

# **Muslim Anarchism**

**Policrateia in the Islamic World**

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## Introduction

Anarchism is an ideology which deeply affected human life since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In both positive and negative ways, anarchists have influenced historical events and societies all over the world. The deeper philosophy of Anarchism has been laid down by likes as the French philosopher Pierre Joseph Proudhon, the Russian thinkers Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin and the famous writer Leo Tolstoy! Especially the latest is of special notice here, because his thoughts combines the Anarchistic thought with religion. Tolstoy is one of the leading members (as you can speak of members among Anarchists) in the Christian Anarchist movement.

And it was this movement combined with some current events in the Islamic societies that made me wonder. Many Muslims would prefer the Caliphate and a Khalifa to return to rule them as it is to many the only true Islamic form of government. Though their version of the Khalifa does in most cases not differ from the average corrupt and despotic rule in the Middle East to date. When we look at the few cases in which an Islamist revolution succeeded a corrupted state emerged. Iran and Afghanistan of the Taleban are notorious examples of how such a corrupted world view would occur. As such, by thinking along the lines of the Mullahs and Ayatollahs these people ignore the concept of Shûra and other important Islamic thought. Perhaps they ignore the Shûra part due to the fact that most Muslims never experienced any form of Shûra in their lives as they live in some form of oppressive government. As Shûra is said to consider an Amir/Emir/Ameer, to lead the people and consult the people before making a decision, they accept any ruler even when this ruler does not consult them. They probably don't know what to do when consulted.

From a Muslim Anarchist point of view such an Emir does not have to be a human. A Muslim Anarchist consider Allah (swt) to be the only Emir he or she pays allegiance to. That stems from the anarchistic view that no other human can make another human listen, unless it is the free will of the other human to listen. Then combined with the afore mentioned concept of Shûra, it enables Muslim Anarchists to create consensus in accordance to the will of Allah (swt) as laid down in the Qur'an the Hadith and prevent chaos to rule their society.

Islam is according to many a religion **that can be simple in all it's complexity, as well that it can be complex in all it's simplicity.**

To work on a workable Muslim Anarchist framework will take some time. Also the nature of Anarchism means that people will tend to disagree with each other. In this Islam will provide a natural constitution for Anarchist to agree upon. As the Q'uran and Hadith provides straightforward guidelines for humankind to live by. The Wikipedia on Islam and Anarchism, mentions some famous westerners and Muslims who had anarchistic ideals!

The French cartoonist Gustave-Henri Jossot, a frequent contributor to anarchist magazines, converted to Islam in 1913, citing "simplicity, no priests, no dogmas and almost no ceremonies" as reasons. After the change, he continued to criticize the idea of a fatherland, demanded equal payment for all, rejected political action, violence and formal education. He rejected social action, with the rationale that change is only possible on an individual level.

An important and influential figure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Ali Shariati, one of the ideologues of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and of whom Jean Paul Sartre said: "I

have no religion, but if I were to choose one, it would be Shariati's". After the Islamic Revolution took on a particularly vicious authoritarian note, Shariati was imprisoned for his lectures, which were extremely popular with the students, and was forced to flee Iran. He was assassinated shortly afterwards.

Although Shariati was not an anarchist, his vision of Islam was one of a revolutionary religion siding with the poor. He believed that the only true reflection of the Islamic concept of Tawhid (unity and oneness of God) is a classless society.

these people just show that the thought goes deeper than one might think and stretches further, inspiring even others.

**If you were to obey a human being like yourselves, then verily you indeed would be losers**

as states the *Holy Qur'an Surah 23 Al-Mu'minun Ayat 34*.

This quote proves that Islam does contain Anarchistic elements! The renouncement of government appears clearly in the Qur'an as as such no Muslim should obey any other Muslim, but only listen to others in order to make up his own mind!

## Historical anarchist tendencies in Islam

Throughout history, there have been anti-authoritarian movements within Islam, but they are not well-documented and it is not clear how much impact they have had on mainstream Islam.

The first recorded strand of anti-authoritarian Islam dates all the way back to the death of the third Caliph Uthmān ibn 'Affān (Arabic: عثمان بن عفان (عثمان). They had a disagreement about who should succeed him as the leader of Muslims, resulting in the Shia — Sunni split. There was a third group, however, the Kharijites, who opposed both the Sunni and Shia sects, and claimed that any qualified Muslim could be an Imam. They held that all people were individually responsible for the good or evil of their acts. They challenged all authority and encouraged all, especially the poor and dispossessed, to see the struggle against injustice as being divinely sanctioned. However, although Kharijites saw all believers completely equal regardless of any social differences, they believed that non-believers had no rights, and could be killed. At least one sect of Kharajites, the Najdiyya, believed that if no suitable imam was present in the community, then the position could be dispensed with.

A strand of Mutazalite thought paralleled that of the Najdiyya: if rulers inevitably became tyrants, then the only acceptable course of action was to stop installing rulers.

As both Sunni and Shia strands of Islam developed into authoritarian ideologies, the libertarian ideas within Islam continued most strongly through Sufism, the mystic strand of Islam. Sufism was very common at the edges of the Islamic empires, in secluded areas, and developed under the influence of eastern philosophy, and anti-authoritarian and revolutionary ideas are present throughout its history. Many Sufi orders and Sufis advocated and struggled for women's equality and social justice.

Sufism also provided much of Islamic poetry and literature where these tendencies are visible. One of the most famous Sufi poets was the Persian writer Farid al-Din Attar, who lived in the

13<sup>th</sup> century CE. In one of his books, “Muslim Saints and Mystics: Episodes from the Tadhkirat al-Auliya’ (Memorial of the Saints)”, Attar tells a story of a Sufi teacher Fozail-e Iyaz (supposed to have lived in 8<sup>th</sup> century CE) and the 5<sup>th</sup> Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid. As Harun looks for a person in his kingdom who can reveal the truth about him, he finds Fozail, who is the only person who speaks honestly and without fawning. Fozail tells Harun that he respects no authority and that “to obey God for one moment is better than a thousand years of people obeying you”.

Although there are examples of anti-authoritarian tendencies throughout the history of Islam, the main developments happen in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which reintroduces liberal interpretations of Islam and sees mixing of radical left ideas and Islam.

The French cartoonist Gustave-Henri Jossot, a frequent contributor to anarchist magazines including *l’Assiette au Beurre* which published numerous illustrated polemics railing against the Catholic church, converted to Islam in 1913, citing “simplicity, no priests, no dogmas and almost no ceremonies” as reasons. After the change, he continued to criticise the idea of a fatherland, demanded equal payment for all, rejected political action, violence and formal education. He rejected social action, with the rationale that change is only possible on an individual level.

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The young anarchist Isabelle Eberhardt rejected anarchism for Islam in North Africa in 1897. The Sufi sect she joined was involved in the anti-colonial struggle.

## **Anarchist criticism of Islam**

Since much of the anarchist movement has occurred in countries under the influence of the Christian tradition, anarchist criticism of religion has been historically focused on Christianity. While some of this criticism can be extended to the belief in God and organised religion in general, Western anarchists have been so immersed in the Christian tradition that transferring these criticisms to Islam is often inaccurate. The Western world, and by extension Western anarchists, often sees Islam as a political religion, dictating all aspects of society and daily conduct. This goes against anarchist principles of self-determination in one’s daily life.

Anti-Islamic anarchist criticism centers the coercion they see imposed on women in certain Muslim societies, as well as the oppression which Homosexuals experience in these Islamic states (see *Homosexuality and Islam*). In the popular imagination of the West, some Islamic societies are patriarchal, where women are forced to wear a veil and are denied basic rights like voting and education. While anarchists would not advocate for voting for leaders (as opposed to voting on issues) or, in a small number of cases, formal education, the reasons for these denials become the source of conflict. In many Muslim countries, homosexuality is illegal and subject to harsh physical punishment, which violates anarchistic concepts of equality and anti-oppression. It is disputed, however, how many of these issues are tied to the religion specifically and how many

stem from regional customs. Furthermore, many contemporary feminists, especially Muslim feminists, do not see the Islamic tradition of “hijab” (modest dress) as oppressive to women.

Also problematic to anarchists is the Islamic treatment of apostates and non-Muslims. The concept of Jihad (which is a traditionally controversial topic among Islamic scholars), while meaning “to struggle in faith,” and originally used mostly in connection with a personal, internal obstacle, is often understood to mean a holy war against unbelievers. Anarchists also oppose Sharia law, which is based on the Qur’an and early Muslim traditions and calls for harsh physical punishment for transgressions against religious teachings. Most Muslim states today do not implement Sharia law.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, there have been a rising number of liberal Muslims who question orthodox interpretations of Islam. These Muslims concentrate on the concept of self-realisation, called Ijtihad. Many liberal Muslims call for complete equality of men and women, accept homosexuality, and reject Sharia law, thus removing many of the anarchist objections to Islam. Many liberal Muslims do not see their movement as a reformation, but rather a return to the essence of Islam, which they say was corrupted through the years.

## **Current figures and trends**

### **In the Muslim World**

#### **In the West**

Peter Lamborn Wilson, who writes under the pen-name Hakim Bey, has combined Sufism and neo-Paganism with anarchism and situationism. He is most known for his concept of Temporary Autonomous Zone’s, which influenced the “reclaim the streets” movement and events such as the Love Parade. However, it is debatable whether he can be described as either a Muslim or an anarchist, as opposed to being influenced by both ideologies.

On June 20 2005, Yakoub Islam, a British-based convert to Islam, published his online Muslim Anarchist Charter. The charter asserted a set of basic principles for anarchist thought and action founded on a Muslim perspective. These reaffirm some of the core principles of Islam, including a belief in God, the prophecy of Muhammad and the human soul, but assert the possibility that a Muslim’s spiritual path might be achieved by refusing to compromise with institutional power in any form, be it judicial, religious, social, corporate or political.

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