

Anarchism in the Modern era: An Exploration of Statist Hegemony

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ABSTRACT

Governments do a lot of things, such as collecting taxes and drafting people into the military, that we would object to individuals doing. Can this be justified? (Professor David Friedman, Santa Clara University)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

To narrow the scope of this essay, a government will be defined as a representative body governing a state that has declared itself federalist, democratic and/or republican in nature. This is in context of a legitimately elected governmental body where legitimacy indicates the consent of the populace in being governed. A state is a body consisting of a government, territory, population and sovereignty. Regulatory powers ensure the protection of property (Eg: parks, roads) and the provision of public services (law courts, police). The Hobbesian view has been predominantly adopted under the term 'contractual lens' whereas the anarchist view represented is from the perspective of modern anarchism under scholars such as Professor David Friedman.

INTRODUCTION

Voting, Election, Politics, Policy. These words populate the lexicon of the populace in the 21st century. Order has become synonymous with representative governance. Anarchy, on the other hand, is synonymous with chaos. Paul-Michel Foucault's bio-political perspective posits the establishment of these 'docile citizens' (Foucault, 2011). They have been 'interpellated': the ideology of social and political institutions in a state have begun to constitute the identity of a populace. In this way, his critical engagement with a government's structure and importance in a state is instructive in understanding the assumed 'hegemonic' nature of the government. Hence, the main crux of the objection towards an individual or private control of taxation, military and in essence, policy-making stems from the dominant statist perspective that pervades the media and education systems today. Foucault acknowledged that 'power relations have been progressively governmentalized, that is to say, elaborated,

rationalised and centralised in the form of, or under the auspices of, state institutions' (Foucault, 1982). This essay will aim to move away from this dominant statist perspective and critically analyse and justify the role of voluntary individual forces in society to justify their effectiveness in adopting the regulatory power of the government.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT IN A MODERN CONTEXT: STATIST INERTIA?

Thomas Hobbes boldly proclaims that "life in the state of nature is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." (Leviathan, Chapters XIII-XIV). Indeed, most modern day examples of autonomously controlled regions consist of some version of authoritarian command with force or an enforcement of negative liberty. The autonomous yet insular Rojava community of North and East Syria has been accused of war crimes and ethnic cleansing⁵. Meanwhile, the Spanish Zapatistas have been renowned for their peaceful, ecological functionality but criticised once again for being insular and refusing external aid.⁶ James C Scott argues in his oft quoted, 'The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia' that the decision to be stateless rises out of conscientious effort to get rid of exploitative statist measures such as 'taxation' and 'conscription'. Despite this, they live in peaceful terms with little or no conflict amongst a group of people with "truly bewildering ethnic and linguistic variety" (Scott, 2009) and stand as a direct counter to Hobbes' ideas of the state of nature.

Two criticisms still follow. Anarchist rebellions at their very core, come from indigenous or marginalised groups. Scott himself clarified in a later interview that his bold claims were a narrow perspective. He states "The only alternative today is somehow

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taming this nation-state, because it can't be held at bay . . . the movie *Avatar*, which pretends you can burn bridges and keep "modernity" away is simply utopian". So how can individual regulation be justified in a 'modern' context?

Somalia is the foremost example of a 'modernised' state de-escalating into anarchy. After the complete collapse of the Somalian state, a United Nations field mission described the formation of a 'local' social contract with no overarching political or social agenda. The volatility of alliances caused a consistent stalemate in the aftermath of the Somalian state. This caused a transition from a 'predatory' to a 'symbiotic' relationship between 'militias and communities that hosted them' (Menkhaus 1998 222) . This blurred the line between 'extortion and taxation, between protection racket and police force' thus forming a 'system of governance within anarchy'. Over this time, a booming private sector emerged with a duty free system in Somalia, leading to boosted economic growth. Though oligarchical domination through this private sector created a power imbalance, voluntary donations allowed access to electricity, water purification, education and transport. Somalia hence exemplifies communal collaboration in times of conflict, juxtaposing the idea of inherent chaos in anarchy.

Though military intervention and the drawback of the civil war created less than ideal conditions, Somalia behaves as a justification that individuals are able to adopt independent methods of conflict resolution in times of crisis within 'modern' society. Regulatory powers were not only adopted, but distributed amongst the populace, with an abandonment of pre-existing divisions between the militia and civilians for mutual benefit. However, a final question arises: What justifies individual assumption of regulatory power in circumstance without conflict?

A PREFIGURATIVE SOLUTION?

Prefigurative politics allows us to understand why individual regulation can function in a real world scenario. This would be without the presence of forced statelessness such as in the case of Somalia. As established, the contractual lens imagines the state as a reality that is largely sociological. The anarchist lens would imagine the contract to exist amongst individuals instead, recognising that human beings are the basis of the socio-political realm. The free agreement that anarchists advocate for is defined as 'voluntary, mutual undertaking' (Pateman: 15). It differs from contractual political thought through its understanding that individual judgement and consent are established through the construction of cooperative institutions. Hence, justice and rights are 'fluid social forces' that are under 'consistent negotiation'. (Cooper, Dhawan, Newman, 2019). However, the dispute of the anarchic process lies in its assumption that 'societal processes in which one can be held responsible for his or her acts' can be made 'known . . . before hand and be developed fairly' (Holterman, 1993). Prefigurative politics acts as a solution.

In her essay, "Using the Master's Tools" Ruth Kinna reimagines citizens as negotiators of their own justice. Challenging that "rights" are "tools" of the state, she argues that they constitute

"grass roots resources for community-driven action." (Cooper, Dhawan, Newman, 2019) Argentinian Horizontalism, a primary example of prefigurative politics, advocates for management power to be equitably distributed instead of the hierarchical system of government management it deems "Verticalism". Here, "basic necessities, such as food, legal support, and medical care are coordinated"⁷. From the period between October 2002 and December 2004, when the majority of the horizontalist movements took place, Argentina saw a declining poverty rate from 57% to 40%. Additionally, unemployment dropped to 15%, with 2 million Argentinians receiving social benefits (Boris & Malcher, 2005, p. 145-46).

A criticism of horizontalist movements is the argument against their functionality in the long term. In Northern California, citizens of the Petrolia hamlet who were disillusioned with the predicated "socio economic upheaval" in the United States, turned to the establishment of an independent currency, the Petol. The failure of the Petol currency is a valid justification of this argument, as is the relapse of the use of the dollar in the Petrolia region. Despite this, alternative currency developer Phoenix argues that the Petols were not a replacement to the dollar but intended to "serve as catalysts to revitalize cash-poor communities with high unemployment, are optimal when they step in and allow people to build on a regular currency." Though the currency itself was temporary, the initiative itself has created an interdependent network of members in the region reliant on barter exchange and voluntarism for "biodiesel production, stonemasonry, a farmer's cooperative, seed banking, winemaking, hemp clothing [and] herbal medicine"⁸, facilitating an exemplary long term outcome.

The methods of prefigurative politics are established as 'pragmatic and local, as no ultimate or universal ground for "the good" exists' (Franks, 2006) In this way, community-based grassroots approaches have ensured communal security while allowing a form of 'participatory democracy' where every individual has a determinate role to play. These exemplary forms of social cohesion justify the potency of the individual ability to protect and provide for service and property in the absence of the state.

CONCLUSION

In this way, anarchist and statist perspectives both conclude that the individual serves as a potent force for regulation in society. Although at both extremes they can go from being insular to totalitarian, a neutral pragmatic conclusion says that yes, individuals should be justified to conduct actions such as taxation and the drafting of people into the military. Increased civilian participation warrants a quest towards decentralisation and a more participatory environment. The status quo can be altered.

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