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Anarchist Solidarity with the BLM Struggle – Echoes from the Islamic World

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The recorded killing of George Floyd by a police officer on May 26, 2020 in Minneapolis, sparked worldwide protests and riots, as well as solidarity with the struggle of African Americans against police violence and inequality. Although spearheaded by the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, anarchists have also played a role in mobilizing people to join protests,² while framing the African American struggle as part of a worldwide anarchist struggle.³ This article sheds light on several anarchist groups in Muslim-majority countries, and their calls for solidarity with the BLM or anarchist causes. Although marginal, these groups are part of an anarchist network that has evolved in recent years on different Internet-based communication platforms. These platforms

¹ The author would like to thank Professor Nigel Copsey of Teesside University for the review and helpful comments on the final draft of this article.

² Jonathan Turley, "[Antifa and Anarchists have Hijacked Floyd Protests but Left Won't Admit it](#)," *The Hill*, 2 June 2020; Rebecca Davis O'Brien, Andrew Tangel and Ben Chapman, "[Lone Wolves, Self-Styled Anarchists: The Disparate Actors Accused of Protest Violence](#)," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 June 2020.

All sources were accessed on 10 June 2020.

³ "[This Is Anarchy: Eight Ways the Black Lives Matter and Justice for George Floyd Uprisings Reflect Anarchist Ideas in Action](#)," *Anarchist Agency*, 9 June 2020.

enable anarchists to construct a transnational, decentralized, leaderless movement that attempts to merge local struggles with the global anarchist movement.

Anarchist groups have never gained popularity in the Middle East or in Muslim-majority countries, unlike followers of other political ideologies such as communism and fascism.⁴ The main reason, as it seems, is that anarchism seeks to destroy any form of hierarchical structures of power. Such structures include all religions and religious institutions, the state (via nationalism), tribalism and patriarchy. These structures still shape and influence domestic and foreign affairs throughout the Islamic world. Nevertheless, there are active anarchist groups and individuals in various Muslim-majority countries from North Africa to East Asia.

The forces which oppose anarchism in the Islamic world – either in the form of nationalism, tribalism or diverse types of Islamism – have proven too strong to confront. This may explain why anarchist groups and anarchism never succeed in attracting the masses and gaining popularity. Moreover, unlike communism, which was supported by the Soviet Union, and unlike various streams of Islamism, which are often backed by specific countries, anarchism never had the “privilege” of having a strong patron.

For instance, in Indonesia, anarchist militants have emerged in the past decade as a threat to public order and state-representatives.⁵ In Bangladesh, the Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation is known for promoting women’s and workers’ rights in the context of an anarchist struggle.⁶ In Iran and Afghanistan a group that calls itself the Anarchist Union of Iran and Afghanistan, communicates with their fellow Western counterparts via their online platforms.⁷ In Egypt, anarchists inspired by their Western counterparts called themselves the “Black Bloc” and participated in the Egyptian

⁴ Israel Gershoni, *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion* (USA, Texas: University of Texas Press, 2014).

⁵ “[South Sulawesi, Indonesia: Insurrectionists in Makassar Block Highway & Attack State Vehicles](#),” *Anarchists worldwide*, 29 September 2019.

⁶ “Message from Bangladesh Anarcho Syndicalist Federation-BASF on International Women’s DaY-2019,” [Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation](#), 8 March 2019.

⁷ Asr Anarshism platforms:

- Website: <https://asranarshism.com/>
- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/asranarshism>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/asranarshism>
- Telegram: <https://telegram.me/asranarshism>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/asranarshism/>

2011 revolution.⁸ In Tunisia, anarchists participated in the struggle for freedom in the post-Arab Spring era.⁹ In Lebanon, there is a small anarchist group named Kafeh striving to establish an anarchist decentralized society in the country.¹⁰ In Syria, there is a large presence of anarchists, most of them are Kurds but many came from Western countries (see below). In Turkey, militant groups such as the Revolutionary Anarchist Action (Devrimci Anarşist Faaliyet, DAF) supports their counterparts who still fight in northern Syria.¹¹

While these anarchist groups represent tiny, fringe communities – they are linked to a transnational revolutionary social movement with supporters around the world. This helps to construct and promote local struggles as part of a wider revolution, thus justifying mobilization of anarchists from one arena to another. An example can be found in Western anarchist foreign fighters who traveled to Syria to take part in the war against the Islamic State, the Turkish army, and the Turkish-backed rebel forces – all depicted as representatives of fascism.¹² These anarchists could join anarchist fighting groups such as the now – disbanded International Revolutionary People’s Guerilla Forces, as well as the Anarchist Struggle (Tekoşîna Anarşîst), which still operates in northern Syria.¹³

Different anarchist groups from the Arab and Islamic world expressed their solidarity with BLM, and the efforts to “defund the police.” For example, on June 4, 2020, Tekoşîna Anarşîst published a photo that features eight masked individuals near some graffiti on a house in Rojava – the autonomous region in north Syria – that reads “No justice no peace - avenge George Floyd and all those murdered by State brutality.” A message that was accompanied the photo reads: “Solidarity with those fighting for the black liberation and anti-colonial resistance!”¹⁴ The group also published an official statement in which it condemned the government of the United States and urged people to “get rid of borders and hierarchies that divide us.”¹⁵ On June 6, 2020, the

⁸ Zeinab El Guindy, “[Meet the Black Bloc: Egypt's most talked about radical opposition group.](#)” *Ahram Online*, 13 June 2013.

⁹ “[Tunisia: Tunisian Anarchists Against World Capitalism.](#)” *Tahrir ICN*, 19 March 2013.

¹⁰ [@kafehleb](#), Twitter.com [page].

¹¹ “[Turkish Anarchists on the Fight for Kobane.](#)” *Crimethinc*, 4 February 2015.

¹² Ariel Koch, “[The Non-Jihadi Foreign Fighters: Western Right-Wing and Left-Wing Extremists in Syria.](#)” *Terrorism and Political Violence* (2019). DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2019.1581614

¹³ [@TA_Anarsist](#), Twitter.com [page].

¹⁴ [@TA_Anarsist](#), Twitter.com, 4 June 2020.

¹⁵ [@TA_Anarsist](#), Twitter.com, 4 June 2020.

Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation shared on its Facebook page a message by the American anarchist group Workers Solidarity Alliance¹⁶ that called for the “abolition of the police,” as cops “are part of the bureaucratic control class that includes middle managers, judges, prosecutors, corporate lawyers and military brass.”¹⁷



Members of Tekoşîna Anarşîst express their solidarity with the BLM movement, [retrieved from Twitter](#), 4 June 2020

The above-mentioned photo was also shared by the Asr Anarshism Telegram channel. According to a message that was posted on this channel on June 7, 2020, “there is a need for anarchist groups operating extensively in virtual spaces to support, promote, and disseminate anarchist texts and news. This can be achieved with the mutual help of anarchists with each other internationally.” Additionally, the group asked its followers to spread its “content from Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Asr Anarshism, our website” and to “live streaming [anarchists] in their

¹⁶ Workersolidarity.org [page].

¹⁷ [Bangladesh Anarcho-Syndicalist Federation](#), Facebook.com, 6 June 2020.

language and discuss anarchism and political issues related to the anarchist movement at the international level and share it with so we all can learn from such discussions.”¹⁸

In an interview on the anarchist website *Enough is Enough*, a spokesperson for the Lebanese Kafeh group said that the group’s goal is to overthrow the regime, “as well as the prosecution and punishment of the corrupt and the abolition of the sectarian laws.”¹⁹ In Lebanon, the BLM struggle is associated with the struggle against “Kafala,” a term that refers broadly to any person who is being subjugated to verbal, physical and sexual abuse by people who lock them up; or more specifically, to the system of sponsorship that legally binds foreign workers to Lebanese citizens.²⁰ Additionally, the Twitter account of “Propaganda,” which is affiliated with Kafeh shared a video that features riots and protests, along with messages such as “Down with systemic racism” and “Riot against the status quo everywhere!” They include hashtags, such as “Down with the regime of Kafala” (يسقط نظام الكفالة), “#BlackLivesMatter” and “#AbolishKafala.”²¹

The recent BLM protests and the riots that followed George Floyd’s killing succeeded in mobilizing tens of thousands of people around the world against police brutality, injustice, and inequality. In the Islamic world, the BLM protests were successfully used to cement anarchist groups together by linking their local goals, ranging from women’s and foreign workers’ rights, through class struggles to the militant struggle of anarchists in Syria to fortify the autonomous zone in the north of the country. By linking local struggles to a global anarchist coalition, as various anarchist groups in Muslim countries are trying to do, these groups are able to present themselves as part of a transnational movement, and not just as marginal, powerless actors. This linkage is necessary to confront the strong antagonists that anarchists face, including the state, tribal, and religious institutions that dominate the centers of influence and power.

¹⁸ [@asranarshism](#), Telegram.com, 7 June 2020.

¹⁹ “[Interview with #Kafeh, Anarchist Movement in #Lebanon](#),” *Enough is Enough*, 7 February 2020.

²⁰ [@kafehleb](#), Twitter.com, 5 June 2020.

²¹ [@PropagandaLB](#), Twitter.com, 5 June 2020.

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