Anarchy in Southeast Asia
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Anarchist currents are ubiquitous and, as with most currents, points of origin and propriety rights are difficult to determine. As they should be: there is no immaculate conception.
- Raymond Craib, *No gods, no masters, no peripheries* (2015)

All the movements for emancipation stand together.
- *Elisee Reclus, The Modern State* (1905)

In Southeast Asia, anarchy is ubiquitous and as diverse as its revolutionaries. Indeed, Arif Dirlik in "Anarchism and the Question of Place: Thoughts from the Chinese Experience" (2010), finds it

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crucial to caution readers from the tendency, often naively, to over-state anarchy's universalistic assumptions about human nature and community.[1] Others contest the terms of this universalism as partly an accommodation of a Eurocentric impulse that repositions class as the singular vantage point from which all other struggles, national-ist anti-imperialist, decentralist, anti-racist, and anti-colonial alike, are to be configured (White 2005, 5). This critique of universality incisively speaks not only to the production of what Raymond Craib calls, a 'diffusionist line,' an issuing of a "script" from Europe "to be mimicked" by the rest of the world 2015). It also makes visible a shift of inquiry into the processes immanent within a 'vast [anar-chistic] rhizomal network' that constitutes itself on a global scale (Anderson 2005, 8). In this article, I wish to highlight this prevailing shift of inquiry which sets out to remember and pursue the forma-tive contributions of previous and recent historical work addressing currents of Southeast Asian anarchy that have contributed to anar-chism's expansive rhizomic connections.

Articulating the term 'Southeast Asia,' I am thinking of the region in much the same way as anthropologist Wilhelm G. Solheim II under-stands it; that is,

> In a cultural-geographic sense [it includes] those areas inhabited by ethnic groups with a generally Southeast Asian culture, and/or speaking a South-east Asia language of Austro-Asiatic, Austro-Thai, or Austronesia relationship, plus Burmese. This defini-tion results in variable boundaries through time. Much of eastern India during prehistoric times was culturally more related to Southeast Asian than to western Indian culture. . .[These cultural elements tend to distinguish Southeast Asian culture from that of China and India. . .houses built up off the ground, [tatooing] with a general lack of clothing in both sexes particularly above the waist. . .animistic religion with ancestral and nature spirits central to this; bi-lateral kinship systems with a general equality of the sexes and a tendency in some areas towards matrilin-

eality; land tenure by descent groups. Geographically, mainland Southeast Asia includes the Yangtze drainage from the Tsinling Mountains on the north, Viet Nam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma, and the Malay Peninsula. Island Southeast Asia includes the islands off the coast of Mainland Southeast Asia from Taiwan though the Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, East Malaysia, to the Nicobar and Andaman Islands. (1985, 143-144)

I have quoted Solheim extensively because his description underscores the degree to which Southeast Asia's relationship to anarchism rests on a collusion of social and political responses influenced by the region's cultural survival, distinctiveness, and geographical productions. In other words, Southeast Asian anarchism is woven in stories of the region's nationalist refigurations, empire, colonialism, postcolonialism, and globalization. Much of how Southeast Asian anarchisms have been disclosed in anarchist literature has a cumulative effect of being limited, evidentiary, sometimes peripheral or extensions to the more recognizable and unmistakably anarchist practices.[2] Recently, however, Southeast Asian anarchisms have been able to find, arguably, fuller location in discourses on "global anarchisms," "anarchic kinships," "international anarchism," or "nonwestern anarchisms." This particular engagement marks an attempt to widen our capacity to understand anarchy's *dispersal*, horizontally, across and beyond transnational and state boundaries. As Sylvia Federici tells us, understanding anarchism as a global phenomenon is crucial because,

> It is to demonstrate that anarchism "as we have known it" is a principle that is present in every age and country, expressing an irrepressible desire for individual and collective self-determination, of which European anarchism is only *one embodiment* shaped by specific historical conditions. In other words, "global anarchism" can do more than displace the assumption of a centralized origin emanating its influence like a king his decrees. (2015, 350)

Federici's point evinces what Dirlik (2010) perceives as global anarchism's peculiarity. That is, it is both "a reinforcement of anarchist universalism and a rendering of it as ideologically ahistorical" (131). This ideological ahistoricality brings radical variations on the analytical themes, potential gaps, as well as renewal, of the practical proposals of anarchism. In *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-Colonial Imagination* (2005), Benedict Anderson amply demonstrates a plurality of anarchism's possible plots through the complex interpersonal networks and 'transglobal coordination' of Filipino novelist and Cuban poet, José Rizal and José Marti, respectively, and the European anarchists with whom they were in dialogue in the 1880s. In their transglobal revolutionary dynamics, what becomes evident is not only the question of methodology that is crucial in making sovereignty a reality in the center of imperial Spain, but the very task of interpretation and insinuation of anarchism's new possibilities through the demands of their consciousness and national contexts. Anderson centers Rizal's novel *El Filibusterismo* (1891) as a prolepsis to an "imagined community" and a critical trajectory for a translation of anarchism in the related contexts of Philippines and Cuba. The novel's protagonist, Simoun, returns to the Philippines, not from Spain, but from Cuba. His return mirrors the arrival of anarchism's important propositions—mutual aid and a common language/vision toward autonomy—to the colonial era within which Rizal was operating, and through which he understood his own lived experience. Anderson observes,

> Simoun is another matter altogether. He has his origins in previous fictions, including *Noli me tangere*, and enters the novel not from Spain but from an imagined Cuba and from wanderings across the earth. He is sort of *espectro mundial* come to haunt the Philippines, mirroring what Izquierdo had once fantasized as the invisible Machiavellian network of the International. Not there yet in reality, but since already imagined, just like his nation, on the way. (121)

The near simultaneity of the Cuban (1895) and Philippine (1896)

nationalist insurrections that Anderson notes throughout the book helps to mark what anarchist Marie Louise Berneri calls, "the living dreams of poets" (2019, 317). It reveals a 'worlding' of what anthropologist Holly High (2012) evokes in her article, "Anthropology and Anarchy": the deeply entangled genealogies of thinking. These genealogies of thought convey activisms and intellectual pursuits as sharing a mutual historical framework (103). For instance, Kropotkin's idea about the human 'tendency' to willingly help others sheds light on the NGO Assembly of the Poor's call for solidarity with the protests of villagers living on the banks of the Mun and Mekong Rivers in Northeast Thailand, who called for the decommissioning of the recently constructed (1994) Pak Mun Dam. In 2001 Burmese refugees, Cambodian peasants, and Canadian, Australian and Indian activists "offered their bodies and learned from the strength" of this movement against the Thai government's dam, which, tragically, was destroying the Rasi Salai wetlands and the villagers' way of life (Ripper 2000). Such solidarity actions are useful ground for re-evaluating and pushing our analysis of anarchistic endeavors such as mutual aid.[3]

Framed in this way, anarchism's ideological ahistoricality and mutuality of thought (anarchy) reveal to us its already porous periphery, thereby reinforcing that anarchism is a global concept and movement. Maia Ramnath (2019) articulates this porousness as she gestures to anarchism's ability to facilitate a linking of diverse places that are not necessarily Western, though connected by an oppositional force to dominant Western paradigms. To markedly similar effect, Kinna (2020) contends that anarchism "can be plotted at multiple geographical sites and different angles" and thus, "can be read backwards and forwards" (12). Porousness in this regard bears a silent but insistent movement across temporalities. In *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde* (2001) Allan Antliff highlights this temporal dimension. He develops a crucial reading of *postindustrialism*, a term coined by anarchist, anti-colonial scholar, and artist Ananda Coomaraswamy in 1914,[4] as not only an important methodological departure from the ideology of industrial capitalism and colonialism, but an imagined revolution that rests on the continual re-integration of precolonial/preindustrial Indian spiritual

idealism realized 'day-to-day' through practices of self-fulfillment, primarily through art (130-135).[5] What Ramnath, Kinna, and Antliff share in foregrounding anarchism's porous and global quality is a perception of its synergistic engagements with a wide range of ideas and practices that cut across and cross over multiple spaces and times. Understanding anarchy one-sidedly—that is, simply as isolated from other ideas and methods—becomes impractical, if not impossible. This brings us to Ramnath's main point: "Western anarchism may never actually have been so purely Western after all" (677). We might also consider anarchism's internationalist roots in prompting this notion of the global. In 1881, a revolutionary congress of militants from different countries, including Kropotkin, Malatesta, Saverio Merlino, Louise Michel, Emile Gautier, Peter Tchaikovsky, and Marie Le Compte, met for the first time to mark the pursuit of international action. In "Internationalism without an International? Cross-Channel Anarchist Networks, 1880-1914" (2006), Constance Bantman underscores the relevance of such internationalism and its emergent intersections with anti-colonialism, anti-militarism, and general strike tactics beyond Europe:

> A second international anarchist congress was finally held in 1907 in Amsterdam. . . An international paper, *Le Bulletin de l'Internationale Libertaire*, was launched in October 1906. . .Once again, it stated the necessity to create an International, asserting in its first issue that, "if, for a long time now, a great many libertarians have been contemplating the creation of an internal organisation, there is no denying that this tendency is appearing—at least in some countries—with greater strength than ever. (967)

What was further articulated in the *Bulletin* was this:

> We are still closed in the narrow and factitious borders on nationalities; with our [brothers] abroad, we only keep purely theoretical relations, hardly do we know that they exist . . . faith without good deeds is but a dead faith: internationalism without an active

international is a dead Internationalism! (967)

Despite the seeming exclusivity[6]—possibly due to geographical distance or the worry that resistance struggles, particularly on the part of Asian revolutionaries, would culminate with new nation-states—the desire for an expansive globalizing network of exchanges at the international level was clearly acknowledged. In a certain sense, the goal of the International required an intersubjective interdependence with non-European anarchists, a conjuring of a reality that did not yet exist. As a response, Southeast Asian anarchists, who were "appearing with greater strength than ever," would help found a network known as the 'Asian Solidarity Association.'[7] This association was a result of alliances between students from China (East Asia League) and India who'd found expedient asylum in Japan after the Russo-Japanese war of 1905. The association, which was initially called the "Asian Solidarity Society," was composed of radical students at the threshold of anarchist ideas. As Masaya Shiraishi (1982) notes, "they found in [anarchism] a solution to the impasse of the Social Darwinist explanation of the existing world" (336).

B.R. Deepak provides an excellent overview of how these alliances coalesced in "The Colonial Connections: Indian and Chinese Nationalists in Japan and China" (2012). Deepak traces their cooperation to the editorship of the *People's Tribune*[8] by Zhang Taiyan: in 1906 he began publishing articles supporting India's freedom from British rule.[9] The articles were written by 'Borohan' and 'Baosi', possibly pseudonyms for two of several Indian revolutionaries who migrated to Japan between 1905 and 1915. Recognizing organizing with other Asian militants and anarchists were essential for overthrowing imperialism and reclaiming sovereignty, Taiyan, Borohan and Baosi attempted to realize the anarchist internationalist desire for networked cooperation by extending mutual support to Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, Burma, Indonesia, and Malaysia (149). The desire for and *possibility* of revolutionary collaboration was underlined by Taiyan in his 1907 call for the meeting that would result in the Asian Solidarity Society:

Chattarpati Shivaji during the end of the 17th century,

rose from amongst the people, fought the Mughals
and brought freedom to the Indian people. He did the
same job, as Ming Emperor did for China.[10] Today if
the Indian people have not been able to take the words
of freedom to the masses, then the expression of this
equally lies in this commemoration meeting. (PT
1907: Vol. 13, p. 94, as cited in Deepak 150)

In summer 1907, the Asian Solidarity Association was founded in
Tokyo. Membership included the Chinese anarcho-feminist He Zhen,
exiles from India and the Philippines, and the Vietnamese anti-colo-
nial revolutionary, Phan Boi Chau. It is worth noting that there are
varying characterizations of Phan Boi Chau and his relationship to
anarchism's goals. Some dismiss Phan Boi Chau's involvement be-
cause "he clung to the idea of building an independent nation-state"
(Shiraishi 1982, 336). Harper (2021) substantiates this claim in his
analysis of the divergent "moral journeys" of Phan Boi Chau and his
friend and militant, Phan Chu Trinh, regarding the path to reclaim-
ing 'the lost country' of Vietnam. For Phan Boi Chau, "freedom from
domination was an overriding and unshirkable end in itself" while,
for Pha Chu Trinh, "the overthrowing of the disempowered Vietnam-
ese monarchy was a more urgent task" (32). Others detect anarchistic
tendencies on the part of Phan Boi Chau by way of his involvement
with the Asian Solidarity Society, where he served as co-manager
and comrade to anarchist militants (Karl 2002; Kuniye 1984; Meo-
Mun interview, 2021). His tactics for armed insurgency against the
French colonial regime follow the same anarchistic route of action
taken in the Philippines between 1896 and 1898 (Hirsch and van der
Walt 2010, xlv). Perhaps there is something to be learned from these
contradictory views concerning Phan Boi Chau's anarchism. Reveal-
ingly, as Hue-Tam Ho Tai observes in *Radicalism and the Origins of
the Vietnamese Revolution* (1992)[11]:

[Phan Boi Chau's] basic lack of interest in cultural
issues for their own sake resulted, however, in a lack
of ideological sophistication, which was to vitiate his
tireless efforts to create viable anticolonial movements
(23). . .He had a wide circle of acquaintances, but,

> uninterested in theoretical subtleties, he remained at
> the periphery of their debates. Indicative of his lack of
> ideological depth is the speed with which he adopted
> and discarded political labels, and his confusion over
> the political beliefs of some of his closest associates in
> Japan. (58-59)

Caught in the history of dynastic states and anti-colonial national-
ism, it could be argued that Phan's supposed "uninterestedness" and
"peripheral" status were simultaneously separate from and emerging
out of the polymorpohus flow and manifold channels of anarchy. His
publicly acknowledged association with the Asian Solidarity Soci-
ety as well as his exilic travels through the hills of Nghe An and the
maritime routes to Hong Kong, Thailand, and Singapore (Goscha
1999, 28) to establish the *Dong Du* Movement (Journey to the East)
constitute formal and informal endeavors towards a radical desire for
freedom. They flow from his own inflection of anarchism through the
demands and consciousness of the Vietnamese resistance: they are
best understood as manifestations of his lived experience as a radical
anti-colonial subject. Here, I enlist Hue-Tam Ho Tai's description of
radicalism as a provocation to read Phan more sympathetically,

> By radicalism, I mean an essentially nonideological
> current of reaction, both to colonial rule and to native
> accommodation to that rule, whose chief characteris-
> tics were iconoclasm and the marriage of the personal
> and the political. In this sense, radicalism is not a true
> "ism" as conventionally understood, but more of a
> political *mood*. (1992, 1, my emphasis)

Existing literature on Chau has comprehensively amplified his albeit
slow and uneven activities and revolutionary pursuits. To use Bene-
dict Anderson's formation, Chau's resistance was a "crucial node" in
the rhizomic networks and collective endeavours of Southeast Asia's
anarchic movements. For instance, immediately after the signing of
the Franco-Japanese Treaty in 1907 Goscha (1999) traces patterns of
immigration and relocation on the part of Vietnamese emigres moti-
vated by Chau to Singapore, Hong Kong and Siam (Thailand).[12] And

Thailand, which opened to the hills of Laos and Cambodia, is where a Chau-inspired Vietnamese insurrection aided by Chinese militants from the Revolutionary Alliance broke out.[13] Unfortunately, Chau's anarchist-derived strategy of accelerating toward revolution through intense militancy proved a failure.[14] As Goscha writes, "Whatever militants may have wanted to do in Siam (Thailand), results were anything but successful. Anarchism's propaganda by deed remained their guiding principle: bombs and suicide squads their preferred methods of action" (44).

Anarchist movements in Japan and China fell into a period of decline after the 1911 execution of Kotoku Shusui and the sudden death of Liu Shifu in 1915. And yet the anarchist idea percolated in Malaysia thanks to Chinese anarchists enlisted by the British to work in the region's tin mines (F.A., Anarchism in South East Asia, 3). A dock-yard worker named Wang Yu-Ting is one of the first documented anarchists to arrive in Malaysia in 1907. As editor of the Malayan anarchist newspaper *Truth* (1918-1919), Wang Yu-Ting participated regularly in Kuala Lumpur's growing anarchist circles. Anarchism was also spurred on by the arrival of Goh Tun-ban (Wu Dunmin), a Fukian[15] militant intellectual who established the journal *Yik Khuan Poh* (1919-1936) (literally meaning, 'to benefit the people') with the help of Sun Yatsen's China-based Kuomintang movement (Leow 2020, Harper 2021). Critically aware of the emerging class system, Goh's first article in *Poh* was titled, "On the Class System and How it Corrupts Society." Here he proposed anarchism as the solution to so-cial strife, and his stance served as a catalyst for developing anarchist links in Singapore.

In a series of editorials published during May and July 1919, Goh discussed paths to national self-determination through the overthrow of the Peking warlord government in Beijing and the total boycott of all things Japanese (C. F. Yong (1991, 627). Goh's press activism was so threatening that the British Malayan government instituted a censori-ous "Printing Presses and Publication Act" in 1920.[16] The act required all publishers in Malaya to have a "publication permit." This compli-mented new measures of colonial control, notably passenger travel restrictions, the surveillance and registration of Chinese schools in

Singapore and Malaya, and a series of new naturalization ordinances depriving rights to those the government did not deem desirable (Leow 2020, 330).

In spring 1920, editorship of *Yik Khuan Poh* was taken over by Liu Kefei, a Chinese anarchist and former journalist with the Manila-based newspaper, the *Common People's Daily*. Kefei had recently renounced his family name (Liu) and, as Leow points out, this reflected his ideological commitment to Chinese anarchism, universal brotherhood, and equitable cosmopolitanism (324). Familial renunciation can also be read as Kefei's characteristic gesture toward breaking with the Confucian intellectual and political systems of imperial China in favor of the New Culture Movement (a movement that took its name from the May Fourth student uprisings in Shanghai).[17] The New Culture Movement considered themselves to be globally attuned and comparable to the dissident Russian intelligentsia of the 1860s, or the intellectuals of the European Enlightenment.[18] Kefei's most important contribution to *Yik Khuan Poh* was "Freedom Talks," a column which he envisioned to function less as reportage and more as a sharing of "common interests" wherein readership was informed by intellectual thinking "cut" directly from articles circulating in the New Culture Movement from Shanghai and Beijng (326). By the 1920s, as Arif Dirlik (1989) shows us in *Origins of Chinese Communism*, Marxism entered into the radical thinking of the New Culture Movement in response to capitalist transformations in Asia, particularly China (261).

What can be observed in extent scholarship concerning *Yik Khuan Poh* is that in later years much of the journal was given over to imagining a "new Malayan society" that rested upon disparate solutions and approaches. For instance, in the "Origins and Development of the Malayan Communist Movement, 1919-1930 (1991)" C.F. Yong mentions the journal's endorsement of Bolshevism, proletarianism, socialism, and anarcho-communism. These socio-political ideas were so palpable in the development of militant approaches in various places transnationally that they effectively, though not unproblematically, assumed a kind of temporal unity through *Yik Khuan Poh*. It is important to note that Goh, Kefei, and the writers of Yik Khuan Poh aligned themselves with anarcho-communism, which is organiza-

tionally and strategically different from Bolshevism (Ko'mboa Ervin 2021). This point is glossed over by C.F. Yong and affectively taken up by Rachel Leow (2020). She describes Kefei's anarchism as "a way of thinking universally" modulated by his historical subjectivity, a positioning that reflects the genealogies of Chinese anarchism and regional action. She writes:

> On this ideological basis, it might even be possible to see Liu Kefei and his brothers not as vessels of Chinese "diasporic" influence in the South Seas, but as nodes in a polyethnic network of global radicalism and ideological bricolage that spanned the late imperial world and the early twentieth century, which found local, regional, and global expression simultaneously in vernacular idioms of universal social justice, individual liberation, and cultural renovation, and were fashioned and transformed in a range of social and historical conditions. (328)

This notion is echoed by Harper (2021) when he cites feminist revolutionary and work-study scholar Zhang Ruoming, who described the state of anarchism during Kefei's time as: "a hodgepodge of those who speak of New Thought, those who say 'Democracy,' those who say, 'Marxism,' those who introduce, 'Bolshevism'" (356). Indeed, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, the internationalist impulse of Bolshevism swiftly formed roots in Asia and engaged in steady and hostile collision with the anarchist movement.[19] Both called for a social revolution. The latter, by way of the simultaneous "destruction of the state and capitalism" and the former, by way of the creation of a "transitional state"—one that would have abolished the bourgeois state—for the sake of socialism.[20] The Marxists lambasted anarchism as a politics attuned to Southeast Asia's "immediate past," to be superseded by Bolshevism.

To a large extent, Malayan encounters with anarchism signals to what Rebecca Karl calls a "new sense of synchronic historical time," a view of a changing world wherein national and regional histories are increasingly subsumed into modern imperialism (45). For the

regions of Southeast Asia, this experience involved economic reorientation or "development" aided and abetted through the establishment of "representative governments" keyed to workers' struggles. In Indonesia, on May 1920, the first expression of such a project took the name *Perserikatan Komunis di India* (PKI; Communist Association of the Indies). It is important to note that anarchist activity in Southeast Asian nationalist movements from the 1920s onwards has been couched in the scholarly literature as a 'reverberation' from the past, eclipsed by the activities of the Kuomintang of China (KMT) even more, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). This treatment blots out the active and conscious efforts of anarcho-syndicalists in the region (and diaspora) prior to, and after, the 1920s. For instance, in 1911, the organization Sarekat Islam, a group of batik traders and individuals from the non-*priyayi* class (local and indigenous) in Surakarat, organized a mass movement of traders and workers in the region.[21] They were committed to creating a democratic society through the establishment of workers' control over the production and distribution of goods.[22] By 1925, Indonesia had established a diverse labor movement, and some of the unions were created by the PKI. Labor militancy was at its height as sugar factory and pawnshop workers initiated a wave of strikes against labor conditions under the Dutch and British rule. Union activists like Raden Panji Suroso, Surjapranoto, and Reksodeputro were PKI "intermediaries" in the thick of Indonesia's evolving nationalist struggles. In this sense, the region's labor movement was autonomous from nationalist currents, but engaged with them (Harper 2021, 545 and Ingleson 1986, 5). Indeed, "A Brief History of Anarchism in Indonesia" (2022), Esrelita et al., have identified anarchist connections in the PKI's *Koran API* journals throughout the 1920s (6), an observation reinforced by Stromquist (1967), who cites Harry Benda and Ruth McVey's *The Communist Uprisings of 1926-27 in Indonesia, Key Documents*, where McVey states, "Two years before Darsono had urged the PKI to remember that the Communism of Marx and not the anarchism of Bakunin must govern the party; but now *API* quoted Bakunin as its guide" (as cited in Stromquist 191).

These historic facts bring us back to anarchism enduring impact and reality of anarchism in Indonesia today. The movement lives on in ac-

tions such as the spontaneous occupation of the garment factory PT Istana in 2007 by 1,000 workers and members of the SBKU and FS-BKU unions[23] — mostly women — who were denied severance pay after the factory's filed bankruptcy. The workers "agreed not to loot the factory, or to sell the machines to compensate for withheld severance pay. Instead, they decided to guard the machines and continue production under workers' control in order to raise money and make a living during the lawsuit" (Hauf 2018, 242). Anarchy lives in the radical unionization of some 90,000 peasants in West Java (Serikat Pertani Pasundan) after years of government repression and bureaucratic stalling, in order to reclaim lands as common property so as to cultivate agricultural goods and develop alternative local exchange systems (251). Anarchism lives in the intensification of knowledge-and-resource sharing via itinerant libraries like *Bandung* and the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library—sharing as an *enactment* of anarcho-communism. Anarchism lives within the intersecting edges of Indonesia's feminist and punk movements (Estrelita et al 2022).

Southeast Asian activists and anarchists posting on the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library website often refer to such examples of self-organizing, sharing, and non-hierarchical workers' control. Additionally, countering the widespread impression that "anarchy" equals 'bomb throwing, riotous violence, and nihilism,' as well as the careless merging of collectivism and the 'new anarchism' of egalitarianism[24] with Communist state totalitarianism, is a second important undertaking. These conceptual challenges help generate further conversation and new and concrete notions of anarchy that are detached from such totalizing stereotypes. In the most general sense, this can only improve prospects for Southeast Asian anarchism.

Another crucial conceptual challenge is to circumvent the constraints of idealist desires for "authentic social relations" which open to an infinitude of socially impossible quests for an anarchic "utopia." As a core theme in anarchist literature, utopian visions have been repeatedly taken up, resisted, and interrogated by anarchists. One of the most widely read, well-reviewed, and cited treatments of Southeast Asian anarchism is *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009) by James Scott. Here he presents a region of Southeast Asia called *Zomia* as an

historical instance in which stateless societies flourished. *Zomia*, according to Scott, "lies at altitudes from two hundred or three hundred meters above sea level to more than four thousand meters. Rough calculations would put Zomia minority populations alone at around eighty million to one hundred million" (14). These calculations were derived from Jean Michaud, one of the first anthropologists to study and trace the Southeast Asian massif in 2006. Scott's argument distills to this:

> The history of hill peoples is best understood as a history not of archaic remnants but of "runaways" from state-making processes in the lowlands. . .Many of the agricultural and social practice of hill peoples can be best understood as techniques to make good this evasion, while maintaining the economic advantages of the lowland connection. (24)

Casting the Zomian peoples as "runaways" turns not only on the fantasy of a "better place"—an autonomous zone of refuge that emerges *deliberately* out of the refusal of state authority (Greenhouse 2010)—but on a political order outside of the state (Scott 36).[25] In "Repelling States: Evidence from Upland Southeast Asia," Stringham and Miles (2012) engage with Scott's observations concerning Zomia's patterns of settlement, agriculture, and social structure as mechanisms that help create a map to disincentivize state control (19). Some scholars reject Scott's thesis because it offers a simplistic view of the state and neglects to fully explore what anarchism entails (Siedman 2012). Others describe it as a fantasy production in which non-state spaces are 'impressed' upon peoples living in the Southeast Asian massif. What we gain from these lines of critique is an appreciation for rethinking our own engagement with anarchist understandings in the face of pervasive orientalisms and the tendency to abstract the *other*. Holly High (2012) encapsulates Hjorleifur Jonsson's evaluation of Scott's work as follows: "it is a manifesto that makes Southeast Asia a backdrop for projections of American, and perhaps, European, fantasies about freedom that begin with the assumption that the state is evil and that end with (armchair) anarchism" (99). Despite speculations, High recommends a re-reading of Scott's Zomian discussion

to explore anarchist insights concerning the limits of state relations, because it is "a useful development in the anthropology of the state" (101).

Conclusion

This brief and by no means exhaustive review of the existing scholarship on Southeast Asian anarchism invites an envisioning of anarchism's historical dispersals, rehearsals, translations, and polemical collisions . . . and a pivotal shift to evacuate the falsely imputed universalities of human nature. Since the late nineteenth century, the stories of Southeast Asian anarchism can be read, to some degree, as a 'palimpsest'—to borrow a term rekindled by Manalansan and Espiritu in *Filipino Studies*.[26] They manifest as multiple layers within a constantly shifting diasporic, anarchistic, anti-colonial-nationalistic set of endeavors towards anarchy's living capacity—anachronistically at times, often unevenly, but always to be taken seriously. These pluralistic and diasporic processes are a force animating global anarchisms. As Raymond Craib (2015) illuminates, "nineteenth and twentieth-century anarchists, wherever they resided, were—in their emphasis on the world as their home, in their peripatetic as well as sedentary radicalism. . .—some of our most visionary postcolonial theorists" (7-8). Implicit in characterizing this theoretical (and ideological) alignment between global and Southeast Asian anarchisms is the (re)discovery of a 'historical problematic,' a term introduced by Frederic Jameson (1993) and reconsidered by Karl (2002) referencing "a theoretical entity," the structure of which intimately links, in this case, both anarchist projects. This theoretical entity "must be grasped in a different way from the traditional representation or philosophical one." [27] In other words, we are now tasked with engaging Southeast Asia's historically specific problematics of coloniality and modernity in the struggle against authority, which is the 'problematic imperative' of anarchism globally. Further, we need to foster synergistic, diasporic, transnational participation in order to engender both Southeast Asian and global anarchisms. As Federici states,

> We need to free our imagination from the assumption
> that we cannot organize our lives except through a

central power, and that communal forms of existence
are bound to remain small-scale unfit to provide the
foundation for a new mode of production. Highlight-
ing the "positive" content of anarchism—positive in
the sense of being positional or constituent in the
autonomist sense—and stressing its political commit-
ment to self-government and to the immediate lib-
eration of everyday life, is especially crucial at a time
when institutional politics is undergoing a historic
crisis and, on the other hand, as a political philosophy,
anarchism is veritably exploding. (2015, 351)

Indeed, Federici goes beyond the popular and historically imagined
centrality of the state[28] as *the* historical problematic. She locates
instead the hermeneutic notion of the *everyday* as the site of inter-
vention and resistance to coerced obedience and extrinsic authority.
The focus on authority is particularly complex in the anarchist frame-
work, and there is still a large effort needed in teasing out contested
varieties of authority "from below and above." I will not take up the
issue here. What I would like to highlight, however, is a concluding
thought about the paradoxical synchronicity at the heart of an en-
deavour toward global anarchism.

At first glance, the notion of the *everyday* as the global historical
problematic undergirds the pluralisms embedded in thinking of an-
archism as global. *Everyday* references a familiar staging from which
anarchisms present themselves. The *everyday* functions as a point of
synchronicity. Just as there was synchronicity between the everyday
nationalist resistance struggles of Southeast Asian revolutionaries
and European anarchists in the 19th and 20th centuries, so there is
synchronicity in everyday anarchisms unfolding around the world
today. The paradox manifests itself with respect to the dangers of the
imperative or normative pressure to synchronize under a *singular*
global historical problematic. This demand intimates a marking of
homogenous time through the absorption, assimilation, or appro-
priation—and thus diminishing—of individual anarchist enactments
and problematics, particularly on the part of bodies and/or cultures
that have been historically exploited. They become auxiliary, with

only scriptural or archival value. Rolando Vázquez characterizes this process of diminishing as "part and parcel of the economy of oblivion" (2009, 2.10), an imprint of modernity's self-affirmational pretentions to objectivity. While a global historical problematic heuristically narrows the object of global anarchy in a bid to widen anarchism's applicability, I do wonder how such a move can meaningfully, intelligently, and inclusively address evolving discursive, affective concerns, and the intersectional spaces that Southeast Asian anarchisms currently foster in the everyday. Might such a move to collectivize and "thematize" anarchy under a global historical problematic preclude, for instance, the everyday psychological, conceptual, or practical concerns of Southeast Asian queer-women-and-nonbinary subjects? How can the synchronicities of their practices and anarchist political goals be fully invested in Southeast Asian anarchisms and not become absorbed into the economy of oblivion? Perhaps these are unanswerable questions, yet their relevance endures in helping us think about the histories of Southeast Asian anarchisms, not simply as 'archival value' for future global anarchisms, but, in Vazquez words, as memories inhabited today.

Notes

[1] Dirik mentions the seeming disproportionate preference to locate Southeast Asian and East Asian anarchism *outside* of these geographical spaces, thus highlighting anarchist values as mainly appropriable from, and resembling, European roots, though not to be articulated as anarchist. See "Anarchism and The Question of Place: Thoughts from the Chinese Experience, 2018, 134.

[2] I second Sunyoung Park's observation about the lack of a 'canon' of anarchist literature in Korea, no less in Southeast Asia. See "Anarchism and Culture in Colonial Korea: *Minjung* Revolution, Mutual Aid, and the Appeal of Nature," *Cross-Currents: East Asian History and Culture Review* (e-journal), 28, 2018, 93-115.

[3] Dean Spade insightfully foregrounds the dangerous co-optation that mutual aid projects face during crisis. This co-optation, according to Spade, is an effect reflected in the reduction of public services by privatization, concentrating the wealth of the 1 percent even further while professionalizing and funding community programs and partners as non-disruptive agents subsidiary to state police, courts, and schools. See *Mutual Aid*, Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2020, 50-64.

[4] See Allan Antliff's *Anarchist Modernism: Art, Politics, and the First American Avant-Garde*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001, 132.

[5] Antliff further discusses (pg. 135) Coomaraswamy's notion of self-fulfillment as

akin to the "spontaneous anarchy of renunciation"—a refusal to power over or rule over another which is conditional for individuals to self-create and self-organize.

[6] Tim Harper notes that "no Asians attended or were invited to their few congresses" in *Underground Asia*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press Harvard, 2021, 86.

[7] Sometimes referred to as The Association for Asian Harmony.

[8] Formerly under the editorship of Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen).

[9] Rebecca Karl also mentions that an earlier story concerning India's "enslavement" by the British in the Chinese journal Jiangsu "awakening many Chinese intellectuals." See *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, 161.

[10] Zhu Yuanzhang, who overthrew the Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) and established the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644), restored the throne to Han people. The Mongols who established the Yuan Dynasty were regarded as foreigners by the Chinese. For a more in-depth discussion, see B.R. Deepak, "The Colonial Connections: Indian and Chinese Nationalists in Japan and China," *China Report*, 48:1-2, 2012, 147-170.

[11] Thanks to the Mèo Mun Anarchist Collective, who recommended Hue-Tam Ho Tai's publication.

[12] According to Goscha, an enclave of Vietnamese people was "brought in" to Siam in 1893 by the French to fulfill bureaucratic positions pending implementation of the Franco-Siamese treaty—a treaty that enabled Siam to maintain its sovereignty with the condition that Laos and Cambodia be ceded. See *Thailand and the Southeast Asian Networks of the Vietnamese Revolution, 1885-1954*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, 22.

[13] As Rebecca Karl notes in *Staging the World*, relations between Guangzhou (China) and Vietnam mediated through Phan Boi Chau and militant leader Sun Zhongshan (also known as Sun Yatsen) remained amicable despite differing ideas of "loss." See Karl, 268 n48.

[14] Chau's activities were informed by Kropotkin's views on evolution and revolution: "Evolution never advances so slowly and evenly as has been asserted. Evolution and revolution alternate, and the revolutions—that is, the times of accelerated evolution—belong to the unity of nature as much as do the times when evolution takes place more slowly." Kropotkin cited in George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, New York: Penguin Books, 1962, 15.

[15] Fuchean Province, China.

[16] Anonymous (n.d.) "Malaysia: Media System," Online: https://communication. iresearchnet.com/media/malaysia-media-system/ (accessed: 1 January 2023).

[17] The New Culture Movement was renamed as the May Fourth Movement after the student uprisings in Shanghai on 4 May 1919. The uprisings were the result of the Versailles Peace Conference Treaty, in which German concessions in Shandong China were transferred to Japan.

[18] The New Culture Movement was an ideological movement of intellectuals, in which leading figures in the Chinese intelligentsia would direct at a younger generation of activists. Although 1915 was considered to be the inception of the movement (this is when its flagship journal, New Youth, was launched), it was not until 1917, when New Culture affiliates made inroads in Beijing University, that the movement found an institutional base.

[19] Ruth Kinna in *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide*, London: Oneworld Publications, 2005, 30-33.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] By this time, according to both Harper and Fachrurozi, the 'green' and 'red' wings of the Sarekat Salam were experiencing a divide. The green wing of Sarekat Salam represented its Islamic constituents while the red wing, was composed of Socialists. See Tim Harper, Underground Asia, 2021 and Miftahul Habib Fachrurozi, "Indie Weerbaar Polemic and the Radicalization of Sarekat Islam (1917-1918)," *Indonesian Historical Studies* 4:2, 128-143, 2020.

[22] See Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *How We Shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth* (1909) reprint (London: Pluto Press, 1990) and Ken Coats and Tony Topham, eds., *Workers' Control: A Book of Readings and Witnesses for Workers' Control* (London: Panther Books, 1970).

[23] The SBKU is the union that represented the PT Itsana garment factory workers in Northern Jakarta. FSBKU, also known as the Federasi Serikat Buruh Karya Utama is the larger federation that represents plant labor unions. The SBKU is under the FSBKU umbrella. See Felix Hauf, "Recovered Imaginaries: Workers' Self-Organisation and Radical Unionism in Indonesia" in *The Class Strikes Back: Self-organised Workers' Struggles in the Twenty-First Century*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018, 238-258.

[24] See Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*, 1962; See Kinna, *Anarchism: A Beginner's Guide*, 2005, See Kom'Boa Ervin *Anarchism and the Black Revolution*, 2021; See Subcomandante Marcos, *Zapatista Stories for Dreaming An-Other World*, 2022.

[25] Critics of Scott's work on Zomia, particularly, Jonathan Friedman, suggests a re-reading without the broad generalization that Zomia was once under an imperial rule. He states that "while it is true that Zomia is a safe haven, it is not a safe haven from state power as there is simply no evidence" that a state ever existed there. See Jonathan Friedman, "States, hinterlands, and governance in Southeast Asia," *Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology*, 61, 2011, 119.

[26] Martin F. Manalansan IV and Augusto F. Espiritu describe the term as "a series of stratigraphic shifts, movements of layers, of inscriptions, erasures, and rein-scriptions or overwritings." See Martin F. Manalansan IV and Augusto F. Espiritu, *Filipino Studies: Palimpsests of Nation and Diaspora*, New York: NYU Press, 2016, 2.

[27] See Frederic Jameson, "Foreword" to Politics, Ideology, and Literary Discourse in Modern China, 1993 and Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn*

of the Twentieth Century, 2022.

[28] As Paul McLaughlin emphasizes, anarchists do not simply disapprove of the state; they reject it in its totality as an instrument of authoritarianism. See Paul McLaughlin, *Anarchism and Authority*, Vermont: Ashgate, 2007, 28.

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