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Süreyyya Evren
Alpine Anarchist Meets Süreyyya Evren
2009

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Süreyyya Evren is a writer and cultural theorist who lives in Istanbul, Turkey. Internationally, he is best known for his involvement in the Siyahi journal and the devlopment of postanarchist theory.

Over the last ten years, the "Turkish postanarchists" have made quite a name for themselves in certain anarchist circles. At the same time, people don't know much about the ones responsible for this. Can you clear some this up for us? Who is behind the Siyahi journal and other projects?

In the last twelve years, we have been working as an affinity group of people who are interested in similar subjects, theoretical and political stances. We have had three main phases of alternative publishing.

1. The Karasin Anarchist Collective was active between 1996 and 1998. It was a totally independent publishing project relying heavily on photocopy (xerox) magazines,

newspapers, texts and pamphlets. As for the distribution of our publications, we used already existing networks of subcultural fanzine distribution; we also built a website publishing everything we made.

2. A period of détournement — Working inside other publications and media between 2000 and 2003. We have worked inside already existing structures, such as an established humanist literature magazine, a comics and culture magazine, a radio station, and a publication house.

3. Launching a separate legal magazine of our own — Siyahi. We started with an autonomous website in 2003, and started to publish the magazine, devoted to postanarchist thought, in November 2004. In total, we have published seven issues of Siyahi.

What were your experiences with these different periods?

Websites achieved a lot. They allowed texts to reach many places and to stay alive. And internet publication was much, much easier.

With photocopy publishing we had serious distribution problems. We were having real difficulty in distributing our material in other cities. Besides Istanbul, we were only distributing small amounts in Ankara and Bursa. We got much more feedback through the website. Readers were able to download and print out all the material. We know that some people even made pamphlets themselves after downloading the stuff. Photocopying was limiting our dialogue with people outside the anarchist and subcultural circles. We wanted to spread our ideas to a larger amount of readers, to different people with different interests.

Between 2000 and 2003, when we worked inside different media platforms, we sometimes tried to transform them, sometimes tried to change their direction a bit, and sometimes we

Why do we tend to imagine anarchism as a homogenous whole? There are and there will be inside wars, separations and inner conflicts. The main inner conflict exists between orthodox tendencies and heterodox tendencies — and this will continue. There will be orthodox postanarchists and heterodox postanarchists. Even postanarchism is far from being homogenous. I see orthodox anarchism as an anarchism born from certain narratives on anarchism. I am without doubt in favour of the heterodox camp. And the postanarchism we have been developing definitely fits into the heterodox camp — and so do many other postanarchist works. Or at least they should be.

Regardless of any labels, which future prospects do you see for (post)anarchism — in Turkey, and globally?

In the world, I expect new debates. There are tons of anarchist taboos. Even freedom is a taboo within anarchist circles, as Matt Wilson wonderfully shows. New debates, new concepts, will bring new interrogations of taboos — which is good for heterodox tendencies. Furthermore, knowledge produced by anarchists is growing. I mean not only knowledge on anarchism and anarchists, but also knowledge in various disciplines. That will have freshening consequences. As far as Turkey goes — who knows whether we will have military coup tomorrow morning or not?

namely Murray Bookchin, Noam Chomsky and John Zerzan all articulated harsh criticisms against "postmodern thinkers", which led to an anti-postmodern impulse within anarchism.

How did you first get interested in connecting postmodern/poststructuralist theory with anarchism?

Personally, both anarchism and poststructuralism came to me through Kuhn, Feyerabend and Koyre. I was amazed by those writers and their views, and sooner than enough, they took me to anarchism and poststructuralism. Of course, our special conditions played a role too; I mean the special situation in Turkey in the 1990s.

Can you elaborate on that?

Anarchism as a movement — with magazines, self-identified anarchists etc. — emerged in Turkish politics in the late 1980s and the early 1990s. It was new and energetic. The same goes for poststructuralism. Nearly none of the classical works in poststructuralism were translated into Turkish in the 1970s, and not much in the 1980s either; it all just started to take place and to be discussed in the 1990s. This made for new, avant-gardist politics and philosophical reflections. Remember also that I was very much into experimental writing and contemporary art at the time, which had a similar dynamic.

As a very young member, or a young candidate of the Turkish left intelligentsia, I was impressed by all this, and anarchism appeared to be the political face of non-modern radicalism.

Would you say that "postanarchism" is the only future for anarchism? Should we all call ourselves "postanarchists"?

just wanted to live and function inside in our own way without changing it. In this period, we developed a radical poststructuralist anarchist approach through the articles we wrote for Turkey's oldest literature magazine. We also wrote for another monthly popular Turkish magazine, which was widely circulated because it was a comic magazine as well. It had nearly 20,000 readers across the country. We also initiated a radio program on the prestigious and independent broadcasting organization Acik Radyo (Open Radio) from Istanbul. Many shows focused on anarchism and postanarchism.

So in this period, we worked in a literature magazine, a comics and culture/literature magazine, a radio station, and a publication house. The advantages included the possibility of reaching a much greater audience in different forms, developing our ideas thanks to many intersections, meeting new people interested in the subject or having new contributions from different angles. But the period also had its disadvantages. The style of "working everywhere" was making it more difficult to understand our position for many people because everybody is not following every medium. The other contributors to the media projects we worked in, and the political and cultural differences in their stances, had influenced the way our ideas were conceived by the general audience. The other material published in these projects affected our message. While we had an impact on these projects, they also had an impact on us, and although this opened many positive new areas it was also limiting our expression. We were again in the need of media where we could initiate our own context and at the same time continue to retain our relations with a broader audience.

So we started to make an independent magazine. Siyahi is a platform for contemporary theory, culture, arts and politics. We have published many articles on postanarchism, and generally on politics and culture. Siyahi is distributed nationwide in Turkey.

Can you tell us more about your understanding of anarchism — or "postanarchism"?

Of course, what we understand as "postanarchism" needs to be discussed in detail, but at the risk of simplifying we can say it has been a kind of updated pananarchism; an anarchism that is understood beyond the limits of politics and one which includes post-eurocentric, non-modernistic elements, contemporary theoretical developments, and culture in a broad sense, which leads to a conception of an anarchism that grabs different fields and everyday life.

I will say that, historically, anarchism was the political face of anti-modernity, or anti-modern movements, which created radicals in art, politics, culture, etc. The current popular definition of anarchism, as another modern political movement next to Marxism, is both wrong in the sense of what actually happened, and also it is a wrong interpretation of the "anarchist efficacy", the agency of anarchism, the anarchist "phenomenon", which keeps anarchism alive to this day despite various strong enemies, powerful forces which have long been trying to crush it forever.

We do not have one homogeneous universal postanarchism. Political cultures give birth to different anarchisms and different postanarchisms. The postanarchism we developed in Turkey has its unique sources and aims. And in many fundamental issues, it is significantly different from the postanarchism of English-speaking postanarchists, say, Saul Newman.

Postanarchism (and "new anarchism" in general), opens a new debate on classical anarchism. This is basically rereading and interrogating anarchist history writing with poststructuralist theories on knowledge and history. Postanarchism, very importantly, shows us a way to question how the history of anarchism was written… Who were the fathers of the "fathers of anarchism" in political history? Who/what was excluded?

thought that the term suggests that anarchism, at least as heretofore thought and praxis, is somehow obsolete.

Regarding all the missing bits, and missing communication between postanarchist works in different languages, I tend to see today's postanarchism in an introductory period. The main problem of above referenced postanarchist literature is that it has not undertaken a new reading of the anarchist canon, it hasn't investigated classical anarchism from poststructuralist perspectives, but instead it compared poststructuralist theory to what was readily available in classical anarchism — which was written mostly from a modernist perspective. Many problems are rooted in this choice, I believe.

What about the term "poststructuralist anarchism"?

The problem with "poststructralist anarchism" is that it represents an intersection of anarchism with limited thinkers who are generally called poststructuralists. This understanding eliminates possible fields of research on different intersections between different anarchisms and thinkers like Bakhtin who are not directly poststructuralist but had a huge influence on it. When the term "poststructuralist anarchism" is preferred, there is no way to think anarchism through hypertext or Cixous or Irigaray or art works or facts from political life or everyday life. It is limiting the scope to just some philosophical works.

"Postmodern anarchism" in this sense sounds more open and effective. The term "postmodern" is much more flexible. But the suggestion of a "postmodern" anarchism has mostly been denied because of the negative connotations that today come with the term "postmodern". "Postmodern" is not a respected term or an area for scholarly work nowadays; for many activists it is also merely a phantasmic trap to neo-liberal politics of the world capitalist system after the end of the USSR. Finally, some well-known anarchist writers of the 20th century,

anti-globalization movement brought anarchism back to the table. The dominant position of Marxism as "the" left political philosophy and movement was more challenged by the anti-globalization movement than by the collapse of the USSR. There were anarchist forms of resistance and of organizing everywhere. Anarchism was "the heart of the movement".

But this empowered, updated contemporary anarchism was not a reincarnation of 19th-century anarchism coming back from the days of the First International — and not from the 1934 Spanish anarchist revolution either. Rather, this was something "new". There was a consensus that this was an anarchism re-emerging, it was, at least, "a kind of anarchism". But which kind? The main "newness" of the "new anarchism" was basically its spectrum of references. All the anarchistic principles employed were defined by actual experiences. There was nearly no intention to describe the movement as an application of an anarchist theory. This open-endedness gave "new anarchism" an additional elusiveness which later led to positioning it as a rupture from "classical anarchism".

"Classical anarchism" is a controversial term and it is positioned as a fixed ideology that is represented through the work of a select band of 19th-century anarchist writers, and even those writers' thoughts are reduced to certain clusters of ideas that only help to confirm prejudices about the "classical anarchists". In many cases, this turned into a debate formulated as "post-" versus "classical" anarchism. For the most part, it was this contemporary need to re-position anarchism fostered all the new studies and discussions on postanarchism. Postanarchism was largely understood in the framework of "new"/ "post-" versus "classical" anarchism.

Which you don't agree with?

Postanarchism claims a place among other anarchisms. However, the prefix post- irritated some anarchists and they

When you open a reference book on anarchism, it starts with key theorists, and ends with a section where you see "applications" of the theories you have read in the first section! But you cannot understand world anarchism as some thoughts produced by some white males applied by the world. Then you first of all miss that anarchist practices are a form of thinking: a thinking on freedom, equality, solidarity, action. This nature of praxis, having the ideology in actions as well, opens new routes to the definition of anarchism. Then anarchist political philosophy can't be understood by referring to representative thinkers only, it requires analysis of the common points of this elusive complex network of radicalisms and resistances. The political philosophy of this network is the thing that most fits a postanarchist political philosophy, as I understand it.

Postanarchism for me is just anarchism, but stronger, joining forces with its relatives, networking with neighbours today and in history. Postanarchism is just anarchism but without eurocentrism, without hidden patriarchies, without seeing the political theory as more politically valuable and seminal than arts or acts. So this approach is an experiment in understanding anarchism (in its stronger form of postanarchism) as a worldwide anti-modernist political movement which has existing or potential connections with other anti-modernist movements in different disciplines today and in history. Thus we feel the need to create a new anarchism which would be an anarchism as a worldwide phenomenon — an anarchism which either won't have a core or which will have worldwide core. This means taking world anarchisms not as exotic movements in exotic places or simple practices of anarchist ideas produced in Europe, but as unique anarchist experiments and perspectives of the anarchist network, something which should be included in the main body and main definition(s).

This opens new areas of study of course: topics like "third world modernisation and world anarchisms", "nationalism and third world anarchisms", "anti-colonial wars and third world

anarchisms", "anti-colonialism and anarchism" in general, and, for today, "the Empire and third world anarchisms", and also "Islam and anarchisms today", conflicts between religion-modernity and anarchism in the modernisation process of different countries etc.

Anti-eurocentric views have been expressed for a long time by different authors and there is a huge body of literature on anti-colonialism and, later, post-colonialism. So apart from working on different anarchisms of the world, we need to discuss these writers' positions. For example, working on Fanon and (post)anarchism should be considered as an urgent issue (looking from our postanarchist perspective). A postanarchist reading of Samir Amin, Arif Dirlik, Edward Said, Chattarjee, Martin Bernal, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak shall follow. I find it crucial to link the work of these writers to anarchist struggles worldwide… Following the theories of Bernal, we can even speculate on the "fabrication of Anarchism as a Western Phenomenon". We need more thoughts on "Orientalism and Third World Anarchims" and "Postcolonial Situation and Anarchism".

Postanarchism is also very helpful in "queering" anarchy. We need to put people like Voltairine de Cleyre and, of course, Emma Goldman in a much important place in anarchist history. English-speaking postanarchists never use Emma Goldman when they discuss the problems of classical anarchism — simply because she has been very strangely, or in a very modern way, dropped from the representative canon. Her very early attempts on a Nietzschean anarchism are thus left in shadow. The thing is, if you take her as a part of the core, you have to accept that many post-68 themes were already represented in classical anarchism. But if you see her outside of the core, then she is only a unique case of a propagandist feminist anarchist (immigrant) without any representative value.

How do you link all this to current political movements?

Anarchism is widely accepted as "the" movement behind the main organizational principles of the radical social movements in the 2000s.

The rise of the "anti-globalization" movement has been linked to a general resurgence of anarchism. It was colourful, energetic, creative, effective and "new". And credit for most of the creative energy behind it went to anarchism. Anarchism appeared to be taking back its name as a political philosophy and movement from the connotations of chaos and violence. Although the mainstream media strategy of focusing on the black bloc aimed to reproduce this image and consequently let the movement down, it also helped to attract more attention of political thinkers and activists who tried to understand what the fuss was all about. Which, in turn, ended in more scholarly and political works on anarchism and the new "movement".

The relationship between anarchism and the anti-globalization movement has been mutual. On the one hand, anarchism was the "defining orientation of prominent activist networks" and it was the "principal point of reference for radical social change movements", as Uri Gordon put it in Anarchy Alive!. Thus anarchism was providing organizational principles and tested tools. On the other hand, the "anarchistic" rise of anti-globalization, the popularity it gained, the major role it played in the first years of 21st-century radical politics, and the massive numbers of anarchist activists within the movement were widely regarded as signs of anarchism's revival. Gordon even wrote that "the past ten years have seen the full-blown revival of anarchism, as a global social movement and coherent set of political discourses, on a scale and to levels of unity and diversity unseen since the 1930s". A tradition that has hitherto mostly been dismissed required a respectful engagement with it. Simply put, the