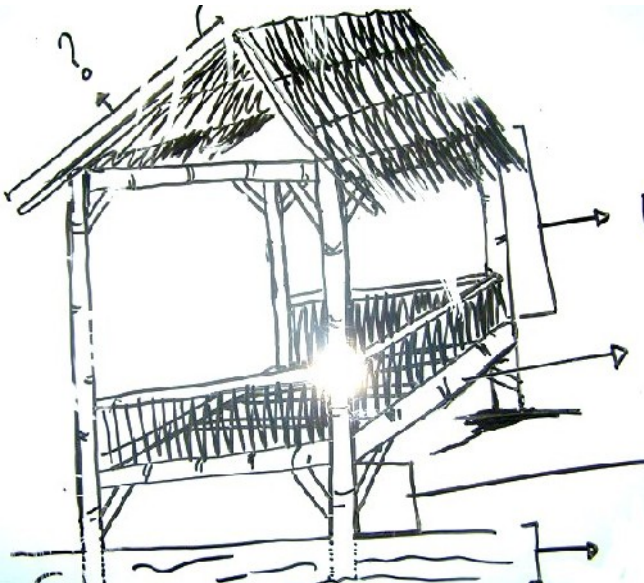


# islands of autonomy

social centres  
in Indonesia  
and the  
Philippines



# islands of autonomy

## **-some social centres in Indonesia and the Philippines.**

This is a collection of interviews with friends in Indonesia and the Philippines, about the different spaces they have created as part of their attempts to build alternative communities or radical movements. Over the last few years I have had the chance to some time in those countries, and have been able to get to know these spaces as they have emerged. As someone who has been able to visit many such projects, I thought it would be interesting to record the experience of these collectives through interviewing the collective members.

My main hope is that this experience is helpful or inspiring other people, in South East Asia especially, who have been thinking of starting a similar project, and because of that I have tried to give the interviews quite a practical focus - how and why to set such a place up. And of course it is also great if people in different parts of the world or different social contexts would read this because they are curious about the growing anti-authoritarian currents in South East Asia.

There are six spaces that have contributed interviews to this zine, two in the Philippines and four in Indonesia. Most are located in cities, but one is slightly different: Gerbong Revolusi which is in a small village by the Javanese coast where the farming community is forced to resist the menace of a mining company. In both Indonesia and the Philippines, the autonomous movements are quite small and also quite recent. This means that each of the projects featured here is a bit of an experiment - the collectives have each had to work out their own ways of running a self-managed space and the activities that go on there.

Counter-information is an important aspect of autonomous space. Most of the places interviewed in this zine contain a library, and in many collective members take part in other activities to make more information accessible to people around them, such as writing or translation projects or video production. Facilitating access to information is much more important in places like Indonesia or the Philippines than it would be in the West, because it can be much harder in those places to get hold of the information we need. The amount of information we have access to, and that we have the power to

create, has a close dependence on our economic status, that's an unavoidable fact. And there is a widespread resentment of the state maintaining control by keeping people dis-empowered and ignorant.

Education is expensive in the Philippines and in Indonesia, and so is often regarded as an investment only, a means to get a better job. As mainstream education can be exclusive and disappointing, a focus for radical collectives can also be alternative education; learning what we want to learn in a way that is empowering. Educational activities with local children, as well as giving kids the chance to see that there are more interesting ways to learn than the school classroom, also has the advantage of building the trust of the neighbours and gaining acceptance from people who might be suspicious of radical politics, in a culture where community is seen as something very important.

Of course another key focus point of any open space is to provide a physical point of contact where people can meet , discuss, plan or just hang out and get to know each other. And each space needs to go through a process of how to run the space: whether there is a fixed collective or whether everyone who comes to the centre can be involved in decisions, how to challenge the hierarchies that can arise in such spaces, and empower everyone to feel they can take part.

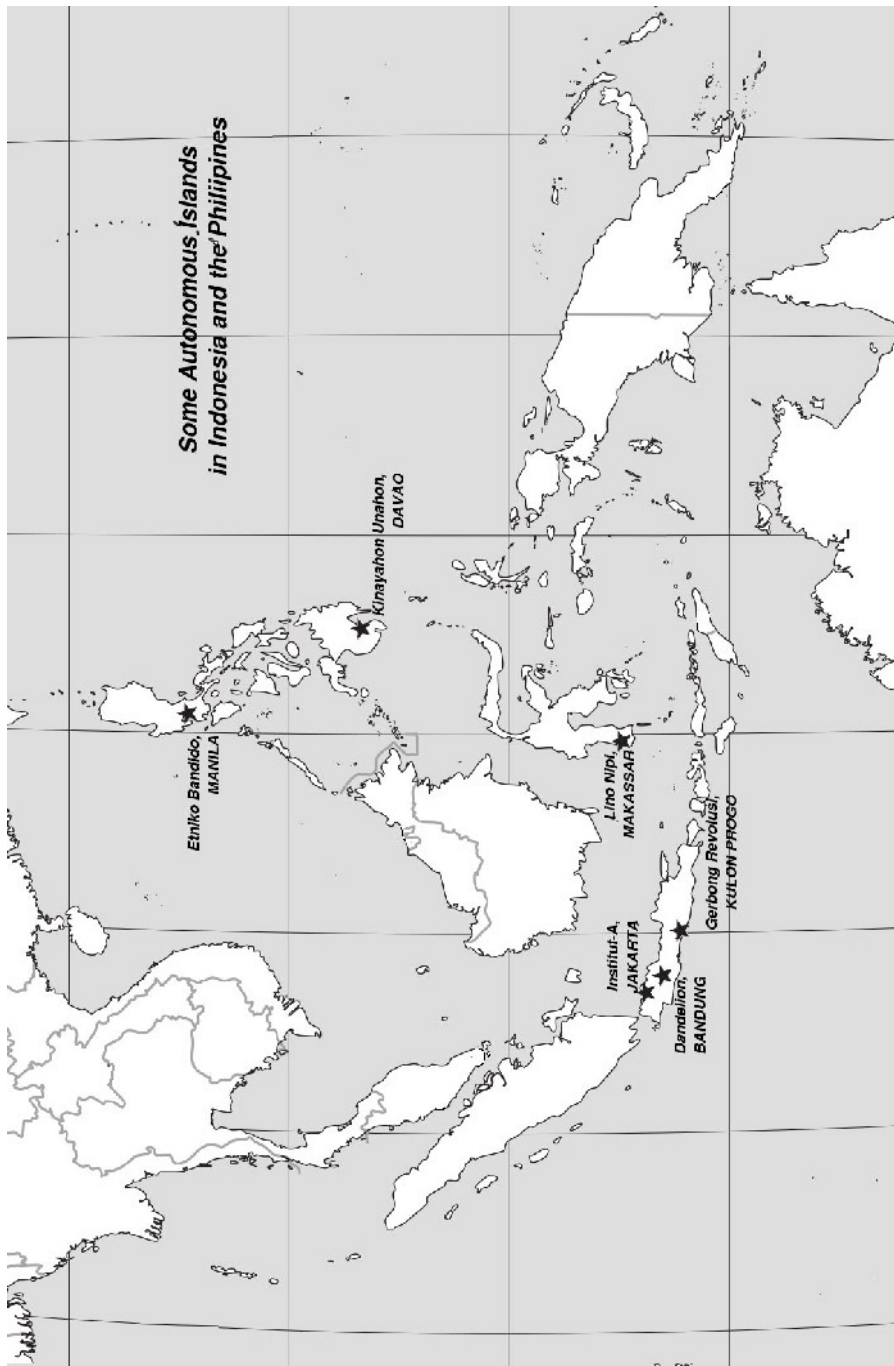
The costs of running such autonomous spaces will always be a problem in poor countries. Although collectively squatted houses have occasionally existed in both Indonesia and Philippines, many people see renting a house as the only feasible way to open a place, but to pay for that is quite difficult from collective efforts alone. Some collectives have solved that problem by approaching funders that are more open to radical projects such as the Dutch XminY, but others feel that this compromises their autonomy and look to do it themselves. This might mean some collective economic activity, such as selling screen-printed t-shirts, which can also possibly pay for food and other day-to-day living costs, so that the collective members don't need to find jobs, but it can be hard to live comfortably from this.

Coming to terms with all these issues is challenging, but each step is part of a process of building a counter-culture that is cementing people's self reliance and developing grassroots networks that challenge the state from below,

based on horizontal non-hierarchical co-operation with no need for any government, political parties, NGOs, businesses or any other institutions whatsoever. And having a great time creating some wonderful places.

Unfortunately there was a gap of about half a year between the time that most of these interviews was conducted and the publication of this booklet. That means that things have changed a little in some of the places, of course, and will continue to change no doubt.

**Some Autonomous Islands  
in Indonesia and the Philippines**



institut-a-  
Jakarta,  
Indonesia



**How long has Institut-A- been going? What was the original aim in opening an infoshop?**

**M:** Institut-A- got going in 2008. There were about 4 of us, and we had the idea to collect anarchist and anti-authoritarian information and literature and distribute it more widely. That's because we felt that at that time although there was much information, it was all in different places and difficult for people to access. We thought it was time that this information should not only be available to us but should also be made available to others. The second reason was that we wanted to make a space accessible for others, where they could experiment or take part in various activities that fit with anarchist principles. That's because at that time we observed that many collectives were closed, doing their own thing, and we figured it was time to bring these ideas to a wider range of groups and people. We started out in 2008, by 2009 the project really took shape and has developed gradually until now.

**Give us an outline of Institut-A-? What sort of stuff goes on there?**

**C:** Institut-A- is an autonomous collective which tries to apply anarchist or non-hierarchical ideas to our everyday lives. Taking into account the fact that anarchism is still something new in Indonesia, it is really important to build up some sort of everyday praxis, even though it might not be complete.

Amongst other activities that we organise are DIY gigs, workshops (screen printing, creative ways of recycling) language lessons and a small library.

**R:** As I see it there's two areas which we try to cover, that's an info-house and a community centre, and many different things are included under each of those two broad areas. For example the info-shop aspect includes translating and publishing material. Then as a community centre we operate a free school as an activity which we can do together with the local community and various friends who also play an active role. A feature of this, which differentiates it from formal education, is that we don't use a syllabus. There are also routine film showings which have been taking place for some time, and there is a safe women's space.

**M:** Just to add a few more of our current activities. We also run campaigns about local issues or against corporations. We try to build up support for those struggles, but in line with our own capacities. That's because we were aware that people here each have their limitations. Also each person's background is different so we have to be realistic about what we can do. The same is also true when we're encouraging people to be involved in everyday activities such as taking responsibility for the house's finances. We also make handmade crafts and t-shirts that we sell online, or at events, or if there's a friend who's going overseas we will send some with that person.

**After it's first year, Institut-A- moved to a new place, further from the city centre. Why was this? How have the aims and direction of the project changed since it first started, and why?**

**C:** There were lots of considerations which made us take the decision to move from our old place. One was that the old place was too far from residential areas and actually what we had hoped was that we would be able to communicate our ideas with neighbours. Apart from that was the traffic noise which we hadn't thought would be such a problem, but it actually did have psychological effects on the group. Finally, to rent a house in the centre was much more expensive than the outskirts. Aim and direction? That's not

changed much, just some of the people have changed.

**M:** Well the main reason we moved is because the rent was too high. We took the decision not to shut down Institut-A-. There had been some failures, we certainly went through a learning process in the first house. But we see this as a normal process - we can't expect instant results. However everyone was agreed that we should keep going with Institut-A- and make the effort to find the money by ourselves. In the end we chose to look for a place that was cheaper, calmer and in a more residential neighbourhood than before. If you're asking about whether there were changes in our vision for the place, I guess there weren't, we were only choosing the most appropriate way forward. At times, if the supporting factors are strong, we can do the projects we want. At other times we can't do everything we might want to. That's the reason we moved.

**R:** The decision was influenced by our understanding of how we, with our alternative situation or lifestyle, can explain to the people around us about how we try to live our lives in an independent way, without creating any dependencies. Then there was also the issue that there were some activities that to be honest were lacking focus. And people felt there was a problem that we were continually disturbed by traffic noise in our last place, which made the atmosphere inconducive. Many activities didn't happen or were delayed and this affected the community centre and the info-shop. And I also think we wanted to look again at some of the hidden problems we had faced when we tried to create these alternatives, and how to live together as a collective. We wanted to solve a few problems which arise when very different people are involved in self-managed and participative activities without a there being anything obvious to connect us to one another.

**What does the concept 'info-shop' mean to you? Why do you see it as important to distribute information? What sort of information is lacking?**

**M:** an info-shop? Well we don't want to be a shop - that's all about buying and selling, so we changed the name to info-house ('rumah info' in Indonesian). Our hope and ambition is to collect data. I used to feel that I wanted to read such-and-such book or know about such-and-such a thing, but I couldn't because the books were here or there or maybe even on another



island. Maybe it could be found online but then you have to download from the internet, and that's quite a different feeling from holding a book in your own hands, and making that book available for others too.

**C:** The concept of an info-shop is something that is focussed on the distribution or archiving of different sorts of literature. But here our vision is broader than just that, because we are aware that it is not enough just to spread information without doing other things to affirm our existence. The reason our distribution of information is important is because this kind of information cannot be obtained in mainstream society. There's so much information that is not readily available, especially around social and political topics, where it is has often been manipulated in the interests of business and power.

**R:** As I see an info-house or info-shop - and there's several other names such as 'taman bacaan' (= reading space) - is a medium for meeting, and for sharing information that is not exclusively from the conventional sources. What we usually encounter in the mainstream media is a manipulation of information which doesn't realistically help us to understand how our situation develops. Lots of people we know have a need information without these limits. So as info-shops or info-houses spring up in different places, I think it will be easier to access information because they can be spaces for each individual to share what they have. So much of the media that is built up locally becomes dominated by the mainstream media - we need to create some alternatives if we want to explore and share all sorts of information as freely as possible.

**M:** Just to add a little more about using the name info-shop or info-house. We're using the politics of language a little as we try to introduce a sort of activism that's coming from an anarchist culture. Because, as **R** pointed out, there are lots of 'taman baca' or libraries, and actually we can see lots of groups that are opening such places but we try to create an image of something different, coming from the anarchist culture: you know that the information you find there will be connected with anarchist discourse, or some other critical discourse. We also don't want to be a static place; whenever we go to different events we are sure to bring some books or zines with us. In this way we move outside our own space and make a kind of

mobile library.

**What is the information for? Action? Critical thinking? Education?  
How can an info-house provide information to reach these  
objectives?**

**C:** Information itself can be a tool to rebuild our dreams that this world has demolished. Because all people have the right to the information they wish for, action is a means to arrive independently at opinions, and all this is developed through a process of critical thinking based on the information they have. Education is a basic necessity for all, and if not all people have access to the education they need, then an info-shop can take the role of an alternative space for those who have had enough of the mainstream system.

**R:** I think we have a need for this kind of information, and it can inspire a kind of critical thinking in our attitudes to our own lives or whatever we happen to be going through. I also see how increased access to information can open up new ways of thinking to a society accustomed to being manipulated. This influences our choices and attitudes then, as we encounter different situations, and eventually we see a wider range of choices and options that we could take as a result of getting the sort of information we might find in an info-shop or info-house like this.

**M:** Yes, I think it can be all of those things, a catalyst for action or a push towards critical thinking. Although in the end the effect will be different for different people. For some it will be adding to their knowledge, for some it will be something to reflect on, and others will later pass that information on. Really it's up to the individual but we try to provide some alternative views. Because here in Indonesia, if we're honest, if there is information that's considered to come from outside the mainstream, then usually it is provided from those irritating leftist groups, or if not, then from these pop-culture, alternative media groups that are all just concerned about lifestyle. But of course we're something different. We want to give a statement that of what an infoshop is like, but it can have various aims, that's up to the people involved.

**R:** When we look at the understanding which the general public around here has about anarchism: how exactly do they see us? What people consume about anarchism is usually negative, although this is without explanation or

reasons or any real information about what it actually means. But if we throw in some issues or information, in the end this builds up a dialogue and people move towards different ways of understanding. Because people usually receive so little information about anarchism, and so there are many misunderstandings. There's so many people that think that it's something to be afraid of. But if there's enough information, maybe it's not quite as frightening as they thought.

**This is the age of the internet so it is possible to obtain a lot of information in every internet café. In that case, why do you think it is important to have a physical place where people can read books and pamphlets?**

**C:** We don't want everything to be virtual. Nowadays activism and especially anarchism seems to be so popular, and we see so many people that claim to be anarchists or stick a circle-A on their account, whether it be facebook, blogspot, myspace and so on. But actually that is senseless, what's important is direct communication where we know who it is we are talking to.

**M:** We can't deny that the internet is a source for many of our information and perspectives. But the reason we feel that a space like this is important is because we don't want to just let people be alienated and isolated in the virtual world the whole time. Because in the end, that's not healthy. We believe that all knowledge or theory is meaningless unless you bring it into the real world. And so we see a centre like Institut-A- is important because it is a direct means of communication. We communicate with our friends, speaking directly, discussing directly, and when we meet can exchange news and share something with each other. I think this is tending to become less frequent, and so that's a challenge for spaces like ours. We want to be more than an info-shop which distributes publications, but also give some impulse by means of activities such as film screenings and discussions. Then if you come to the film screening you can also pick up some publication, you can copy it to share... The key point is that there is direct interaction between human beings so that we're a bit less alienated.

**R:** It's interesting because as the internet and other technology evolves in this modern civilisation, it becomes a basic necessity for some people - or that's how I see it, and that's not something that can be denied or casually brushed

aside. The important question is this: we have the internet as a form of virtual communication, but why do we see conversation or face-to-face meeting declining? As I see this phenomena unfolding, we are seeing a shift towards a classic problem of communication - people consider communication is becoming easier on one hand, but that same communication is negating an emotional closeness between people. It's a shift where a form of communication that seems to be aiding us, is also creating limitations of social interaction between us, such as helping each-other out, or exchanging information and thoughts about our daily lives. It's interesting that a new form of consumption becomes something essential to us, and we neglect many things that are actually the core of communication, because it is easy to connect to the internet. Of course the internet can offer so much of all kinds of information, and it's also pretty well organised online, but it's a very weird situation when so many people can access so much information without ever having to meet with someone else directly.

As people use the internet more intensively - or right now it's facebook that's reaching into every part of society, even primary school kids - we see that when they actually do meet, they don't know what to talk about any more. The focus of their concentration is in the virtual world. That's an important shift where people's enjoyment and concentration is focussed on this hobby which actually was designed by software companies. And that shapes people, they're not themselves any more. I see this phenomena a lot in my own surroundings: if people want to chat directly when they meet, the conversation is already over because it has been had on facebook or whatever.

**Can you tell us a little bit about the educational activities that have taken place at Institut-A-? How would you evaluate those that have taken place up to now?**

**C:** There have been various educational activities that have taken place in Institut-A-, for example English language skill-share, and a workshop on recycling used goods. In the old place it often didn't go as well as hoped, there were a few problems, such as very few people turning up, maybe five people or maybe even less, although we had tried to inform people beforehand, through the internet or posters. Apart from that, we were really having to

learn everything from the beginning. Sometimes we ourselves were the reason that activities didn't go smoothly, and finally there were too few volunteers from outside the collective who took the initiative to be actively involved.

**M:** Before, when we still had the place in Permata Hijau, at the beginning it was quite effective, but then some problems came up, such as commitment, sharing the workload and participants in the collective taking responsibility for the free-school activities. Secondly there were problems because our house was some distance from the neighbours, and that also had an influence. To be honest, in this new place we have yet to really judge the parameters, because we're still new here, but until now the free-school has been more aimed at children. We've been learning together with the children here and we feel we are building up a personal connection with them. We have to make sure they really understand our teaching methods because we don't want to create the impression in the kids that learning is something boring or tedious.

But something else that I have to add is this: if we're honest, we need to do this in order to be accepted by the neighbours. I can't pretend otherwise, because to be able to do all the things we want to do, we need a connection to the people around. Because everywhere here the local community has quite tight control - they can sink you if they don't like you, and especially if you are doing things which they consider political. We try to be careful about that, and one way of doing that is activities together with the neighbours. I don't want to conceal that fact, although we are truly very happy to play and learn together with the kids and help give them some different kinds of understanding. And there's lots we can learn from them too.

**MI:** My opinion about the free-school here is that sometimes it's really fun, sometimes the kids here get on my nerves a little. I join in with their games: what do they want to do? what do they like? I'm still getting to know each of their characters. But you know, kids around here, sometimes they don't have so much time for playing, and so maybe at the times we're doing the free-school here, they are busy with their own games. So it could be that they don't always come here. Sometimes it's hard because they're always playing games on the internet. And then for the general public, young people over 17

years old, that's even harder, usually it's small kids around here. The older ones prefer just having fun around the place.

**R:** I've got a few thoughts about our activities in both the old place and this new one. Our approach is quite different. How come we don't set ourselves targets, or have particular points that we're trying to achieve? It's because the methods we use do not have a syllabus or structured education where everything is outlined from A-Z, step by step or other such structures. Our activities are meant to be flexible and lead towards autonomy. Any participant of the free school can bring their own initiatives, learning methods, whatever fits with the wishes of the people taking part. I don't think that those of us who run the place can really use a syllabus because the kids are already sick of that every half day they spend at their schools. The subjects they get taught there just make them bored, studying in monotonous conditions that are no fun or pleasant to study in. It's a bit complicated because we try to use methods that are different from usual, but I think every single person involved really does take an active role, and in the end we are able to make some sort of evaluation together. They can experience a form of education that they never would have imagined beforehand in an autonomous way. They might think, for example: "oh, we can learn sitting on the tombstones in the graveyard", or "we could go and learn on the grass in Ann's father's garden", or someone else's garden. It turns out that this learning is not defined in the way that general school education is. It's a little tricky for us because we always try to find ways to offer a form of education or knowledge that is characterised by sharing. So we offer activities based on the skills we have, and try to see if there are any kids who are interested. But the difficult part of this collaboration is that they are accustomed to the monotonous style of learning. But if they try it then they feel they are experiencing something very new and can be a bit shocked. But this confusion is a basic point that we hope will develop and become a wider sense of experimentation and exploration

**M:** Actually another point of evaluation about this free-school or community centre (because the free-school is part of the community centre), is the problem of other people getting involved. We've been building this process of learning together with our other friends here. But of course, we're the ones who organised the space, and we tell other people that they are free to

participate here or take on some role here. But in the old place it didn't happen and actually there was only one person who was teaching. If that person couldn't make it, the activity couldn't take place. But now we've started to learn from that experience - there should be a back-up. And actually we're quite pleased with how it's turned out: although we're still not doing very much at all, we're slowly working it out. And we're pleased that now there's friends from outside our collective that are doing things. They want to volunteer, and that's great because volunteerism is an important principle for us, and we're seeing the desire to participate start to build up. I think that's what's developed recently is pretty good situation.

**Institut-A- is also an effort to live together and build a collective. How does the collective process work between you? What steps have you taken to build an effective collective? How is the communication within the collective at the moment?**

**C:** Other friends have supported us in building up towards economic self-reliance, and we also try to build that economic base in an equal way, making decisions that we can agree to together. For me, to build an effective collective, there has to be a balance in the emotional connections we have with each other, and it's not good if we're too distant from each other emotionally. And of course the most important thing is communication.

I still have a pretty good connection to my friends in the collective, although now I'm living very very far away.

**M:** Institut-A- was originally an initiative of certain people, but in the end the composition changed and so we have to adapt to fit in with the needs of the new people that joined, we can't just shut the door. In the end we became open to friends who wanted to join the process of learning together with us. We agreed on certain principles and values. That's one difference between us and some other collectives; they have members who are have are clearly involved for a longer time, but we've always got people coming and going. That can be a strength on one hand but it can also be a weakness. As we run our collective we always push for openness, and any problems that come up we put out on the table, as we say here, and everyone has to acknowledge the problems and discuss them together. This way we try to avoid the situation where a few people dominate the flow of information. Also, decisions are

always made together, ideas also come out of our collective explorations. It's a kind of journey, because of the variety of different people that are involved with us and their different backgrounds which sometimes makes things more difficult. We're still coming from different standpoints, and sometimes certain people are still going through the process, they don't really know how to get involved, or how to understand the difference between personal responsibility and collective responsibility, or respect the rights of individuals. Or they still suffer from shyness. But we try to overcome all this with an approach that is more persuasive, based on talking and more relaxed. We have to accept it as the way things are, a part of reality that we have to confront. Because I feel that, after seeing some of our friends' experiences, if we set our expectations too high or are too ambitious, we can't see what are people's real needs right now, or what stage they are really at.

**R:** Yes, openness of communication is important in a collective where we make efforts to understand one another, what are the boundaries within which each of us can be comfortable, to experiment or engage in activities. Because in all we do here we are connected to the others, and if we don't try to cultivate an openness of communication then problems are going to emerge. One interesting point of convergence is how our meetings also deal with emotions, egos and all the very different ways of doing things that can arise here. It's because we are trying to understand "how come we all end up together in this place?". Also, if someone comes up with an idea for what they want to do, and this is proposed to the others in an effective way, then they can often get a pretty strong support from the rest. If something comes up within the collective, maybe one member has certain issues that they bring up. We ask ourselves what could be a role for the collective, whether this is something that could be shared with the whole collective, and we try to work out our attitude towards it. But if in the end somebody has some problem that they don't feel like bringing to the collective, we don't place limits on that, or try to build up walls. Yet openness is something which we see as interesting and beautiful. Open communication because we can't just run on individual ego the whole time, after all we are living together. Our aim in the end is that everything we do fits in with each of our desires.

**M:** U, maybe you want to add something? You're new to the collective, but I guess you've seen a fair bit of how we do things here since you've been



involved. How do you see it?

**U:** As for me, I was involved in a collective before which failed and now I'm giving it another try here, to try to understand some of the things i didn't know when I was in that other collective. I see that sometimes friends here do keep their problems to themselves, there's things they don't like but they keep quiet about and don't want to speak about directly. But then there's also people that encourage them to speak about the things they don't like so that everyone knows. But right now I really just want to learn what it means to be part of a collective.

**Included in Institut-A-'s activities are attempts to make a collective 'business'- screen-printing and so on. Are you able to be economically autonomous in this way? Can you only meet your everyday needs this way, or pay the rent of the house as well?**

**C:** Maybe for the everyday needs, we could answer 'yes', but at the moment it seems difficult to pay the rent, because actually none of us have a fixed income. We very often have to face the fact that we also have to make enough for our individual needs.

**What role does institut-A- play in building an anti-authoritarian movement in the capital? How do you relate to other anarchists and activists in Jakarta.**

**C:** Whether we're aware of it or not, looking at the facts, Institut-A- has a fairly important role in building an anti-authoritarian network in the capital, because actually there aren't that many anarchist collectives that are active at the moment. we can say that relationships with other anarchists are pretty good but you can also find the classic problems, although that's not such a serious issue for us. As for other activists, we sometimes work together with NGOs, because there are not so many initiatives for collaboration coming from the anti-authoritarian scene alone.

**How can an infoshop raise the consciousness of local people? have you had any relevant experience in Instituta?**

**C:** An infoshop can increase the political awareness of local people by involving them in our activities, such as GOTONG ROYONG [an Indonesian term meaning mutual aid within a community] or inviting them to get

involved in discussions, and also we don't really have to explain who we are, or why we're here. As for experience, if you ask me whether I've noticed local people becoming more politically aware, I would say that that is not something that I've seen yet. But at least we feel an openness from them, and they are keen to accept new things that they didn't know about before.

**In the long term, how do you see the future of Institut-A-?**

**C:** Looking to the future, I hope that Institut-A- continues to exist. And that lots more cells continue to grow!!!!

**Can a community replace a family?**

**C:** Sorry, does that question mean community as a whole or Institut-A-? For me it is very clear that a community or collective can become a family, especially when we live together in one house where every day we have to organise ourselves as a group at least, and we don't avoid relationships of mutual dependency either. so one day one person might cook and another shop or clean, and from there it escalates to strong emotional connections...

linonipi

## Makassar, Indonesia



**How long has the Linonipi Info-house been up and running?  
Before there were similar info-houses, is that right? Can you tell us how you came to set up Linonipi? Maybe you can also tell about the history of autonomous spaces in Makassar in recent years.**

We've been in the current place since 11 November 2010, which makes it 5 months that we've been here, up to March 2011. Before that, there was an info-house by the name of Idefix, but that place didn't have the same concept as the info house we have now. In particular what is different are the open space and the discussions/classes that we arrange on a regular basis each month. There are other activities inside, and then there's the information we make available in the form of books, journals, zines, literature or through web-based media to give open access to everyone, and many other changes that we've made with the current info-house. Idefix had concentrated mainly on being a public library and bookshop, as well as a space for discussion. It had been operating for several years before becoming Linonipi.

The plan arose from small conversations we had been having about setting up an info-house. We were aware of the importance of having an info-house for

local anti-authoritarian movements, and in Makassar it was still difficult to find an open space to put on meetings, to organise actions and other activities, primarily for the anti-authoritarian movement, but also for other oppositional movements or radical communities, activists and even the leftist movements. We started it with plenty of energy and a strong desire to make it happen, putting on benefit gigs to look for funds, busking, staging a food bazaar, asking friends for donations and other such autonomous efforts until we collected enough money to rent a house. We also had to borrow some money because we didn't reach our target; to find a strategic building that is both accessible and cheap to rent is difficult in Makassar. I guess that's the same in cities anywhere in the world. In the end we chose a house in a densely inhabited area behind a petrol station behind the second gate of Hasanuddin University. It was big enough, conveniently located, and you could call it cheap for a seven-roomed house. We got busy doing everything needed for the opening and finally launched the place on the 11th November 2010 at 3pm, with friends from different communities and collectives around Makassar. People from the neighbourhood also showed up, as did the Bandung Reggae band The Paps who happened to be performing in Makassar at that time. The original plan was that the Paps would perform at the opening but for various reasons we were only able to share stories with the band members, one of which had once been active in a local collective in Bandung.

The open-house event went well, smoothly and calmly, and reached its climax with a hilarious and energetic magic show from our friend Macan, whose tricks made everyone laugh. The event finished at 10pm.

In the last few years different autonomous spaces, infohouses, community centres, meeting spaces and spaces to access radical reading material have sprung up around Makassar. Some examples are Malcom near the Stimik Dipanegara campus, the Hypnosis collective on Jalan Macan in the North of Makassar and then Linonipi in Makassar Tamalanrea. This is a sign of the upwelling spirit of Makassar's youth to engage in the revolutionary process to speed and intensify social change. We confront life as an act of love, and try to become even more alive as we go through it. We already started some time ago and continue until today, tomorrow and ever forwards.

**How come it is so important to the anarchist / anti-authoritarian**

## **movement to have an info-house? Do you feel something is missing if you don't have a place like this?**

I think info-houses play a really important role for anti-authoritarian movements anywhere. They help to make information accessible through books, literature and the latest news, and there's also an open space for meetings, co-ordination of actions and other activities. An info-house is also a focal point where ideas, suggestions and collaborative processes to organise actions, gigs or solidarity festivals all spring up. When we aspire towards something together, it is clear that this strengthens the movement itself. People come here to read or buy the books we have, watch movies, exchange information, to discuss, and also just to hang out.

As we know, anti-authoritarian movements are in opposition to the State and authority and all the institutions which are sheltered by it, and this vital fact can be difficult to accept for many people who are enslaved by the system, repressive governments and corporations. This means that the state will try to constrain the space to move for those who fight the system we have now. So an info-house can light the fires of hope and set our rebellious desires aflame and so enables the movements' continued existence. As well as a meeting space for radical groups, it also can be a means of communication through which we can contact other groups, in cases of need such as evictions, shootings, fascist attacks or labour disputes where the workers mobilise for local activities, to build networks and organise actions.

## **What sort of thing do you do there? What are your plans for the future?**

A lot, similar to what goes on in info-houses in other places, such as alternative education classes and skill-sharing. We have some regular classes such as knitting, graphic design and so on. Also workshops such as screen-printing, woodcuts, bike/motorbike maintenance, wine-making, zine-making, arts and crafts from recycled materials and so on. Free or focussed discussions to tackle a problem or to choose a topic to share our thoughts about. We're always aim to become more critical in Linonipi and so we reject any learning process with a monolithic structure that denies our creativity and individual autonomy. And then there's film showings, book discussions and the women's space. The women's space is a place where we can share and

learn together, tell our stories, make jokes or tell of our feelings about different aspects of our daily lives, about sexual reproduction, health, gender equality, about our lovers or whatever it might be. Not only women, but also men can join in with women's space activities. We also put on Food not Bombs and a give-away shop on a regular basis, put on gigs and many more creative activities that bring us pleasure. We run Linonipi to always be non-profit, autonomous, non-hierarchical, anti-racist, anti-fascist and of course, free of charge for all. Whoever has some expertise or knowledge, whether it should be the genealogy of power or fixing broken bicycles, can always arrange a time to put on a class or workshop here.

There's no clear plans for the future yet, we just hope that the info-house is set to continue.

**In Indonesian social movements, including the anarchist movement, tend to be made up of many more men than women. I see in linonipi that there are many more women who participate than in some other places. is there any reason for this? Have you discussed the problems of gender and participation within the Linonipi collective?**

Yes, we're aware that gender stereotypes, discrimination and male domination over women still goes on, even in our own surroundings. On campus, in the family, in the street and everywhere, women are often pushed aside, considered as weaker beings, objectified and placed in inferior positions. In addition, there's the local culture, especially in Makassar, with patriarchal tendencies, which is then topped off by religion's moralizing and normalizing. Women make up half the people involved in Linonipi, some are still studying, some are working, and we also have married women. We often discuss gender equality and women's role and involvement, every week in the women's space and also in other meetings, and we try to find ways to communicate this to others. We also try to apply it to our own daily lives, in Linonipi, in school and everywhere, starting from the most basic level. In Linonipi we share responsibilities in a fair way, according to principles of egalitarianism and mutual aid, and do not view that gender, behaviour or preferences has anything to do whether someone is male or female, such as when it comes to cooking, cleaning, going to market, washing up and so on.

Because there should be no social and political differences between men and women, other than giving birth and breastfeeding.

As well as the reading space in Linonipi many people in the collective are also involved in writing ( for the web, Kontinum journal and so on). How do you see written information as a tool of struggle? What concrete effects do you see from this in Makassar?

Written information is a part of our efforts to create debate around anti-authoritarian ideas and material. Some of us write for the Serum journal that we bring out regularly and distribute for free to whoever wants to read it. People also write for the Kontinum and Linonipi websites, and some people make their own zines, propaganda posters, translate articles, books and films, and other individual projects aimed at creating a lively and fertile movement, and anti-authoritarian activism which later results in the emergence of new collectives, autonomous spaces or even new info-houses.

**One thing which I see as really good in Linonipi is that nearly everyone involved writes something. In many other places, people rarely have the self-confidence to publish their writings. How did you achieve this? Do you support each other to write?**

Yes, we help and support each other when we're working on a journal or a book, and also with our private projects such as making zines and translating articles for publication. There are people who can help with layout, and also help suggesting alternative words or terms to use. We can work together as a collective when we're working on something, but we can also work on our own or just with certain people, a form of mutual collaboration.

**How do you pay Linonipi's rent? What is the best way to find the money that you need?**

Because we receive no funding and don't have links to any institutions whatsoever, we try to build our economic base by ourselves, through the production and distribution of printed material. We also have a kind of grassroots co-operation in Linonipi, making a small contribution each day to pay electricity and water. Then there's selling books, zines and t-shirts, working on translation projects and pooling our money as well as donations from anonymous benefactors. We also have plans to open a kiosk to

distribute cheap rice that we buy directly from farmers. Building an alternative economic base is one practical way to apply the ideas of autonomous anarchy and DIY principles, and it's also a concrete attempt to fight the rising suffocation of the capitalist system.

**What sort of collective is it? A closed collective or something that other people can join in with? Do you have meetings to discuss about the future of Linonipi? How do you take decisions?**

Anyone can come and be involved in this info-house regardless of ethnicity, religion, nationality or social or political background.

Meetings to discuss the monthly programme of activities take place every month. We also have evaluation meetings once every few months to discuss projects that are already underway or that we've yet to start. Decisions in regular meetings are taken by means of direct democracy, and we tend to use consensus, although that's not something that's become an absolute for us. There are no leaders here, all members or individuals that are actively and directly involved in Linonipi have the right to speak and voice their opinion. No-one has a paid position here, all participate voluntarily.

**How is your relationship to the local community? Do any neighbours join in Linonipi's activities?**

The neighbours response to our presence here has been pretty good. Local people have been involved since the beginning of Linonipi. We build strong emotional connections, and neighbours are directly or indirectly involved in linonipi's activities. For example when we make Food Not Bombs, we are able to borrow cooking utensils and other things we need from our neighbours, and they can also borrow things from us - a two-way relationship that is of benefit to each. We hope to keep this good relationship, and this is reflected in our daily life, for example, stopping to chat for a few minutes each morning, because change begins with the small things we do in our immediate surroundings.

**Do local kids like to hang out in Linonipi? what do they get from an autonomous space that is different from other places?**

Yes, lots of local children come here to draw, make origami or just to play. We don't think about giving any teaching to the children, like they get in school.



Because I feel that's very boring for them, and they surely feel the same. And I'm sure that they would have no interest whatsoever, or even stop coming to this house if we make a school for them here. They just want to play and here they're able to do that. Play is a learning process that's also really fun.

rumah info  
dandelion  
Bandung,  
Indonesia



**How long is this project running? Who [what projects] uses the place? Tell us a bit about it, a little explanation of the projects involved?**

Dandelion Info-house has been running nearly 1 year. Initially Dandelion was a alternative literature publishing collective, focused around anti-authoritarian issues, but later it evolved into a info-house. Dandelion Info-house is used as an open space, for anyone who is actively involved in issues around resistance or self-empowerment in alternative ways.

**How do you manage the place from the economical side? How do you pay the rent? How do you get money for it?**

The people in Dandelion manage the info-house by making it a place to live collectively. As for the rent, we get the money by selling literature or by collecting donations each time we have activities.

**Is it only one collective that operates in the space, or are there different groups that use it as well?**

Several collective use Dandelion Info-house as a meeting place. The more

active ones are, for example, Bandung Pirate Punx who put more attention into organizing DIY gigs, also Dandelion Publishing which is focusing on publishing literature, and Lapak Gratis! collective who use the info-house as a place for gathering and storing the stuff they give away for free.

**What about the process inside the collective? Is it easy or not to for people from outside to join the activities? What about questions of who to trust?**

The activities in the info-house aren't fully open for whoever, but only for collectives that we already got to somehow know. We need to know in which direction they're going, and what is the focus of their activities. The majority of collectives that use or participate Dandelion Info-house are friends of ours that we trust, so the sorting of activities from that side in Dandelion isn't that hard.

**How about the gender equality issues? Are there many women who have participate(d) in Dandelion? Do you see it as important to support the women, to make an effort for them to feel comfortable? The same goes for newcomers, do you encounter problems with the separation between them and older, more experienced collective members? What do you do to challenge it?**

Gender equality is a matter that should be taken care of, not only for the sake of women's comfort, but for the comfort of everyone who is around Dandelion. There are many women who are directly or indirectly involved in the Dandelion collective and this is not because we're only focusing solely on gender equality issues, but because we share the same interests about many things, so why can we not do it together? Same for the new people who wish to engage with Dandelion. If we meet individuals or collectives who have similar interests and attitudes to life we welcome them with open arms and a big smile. That means we consider that there are no differences would stop us from being able to live together as a collective, whether they be 'newer', 'older' or even 'wiser'? Since Dandelion is a collective of friends that already knew each other from before, fundamental things like a person's gender or age do not become the cause of conflict.

**How about the relationship between people in the group? Is Dandelion a group of friends? Or is it only a base for political**

**work? Is it important for you to challenge differences in attitudes between friends / comrades?**

Each individual in the collective was a friend before we started Dandelion. We consider info-house as the place we live, not only a space for activities. We do not feel that differences in attitudes between individuals are something that we need to challenge. However if the differences are about how to live together as a group, then that's something that we all try to address, to work out what should be our attitude to group dynamics.

**Have you ever had any problems with the state apparatus / religious fundamentalists / Fascists? What about the security of the place?**

Dandelion info-house has not yet had serious problems with the state apparatus or religious fundamentalists, because we have always built good relationships with the neighbours, engaging them in activities that we do. With the good relationships that we have, we don't worry too much about the safety of the house, because our neighbours also consider Dandelion Info-house as their own house.

**What about Dandelion's autonomy? What do you think of the NGOs / institutions / donors who might want to give money to you?**

Dandelion avoids getting its income from institutions. During our time here, we have only received money from personal donors, which has been more focussed on what we needed at that time. We avoid donations from institutions, because we do not want to participate in the circle of struggle which claims to be acting on behalf of the masses.

**Are there other places like Dandelion in Bandung? Do you see the importance to have autonomous place? If so, why do you think it is important?**

There are plenty of alternative autonomous places in Bandung, but not info-houses. We have also established our relationships with them. We didn't do this in order to unify our programs or our ideas, but rather to strengthen our network of autonomous spaces, which we see as necessary. Through having autonomous spaces we can empower each of our lives individually and in

groups, by living the kind of life we want.

**How about your connection with other autonomous places in Indonesia / South East Asia / the world?**

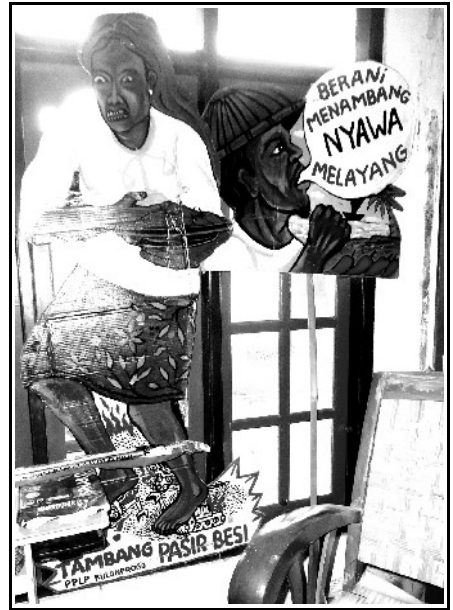
Dandelion info-house is engaging in networking with other autonomous spaces outside Bandung and outside Indonesia. In addition to exchanging information, we also seek to strengthen the network of autonomous spaces around the world.

**What sorts of direct or indirect threats does the project face?  
What are the biggest challenges facing you today?**

The challenges we face in doing things here come from the limited facilities we have to support our activities, but that has never become a threat for us which would stop an activity from happening. So far we have not encountered a significant challenge that could stop our activities.

**Rumah Info Dandelion PO. BOX 1300 Bandung 40013**

# gerbong revolusi Kulon Progo Indonesia



**Can you tell us a little about the farmers in Kulon Progo and some background about your current situation?**

Thanks. The background of Kulon Progo farmers is like this: originally the coastline of Kulon Progo was land which could be described as barren and unproductive. But with techniques developed locally, this land was able to be farmed, raising the standard of living of many coastal people, through their cultivation of fruits and vegetables. All this was the result of Kulon Progo people's own labour, without any helping hand from the government.

But now, just as our livelihoods were bringing us some security, our lives are suddenly threatened by the government, working together with corporations, who want to evict us from our homes, our land, our farms, all of which they will turn into an iron mine. Currently the people have autonomously created an association called the Association of Kulon Progo Shoreline Farmers (Paguyuban Petani Lahan Pantai Kulon Progo or PPLP KP for short). The people created this on their own, from different groups of farmers that have got together to make this group in order to resist together the government's attempts to evict us. This association is created for and by the people of Kulon Progo without any involvement from outsiders, which means we do not want to accept councils, NGOs, civil organisations and so on. This is so that we, as

farmers, can continue to farm, and defend our lives as farmers and continue to support our families through farming whatever might happen. If our livelihoods are under threat then we will fight, even though this means (in this case) fighting the government and the state.

**Ok, let's talk about 'Gerbong Revolusi, the people's reading space. Where did the idea come from to make a place like this and what's the aim of the project?**

It came from the local youths just talking about it, especially in the village Garongan 2. Before, they used to just hang out wherever, they didn't have a place to go other than the roadside, where whatever they did would disturb other people. Then a few of us took the initiative to make a kind of public house, a house for everyone, to be the base for activities. It would actually be owned by everyone, but run by the youth. So that's how the idea came up to get people together, although it was just a little idea at the beginning, but with the help of friends we tried to provide books. The second idea was to to make a place to play games like ping-pong, karambol (a game like billiards) or cards, but just as a way to get people to gather together.

It turned out that our efforts were successful. It has meant that the young people can get together and exchange their experience, and people even come here from other areas for that reason. And so today here we are, running this house.

On the sign above the place is written: "Gerbong Revolusi, People's Reading House and Honesty Café", because at the beginning when we were just starting to collect funds, we started in small ways, and the young people opened a café selling ready-prepared foods such as cakes, drinks and so on. The customers would take what they wanted, eat it, and work out what they owed themselves as well, - we only would provide a place to leave money and at the end of the day we would work out whether people had been honest or not. At it happened that at the end of every day there never seemed to be anything missing, which means that the people of this area are basically very honest indeed. This went on for some time. Nowadays however, the honesty café has been neglected because the youth are more involved in the more urgent social issues.

Up to now we have always had the good fortune that there are people from

other places, and even globally, who have supported us, for example by building community radio. The young people here are happier and more involved in discussing the resistance to the mine and to injustice, as well as fundamental rights, especially for us along the Kulon Progo coast.

**It's a really great house, and also very large. Maybe you can tell us a few details about how you managed to get a big house like this? How did you collect the books and other equipment that there is here?**

This house belongs to a member of the community who wasn't living in it, and they offered it as a collective house. Actually we weren't only offered this house, we had a choice of houses. Here there are 5 big houses with no-one living in them and they are all owned by farmers. All of them offered the young people to occupy their houses, but we chose this one as the most suitable. The others were also big and appropriate to our needs, but because, unlike the other houses, this place already had a toilet, so all we had to do was move in. About the amount of equipment we have inside, as I said before, that comes from solidarity from friends in other places. It means that they want to build networks together with us, and learn together, and so they donate what they have to Gerbong Revolusi reading space.

**Aside from being a space to gather, play games and hang out, what other activities have taken place in Gerbong Revolusi?**

We've already put on so many activities here. For example, if life is getting tedious, we organise some competitions just to have fun. We also have learning activities for young kids, and spread information to the community. We often show films about struggles, and films about people's stories so that our community realises how diverse the world really is. Then there's other things - for example right now, when the Merapi volcano erupted, we opened a gathering point to co-ordinate bringing our donations of vegetables to the refugee centres, working together with the farmer's organisation, PPLP. Because, whether intentionally or not, Gerbong Revolusi forms a kind of youth movement which is connected to part of PPLP. And then there's lots more social activities needed in the community, such as community projects or regular maintenance or whatever. If someone needs some help with something, we will always give our support and work together with that



person, that's how it works.

**How is the relationship with the anti-mining struggle here? Does the existence of this place help to strengthen the people's solidarity , or what is its impact? How can this strategy be used as part of your struggle?**

It has such a big impact. It seems that the community which makes up PPLP has a great need for spaces like Gerbong Revolusi, because aside from being a space which can be used for different events, it also makes PPLP very visible. We also need Gerbong Revolusi, as one focal point, because if friends from outside the area want to know about PPLP and its struggle, or show their solidarity with PPLP, for sure they will come to Gerbong Revolusi. Because it seems to me that the place has taken this role naturally. It is as if the running of Gerbong Revolusi happens by itself, and it's really fine for everyone like that. PPLP really needs Gerbong Revolusi, but also the other way round, because Gerbong Revolusi is also part of PPLP's struggle.

**I want to ask about the books, because I have been involved in library projects before. In our library there were so many good books, but I was quite often disappointed because the people didn't really want to read them. How is it here? Do people borrow books here, or is it more of a space for being sociable?**

Actually those books are important, but it's all to do with the character of people, and each person is different. Here there are some people that often borrow books or read them here, but as I see it, more people prefer to see something visual and direct. You could say that the percentage of people who read is low, but there are people who do read. We are still lacking in books though, for example children are always happy looking at comics. Actually looking at anything they're happy.

**Are there educational or creative activities for children here?**

Creative activities for children haven't happened yet, learning about religion has happened, but infrequently since the focus for learning about religion is the place of worship.

**Community radio has just been installed here, what do you think about that? It's only been a week, but how do you see that**

### **project? What could be the positive impact of community radio?**

We see it as really positive, after only one week on air we already have many listeners. There are song requests, information about farming and the prices of commodities that we produce, the struggle and so on. It turned out that people are really responsive to this, people are very happy because they can get the information directly without having to go to Gerbong Revolusi. And for the young people it seems really important for learning, they also have to learn about journalism, or how to provide the information that people need. And it's good that they can learn these things right here, because young people here also really love farming and they don't want to stop being farmers. It's already been shown that here in Garongan people are not into organisation at all, they just want to get on with farming. So with the community radio in Gerbong Revolusi, the youth are more together, as we can spread information about the struggle directly through the radio.

### **Looking to the future, are there more ideas of how to develop this space? Or new ideas for activities or projects here?**

In the future we will continue to do new things which have the basic aim of strengthening the farmers' struggle, by conveying opinions that can be believed in, the truth from reliable sources and the facts of what is happening around our area. We will maintain this in the future and develop it further, and for this we strongly hope for solidarity from comrades wherever they may be, which could take any form that doesn't damage the farmers' resistance. We want to develop it so that Gerbong Revolusi becomes a focal point for the Kulon Progo struggle specifically and, who knows, maybe it will become a catalyst for all kinds of movements.

### **Is there anything else you would like to mention, or suggestions for friends who want to build up autonomous spaces in their own areas?**

Our belief is that the more friends we have the stronger we are. And we are always open for networking with others. There is still much we are lacking here. Also I am aware that as someone who is from here, I cannot really look at what we do here in a critical light. We also need criticism and suggestions from others about how we should go forward, as long as that does not take away from the struggle of the farmers themselves. And if you're able to do

something, then you really should do it. Friends who already know about the farmers' situation here have the responsibility to bring the campaign wherever they go and to whoever they speak with. They should let people know that the coastal farmers will keep fighting injustice in Kulon Progo, and if necessary in other places too. From here also we are ready to take action in solidarity with people in other places.

etniko  
bandido  
Manila,  
Philippines



**Tell us about the infoshop. Where is it located? How long has the project been running? Why did you want to set up an infoshop in Manila?**

It can be found in Pasig City, east of Manila. I started it last September 17, 2010. It's just a small space with a room, a living room and a kitchen. I had lived here for a month with nothing before I converted it into an info-shop. And when two friends from Davao and Switzerland came by to visit, I told them about my plans of making an info-shop or an autonomous space and the only problem was I did not have money to do it. After that they helped me with the finances and in two weeks' time we were able to fix the roof, the ceiling and the bookshelves. Some friends and individuals here in Manila also helped and so we were able to officially open this info-shop last September 17, 2010.

-One of the reasons why I decided to put up this info-shop is because there is no autonomous centre here in Manila.

-Second is that I didn't want to waste all the stuff that I collected for the previous info-shop in Bulacan that didn't last that long. It would be such a waste to put them aside.

-Thirdly, it's personal. After a year of living a 'normal' life, I realized that I can't take it any more. I want to get back to activism and be comfortable and happy with what I do.

-Fourth, I see how important it is to have an info-shop to meet the need for alternative information.

### **How did you get the place? How did you get the books?**

I am renting the place, small space from my aunt, the rent is 1,000 Philippine Pesos. The books, zines and other reading materials are from stuff I collected from the previous infoshop in Bulacan.

### **What sort of books and materials do you try to collect? What sort of people do you hope will use the info-shop? Are you collecting information for Education? Discussion? Action?**

Anarchist literature alternative. The ideas here are plain black and white, there are no alternatives or other options. Alternative literature and reading materials are what we need here. Second, reading materials that would be accessible to the community here, other than the information from the media and the government. Most people are just dependent on the information coming from the media and the local government. Now if there are other information and alternatives accessible to them, it can empower the community to be 'self-organized'. I want to open it to friends, comrades, and the people here in the community. The discussions, issues and actions I am leaning towards would be socio-political and environmental issues.

### **I want to ask about the politics of language, because in the Philippines much of the written info is in English. But while most Filipinos know English, many people are not really confident to read in English. How do you try to respond to this problem? Do you manage to find interesting material in Tagalog?**

None. Even the materials and books from the left are written in English. I also have trouble in fully understanding the English books, what I do is to read it again and look for the meaning of words that I do not understand in the dictionary. We provide this material because of the quantity of alternative literature available and the fact that "Filipinos" usually learn the English language easily, but the process would really be much better if we could give

them a lot of literature in Tagalog.

Most of the people who are well versed in English come from the rich and upper class communities because they have good access in this field. There is what I call a "moderate poorer class" in every part of the Philippines. In poor communities such as this, we do not have much access to English reading materials, and thus we do not read much either. To refer to kids, there are two situations commonly encountered in terms of the learning process and education. One is that of the kids who only study in school every other year, ie. they will study this year but next year they will stop studying because of their poor situation. The other situation is about kids who have the privilege to study at public school but the problem is a lack of reading materials in that school. Also in schools, the English subject is not given much attention. So if there's an alternative learning space that provides English and Tagalog literature in their place then maybe it can help as a further learning process.

**I think your collective is quite small, is this true? Is this a problem? What advice would you give to people who wanted to open an info-shop space with just one or two people?**

Yes, it's small. No, it's not a problem. For now, the anarchy idea here is just on its nursery stage and that is not a problem. All you need is a dedication and a clear plan. As long as you can do it without pressure, and just enjoy what you are doing and what you have.

**Before you were also involved in an info-shop project in a small town, what have you learnt from that project? How is it different in a big city?**

It was difficult before because they were dependent on me. We had ideas but there was no consensus, I would have to decide for everyone and they just go with whatever decision I make. That's when I decided to make my own Info-shop and now everything seems easier. In four months too many things have happened. Being in a big city is quite good, and it is more accessible to comrades. It is also easily reached by the community here, the students and sub-culture people, to the kids and their parents.

**How has the anarchist movement in Manila and the rest of the Philippines responded to your initiative?**

Positive, I got good encouraging response from the people and at the opening of the info-shop people came with reading materials and books and showed their support. They also proposed events and other activities. It's moving and rolling, the so-called movement. Unlike before when I didn't know where to look and how to contact people, now there is a spot for everyone.

**Have there been any expenses in opening the info-shop and keeping it running? If so, how have you solved this problem? Do you have any thoughts about what is the best way for an autonomous space to approach these economic issues ?**

Yes, now I work as a tricycle driver to pay bills and make ends meet. It is hard a times, especially when there is an activity because I cannot go to work, hence I don't get any income for that day. I was thinking, if there is a way to finance an internet shop business, I can put up one here and create the info-shop on the second floor. But this is just for me, the solution varies on the situation. This is just the solution I see for myself.

**Do you hold any open events in the info-shop? What sorts of activities take place there?**

Yes, we have workshops, art shows, film shows, gigs, discussions and talks - for now this is what's happening here.

**Anything else you want to add from your experience in this project especially that might be useful for people considering similar ideas in their own places?**

Just focus. Make your plan and follow your plan and manage your own time. Just enjoy what you are doing and be vigilant, because what we are doing is not that simple.

# kinayahan unahon

Davao City,  
Philippines



**Tell us some history. Your collective was formed a few years before you got a collective building. What was the original idea of the collective? When did you start to think that you needed a space? Why did you make that a focus of your collective?**

We formed a collective to continue work on autonomous radical projects locally. After the demise of Earth First Davao, collective members went to pursue individual activities in life, or some eventually had families. But we could not let our activities and actions towards creating a radical and decentralized movement stop so we formed a new collective, looking to friends and people that were determined to do something politically. Before, we were using public spaces like parks and gutters and had meetings there. Sometimes we would hang out together and cook food at a friend's kitchen, while preparing stuff for demos, street actions, food not bombs and related activities. We had good times and were successful doing such activities and none of our comrades got into trouble with the government or authorities. I feel no regrets and it was a worthwhile experience back then.

The info shop project comes on a different level, to have a base from which we could intensify our work and do many things and reach more people. Our position security-wise, which we think is quiet important, is good at the



moment. We share ideas collectively and deal with interpersonal relationships more since we live in the info shop. People came to know better each other while living under the same roof.

**What sort of collective discussions did you have when you were planning to get this space? Did you all have similar visions for the project? What problems did you anticipate?**

Before we got this space-I mean the info shop that we are running now- we had meetings and activities once a week- every Sunday. Meanwhile at that time some of us explored or tried to learn yoga education- its basic exercises, diet and meditation - as well as make friends with people there. Then later we got a temporary space we could use for activities and meetings inside the premises of Ananda Marga Yoga Centre. We were a bit lucky because we came across meeting Dada Rakesha (a yoga teacher) that we knew and was our friend back then. He visited the centre one time, and also happened to be in the underground punk subculture as well in bands (Mongoloids and Alcoholocaust later) during the 90's or so and knew a few people in the anarchist collectives in Manila and outskirts of Luzon island before he transformed becoming a Yogi. He then asked or lobbied to Dada Mantra, who at that time was on top of the hierarchy which manages and controls the Davao Centre, until permission was granted that we could freely use the space.

During that time, there were several empty rooms and offices inside AM building. Mostly young people from the music and art group of 'margiis' or friends were also using the building, most of them being spiritually initiated like most of us were back then. The good thing is that Ananda Marga organization did not interfere or disturb our actions and meetings when we began to run the space.

During that time, collectively we discussed more how we could go about organizing things and being openly able to reach other people beyond or outside our subcultural lifestyle (which we had been conditioned to for some years) who actually lived- like several communities mostly exploited folks from the bottom- mainly poor and in the brink of survival-struggling to obtain basic necessities of life. We often reflect, tend to look on ourselves as an individual in the collective- how we could go ahead with our actions to

support other people while initially encouraging means of struggle towards self- organization, autonomy and independence from survival and counteract the enemy who profits from our blood and misery that we basically think is important.

In the end, we've only been able to reach and have contact with a few people. I could say that we do not have similar visions. Altogether we listen to each individual in the collective and gather different ideas of what they want and desire to do. But I realized that we are always involved in an endless process, as we accept failures and successes during the course of taking action. I learned to live life on daily struggles and circumstances without waiting for such results to come. Some members of the collective from before were not around when we began to establish the info shop. There were only a few people left, like 3 or 4. It is also very important to note that we owe much support and inspiration from different people and comrades overseas who have raised money and materials, gave their time and energy and work out organizing benefit events from their respective towns, and that is why we have an info shop space we can use. It's been two years now since we've started the info shop project.

### **Tell us about the place. What activities have gone on there since it was started?**

We rented the space which started around November 2008. Before it was a house owned by a family. There were ranges of activities we did before, like book discussions and free school happening every week, and there have been several workshops and so on. Most of the times we cook with friends and organize film screenings. Every Saturday, local foods not bombs used to cook in the info shop and later serving meals on the streets, for free as always. Several meetings, occasional parties with friends and wild events happened. It was pretty fun. People got together. There are many tiny initiatives done by individuals making and creating their own stuff in the info shop and I see that it was productive and quite a worthwhile experience to learn something from them, while sharing your own stuff too. There are spontaneous activities - a bit informal - that during the process enhances joyous dynamics and chemistry among people involved - so that later I came to wonder that I've been driven or riding beyond my limits and expectation.

For now, once a week we have mobile library where we share and do info tablings and circulate alternative and radical information in town. There is also film evenings every Saturday of the week where mostly we invite neighbours and the nearby community. We also started a zine club (mostly anti-capitalist/anti-state literatures) which few friends and comrades involve that will happen inside the info shop twice a month. We sometimes do leaflettings and hand out flyers to people. Some members of the collective run their own personal distro and film screenings in town, make their own zines and are doing translation project of radical literatures into Filipino languages.

**What about the library? There are a lot of books. Where did they all come from?**

The library is mainly connected to the info shop and is open every day as long there's collective member inside people could have a look or borrow materials. It's not really well organized though, in terms of categorizing the books, zines, films and other stuff, I could say that it's a bit chaotic. But I think people in the collective gave their utmost energy and tried and strived to make it more orderly and nice with visions. Several people come to look at the library while some borrow materials, but not so many. These are mostly friends, supporters and colleagues coming from different places in the city. Also our adult neighbours rarely come inside the space as they think we're weird or they're just too shy. Only kids sometime occupy our space - they come to gather, play and have fun. Some of the books came from people's donations locally and overseas but most were stolen from book chains and businesses. Other stuff we buy from our pockets especially when it's cheap and interesting.

**Who comes to use the centre? Do you feel that people make good use of the materials you have collected? Because many times library collectives can be disappointed because they collect so many great books and zines and then nobody wants to read them. Is language a problem - I mean because there are not many books in the Tagalog or Visayan Languages?**

Not so many people come to use the centre - only when there are certain activities they come. Only several people and friends borrow books or come

to the library. It's mainly the collective that uses the centre, which is our base in preparing and organizing stuff or projects, and we live in the centre as well. Some people felt that our physical location is quite remote (we are inside a subdivision), and this is something they always complain about. Of course I know it is not true as the space is within the reach of the city. I realized in the end there are only a few people in town that are deeply interested about the cause and that's how it is at the moment. On the other hand, there are visitors or travellers coming from different places in- and outside the country and we welcomed them because they were nice and friendly. In contrast, a few months ago there were too many people, punks, around 20 or so, who came to the info shop invading and occupying the space and leaving some of the collective members feeling uncomfortable and disrespected. Most of these traveller punks we did not know personally.

And yes it's true we do not have many books and materials in Tagalog and Visayan Language and some people prefer local languages. We have dictionary though from English to Tagalog and Visayan translation. The thing besides these rigid complexities is that most authors and writers in the Philippines came to produce their own work using English language which many people could not able to understand. This becomes discrimination at some point, especially for poor people who never had a chance to afford the poverty of school life, or have never been raised like a herd to someone else's programming and control. For example how could indigenous people and other communities dependent on their land and nature care much about western standards, city life and status quo?

**The Kinayahan Unahon house is not only a public space, it is also a communal house, and this is quite unusual in the Philippines where nearly everyone lives in a family. How has it been to live together for the last 2 years? There must have been a few conflicts! What is your approach when there are problems?**

Our approach is to seriously and honestly deal with the problem, and discuss it and talk about it face to face. I see these are our strengths and from there many lessons learned and reflected upon. We cannot escape from associating with people, those we know and those we don't. Within the mass of people everyone has individual differences, even though somehow there are

manifestations of social uniformity, but there is also something inside that reflects that we are humans who want to go beyond what the system expects us, mirrored through our mechanical actions and conditioning within society. This cycle happens everywhere everyday, even inside our info shop, and needs to be fearlessly criticized and discussed if the aim is to build a more healthy, caring and meaningful relationship to one another. There will always be a problem of course - even worse, barbarous and degrading like violence and chaos or people killing or raping each other that will result (and it's obvious as we see this every day) if we cannot get through our incarceration(physical, mental and spiritual) and confront this destructive madness: a greed-driven enslaving culture that defines and reduces us into being mass consumers and commodities and when excesses of words and opinions are endlessly at war having mentally absorb to what power and order dictates and invisibly taking us to our oppression. Personally, I don't want to speak for everybody, it is simply just how I see and feel about my surroundings and situations that affected me which leads me to fight and struggle on because there is nothing left to imagine than to act and resist be it someone else that fucks you up on the streets coercing your freedom and dignity.

And about the info shop, yes we have conflicts and they are quite normal - and we have lasted for two years. We have always discussed collectively whenever tensions have arisen. These brought us to our personal shaping and development. The acceptance of individual mistakes and failures and respect for each persons' needs and differences we see as valuable and worth to live. There are new interesting ideas that develop along the way when people are comfortable and openly accept listening and sharing their feelings face to face most especially when it's natural and emotionally coming deeply from our hearts. So I can personally say that living for two years with the collective is somehow good and sometimes not and there are many reasons why problems (small or serious) or tensions occur, and there are still many solutions and possibilities for everything that anyone might try, express and act upon.

**Do you see the collective as a long term project? Do you want to continue with the same people? In the same house?**

I don't really know if the collective would become a long term project or not and I don't see into the future. I hope it would be and more people creating their own autonomous affairs. At the moment I just stick to the ground doing what I can do. My activity is not always been reduced to what an info shop project is expected to be, or reflected as the situation changes all the time and new perspectives and thoughts are coming around. This reminds us or justifies how an info shop or collective project is very important as I am free to create many ideas and activities that transform my own and maybe other people's lives. Personally, I can say not all the people in the info shop I like and I don't want to live with people I don't like for many years in the same house even though things are going well at the moment. We never came to talk about it yet and I think it's very important. Somehow being inside the info shop forever is not so even healthy, and that also goes for living with the same people.

**In the Philippines there are so many activist groups, many with some sort of connection to left-wing movements. What makes your collective different from those other groups (if anything)?**

Yes there are many activists groups in the Philippines that follow certain ideologies and are structurally hierarchical. Many as well are pacifists and are inclined towards command and obedience as a way to get things done. They are believers of reform and some see activism as mere career or work to abide upon or express with. We believe in autonomy and we keep ourselves off to any forms of governmental, state and capitalists' relations and authority. We are very ordinary people who don't want to set up standards to go within the process of changing and creating things possible. People are free to live up to their own potential. We are for life not to make a living. We are not beneficiaries of a perfect world in submission to any central committee or master's formula. We don't believe in it.

**Some of you are also involved in activities outside the house, for example supporting communities that resist mining or organising film screenings downtown. Do you think having a base can have a beneficial effect on these other activities? Or do you think it is too much work to run the info-shop and also do all the different projects?**

We still have the info shop now and still run activities inside such as alternative library, zine discussions and free school regularly. We use the space as our base as well particularly to continue external projects like anti-mining campaigns, film showings downtown and grassroots form of circulating alternative information on the streets. We translate literature, have a mobile library, some members are making zines, making a film documentary, networking other people and organizing events inside and outside the info shop all at once. We are composed of less than ten people enriching the hard work and pleasure together, and sharing our limited time and capacity with other people and friends who need our support. These things are all quit challenging and some are definitely difficult but we're happy and feel motivated in doing something - until now, we've existed for more than 2 years of fucking light and hardships. These are all I see beneficial things which I think we can start doing on a more simple way and honesty. Sometimes we go outdoors, spending time on collective picnics or hiking, when we are too tied up and feeling like machines.

**What about the economic issues? How do you manage to pay the rent and have enough to live from day to day? Do you feel you make compromises to meet the economic necessities? Any further thoughts about what are sustainable and autonomous solutions to this difficult problem?**

We depend on financial donations coming from comrades or groups overseas we are in contact with. We pay the rent by that money. Some groups or people does benefit events for us or come up with fundraiser projects. Some make big amount of cash and some don't. We thank them and thus keep our info-shop existing more visibly or used by people. Before, we don't have the info-shop but our collective spirit was there and we started to organize. I could also see that maybe someday there will be no money or financial support coming from other people or anything but we won't stop collectively fighting for a better world because we don't have one.

There are some enjoyable moments and adventures where money does not exist and become meaningless. Money in the end is only a material thing without any value when we try to see inside our hearts and humanity. There are people who have more wealth and there are many people who are poor

and it is not negotiable when everything are reduced to bloody economic living and corrupt institutions fighting against each other defining wage as essential. There is some point in time where I make compromises to meet economic needs. I can also think some people will do it the other way and it should maybe look like that. I could not really care enough about who's in between sides are more fine enough which I felt makes each one of us prone to merciless surviving economically.

Anyway, I was selling some informative materials a month or two ago on the streets but only got very little amount of money for a day since not much people in town buy those stuff. Then, I applied for translation of anarchist materials carried by a collective based in Canada and they will send off some cash for my time when its finish. I wanted to distribute afew of the titles they carry which I selected as being useful for our local organizing. They will also assist me on print run. They also agreed to putting the translated materials on our webpage Panganduyan Press.

Also, there was a time recently when we tried to organize a collective info-kitchen project serving vegetarian food and activities inside intended for us to gain autonomous income ourselves without bosses work by few friends who have similar interests running the space. But we felt need more money initially to start one for us to pay the rent and some other expenses. So, it went nothing in the end but at least it resulted to some few meetings and interesting discussions. Farming would be ideal as well where we can grow our own food and own the land. I don't consume many things that I don't necessarily need, so I guess it's worth the life.

### **Are there any new projects that you'd like to start there in the future?**

We wanted to finish our film documentary focussed against mining in the Philippines and produce our own collective journal-some pieces of our writings, updates and news. I hope there will be more people in the local working with translation and writing project. The South East Asia network I would also love to support. I'll try to maintain Panganduyan Press as well circulating translation materials. I would also like to support other struggling info shops collectives in the Philippines if they need some help. I still never lose hope with the info kitchen project someday.