

recordings'), each of which offers acute insights into a specific aspect of this history" (p. 6). In that sense, the book is a success.

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UMALI, BAS. *Pangayaw and Decolonizing Resistance. Anarchism in the Philippines*. Ed. by Gabriel Kuhn. PM Press, Oakland (CA) 2020. 116 pp. Ill. \$15.00. (E-book: \$8.95.)

This short collection of essays aims to educate, provoke, and seduce its readers to consider anarchist alternatives to the politics of the state and of the Marxist "authoritarian left" in the Philippines. It is not an academic overview of the history and current practices of anarchists in that country (though some relevant information is provided throughout the text), but instead sheds light on discussions and concerns within a small network of anarchists spanning several Philippine cities. The author, Bas Umali, is a Philippine activist, anarchist, and writer who lives in Metro Manila and who has worked, inter alia, as an Uber driver, environmental activist, and technical assistant to small-scale fisherfolk. His essays were first published on several online forums and later assembled into this volume by Gabriel Kuhn, an independent author on anarchist activism in Europe and the United States. As Kuhn tells us in his preface, the book is intended to introduce "voices that are heard much too rarely", as international publishers still favour Western authors who write *about* anarchists in the Global South rather than authors from the region's anarchist community itself (p. 6). The editor added two pieces that precede Umali's essays to offer contextual information. A brief list of resource material and websites of Philippine anarchist groups is included at the end. Written in a clear style for a popular audience, the volume presents original ideas and broadens our knowledge of an anarchist network about which little has been published so far, but it also raises a number of questions.

The author's main purpose is to "imagine" an anarchist social set-up within the specific context of the Philippine archipelago. Spanish and American colonialism and post-colonial neoliberalism produced wide acceptance of the institutions of the nation state, the market, and socio-economic inequality, and Marxist influence constrained the vision of political alternatives to models that are, the author argues, also statist, top-down, and non-inclusive. These models and institutions are western imports and "alien to the communities of the archipelago" (p. 64). The author makes an appeal to "reconnect to our indigenous past" and to explore the social arrangements in the archipelago's precolonial societies (and current indigenous communities) insofar as these were (and are) marked by autonomy, horizontal political relations, mutual cooperation, and diversity (pp. 74–75). By considering the country's precolonial past for anarchist models, Umali aims to "decolonize resistance" and to present anarchist alternatives not as outlandish and unrealistic for its present inhabitants, but as part of their cultural heritage. Instead of the Marxist term "struggle", Umali uses the indigenous term *pangayaw* (a precolonial form of warfare and raiding) to envision people's active

engagement in decolonization, starting with a “propaganda war against centralized institutions” (p. 95) and local-level implementation of direct democracy and self-determination “to retake our own lives from corporations, the state, and other institutions” (p. 109).

The Philippines has only a modest history of anarchist activism compared to other Asian countries, such as China, Japan, Korea, and a region of Manchuria near the Korean border that was briefly transformed into an autonomous anarchist zone in the early twentieth century. The Spanish colonial connection did help acquaint elite Philippine students and other Philippine intellectuals in Madrid with anarchist and other radical thought in the late nineteenth century. But it was primarily oppositionist Philippine journalist and printer Isabelo de los Reyes who, after his deportation to Spain in 1897, became seriously interested in anarchist ideas while incarcerated in Barcelona’s Montjuïc prison together with Spanish anarchists, and who, upon his return to Manila, was instrumental in the introduction of direct-action methods, such as the strike, and in the formation of the first labour union in the Philippines in 1902. This union was short-lived, however, and Marxist and reformist models of political organization of the working poor soon dominated. This volume briefly touches upon this early history, which is discussed more extensively in Benedict Anderson’s *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* and William Henry Scott, *The Union Obrera Democratica: First Filipino Labor Union*.<sup>1</sup> The current generation of Philippine anarchists to which Umali belongs has little connection with anarcho-syndicalism. It is partly rooted in the punk scene of the early 1980s (during the last years of the Marcos dictatorship), further inspired by the anti-WTO protests in Seattle in 1999. Its current networks (still moderate in scale) include students, environmentalists, anarcho-feminists, musicians, and former Marxist activists disillusioned by the communist underground. They organize, for instance, small-scale information drives on college campuses and beyond, encourage self-organization in urban squatter communities, and organize food-aid drives through “leader-less” volunteer actions.

Umali’s essays consist of two parts. First, the author critically reviews Philippine history and current society through an anarchist lens, aiming at statism, nationalism, capitalism, representative democracy, and Marxism. Speaking in general terms, with few illustrations, he argues that the roots of society’s ills are “the hierarchical and centralistic politics that dominate our current social relations, causing slavery, hunger, poverty, discrimination, war, oppression, and ecological destruction” (p. 73). Representative democracy produces, in the Philippines, elite democracy, bossism, and clientelism, and marginalizes people from the decision-making process. Nationalism and the nation state promote the centralization of power and undermine cultural diversity, forcing cultural homogenization. Tracing a history of local revolts against the Spanish colonizers, Umali stresses that “all these revolts were to defend the autonomy of the local communities” (p. 99), until the nineteenth century, when the nationalist Western-inspired Katipunan movement adopted the model of centralized national political power, which was “tantamount to replicating oppression” (p. 100).

Marxism is criticized separately in the brief essay “Dialectical Historical Materialism: An Effective Tool for Authoritarian Politics, Dominance, and Control in the Archipelago”. In the Philippine context, this critique is significant, because the Marxist Left has long been the dominant political opposition in the country. It was first grounded in the Soviet-oriented

1. Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (London, 2005); and William Henry Scott, *The Union Obrera Democratica: First Filipino Labor Union* (Quezon City, 1992).

Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP, 1930s–1950s, linked to the peasant-based Huk guerrilla army), then in the Maoist-oriented underground Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP, with its New People’s Army, late 1960s–present) and its various revolutionary and reformist offshoots (1990s–present). Though Umali was himself part of the Marxist youth organization Kabataang Makabayan (Patriotic Youth) in his younger years, he does not tap into the rich reservoir of his own and other activists’ experiences, and his critical discussion of Marxism remains, unfortunately, quite abstract. Marxism, he argues, “replicates oppressive systems” with its centralized top-down politics which aims for an “absolute truth, [...] uniformity and singularity” (p. 71). Moreover, it is non-inclusive as its evolutionary model favours the working class and discriminates against non-state indigenous communities, which are perceived as “underdeveloped and in need of evolving into a higher form” (pp. 68, 70). We need to look elsewhere, Umali argues, for an oppositional model that promotes diversity, horizontality, tolerance, and spontaneity (p. 71), and people’s genuine control over the decisions that affect their lives.

In the second part of his argument, the author proposes the concept of “archipelagic confederation” to imagine an alternative anarchist political structure for the Philippines and beyond. He draws on the precolonial structure of the Philippine archipelago characterized by networks of semi-autonomous villages and island regions linked by sea, through trade and kinship, into loose federations without central control, marked by rich cultural diversity. Inspired by Murray Bookchin’s concept of confederalism, the “archipelagic confederation” would involve the following: 1) a network of administrative councils that connects politically and economically all communities that belong to it, whereby delegates have a coordinating function but no decision-making power; 2) communities that are integrated on the basis of cooperation, complementarity, and solidarity; and 3) policymaking power that remains at the community level, in popular assemblies.<sup>2</sup> This structure, he argues, would allow for genuine direct democracy, self-determination, “the flow of political power from the bottom to the top” (p. 36), a fluid network structure without a centre, and respect for cultural diversity. Umali’s purpose is not to discuss whether and how this could be realized, but rather to first envision this alternative as a basis for discussion, and as a first step to exploring real possibilities. Meanwhile, readers are encouraged to apply the principles of direct democracy, autonomy, and sharing within their families and communities, realizing alternatives on a small scale.

In a separate article included in this volume, Marco Cuevas-Hewitt highlights the value of Umali’s concept of “archipelagic confederation” as a liberating metaphor to imagine non-nationalist forms of belonging. Where nationalism imagines bounded space and “essence-based collectivities [that] are intolerant of difference”, the trope of the archipelago (which stands for fluid, open, decentred networks) may help people to value diversity in its own right and to “construct new forms of belonging based on *affinities*, rather than essences” (pp. 30–31; italics in the original).

This engaging volume, with its bold ideas that break with established political conventions in the Philippines, does have some blind spots worth mentioning. First, Umali uses a simplistic binary model (the state as a main source of evil and non-state alternatives as a solution), which produces a one-sided picture of recent Philippine political history, as does

2. Bookchin envisaged a confederation of free municipalities. Murray Bookchin, “Thoughts on Libertarian Municipalism”, *Left Green Perspectives*, 41 (2000). Available at: <https://social-ecology.org/wp/1999/08/thoughts-on-libertarian-municipalism/>; last accessed 6 May 2021.

his contention that left-wing movements have achieved little in advancing the interests of ordinary people. The Philippine state is undoubtedly a source of oppression, exploitation, and political marginalization, but the flipside of any state–citizen relationship is that the state needs to make concessions to its citizens when forcefully pressured by them to do so. Since this dynamic is left out of Umali’s story, we hear little of the successful popular struggles in the Philippines for expanded state-recognized rights of ordinary people, for example the right to land for the landless (under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Law of 1988), the indigenous people’s right to claim their ancestral land (under the Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997), and an expansion of the right to welfare, even if implementation is still deficient.

Second, his model based on precolonial times is a bit shaky. Umali acknowledges the constant threat of mutual warfare and raiding that existed between communities, but offers no suggestion how an “archipelagic confederation” would be able to maintain peace and secure protection for its inhabitants. Moreover, the type of precolonial communities he refers to is, surprisingly, that of *datu*-headed communities, which were, indeed, quite autonomous but far from egalitarian (marked instead by hierarchy, slavery/bonded labour, and occasional slave raiding). Much closer to his anarchist community ideal are non-violent indigenous hunter-gatherer and shifting cultivator communities, whose current remnants in remote regions of the Philippines are studied by anthropologists – work that Umali hardly uses, even though he claims there is much to learn from the “wisdom” of current indigenous communities.<sup>3</sup>

Third, Umali encourages people to self-organize along lines of shared interests, but implementation seems unproblematic and examples are not discussed. Those interested in actual cases of direct democracy in the Philippines (including challenges and possible solutions) will need to look elsewhere. The vast literature on the bumpy road of cooperatives in the Philippines might be a starter.

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KHALILI, LALEH. *Sinews of War and Trade. Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula*. Verso, London [etc.] 2020. xvi, 352 pp. Ill. Maps. £20.00. (Paper: £11.99; E-book: £20.00.)

Maritime trade is unavoidable in any analysis of the explosion in global flows of commodities over the past centuries. Tracing the history of such trade into the present, however, presents a major difficulty: as logistics spaces have increased in importance, the more invisible

3. See, for example, the work on “anthropology and anarchy” by French anthropologist Charles Macdonald, who lived for a long time in hunter-gatherer communities on the Philippine island of Palawan. Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/charlesjhmaacdonaldssite/>; last accessed 3 May 2021.