Anarchist Archives: Critique & Self-Critique #1.1

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Printed and published (or even unpublished) works—such as books, pamphlets, leaflets, and zines—hold a significant place among anarchists. This is because such media have proven capable of preserving the diverse experiences and thoughts of many individuals; in certain cases, even if there is an intervention targeting these printed materials, their existence will endure—if not be eternal—longer than the lifespans of the individuals who lived through those experiences and produced those ideas. And the individuals who have fully preserved these printed and published words will subsequently receive a benefit, such as having access to revisit past "practices for reaching emancipation" (movements and struggles).

That is why, according to Baker (2023) in his study of Spanish anarchist counterculture—or the process of evolutionary change—many anarchist libraries were established to provide access to a comprehensive collection of printed works that had long gone out of print. Unfortunately, the history of the growth of this counterculture—or the process of anarchist evolutionary change—did not proceed smoothly in Indonesia; in fact, it came to a standstill. This was because Indonesia endured a prolonged period of authoritarianism—in its harshest form. The anarchists of the 1920s were exiled to Digul following the 1926 uprising; meanwhile, individuals with (anarcho-)syndicalist leanings who emerged in the 1940s were forcibly removed by Sukarno's Old Order regime from the factories they had self-managed and were gradually pushed out of the intellectual sphere by the PKI; their very existence became completely untraceable following the 1965 genocide and the rise of Suharto's New Order regime to power (Bima, 2018).

However, this prolonged period of authoritarianism was not unique to anarchists in Indonesia. The prolonged period of harsh authoritarianism—namely, the Communist regimes of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej (1948–1965; 17 years) and Nicolae Ceaușescu, meant that anarchists in Romania and Indonesia shared—without denying the differences in the impacts of the post-communist era in Romania versus the post-colonial and post-military-authoritarian eras in Indonesia, which created complex distinctions—a commonality in the historical development of their anarchist cultures. This is because when the communist regime came to power, anarchists were marginalized—ranging from having their movements suppressed to being killed—and those who survived had to go into exile abroad or, if they remained in Romania, chose to go completely underground (Anarhiva, 2021). This situation ultimately meant that the anarchists who emerged in Romania

during the collapse of the communist regime in 1989 or afterward—the majority of whom were active in the anarcho-punk scene— had only a fragmentary understanding—or none at all—of the anarchists who existed before them, meaning they automatically lacked a collective experience to draw upon when practicing anarchist or anti-authoritarian principles (Tataran, 2026).

In line with Adrian Tataran, Ucok (2026) also made a nearly identical point during a discussion of the book Unfinished Nation held at the Bunga di Tembok Library. According to him, before Bima Satria Putra's book Perang yang Tidak Akan Kita Menangkan was published—long after the Reformation—in 2018, the anarchists who emerged—and just like in Romania, many of whom were also active in the anarcho-punk scene—during the fall of Suharto and his New Order regime and the period that followed had no knowledge of earlier anarchist movements, so it briefly crossed their minds that they were the first generation of anarchists in Indonesia. Consequently, lacking the experience and collective memory passed down from earlier anarchists, these later-emerging anarchists had to start from scratch; in stark contrast, the authoritarian regime—though said to have collapsed—already possessed a bureaucracy, structures, and a military that had been built up over decades, were well-established, and ready to be handed down, making it no difficult task for them to return to the seat of power.

Drawing on that experience, Ucok said that it is important to launch an initiative to preserve collective memory, so that gaps in historical memory can be prevented and future generations can learn by looking back at history. This collective memory preservation initiative itself can take various forms, with shared responsibilities; for example—in the context of reading—some may collaborate to document and publish, while others discuss and put it into practice, only to have those insights documented and republished. In my view, in addition to the initiatives to publish, discuss, and put into practice—which many friends have already undertaken—archives efforts are essential for documentation and, furthermore, for the preservation of historical memory itself.

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Archives initiatives, particularly community-driven ones (community archives), have in fact been emerging in large numbers and are flourishing. We can say, broadly speaking, that community archives in Indonesia itself has experienced three waves of growth. The first wave was marked by several community archives that emerged in the post-Reform era through 2010, including the Indonesian Visual Art Archive, Warung Arsip/Radio Buku, and KUNCI. The second wave was marked by the emergence of archives initiatives between 2011 and 2021, including—to name a few—Bebaskan Buku!, Perpustaxaan, Ruang Arsip & Sejarah Perempuan, and Queer Indonesia Archive. Meanwhile, the third wave is characterized by archives initiatives that emerged from 2022 to the present, such as Jogja Sonic Index, Pustaka Taratsa (if they can even be categorized as an archive), Pustaka Langka/Logos, Catatan Nusantara, and Puss in Bed Zine Library.

Community archives itself is a grassroots practice of collecting, preserving, and ensuring open access to materials that the community members themselves have created. And according to Moran, anarchist archives is a distinct segment—or falls under the broader umbrella of—community archives. That said, because anarchist archives shares characteristics with community archives, including—to name a few—a focus on preserving specific materials, a tendency to operate outside the scope of government and even the NGO system, and being driven, managed, and funded by those who create and embody the experiences and ideas contained within the materials themselves—the anarchists.

In contrast to the thriving community archives scene, it appears at first glance that anarchist archives initiatives themselves are still few and far between. Although it may seem that way,

there have been several anarchist archives initiatives in Indonesia, such as Pustaka Otonomis (2005–2009), Pustaka Anarkis (2017–2019), and Arsip Bawah Tanah (2019–?) (all three were part of a single initiative that operated, ceased operations, changed its name, and then resumed operations); in addition to these past initiatives, there are also archives initiatives still in progress, such as Page Against The Machine, for example. Each of these previously existing initiatives focused on collecting and distributing digital materials; thus, even though they have ceased operations, there are still small-scale initiatives that are re-collecting existing materials to store them on their cloud drives. Meanwhile, the initiative currently in progress (PATM) starts with physical materials that are subsequently digitized, so the process proceeds slowly. However, whether they are defunct or still in progress, the focus of the archived materials remains on printed text such as books, zines, pamphlets, and so on.

It would be interesting to take a closer look at the challenges faced by anarchist archives initiatives—whether those that once existed but have since disappeared or those that still persist. But before that, we need to take a brief look back at community archives. According to Flinn, community archives itself faces several challenges, such as an unstable financial situation or even a complete lack of income—relying solely on the personal funds of its activists—a situation that, according to Moran (2016), also occurs in anarchist archives. This, in turn, gives rise to other problems, such as limited space for storing physical materials, and the risk that stored digital materials may be lost if cloud storage subscriptions are not renewed; Although the problem of digital storage has now been solved with the existence of the Internet Archive, significant funding is still required to create a website capable of showcasing, distributing, and making these materials easily accessible to the general public.

It doesn't stop there; these economic challenges also affect those who manage or drive these archives initiatives, who naturally receive no pay for the archives work they do. Consequently, to meet their daily needs, they must take on other jobs—in addition to the archives work that already demands so much of their energy, time, and mental effort. So it's actually not surprising that archival initiatives that have existed in the past often make slow progress, sometimes appearing and disappearing or treading water, or—in the worst-case scenario—vanishing altogether not long after the initiative began. However, if we look at the issue more broadly, economic problems are not limited to the realm of anarchist archives and archives alone, but also extend to the realm of social change in general.

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Again, according to "Ucok," in an interview, he said there is a cycle in which those who want change in their lives often disappear after actively fighting for it for 2 or 3 to 5 years. They are then replaced by new faces, who, after 2 to 3 or up to 5 years, also disappear and are replaced by yet more new faces, and so on. The emergence of new faces is certainly not the problem; rather, it is the disappearance of the old ones. This is not because the enthusiasm and commitment of those who disappear are any less than those who stay; rather, it is primarily due to economic issues. For this reason, starting in the early 2000s, Ucok has been advocating for the formation of economic collectives. Even if these individuals eventually disappear, at the very least, these economic collectives can help extend the timeframe before they withdraw and disappear—to 10 years, for example.

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Before we've even finished dealing with economic problems—which are like throwing a single spark into a field of tall grass—a new problem has emerged that now haunts anarchist archives:

a more subtle issue that isn't even questioned because it doesn't appear problematic on the surface. This problem is the alienation caused by scrapers operated unilaterally and without proper attribution ethics. In addressing this issue, I'll focus on a specific case involving the Archipelago Anarchist Archive (AAA): the use of scraping tools by Pustaka Taratsa to extract materials collected by the AAA (the "mine"). This issue warrants discussion because—as we'll see later—it has consequences just as devastating as the economic problems.

To begin with, a scraper is a bot that can scrape digital data from the internet in a short amount of time. And it doesn't just retrieve the data—it also extracts the complete metadata associated with that data. For example, when the Pustaka Taratsa scraper retrieved the book Kiamat Baru: An Anthology of Essays, Poems, and Stories of Worst Generation of Indonesian Literature to upload it to their website, what they retrieved and subsequently uploaded included not only the book file itself but also the author's name, publisher, publication year, and description. However, the issue that arises is this: although they were able to program the scraper to extract complete metadata from AAA, they were unable (or unwilling?) to program their scraper to credit AAA as the source from which they extracted the data and metadata. This might not seem like a problem at first glance, since one could argue that "AAA also takes materials from other people's collections."

It is true that AAA sources its materials from other people's collections, but it should be noted that AAA obtains most of these materials directly—one by one—from the creators and provides proper attribution by ensuring the metadata is complete so that those who access the materials know who wrote them, who published them, and when they were published. And even though AAA obtains the remainder from other archival collections—such as Puss in Bed, for example—AAA still provides attribution to them by including the name of the Puss in Bed archive in the description; and if, in certain cases, AAA uses digitized material and knows who digitized it, AAA will also include that information in the description, as can be seen in the Haydarian zine by Iqbal Muhamad, published by Talas Press and digitized by Seburukapasih.

This issue became even more complicated when, in reality, Pustaka Taratsa—using its web scraping tool—did not merely take one or two items from the AAA collection, but rather extracted (almost) all text-based materials along with their metadata and uploaded them to their website without proper attribution. It is considered complex because omitting attribution does not merely mean omitting a name, but also nullifying (which is worse than omitting) the contributions of archival work that has consumed energy, time, and thought. Those involved with AAA (whose numbers are actually quite small—fewer than people might think) collected the approximately 2,000 items now available in the AAA collection one by one—without the use of any automated tools.

And to gather all of this material piece by piece, they need to constantly read and listen (learn) about anarchism—both from the past and the present. This is because those active in AAA are not individuals who lived through the fall of Suharto's New Order regime, nor during the early post-Reform era; thus, without studying, they would know nothing about what happened during those times, let alone the printed materials from that era. Furthermore, those active in AAA—even though they live and are active in the present—still need to study; otherwise, they will remain completely in the dark due to the overwhelming flood of information. In short, the collection of these approximately 2,000 materials is also a curatorial effort (which—once again—involves a great deal of effort, time, and thought), not merely a haphazard act of gathering and uploading—because without curation, AAA would not be AAA, but would simply be a repository of PDF

files. And without learning how to curate, it's highly likely that those managing AAA will end up confused and unable to navigate the decision-making process, which is sometimes fraught with dilemmas.

In addition to curating—ensuring that AAA remains AAA, rather than becoming merely a repository for PDF files—AAA also revitalizes old or existing translated texts by re-editing them. This is because AAA recognizes that the world of anarchist literature does not lack translators or publishers, but rather tends to lack editors. AAA then attempts to republish the results of this revitalization through AAA-Press. Through these efforts to revitalize texts and republish them, AAA can at least meet the basic living expenses of its administrators and remain independent. After three publications, the digital files of these revitalized texts will be re-uploaded to the Internet Archive so they can be accessed by the general public.

AAA also began publishing in order to build up "capital" to establish a economy unit, with the hope that AAA's financial resources would be able to meet not only the tertiary needs of its management but also their primary needs. In addition, AAA also intends to channel this "capital" into AAA-Distro, a business unit that not only sells AAA-Press products but also those from other publishers (and perhaps beyond just publishers), so that the publishing ecosystem can thrive in the long term and its work be properly valued. Not stopping there, we have also begun converting PDF texts into plain text by uploading them to the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library, and we plan to upload them to the AAA blog as well. This conversion is done to make it easier for individuals or collectives who wish to reprint—as well as reformat and edit—these texts.

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From this explanation, it might seem that the use of web scrapers without attribution merely leads to alienation among those in the AAA community. However, in the case of Pustaka Taratsa, the use of web scrapers is also a form of intellectual laziness, because they do not utilize these tools to focus more on organizing the materials they gather from various sources and supplementing them with proper attribution. Instead of doing that, they've chosen to keep themselves constantly busy posting on two social media platforms at once (Instagram and X/Twitter). This is ironic, considering they've included the three words "sharing," "caring," and "preservation" in their Instagram bio; in other words, by listing those three words, it appears they're trying to combat forgetfulness, but by failing to provide proper attribution, they're actually contributing to that very process of forgetting. This is intellectual laziness, as they prefer to relegate proper attribution to a back-alley storage bin—the "About Us" section—and even the name embedded in that link is "archipelago anti-authoritarian archive," a name simply copied from the Internet Archive AAA link.

In addition to causing alienation and giving the impression of intellectual laziness, the attitude of those who prefer to post online rather than correct and provide proper attribution also implies a tendency to crave fame by exploiting anti-authoritarianism. Or more precisely, Pustaka Taratsa uses the term "anti-authoritarian"—a usage we initially had no issue with—as an excuse to extract AAA and/or anti-authoritarianism itself, as evidenced by how they inserted the phrase "our focus on issues aligns, for example, regarding anti-authoritarian publications and materials" (emphasis added by the author) in the caption of the collaborative post we provided via Direct Message (should we include an attachment here? It probably isn't necessary, but if anyone wants proof, they can contact us). (Because—as an aside—why would they prefer to repeatedly upload, even up to five posts in a row, AAA materials [without attribution] rather

than materials from Logos/Pustaka Langka or Catatan Nusantara, for example?). So, even if they truly are anti-authoritarian, why isn't that reflected in the practice—which they call—archiving? It is nothing more and nothing less—to emphasize it once again—than a mere excuse. The use of the term "anti-authoritarian" as an excuse doesn't just occur in the realm of archives, but also in publishing, and even in other spheres. However, we will write a separate article to discuss that issue later.

Even if no attribution is provided, AAA actually understands this—if, and only if, they retrieved the materials manually, one by one, so that (as a consequence) they did not have time to organize the retrieved materials and include the necessary attributions—since AAA accepts that consequence as well; however, in the case of Pustaka Taratsa, the situation is different. That understanding was actually the first thing that came to mind when we saw Pustaka Taratsa scraping nearly all the data and metadata from materials archived by AAA. And based on that understanding, we tried to reach out (yes! We were the ones who reached out, not them), offering to help resolve the metadata issues, and even adding new materials to their collection. We even invited them to create a collaborative post, so that people would know there's a Pustaka Taratsa in this world. Then we posted snippets of AAA materials from Pustaka Taratsa's collection on Instagram, while also tagging their Instagram account. AAA did all of this so that Pustaka Taratsa could learn—without feeling taught or lectured—how an archives system based on what they call "anti-authoritarian" principles works. But as it turned out, it was all in vain. Pustaka Taratsa never learned a single thing.

It must be said, after writing Anarchist Archiving: Criticism & Self-Criticism #1 and re-reading it prior to its publication here, we realize that we have not yet reached the stage of 'self-criticism.' We are still stuck in the phase of 'criticism'—complete with an emotional and explosive tone, dominated by judgement, external finger-pointing, and a profound disappointment driven by outward contradictions. In short, we were still too busy looking outward rather than inward at ourselves. The dismantling of our own naivety, over-expectations, and internal contradictions has not yet been written into this text. Nevertheless, we will leave this piece exactly as it is, as an act of honesty regarding AAA's own vulnerabilities, and we will fulfill our self-criticism in the writings to come.

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