to fight for scraps on the shop floor leaves one with stories of workplace politics that I am sure everyone has heard of before. That does not even mention the long-term effects of being forced to do things a certain way just because some aloof, profit-chasing middle manager could increase revenue by half-a-percent. And if all of that is happening to a single person — imagine how it would impact their daily life, how much of their workplace troubles unintentionally gets brought back home.

So let us say you were able to start a business of your own. Great! Now you can try to serve your community directly, emphasis on “try.” That is because what usually ends up happening is that you become a wage-earner in your own right by serving both your landlord and your creditors (the banks), and if you are able to start your own business without getting into a large amount of debt, you might not be who we are trying to reach with this piece. Talk to any small businessperson and they will tell you how many sleepless nights they have pulled to keep the business afloat, all so the bank will not repossess their shop, farm or house.

But then, you figure out that if you hire people to do all the dirty work of “work” for you, and getting favorable zoning/tax legislation from local government. And the higher you go, then you just repeat the same problem you have had with your bosses, just to someone else. The cycle continues.

The hell of capitalism is the same as that of authority and states — it is the massive power of the few at the expense of all of us.

## The Act of Liberation

The power of the state and capital seems inescapable. But it is important to remember that they aren't as powerful as they think. They can't touch the entire world however they want it. There are many spaces in which authority cannot reach us. All we need is to find them, or make them.

In liberation, we do not act because we want to lead a revolution, nor wage “war for the people,” because no one can free us but ourselves. We act because we can, and any small act we can do lays the foundation for something greater than ourselves. Our liberation is tied up together; we will be secure in our freedom when everyone around us are also free.

There are many ways in which we could expand our freedom just by establishing places where freedom is possible among ourselves. This is the strategy of creating autonomous spaces. A key feature that we should keep in mind is *trust*. As CrimethInc. puts it, “unlike authority, trust centers power in the hands of those who confer it, not those who receive it.” Who needs authority when you have trust? You would not let someone boss you around just because, would you? In focusing on each other and our immediate world, we are planting the seeds in which a free society may rise. From it, anything may grow.

There may be seeds, but it can only grow if you water them. And if there are many seeds, then we should water them like rain. The path to a freer society is one built along the lines of us doing what we can in our own little way, together. There is no singular path towards our collective liberation.

## Dual Power and Direct Action

If there is a giant rock blocking your path, the first thing that would probably think of would be to either hop over it or move it aside. If you move it aside, it does two things: you let yourself through, and you potentially let other people walking the same path through. By this small act you, yourself just did something to achieve a goal that also helps everyone that would have to deal with the same problem. This is **direct action** at its most basic, and it is something that showed results.

One of the greatest examples of direct action in our recent times has happened during the Coronavirus crisis. The government's response to the crisis was to enforce a militaristic solution to a health crisis. The Extended Community Quarantine was mainly handled by the military, and started as a military- and police-enforced lockdown. The President ordered violators of the Extended Community Quarantine to be shot dead while threatening military action against critics. There was a lack of mass testing to actually gauge how bad the situation was. Food aid was inconsistent and at times nonexistent from the central government, prompting LGUs and civil society to bear the brunt of helping those trapped in the situation. And once these groups were showed

more results compared to what the government was doing, the central government decide to reprimand them!

All these issues piling up led to massive outrage across the political spectrum, even conservatives were calling for the president to step down. There was a certain feeling that a future protest action that could include everyone was underway. The following day, the administration relented, reversed the reprimands, moved to pledge money to the pandemic effort, and even declared for free mass testing! This happened all before any actual direct action had happened. It not only showed that the government is not as all-powerful as we thought, but also shows how much what we can achieve should we act

One of the more long-term (and complete) forms of direct action is **dual power**. Dual power is the idea that we should build institutions outside the purview of the state and capital. Forming networks and links of trust with others while forming *counter-institutions*—intended not just to build solidarity with people, but to also make so that the people only depend on themselves and each other, not the state. Some notable examples of dual power in real life are:

- **Community gardens** and collective farms that have farmers own the land and also work and benefit from it together. It does not have to look like a garden, just that it produces fruits and vegetables. If you live in a city, keep your fruit seeds and put them on a pot with dirt on it. If you have leftover vegetables like lettuce, kangkong, mongo and onions, put them in trays of shallow water with sunlight on it. You will not believe the yield you will have from the seeds of a single chili pepper or a single tomato. You could keep it just outside of your home or on an open space in your neighborhood. Let your neighbors participate!
- **“Do-it-yourself” initiatives** where people with the knowledge can help fix and create tools for our daily needs against the planned obsolescence of some modern technologies. Your local repairman or mechanic seems to be more trustworthy than an Apple Tech who would suggest you would replace your gadget with a new one instead. There is also international initiatives towards making medicine accessible to people where medical help is expensive — from Open Source Pharma to Four Thieves Vinegar. People also sent out free schematics on how to make your own medical equipment during in the time of the pandemic. People are weaving their own masks, crafting personal protective equipment, and making manuals on how to make their own plants grow.
- **Autonomous patrol groups** that form stronger solidarity with its members and create a stronger defense against criminal activity in communities. People can and will stop crime themselves if given the power. If a snatcher or any other thief drops his gun, concerned people will move together to stop them before he gets that weapon. There is a “women’s patrol” in Pateros to keep clear of potential vigilante groups killing people. This community-based vigilance became an impetus for their communities to return to relative safety.
- **Mutual aid** associations and similar efforts that form as viable alternatives for public welfare, basic services and aid relief. Mutual aid is people pooling together to make something helpful from what they have. Free schools such as Kariton Klasrum and small study groups as a form of alternative education tools. Community kitchens like the ones being run at Sitio San Roque where the residents themselves are made by the residents for everyone. Wireless Internet Service Providers (WISPS) run by and for rural communities in the US and Europe.

- **Mutual banks** serve to protect a community's individual finances where they are not under the oversight of larger financial institutions.
- **Cooperative** factories and other businesses **self-managed by workers**, where workers themselves become stakeholders and managers of the means of production. Cooperative ventures allow for a more sustainable form of employment in the face of corporations seeking to curb worker's rights. A lot of cooperatives around the world exist; the most successful of them being Mondragon in Spain, while there are also notable collective agricultural ventures like the Palaymanan Farmer-Partner's Association in Bohol.
- **Collective Housing** efforts lead by local housing cooperatives, making sure that everyone has a home that they would be proud to call theirs. Examples include the Canadian Cohousing Network and the transgenerational housing projects in the Netherlands.

In these situations people give what they have and what they know in order to help as much people as possible. And a lot of these are just everyday things!

- If you are a student, you could band with your classmates in order to pool your resources to pass your requirements. Studying together instead of individually can result in easier time passing requirements.
- If you are a doctor, you could pool together for a clinic funded and managed by the community themselves. If you are an engineer or an electrician, you could offer your skills to install stuff such as solar panels or lighting, or just help with machinery.
- If you have a background in botany, you could work towards community gardens or grafting fruiting branches.
- If you are from an information-technology background, you could work to pirate books, films, music and media kept from a paywall for free distribution.
- If you are a teacher, you could look for other educators fed up with the red tape of the educational system and set up a community school.
- You can create spaces where all of these skills taught to others to ensure that vital skills are never lost. You can organize paid or remunerated internships and apprenticeship programs make sure that there will never be a shortage of capable hands and minds.

The possibilities are endless, so long as you have the will to do it.

*"But how is this different from charity work?"*—one may ask. Mutual aid differs from charity because people do it for themselves instead of waiting on others to help them. Mutual aid is something that does not just throw people a bone, it is an effort to get ourselves moving without the help of a higher authority.

Mutual aid networks can band together to form large, self-sustaining networks that turns their economic power into a political force and dual power that could one day directly contend with the powers of state, capital, hierarchy, and authority. There may be a time when the state crumbles under the weight of its own corruption and our networks can swoop in to abolish the remnants of hierarchy and capitalist oppression, as it has happened once in Rojava in the Middle East. Our networks of mutual aid can potentially outlast the state as it is the people themselves who are involved and who sustain it. They hold a stake in it. *You* hold a stake in it.

## The Free Society

Imagine if the things we are doing right now outlast governments in the future. Imagine it continuing beyond ourselves. Imagine it blooming beyond what we started with. At the end of it all, it is just people, people living as they will and depending on each other. It would be a real ecosystem where our own niches as individuals change as we please. We set our own time, our own work, our own worth.

From childhood we have been taught to share. We have been taught to speak up and explain why we think the way we do. We are taught that if we do that for ourselves, we will be able to get further in life. And we could get further in life, assuming you get lucky, meet the right people, and kiss the right boots. But we are not free within capitalism and we are not free under the thumb of the state.

A free society does not need bosses and patrons, or servants and underlings. There is no center, no group of people to please, no ideas to follow without doubt, and no person to step on and be stepped by. Everyone is on an equal field, trying to develop themselves and the people around them. Everyone simply works at their own pace, and everyone receives the fruits of their labor. You go to get some vegetables on a market, and instead of immediately asking for something in exchange, they just gave it to you because they know the clothes you helped make, or the games you stream while testing them, are going right back to them in the end, all in a roundabout cycle of care and gratitude. This is an economy based on needs rather than profits. “I scratch your back, and you scratch mine.” This highest valued-currency is *reciprocity*.

Reciprocity does not end just on your community — what about other communities? Not just all around the archipelago, but also throughout the whole world! Being able to freely share things, ideas and resources from one end of the country to another thanks to technology allowing us to directly connect to people from far away. And with those tools we might be able to remake the luxuries we once cannot have. We can collaborate on new things with anyone and everyone. The possibilities are endless.

When we are governed by no-one, we open our affairs to the world. That is what a free society is.

## Beyond Us

All over the world, people are also fighting for freedom — *true freedom* — against the systems that seek to control and exploit them. Many rise, many fall, but many of them persist, flowing like water. We cannot survive without helping one another, and that extends to the whole world. We may not see them face to face, but our desire sings true for all of us.

The fight for freedom never stops, and bubbles up all around the world:

- Grassroots-based resistance movements in Chile,
- A massive, decentralized protest movement fighting against state control in Hong Kong,
- Brazilian Favelas taking care of their own when their government has left them for dead during the COVID-19 pandemic,
- Exarcheian Anarchists in Athens protecting refugees from state persecution, and deportation

- Hacktivists creating spaces to allow for the free flow of information.

We must free ourselves and take back control of our own lives. Once we liberate the islands we call our home, we must act for the freedom of those beyond the seas we have explored. We raise an armada to protect all the other islands in the world that still face the threat of oppression, of authority. We will not stop until there is no island beyond us still in fear of capital and the state. We will not stop until the archipelago of man is free, from anyone and anything, and free to act however and whenever they see fit.

Authority may be strong and on firm ground, but the sea of freedom belongs to us.

And we have a whole lot of sailing to do.

*Palayain ang Kapuluan!*

*Palayagin ang malalayang bayan!*

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## Further Reading/Bibliography

A lot of what is written here touch the surface of what is actually being talked about. So, if you are interested in knowing more, we have a bunch of texts we would like to share with you.

- *Your Freedom is My Freedom* by William Gillis
- *A “Political” Program for Anarchists* by Kevin Carson
- *The Anarchist Manifesto* by Max Nettlau
- *To Change Everything* by CrimethInc.
- *Archipelagic Confederation* by Bas Umali
- *Direct Action* by Voltairine de Cleyre
- *Towards an Anarchism in the Philippine Archipelago* by Simoun Magsalin
- *State Socialism and Anarchism* by Benjamin Tucker
- *An Anarchist Programme* by Errico Malatesta

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