

# Anarchism

## Key Concepts in Political Theory

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Carissa Honeywell

polity

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# 1

## 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'

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### Introduction

Problems of harm, violence and collapsing resources proliferate on local and global scales, affecting humans (some much more than others), non-humans and the natural environment. Not only the anarchists say so. But, one way of understanding contemporary anarchism is to see it as a connected series of attempts to respond to these problems from an egalitarian and anti-authoritarian perspective. This perspective is grounded in the conviction that orderly society is possible without the need for coercive hierarchy. Each chapter of this book deals with a dimension of contemporary anarchist practice (food distribution, harm reduction and decarceration) and with the core anarchist principles that are manifested through those activities (freedom as connection, prefiguration and transformative justice). It is hoped that you will come to understand the main theoretical commitments of anarchism through seeing how they shape the social movements that anarchists create.

At its core, anarchism seeks to challenge some of the central foundational assumptions of mainstream thinking about the political world, assumptions that anarchists see as

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responsible for current problems. Much of western political thought rests on the Hobbesian assumption that hierarchy, chains of command and the protection of private property are inevitable, natural and necessary for social order (especially the large-scale, complex structures associated with contemporary life). Added to this, the 'possessive individualism' of mainstream western political thinking depicts human beings as locked in a competitive struggle for freedom and security. This 'grow or die' survival mythology is so intensely fearful that normal political and economic life looks like a preparation for war (including accumulative stockpiling) and often erupts into actual war.<sup>1</sup> Anarchists, alongside critical scholars from various fields, describe this thinking as 'militarist' and indict this collection of assumptions for creating political dysfunction and domination. Militarist thinking, they argue, inhibits our ability to connect in the present or to think into the future and develop policies that will meet environmental, human and non-human needs. Anarchists tend to engage in radically transformative responses to the practices and institutions that embody militarist assumptions (or they communicate about them in such a way as to encourage these responses).

The anarchist rejection of current frameworks of electoral politics, representative democracy and formal legal avenues of political action reflects the sense they have that these institutions inevitably and irredeemably maintain militarist logics of fear, competition and hierarchy. This is because (they argue) these institutions proceed by protecting the unjust allocation of private property, inflicting punitive punishments, excluding most people from real decision making and creating categories of excluded beings and beings whose bodies can be used as resources for the benefit of the rest. Current formal political institutions, they argue, are just not up to the task of finding solutions to harm and violence on local and global scales because their commitment to these militarist practices makes them part of the problem.

Various (non-anarchist) political and sociological commentators have observed that the hierarchies of power that inhere in representative democracies are indeed structurally virtually identical to non-democratic political forms.<sup>2</sup> Even in a functional representative democracy, government is exercised

by the very few over the very many, and policy choices typically favour powerholders' short-term interests and their private accumulation of resources. Wider social and environmental costs tend to be minimized or ignored, and economies can appear to grow whilst depleting resources, polluting and destroying ecosystems and catastrophically impacting social well-being.<sup>3</sup> Short-term profit orientations and investment calculations are blind to social, animal and environmental costs. These costs include exploitation, oppression, imperialism, child labour, poverty, pollution, ecological damage, slums, homelessness, malnutrition, war, shortened lifespans, pandemics and mass species loss. As this economic growth continues, the few who benefit (for the moment) find that political control (including police, prisons, emergency legislation and border regimes) needs to be intensified and further militarized in order to offset popular resistance to its social and ecological impacts.<sup>4</sup>

It is increasingly being argued by radical commentators that the changes that are necessary to avert total climate catastrophe will not emerge from this constellation of political and economic relationships, nor the 'depraved indifference' to human and non-human suffering that they perpetuate.<sup>5</sup> Some ecological changes, like flooding, hurricanes, forest fires, deforestation, droughts and unbearable daytime temperatures, are already killing many people. We are also seeing rapid species loss, loss of sea life and changes to climate that are increasingly undermining agriculture and food production.<sup>6</sup> According to critical viewpoints, the climate crisis is the dramatic outcome of the tendency of political and economic elites to dismiss the suffering or harm experienced by those with little or no power (including many people in the global South, poor people, animals, children, ecosystems, etc.) as 'externalities', 'side effects' or 'collateral damage'.<sup>7</sup> The effects of this dismissal will be catastrophic for everyone.

Anarchism rests on this assertion: coercive political hierarchy (based on legal institutions of punishment and reward and on the protection of private property) is a choice. It is just one response to the dilemma of how to organize human collective life. There are other possible responses to this dilemma, including the non-dominating models of

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social order and resource management offered by anarchists and others. Archaeological findings relating to the earliest known human civilizations suggest that human beings have been self-consciously experimenting with different political forms since the very beginning. There is no evidence, apparently, that top-down structures of government are necessary for large-scale organization.<sup>8</sup> Centralized hierarchy is not the only option, argue the anarchists; it is not inevitable or 'natural', and it is deeply dysfunctional if the costs borne by most beings as a result of political repression, economic collapse, environmental degradation and war are considered. These are unfamiliar ideas to some of us, and their unfamiliarity is partly why anarchism is sometimes seen as a juvenile response to authority or understood as *advocating* 'chaos' as a positive goal.

In this introductory chapter, I will say something about the history of anarchist thought and the big names that are usually associated with the tradition, whilst also hoping to show that there are other important sources of anarchist ideas beyond these thinkers. This wider understanding of the roots and routes of anarchism help to make sense of the resurgence of anarchist activity in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and its anti-militarist emphasis on 'domination' as the source of global problems. Having set out some of the history and conceptual reference points of anarchism, I will turn to wider concerns about militarism that have emerged in other fields. This helps place anarchism within wider debates about contemporary problems and dilemmas. and it gives us one clear answer to the question 'Why study anarchism?' The answer I shall offer to this question goes like this: within the frame of anti-militarism that anarchists share with activist peacemakers and other critical thinkers, we can identify a radically interpersonal (or inter-being) philosophy of grass-roots relationship building that aims to foster or model ideals of community wherein all needs are taken seriously. The practices that emerge from these ideas (or the ideas that emerge from these practices) may be a source of new thinking in difficult political times.

Maybe it's best to start with a story. It's one that I think captures something important about the anarchist attitude to breaking the law, which is one of the most immediately

recognizable habits of the anarchist. (As the CrimethInc. collective writes, 'If you want to be sure you never contribute to war, genocide, or oppression, the first step is to stop following orders.'<sup>9</sup>) In her short story, 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', anarchist science fiction author Ursula Le Guin writes of a perfect dream-like city. The people she describes there live in 'boundless and generous contentment', cultured, sophisticated, compassionate, expressive and free. As a vignette of city life, Le Guin describes in detail the citizens in the throes of a joyful summer festival. They are having a really great time. However, in a dark rotten room hidden away in one of the public buildings of Omelas, a single neglected, malnourished and frightened child is imprisoned.

For reasons that are not made explicit in the story, the happiness and flourishing of the entire city 'depend wholly on this child's abominable misery'. These are the terms on which the prosperity, and ultimately the law, of Omelas rests. It falls on the citizens, usually in their youth, to make their peace with the compromise on which the city is founded. In the terms of the story, this compromise is painful, but rational and ultimately inevitable. The happiness of the whole city has been weighed against the suffering of one child and this careful moral calculation of the greater good has been codified in a sort of social contract that overwrites individual citizen responsibility for the child's suffering. The law represents the optimal outcome under an unfortunate set of circumstances. It is not expected or appropriate for the residents of Omelas to question their pleasant and comfortable life. They are asked to trust that the law is the result of responsible, wise and considered reflection. If they break this contract, the prosperity will end. Their duty to their fellow citizens is to tolerate the suffering of the child.

Most of the people are willing to do this. But there are a small number of individuals who cannot live with this contract: 'They leave Omelas, they walk ahead into the darkness, and they do not come back.' These individuals forsake the law that makes life pleasant and predictable in Omelas and choose instead a precarious life without guarantees, stepping towards an unknown world where anything could happen, even chaos. They demonstrate a willingness to become subject to the radical vulnerability of

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both responsibility and uncertainty, things which the law in Omelas protected them from.<sup>10</sup> 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' is not really a metaphor for anarchism as such. The story is a thought experiment; the reader wonders whether they might 'walk away' from the social contract on which Omelas is based, even if the alternatives were unknown or uncertain, or possibly unpleasant. The story expresses something of the anarchist agenda to reveal what they see as the dark roots, the secrets, and the hidden dominations of unequal social and political structures that appear democratic and just.

The anarchist spirit that Le Guin's story captures is one of negation, a refusal to make contractual peace with suffering or avoidable harm even if it can be justified or normalized as inevitable or necessary. This spirit was expressed by the nineteenth-century Italian anarchist Errico Malatesta when he claimed that 'it is the duty of humanity that no one should suffer'.<sup>11</sup> It is a political project of 'contagious disobedience' that is not framed as a war or a binary conflict between militarized enemies with irreconcilable interests but as an attempt at unlimited solidarity between beings whose needs are irrevocably intertwined.<sup>12</sup> From the anarchist point of view, the shared global precarity revealed by pandemic, climate change and global economic dysfunction finally, irrefutably, demonstrates the interdependence of all living beings. From this point of view, embracing shared vulnerability can become a positive political and economic project. Precarity is the condition of being vulnerable. It can be even more importantly mobilized as a political force as we notice that some human and non-human beings bear the burdens and costs of this shared vulnerability to a much greater extent than others.<sup>13</sup>

The obstinate and possibly impractical impulse of unlimited solidarity is not the whole picture of anarchism, but it is important if we want to understand where anarchists are coming from, and why anarchism can seem like such a confrontational position. As it is expressed in the animal liberation lyrics of British punk band Conflict, 'It means that we are no longer prepared to sit back and allow terrible cruel things to happen.' This anarchist refusal is also apparent in the anti-fascist *no pasarán* of the Spanish Civil War, the 'fuck

off' of anarchist-inspired punk musicians like Crass and Conflict, and in English poet Sean Bonney's 'A.C.A.B. Nursey Rhyme', which ends with the line 'say "no justice, no peace" and then say "fuck the police"'.<sup>14</sup> In mainstream political discourse, this stance is taken to be naive and unrealistic at best and, at its worst, potentially dangerous and chaotic if taken seriously by disgruntled individuals and groups.

What is important, however, although perhaps not immediately evident, about these anarchist refusals are the multiple visions of possible alternatives that stand behind the 'no' or the 'fuck off'. A 'no' to one thing is logically premised on a 'yes' to something else. The nineteenth-century Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin argued that the urge to destroy what we don't want is also necessarily the urge to create what we do want. This kind of destruction coincides with the creation of an alternative. A 'no' to police violence is premised on a 'yes' to care for the bodies and minds of stopped, arrested or incarcerated individuals, a 'no' to the state is a 'yes' to self-organized institutions, and a 'no' to hierarchy suggests a 'yes' to more profoundly democratic structures. Or, in the words of the Black Rose Anarcho-Feminists, 'Anarchism indicates what people should not do to one another' and then (as the 'yes' behind that 'no') 'all the groovy things people can do and build together, once they are able to combine efforts and resources on the basis of common interest, rationality and creativity'.<sup>15</sup>

A partial vision of what anarchists are saying 'yes' to is contained in early twentieth-century Russian activist and essayist Peter Kropotkin's entry on anarchism in the 1921 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in which he names 'free agreements' and 'interwoven networks' of federations aimed at the meeting of needs as central anarchist aspirations:

Anarchism is a principle or theory of life and conduct under which society is conceived without government – harmony in such a society being obtained, not by submission to law, or by obedience to any authority, but by free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional, freely constituted for the sake of production and consumption, as also for the satisfaction of the infinite variety of needs and aspirations of a civilized being. In a society developed along

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these lines, the voluntary associations which already now begin to cover all the fields of human activity would take a still greater extension so as to substitute themselves for the state in all its functions. They would represent an interwoven network, composed of an infinite variety of groups and federations of all sizes and degrees, local, regional, national and international – temporary or more or less permanent – for all possible purposes: production, consumption and exchange, communications, sanitary arrangements, education, mutual protection, defence of the territory, and so on: and, on the other side, for the satisfaction of an ever increasing number of scientific, artistic, literary and sociable needs.<sup>16</sup>

In this passage, and in the anarchist tradition exemplified more broadly in the writings of (among others) Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Gustav Landauer, Errico Malatesta, Emma Goldman and the anarchists of Spain, the 'no' to police forces, armies, governments, corporations, landowners, colonialism, prison, marriage, meat, social mores, regimentation and law has been underpinned by 'yeses' to relationships of freedom, equality, care and trust. Starting with these authors, their affiliates and the ideas and movements that they inspired gives us the opportunity to improvise a focused definition of anarchism, which can help to map the terrain of its wider politics. This is not to claim that these authors or their contexts are the only sources or origins of anarchist thought and practice nor that their thinking defines the boundaries of anarchism.

As writer Maia Ramnath highlights in her work on Indian decolonial movements, these western authors represent just one 'contextually specific manifestation' of a larger global tradition of anti-authoritarian and egalitarian thought and action which also occurs 'in many other forms in many other contexts'.<sup>17</sup> In a similar vein, anthropologist Jack Weatherford argues that anarchism, defined as 'respectful individualism and equality' in societies operating 'without strong positions of leadership and coercive political institutions'<sup>18</sup> in fact entered into the political culture of Europe from accounts of indigenous societies in South America brought back by travellers and colonialists from the early sixteenth century: 'For the first time the French and the British became aware of the possibility of living in social

harmony and prosperity without the rule of a king.<sup>19</sup> Early French ethnographers apparently revived the Greek-derived word 'anarchy' to describe this phenomenon of orderly society without formal hierarchy that they observed in some of the peoples they encountered.<sup>20</sup>

## 'Classical' anarchism

Starting with the writings of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Landauer, Malatesta and Goldman is one way to draw together three important early anarchist claims that can orientate our understanding of some anarchist writing and activism. These are, firstly, that the state is a violent instrument of control and economic injustice; secondly, that freedom and individuality are social and relational (not 'possessive' or competitive), pursued through bonds of trust and reciprocity; and, thirdly, that genuine social order and security are the products of interdependence and mutual aid. These authors presented anarchism as a form of socialism opposed to social and economic inequality, political hierarchy, capitalism and the state to be pursued by means of direct action by the working class and the peasantry through cooperative organizations.

French politician, philosopher and early proponent of mutualist economic policies, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, appropriated the term 'anarchy' in the mid-nineteenth century as an egalitarian and libertarian ideal and used it to make his case against private property, legal government and compulsory authority. He argued that individuals should not be able to accumulate so much that they can reduce others to dependence. His famous claim that 'property is theft' embodies his objection to this economic imbalance. The property ownership he opposes is that which is unearned, including things like interest on loans and income from rents and inheritance. This is contrasted with ownership rights over those goods produced by one's own labour or the resources necessary for that work. Inherited and unearned property leads to the division of society into two classes: those who live off the proceeds of their capital and those who are obliged to sell their labour. The relation

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between property and labour, he argued, is one of deep inequality, and it is enforced and maintained through legal domination. According to Proudhon, legal government also stunts individuals and breaks communal ties. It is characterized by its location of authority in public officials who control behaviour with fixed, general rules, enforced by threats of physical punishment. One feature of the just society frequently emphasized by Proudhon is the existence of mutual respect among its members, arising from the individual's capacity to recognize and value in others the distinctively human dignity he finds in himself.<sup>21</sup>

With the exception of Proudhon, whose best-known works were published in the 1840s, the anarchist movement connected to the writing and activism of the figures named above emerged from within the internationally expanding workers' movement of the 1860s. Debates that arose within the International Workingmen's Association between Karl Marx and Mikhail Bakunin about the role of the state in the anticipated workers' revolution were critical in distinguishing the two figures and the different forms of socialism that they espoused. Marx stressed that revolutionary struggle should be directed against the basis of capitalism and private property rather than state and law. Bakunin argued that the state and the law were equally problematic and must be immediately abolished alongside hereditary capital. As part of this argument, he argued the key prefigurative point that the means that are used as part of the revolutionary struggle will be reproduced in the outcome of that struggle. Thus the means of social change must be consistent with the ends that are desired: 'Liberty can be created only by liberty.' This ruled out any kind of top-down revolutionary vanguardism as it was expressed in authoritarian socialist traditions.

This is the basis of the anarchist objection to Marxist revolutionary strategy. Anarchists, like Bakunin and others, argued that to begin by seizing political power is merely to ensure the perpetuation of the state in another form. The revolution must not be from above, they argued, or it will merely reproduce what it was trying to destroy. Early twentieth-century political activist and orator Emma Goldman firmly echoed this sentiment in her essay 'What I Believe', in which she argued that there is a mutually

constitutive relation between what we are seeking and how we seek it.<sup>22</sup> She was more interested in the daily political work of movement building through education and social programmes than in precipitating or leading the climactic explosion of revolutionary moments or episodes.<sup>23</sup> More recently, indigenous-anarchist writer and activist Taiaiake Alfred has also argued this point, writing that 'How you fight determines who you will become when the battle is over, and there is always means–ends consistency at the end of the game.'<sup>24</sup> Anarchists working in this tradition see political struggle as a work in process in which political actors become what they strive for.<sup>25</sup>

Emma Goldman worked as an activist, orator and pamphleteer for various causes in the early twentieth century, including support for the labour movement and striking workers; opposition to the First World War draft and to war in general; free speech, free love (the campaign to challenge the institution of marriage) and free sexuality; defence of sex workers; opposition to prisons; and access to birth control, campaigns for which she was often imprisoned. Her work makes links between anarchism and critical thinking about sexuality, emotion, intimacy, desire and feminist politics. Her life and work made it clear that freedom for women could not be achieved without fundamental changes at the intimate level of love and sexuality. She pointed out that free sexual expression cannot exist between unequal beings.<sup>26</sup> She saw marriage and the nuclear family model in particular as social and legal institutions that stood in the way of women's sexual and reproductive freedoms. That these practices were pursued wholeheartedly by women demonstrated for Goldman the extent to which women were taught to desire that which denied them their freedom and maintained their financial, emotional and political dependency.

In a debate about the role of women in the 1935 Spanish anarchist movement, Goldman put women's experiences at the forefront of her view of freedom and equality: 'I have seen too many broken bodies and maimed spirits from the sex slavery of women not to feel the matter deeply or to express my indignation against the attitude of most of you gentlemen.'<sup>27</sup> In her essay 'Marriage and Love', Goldman argues that the state and the capitalist have vested interests in

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controlling the reproduction of future workers and soldiers and thus in controlling women's bodies: 'The defenders of authority dread the advent of a free motherhood, lest it rob them of their prey. Who will fight wars? Who would create wealth? Who would make the policeman, the jailer, if women were to refuse the indiscriminate breeding of children? The race, the race! Shouts the king, the president, the capitalist, the priest.'<sup>28</sup> This, she argued, is why women's sexuality was limited by convention and law to ownership within marriage, and why marriage locked women into dependency and subservience.

Yet, importantly, she argued that living without love and sexual expression is not a liberating option for women either. Neither state reform nor female suffrage would deliver the freedom women needed, according to Goldman, because what was required were opportunities to experience real intimacy and deep emotions of genuine equality between men and women that could only be achieved through a reconfiguration of intimate and reproductive relationships outside of the demands of the state and capitalism. Goldman attempted to show that the demands of sexual and individual freedom are not at odds with the need for love and reciprocity. She argued that 'if partial emancipation is to become a complete and true emancipation of woman, it will have to do away with the ridiculous notion that to be loved, to be sweetheart and mother, is synonymous with being slave and subordinate.'<sup>29</sup>

The experiences of women were crucial to Goldman's anarchism because they showed the interior depth of the reach of state and capitalist domination and the extent to which (even well-meaning) men benefited from their complicity with it (and also suffered from the loss of genuine intimacy). More importantly, the pockets of resilient female sexuality and love that survived even under these stultifying, controlling conditions proved for her that these are powerful aspects of human longing that exist outside of the reach of social conditioning, legal control and cultural norms. As Goldman saw it, individual agency and the spirit of genuine connection and freedom will be able to transcend the structures of domination that exist because some impulses simply cannot be co-opted by an unjust social order, no matter how interior its reach.<sup>30</sup>

Bakunin, Kropotkin, Goldman and Malatesta all developed theories of anti-statist socialism and contributed towards creating a theory and practice of freedom and equality that was opposed to hierarchy and committed to decentralization. They went much further than Proudhon in the emphasis they placed on interdependence as a necessary and desirable feature of human society.<sup>31</sup> This interdependence is a crucial feature of anarchism, which has a distinctly relational approach to freedom and social order. From the anarchist point of view, solidarity is the foundation of freer, safer and more equal societies. Anarchism offers a distinctive model of social order, one in which people do not see their relationships between each other as defined by the authority of the state, the law and the police but instead through the free agreements that they make between themselves.<sup>32</sup> In the following chapters, this model of social order permeates many of the anarchist practices that are described. This quote from the work of early twentieth-century Bavarian anarchist Gustav Landauer captures the anarchist sense of the revolutionary significance of building free relationships: 'The state is a relationship between human beings, a way by which people relate to one another; and one destroys it by entering into other relationships, by behaving differently to one another.'<sup>33</sup>

His perspective anticipated some of the relational insights of mid twentieth-century French philosopher Michel Foucault's governmentality thesis, which posits that we are not solely governed by 'institutions' apart from ourselves, but that we all govern each other via a complex web of relations. This complex web of relations can manifest the commodity driven values of capitalism, the hierarchical othering of the state and the patriarchy of the nuclear family, or they can manifest the unconditional respect and reciprocity of friendship and kinship, and the egalitarianism of socialism.<sup>34</sup> Human actions and relationships are the means of shaping and ordering collective life. Thus, from this perspective, political change is a programme of relationship transformation. The point, from the anarchist view, is that we have choices about the kinds of societies that we live in, choices that we can exercise through the way that we relate to each other. As Malatesta argued:

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Abolition of government does not and cannot signify destruction of the social bond. Quite the opposite: the cooperation which today is forced and which is today directly beneficial to the few, will be free, voluntary and direct, working to the advantage of all and will be all the more intense and effective for that ... Out of the free collaboration of everyone, thanks to the spontaneous combination of men in accordance with their needs and sympathies, from the bottom up, from the simple to the complex, starting from the most immediate interests and working towards the most general, there will arise a social organization, the goal of which will be the greatest well-being and fullest freedom of all ... . Such a society of free human beings, such a society of friends, is Anarchy.<sup>35</sup>

Through the work of Kropotkin in the late nineteenth century, free agreement through mutual aid organizations in particular came to be strongly associated with anarchism. Worker cooperation through labour cooperatives, unionization efforts, mutual saving funds, emergency funds, skills sharing, cooperative educational organizations, health care and credit cooperatives were not novel, or necessarily anarchist, but anarchists like Kropotkin radicalized the meaning of these institutions. His book *Mutual Aid* emphasized the human propensity for voluntary reciprocal exchange of resources and services for mutual benefit and put it at the centre of the anarchist alternative model of human social order. His ideas fitted into an emerging, influential evolutionary world view popularized by Charles Darwin's work on natural selection. Kropotkin emphasized evolutionary findings that illustrated the significance of cooperation in the struggle for survival. He was a geographer and a biologist and challenged the ways in which Darwin's theory of evolution had been interpreted. He argued that the Social Darwinist focus on competition overstated just one aspect of evolution, ignoring the significance of cooperation within (and often between) species: 'sociability is as much a law of nature as mutual struggle.'<sup>36</sup>

Starting with an examination of non-human animals, Kropotkin claimed that 'natural selection continually seeks out the ways precisely for avoiding competition as much as possible.'<sup>37</sup> He argued that few animal species exist by directly competing with each other. In fact, he argued, those

who practise mutual aid (within and across species boundaries) are likely to experience the best evolutionary prospects. Contemporary biologists might describe this in terms of co-evolution or symbiogenesis – natural systems comprised of evolving relationships and connected growth.<sup>38</sup> Kropotkin framed human practices of mutual aid as evolutionarily pivotal by linking cooperation (rather than competition) to survival, progress and civilization. These ideas proved very popular in an era of dramatic economic restructuring, migration and social dislocation.

Kropotkin's work was translated widely and read in various parts of the world, from Europe to the Eastern Mediterranean, Japan and South America. According to Kropotkin, mutual support, not mutual struggle, was the key to social development and an effective mechanism of association and coordination. As he argued, humans, in their pursuit of various ends and interests, create, discover, modify and destroy social organizations as they strive to meet their needs and the needs of others. Mutual aid organizations thus form networks of humans interacting in various ways, creating and assigning capacities as necessary (to create and distribute goods, provide health care or manage conflict, for example). In this way, coordination is achieved not by unifying and centralizing individuals and networks into a single territorial hierarchy like a state but by federalization and agreement. From the late nineteenth century until the Second World War, these ideas and practices were widespread in the European workers' movement and within communities of migrant workers, and also in parts of the colonized world where the nation-state was deemed too weak to protect workers from foreign economic penetration.<sup>39</sup> They have emerged again, more recently, in response to meeting needs during coronavirus pandemics.

By the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, anarchism had developed as a transnational mass working-class and peasant movement that exerted a powerful 'gravitational force' around the globe as the main focus of resistance to capitalism, landlordism, autocracy and imperialism. Research suggests that the movement developed through interconnected networks of activists across the continents of Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas.<sup>40</sup> Anarchism

emerged during this first era of globalizing empire 'primarily' as 'a movement of the most exploited regions and peoples of the world' in those areas closely enmeshed in global processes of capital accumulation and subject to imperial penetration.<sup>41</sup>

This is an important point because it connects the early development of anarchism to the resurgence since the early 1990s of anarchist theory and practice, which has emerged specifically in response to accelerating and intensifying patterns of capital accumulation facilitated by the neoliberal economic policies of powerful global institutions (sometimes referred to as the second era of globalizing empire). The policies of these global institutions have ensured that large corporate interests have retained economic control over the countries that had won formal political independence from colonial domination following the Second World War.<sup>42</sup> Since around 1980, wealth has been flowing upwards from poor countries to rich countries in accelerating patterns of transfer. Within rich and poor countries, wealth has flowed upwards to corporate and financial elites. In the words of medical anthropologist and global health campaigner Paul Farmer: 'in the course of these events, progress toward tolerable levels of inequality and sustainable development virtually stopped. Neocolonial patterns of center-periphery dependence, and of debt peonage, were reestablished, but without the slightest assumption of responsibility by the rich countries for the fate of the poor.'<sup>43</sup> Thomas Piketty tells a similar story about national and world-resource flows in his 2014 economic study *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>44</sup> This is the context in which global anarchist social movements re-emerged in the 1990s.

Following the 1999 anti-globalization protests in Seattle, which targeted the meeting of the World Trade Organization, there has been a re-emergence of interest in anarchist thought. Self-identified anarchist groupings have played key roles in the disruption of a series of major economic summits associated with neoliberal globalization (World Trade Organization, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.). The resurgence of anarchism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can be understood as a response to the imposition of neoliberal economic politics, the impact of increasingly globalized capital, the restructuring

of state–society relations and the related emergence of new forms of authoritarianism and social control.<sup>45</sup> The movement aimed to expose neo-colonial global power relationships and draw attention to the growing distance between political decision makers and the public as systems of representative democracy became less able to meet citizens' needs.<sup>46</sup> Recently, awareness of this growing distance has become even more acute as whistle-blowers begin to reveal the role of data analytics firms like Cambridge Analytica in influencing voting choices.<sup>47</sup>

Anarchism today is at work through a global network of collectives, communities and individuals. Many social movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have exhibited significant utilizations of anarchist theory and practice, including rejection of nation-states and neoliberal economic policies, resistance to war, the use of direct action, organization through cooperative association, horizontal structures, commitment to bottom-up organization, decentralization, voluntary association, mutual aid, the rejection of any idea that the end justifies the means, consensus decision making and network models of organization. They have been inspired by anti-neoliberal movements like the Zapatista movement in Chiapas (which rebelled against the adoption of the North American Free Trade Agreement by the Mexican state in 1994), the indigenous rights and anti-privatization movements in Bolivia (who organized mass protests in 2000 and 2003 against the privatization of water and gas), and the Indian Karnataka farmers' movement (which stresses independent, democratic village communities and opposition to neoliberalism and capitalism).<sup>48</sup> The Occupy movement also utilized some distinctively anarchist modes of organization and analysis. This renewal of the socialist project (alongside ecological, anti-nuclear and anti-war movements) in the context of neoliberal policy agendas, has intersected with a variety of movements concerned with the needs and interests of women, people of colour, emigrating people, indigenous people, homeless people, LGBT groups and animals.

## Anarchism as 'non-domination'

The philosophy of anarchism rests on a critique of hierarchical institutions and social patterns, and anarchists directly target these phenomena for social transformation. In principle at least, no one is sacrificed to the greater good, and no one is left behind. All needs and all harms matter the same, and no being is deemed expendable. In twenty-first-century iterations of anarchism, this includes poor and disenfranchised people, women, gender non-conforming people, people of colour, children and animals. And it also includes criminals, incarcerated beings, legally and illegally migrating people and drug addicts. This means that modern anarchist activity has close relationships with work connected to Marxism, feminism, critical race theory, post-colonial theory, queer theory, humanist and gestalt psychologies, transformational justice, ecofeminism and animal liberation.

Key to this network of ideas is the resistance to the idea of collateral damage, the ingrained belief that some must suffer for others to flourish. What we see, as the relationships within this constellation of ideas and movements develop, is that the anarchist critique of the state has been extended to include all centralized, hierarchical and exploitative systems. This has been identified as a radical objection to all forms of domination.<sup>49</sup> The term 'domination' is one among a few related terms that scholars and activists use when talking about power, control, justice and hierarchy in social, economic and political spheres. We can say that the term describes the relationship between one group or individual and another, whereby one individual or group has the arbitrary but regularized power to impose their will on others when decisions affecting the community are made. Domination means subjection to the will of others and it manifests itself in both personal relations and through the structures that shape relationships of political and economic power.

Anarchists argue that domination breaks ties between individuals by replacing connected relationships with chains of command. As the writers of the anarchist CrimethInc. collective argue: 'Without imposed power imbalances, people

have an incentive to work out conflict to their mutual satisfaction – to earn each other's trust. Hierarchy removes this incentive, enabling those who hold authority to suppress conflicts.<sup>50</sup> In a chain of command, compliance is achieved through direct, indirect or structural violence. Domination can be seen then as a mode of relating without really connecting to the other. According to the anarchists, this infuses our shared life with dynamics of manipulation, fear, anger and shame, rather than equality, trust and freedom. This in turn, they argue, undermines creativity and collaboration. On a socio-psychological level, then, even those individuals with significant social, economic and political power experience this loss of meaningful relationship as harmful to their well-being. Maybe this absence of genuine connection, affinity and shared experience is why it is said to be 'lonely at the top'? People with power over others do not experience genuine dialogue because their needs are always being prioritized. Connection atrophies without dialogue and without information (or feedback) about our impact on and relationship to others. Empathy also atrophies because people with power over others do not learn about their lives. Isolated from their interdependence, people with power do not enjoy the connecting experience of learning about their effect on others.

International activist and non-violence educator Miki Kashtan has reflected on the moral fragility around having structural power and being isolated from its consequences: 'To learn that my life is supported at the expense of others is unbearable to the human soul.'<sup>51</sup> If being connected is the true meaning of freedom, as the writers and activists in this book would claim, then we could say that domination reduces the freedom of all. Whether or not this is the case, those who dominate can determine the rules, norms and values for the entire community, and anarchists argue that this domination is correlated with material hardship and deprivation, and also with limits to human well-being, freedom, self-esteem and safety.

Related terms, like 'oppression', used to describe the mechanisms and apparatuses of discipline and control that rely on violence or fear of violence; 'appropriation', which describes the profit that is drawn from the labour, work or

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possessions of those who are dominated; and, 'exclusion', which describes the power to segregate, confine, expel or exterminate individuals or groups, are all parts of an inter-related terminology.<sup>52</sup> Together these terms are used by activists and theorists who seek to understand the systems of power and coercion that support some individuals or groups getting their needs met at the expense of or to the exclusion of others. From a socialist point of view, capitalism is a system of domination because it is characterized by forms of oppression, appropriation and exclusion that in most contemporary societies affect almost every activity. From a feminist point of view, patriarchy is a system of domination that includes oppression, appropriation and exclusion. From a critical race point of view, the same can be said of racism. From a critical animal studies point of view, the status of animals as 'property' and 'less than human' means that they experience extreme forms of domination (including oppression, appropriation and exclusion) as they can be legally 'bought, sold, eaten, captured, experimented on, or even killed'.<sup>53</sup> These 'regimes' or intersecting structures of domination are irreducible to each other; each requires its own analysis and intervention as well as the understanding that these structures of domination support and reinforce each other.

Contemporary anarchists tend to understand the state as a sort of matrix of domination that reinforces other structures of domination. Thus indigenous anarchists focus on the history of colonial states, which 'developed particularly powerful methods of domination, oppression, appropriation, and exclusion'; anarcho-feminists focus on the 'patriarchal-state'; anarchist antiracists on the 'racial-state'; and anarcho-communists and anarcho-syndicalists on the 'capitalist-state'.<sup>54</sup> The concept of domination and its related terminology form parts of the language that anarchists and affiliated activists use to talk about the 'non-egalitarian division of material, psychological, and symbolic work' and the 'non-egalitarian sharing of material, psychological and symbolic resources'.<sup>55</sup> Or, more simply, 'Anarchism then is the social and political philosophy that proposes the eradicating of all division between (political) haves and have-nots'.<sup>56</sup> Or, even better, in the words of punk band

Propagandhi, 'I have recognised one form of oppression: now I recognise the rest.'<sup>57</sup>

The state is, in a sense, for anarchists, a special case of domination. It is a system of domination that operates on several levels; through armed force, police and prisons; institutions like parliaments, government departments, the courts, state companies and public services; and a mass of individual agents and social relationships.<sup>58</sup> Through operating at these three levels, the state exercises 'sovereignty' over a population and a territory, defines who will be rulers and who will be ruled, and determines the rules, norms, and values for that population including punishments and rewards through making laws, regulations and policies, and through the legal monopoly on armed violence. Further, as part of enclosure and of the colonial expansion of the state, it deprives populations of land, rivers and natural resources.<sup>59</sup> The state distinguishes 'its' citizens from 'foreigners', whom it can exclude from its territory. The state can also exclude from the political arena certain social groups, for example women, who in many countries are still excluded from various sectors of the state.<sup>60</sup> Proudhon argued that state institutions of law and justice are thus radically 'infected with violence'.<sup>61</sup>

More recently, radical anti-violence activist Andrea Smith has noted, with particular reference to the actions of the US state towards Native American Peoples, that 'genocide has never been against the law'.<sup>62</sup> She further argues that the clearing and enclosure of the indigenous population of the Americas was not 'a mistake or aberration' of US democracy but 'foundational to it'.<sup>63</sup> Proudhon originally coined the term *militarisme* to describe this integration of war-making acts with state-building politics.<sup>64</sup> In the twentieth century, anarchist author Colin Ward also argued that 'War is the expression of the State in its most perfect form.'<sup>65</sup> Military historian Caleb Carr notes that empires with strong military forces have almost always employed terrorist tactics (that is, brutal punitive attacks upon civilians) as part of the way they maintained power.<sup>66</sup> According to anarchists, the military logic of coercive hierarchy is the same even if these directly violent forces are hidden behind the scenes of a representative liberal democratic polity, within discourses of 'law and order', security, reasons of state or within the

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practices of relations between states. For anarchists, then, militarism is understood as an embedded political logic of violently policed hierarchy derived from military sources for war-making purposes, and deployed (overtly or covertly) in personal, social and economic spheres of life in order to defend, extend and justify domination.

Anarchists object to the underpinning political logic of coercive top-down 'chains of command' that they argue inhere in all states and their related hierarchies. This is indeed the spirit of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's famous 1851 invective against the state:

To be GOVERNED is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded, by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so. To be GOVERNED is to be at every operation, at every transaction noted, registered, counted, taxed, stamped, measured, numbered, assessed, licensed, authorized, admonished, prevented, forbidden, reformed, corrected, punished. It is, under pretext of public utility, and in the name of the general interest, to be placed under contribution, drilled, fleeced, exploited, monopolized, extorted from, squeezed, hoaxed, robbed; then, at the slightest resistance, the first word of complaint, to be repressed, fined, vilified, harassed, hunted down, abused, clubbed, disarmed, bound, choked, imprisoned, judged, condemned, shot, deported, sacrificed, sold, betrayed; and to crown all, mocked, ridiculed, derided, outraged, dishonoured. That is government; that is its justice; that is its morality.<sup>68</sup>

So, again in the more contemporary expression of Andrea Smith, the nation-state 'is itself a form of governance based on social hierarchy, domination, violence and coercion'.<sup>67</sup> Or, in the words of South Asian activist and writer Harsha Walia, 'The material structures of the western state have killed, tortured, occupied, raped, incarcerated, sterilized, interned, robbed land from, pillaged, introduced drugs and alcohol into, stolen children from, sanctioned vigilante violence on, denied public services to, and facilitated capital's hyper-exploitation of racialised communities.'<sup>69</sup>

Contemporary anarchist writer Simon Springer develops the same Proudhonist anti-militarist theme on a more personal level when he argues that 'almost every event that follows one's birth is a process whereby s/he becomes ever more "mutilated" into the "ideals" of nationalism, religion, class, ethnicity, gender and so forth, which are the fragmented pieces that are antecedent to war.'<sup>70</sup> The argument here is that gender categories, categories of social class, racial categories and species categories are all ways of organizing the world into natural-seeming hierarchies. It is through challenging this fragmentation of identities and emphasizing solidarity across differences (of gender, ethnicity, species, etc.) that anarchists have sought to re-evaluate the very roots of traditional political philosophy and recover models of individuality and community that do not follow this military model.<sup>71</sup>

This does not mean that anarchists argue that the identities created by the militarist process of fragmentation do not shape people's experiences (of classism, sexism, racism and homophobia, for example) in important ways. These identities are real, they connect to real experiences, and they are usefully mobilized in social movements against domination, exploitation and exclusion like #MeToo and #BlackLivesMatter. The point about the militarization of identity that Springer is making is that if we live our identities through rigid categories and boundaries between *us* and *them*, we create 'others' that we perceive as so different from us that they become either *less* or *more* important than us, and we thus dismiss their suffering or our own.

According to anarchists, militarist politics seek to totalize a diverse polity under the rule of one small group, imposing homogeneity and uniformity, rather than allowing for the necessarily messy, complicated, diverse, conflictual dynamics that community self-government requires.<sup>72</sup> 'The State', as Kropotkin put it, is a 'power placed above society ... a territorial concentration and a concentration of many or even all functions of the life of society in the hands of the few'.<sup>73</sup> It is a means of social regulation that he argued is best understood in contrast to the anarchist model of social order; a bottom-up, decentralized network of voluntary social groupings connected through horizontal rather than hierarchical links, building and maintaining

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institutions focused on meeting diverse needs. Colin Ward put it this way: 'There is an order imposed by terror, there is an order enforced by bureaucracy (with the policeman in the corridor) and there is an order which evolves spontaneously from the fact that we are gregarious animals capable of shaping our own destiny.'<sup>74</sup> Writers like these argue that the actual day-to-day work necessary to deal with non-simple human interactions of any kind is effectively bypassed when individuals and institutions resort to coercive hierarchy. It is an avoidance of connected relationship. Even mainstream political science recognizes that centralized decision making tends to oversimplify or distort non-simple reality and reduce the relevance or applicability of social policy to the contexts in which it is applied.<sup>75</sup>

Within anarchist discourses, social order is reckoned to be the spontaneous collective product of human creative and collaborative problem-solving impulses. Anarchist writers, from Peter Kropotkin to Colin Ward, point to examples of organizations and institutions that have emerged from the voluntary practices of individuals and groups in order to meet complex lived human needs without the hierarchical authority of state, law, armies or police forces.<sup>76</sup> In fact, Ward points to the origins of the UK National Health Service in one such organization in a Welsh mining town that operated a user-controlled, self-funded set of health-care and social services accessible to all members of the community. In his radical challenge to the familiar social history narrative of inadequate and inconsistent welfare before the intervention of the state, Ward points to the Tredegar Medical Aid Society, founded in 1870 in South Wales. Through voluntary levy, the society provided medical and hospital care for local miners and steelworkers and their dependants, irrespective of contribution or employment status. Ward stressed that this example and others like it demonstrated clearly that a different model of welfare could have evolved in Britain in the post-war era. As he argued, 'There once was the option of [user-controlled] universal health provision "at the point of service" if only Fabians, Marxists and Aneurin Bevan had trusted the state and centralized revenue-gathering and policy-making less, and our capacity for self-help and mutual aid more.'<sup>77</sup> The local and federalized approach to medical

care was, he argued, ignored in favour of a centralized model of health provision and, as a result, he claimed, 'permanent daily need' has become 'the plaything of central government financial policy'.<sup>78</sup> Part of contemporary anarchist criticism of the capitalist system and the hierarchical state focuses on their failure to adequately fund public health services. Anarchists and others point to the British government's systematic destruction, underfunding and privatization of the National Health Service (NHS) and other front-line services. The first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in the United Kingdom in March 2020 exposed the grave state of the NHS after a decade of austerity and several decades of privatization and marketization. It was revealed that Britain had terrifyingly few beds, just 2.8 per thousand people, and even fewer intensive-care beds.<sup>79</sup> Health crises in other regions of the world, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, also follow years of erosion of public services by neoliberal structural adjustment programmes.<sup>80</sup>

## 'Who should ask for pardon, and who can grant it?'

As we have seen, 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas' is an allegory of the struggle to create a viable, meaningful life in a world that is perceived to be unpredictable and structurally unjust, especially (as in the case of the ones who do walk away from Omelas) when in one way or another you are the beneficiary of harms suffered by some others and the beneficiary of a culture that depicts those harms as necessary and just or that hides them from sight. A recent issue of the anarchist publication *Strike!* addresses the issue of racial privilege in just these terms: 'To admit that we benefit from these structures in every part of our lives is admitting that white people have the responsibility to reject these privileges and work towards a different model of society.'<sup>81</sup> And, as Walia writes, 'Decolonizing begins with the understanding that we are all, in some way, beneficiaries of the illegal settlement of Indigenous lands and unjust appropriation of Indigenous jurisdiction, both locally and globally.'<sup>82</sup> Or,

to put it another way, the ending of avoidable suffering requires that members of groups who benefit from one or another structure of domination recognize their responsibilities to deconstruct their own dominance in that sphere (in partnership with people or beings from that marginalized group). Anarchists aspire to resist all systems of domination, under which beings are systematically subject to the will of others. Because structural benefit is invisible for people who have it, *walking away* might mean listening out for what you have not yet heard.

These reflections on Ursula Le Guin's short story might give the impression that anarchism, or anarchist movements, have arisen primarily in nationally or globally privileged communities. This idea, alongside the idea of 'anarchy as chaos', is one of the stereotypes or misleading characterizations of anarchism that predominate in mainstream debates. In fact, as the discussion so far indicates, anarchism is part of a global anti-systemic movement that has emerged in response to capitalist and imperial world systems; it has also been shaped and developed within non-western regions.<sup>83</sup>

In particular, the indigenous Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas in Southern Mexico, which began in January 1994, has been a major influence on other movements attempting non-violent resistance to neoliberal corporate and state-led domination. This rebellion began as an attempt to resist the neoliberal trade agreements being signed as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These agreements form part of an economic and political context in the Chiapas region of encroaching state and corporate restrictions on access to work, housing, land, food and education for the indigenous population. As part of the Zapatista rebellion, Chiapas communities developed systems of self-government centred on assemblies and consensus-based decision making that embody the Zapatista concept of 'commanding obeying' wherein all authority rests with the community and not with military groups or political hierarchies.<sup>84</sup> They are linked to anarchism by a radical critique of power and a disavowal of the desire to seize state power, a systemic critique of violence and exploitation, and an emphasis on direct action and direct democracy.<sup>85</sup>

The Mexican military drove the Zapatistas back from their initial insurrection, but their example catalysed a wave of

global anti-capitalist direct action struggle. Through networks of internet-based support that spanned the globe, many anarchists became engaged with the Zapatista movement, and these networks were an important part of the organizing that led up to the anti-World Trade Organization uprising in Seattle in 1999 that heralded anarchism's re-emergence onto the political scene at the turn of the century. In the days following the military containment of the Zapatistas in January 1994, the rebels were offered a pardon, and the response released by their spokesperson Subcomandante Marcos reminds us of the refusal of the 'Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas', only this time it was the most oppressed who exercised their agency and refused to conform to the laws:

Why do we need to be pardoned? What are they going to pardon us for? For not dying of hunger? For not accepting our misery in silence? For not accepting humbly the historic burden of distain and abandonment? For having risen up in arms when we found all other paths closed? For not heeding the Chiapas penal code, one of the most absurd and repressive in history? For showing the rest of the country and the whole world that human dignity still exists even among the world's poorest peoples? ... Who should ask for pardon, and who can grant it? Those who for so many years glutted themselves at a table of plenty while we sat with death so often, we finally stopped fearing it? ... Or should we ask pardon from the dead, our dead, who died 'natural' deaths of 'natural causes' like measles, whooping cough, breakbone fever, cholera, typhus, mononucleosis, tetanus, pneumonia, malaria and other lovely gastrointestinal and pulmonary diseases? ... Should we ask for pardon from those who deny us the right and capacity to govern ourselves? From those who don't respect our customs or our culture and who ask us for identification papers and obedience to a law whose existence and moral basis we don't accept? ... Who should ask for pardon, and who can grant it?<sup>86</sup>

From Pierre-Joseph Proudhon to Emma Goldman to Subcomandante Marcos, anarchists have argued that whatever it is that is being referred to as 'order' or 'peace' or 'security' does not merit being described that way if someone or some group has to suffer harm according to the will of

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another in order to sustain it. They claim that the apparent legality, predictability and harmony of Omelas is an illusion; the true disorder and conflict of the community is merely hidden by suppressing and silencing the voices of those who suffer. In this view, silent or muted harm *is still* a sign of disorder and conflict. The fact that some people (by means of categories of race, gender, ability, wealth, class, geographical location, species or sexuality) are routinely treated as if they matter less than others cannot be described as a 'peaceful' or 'ordered' society, and the permanent inability of some to have important needs met (for food, housing, safety or protection from violence) is *by definition* a disordered social condition, or indeed 'chaos'.

Thus anarchism tends to celebrate social or interpersonal conflict as an opportunity to gather the sort of information about persistent unmet needs and embedded injustices that would make a more profound and lasting social order possible. This is another reason why anarchism has such a strong reputation for social disruption or 'chaos'. In a challenge to the anarchist reputation for advocating disorder, American journalist and peace activist Colman McCarthy asks us to consider the 'war, poverty, and the degradations of violence sanctioned by political power and laws':

What about the 40-odd wars or conflicts currently raging on the world's known and unknown battlefields? Isn't it chaotic that between 35,000 and 40,000 people die every day of hunger and preventable diseases? Doesn't economic chaos prevail when large numbers of the world's poor earn less than \$1 dollar a day? Isn't environmental chaos looming as the climate warms? Aren't America's prisons, which house mentally ill or drug addicted inmates who need to be treated more than stashed, scenes of chaos? All of these questions address the real chaos that is occurring in the world today. Anarchists aren't causing all that, but rather (it might be said) are trying to prevent it.<sup>87</sup>

## Why study anarchism? Globalization and militarism

In the very early twenty-first century, esteemed mainstream sociologist and political scientist Charles Tilly began to express concerns about the rise of global militarism. He was concerned that the relationship between war makers and state builders was becoming increasingly incestuous and 'self-seeking'.<sup>88</sup> From a mainstream political science perspective, then, the relationship between nation-statehood and international security is in question. As Tilly argued, 'Someone who produces both the danger and, at a price, the shield against it is a racketeer.'<sup>89</sup> More recently, scholars and practitioners in the field of international relations, conflict resolution and peace studies are also drawing on the concept of militarism in order to understand the interconnections between the processes of globalization, the global cheapening and disenfranchisement of labour, and the worldwide increase in the number and intractability of civil and interstate conflicts.<sup>90</sup> These scholars and commentators note the related fact that the manufacture and global trade in weapons is burgeoning, even in countries that are not officially at war.<sup>91</sup>

Writers like international relations professor Cynthia Enloe see these phenomena as linked to a shared underpinning culture of militarism that drives them and the wider process of globalization. Enloe describes militarism as rooted in the following interconnected cluster of beliefs: 'the belief that hierarchies of command are a natural part of society'; 'the belief that in human affairs it is natural to have enemies'; 'the valuing of physical force over other modes of human interaction to resolve differences'; and 'the belief that any country without a state military is not a fully "mature" state'.<sup>92</sup> Once this culture of military rationalization is in place, she argues, 'threats appear magnified, enemies seem to multiply, secrecy is more easily justified, intrusions of the state into civilians' lives are easier to rationalize, and compromises to civil rights can become legitimated'.<sup>93</sup>

Political philosopher Nancy Hartsock has expressed similar concerns about the encroachment of military logics into our social and political thinking. She argued that these

military logics entered western political thought as far back as the ancient Greek city-state, which she refers to as a 'barracks community' and a 'military encampment' in which 'human relationships were conceived as being fundamentally antagonistic and competitive' and defined 'as struggles for power and domination'.<sup>94</sup> Geography Professor Ruth Wilson Gilmore has similar concerns about militarism in contemporary culture and politics: 'An entire development path has been created through the assumption that there is a perpetual enemy who must always be fought, but who can never be conquered. And that's where international militarization and domestic militarization meet – at this notion that there is the production of an enemy around which we organize everything, *everything*, not simply profit.'<sup>95</sup> International relations scholars have argued that this militarist social and political culture has 'painfully' affected the lives of millions, from Latin America to Rwanda and, most recently, Israel and Palestine.<sup>96</sup> It is noted in this literature that the burdens of militarism carried by women, children and the natural environment are particularly heavy.<sup>97</sup>

'Ideas matter', Enloe says, and in particular she argues that 'the idea that the world is a dangerous place' is 'the seed of many militarizing processes'.<sup>98</sup> In the words of American professor Donna Haraway, 'It matters what ideas we use to think other ideas.'<sup>99</sup> Or, we might add, going back to the Landauer quote earlier in this chapter, it matters what ideas we use to build our relationships and communities. How we frame our relationships affects both the way we collectively handle problems and the kinds of societies we create. Mid-twentieth-century anthropologist Margaret Mead was making this point when she concluded from her studies of the different conflict resolution strategies of different tribal groups that 'war is only an invention – not a biological necessity'.<sup>100</sup>

In this vein, contemporary conflict resolution specialist and peace activist Diana Francis reminds us that conflict is 'a sign of life', inevitable because people are varied, dynamic and social creatures. This fact need not lead to harm and violence and war, she argues, but for the fact that human relationships have been framed in 'competitive and dominatory' ways within discourses of insecurity and

crisis.<sup>101</sup> This framing means that hierarchy, violence and war are seen as the answer to all problems, for example relating to territory, economic collapse, sovereign bankruptcy and environmental catastrophe. This framing tends to enforce conformity and decrease civilian engagement with politics.<sup>102</sup> It works against the emergence of communities of engaged participating agents acting with the belief that they have the power to influence their own fate and the fates of others. This in turn serves to undermine the resources that communities have for independent dialogue, problem solving and conflict resolution.<sup>103</sup> Social norms shaped by these linked cultures of militarization and disempowerment normalize violence and make it less visible.

These authors argue that vertical chains of command feed the logic of blindly obeying orders, whilst horizontal and egalitarian social structures foster empathy, humanity and responsibility for actions and outcomes. As Francis argues, 'One of the influences which discourages most people, most of the time, from taking any form of social or political action is the culture of domination which, while it glorifies violence, incorporates the assumption that it is the task of some to rule and of others to be ruled.'<sup>104</sup>

Authors and actors in this field agree that personal connections and social interaction are fundamental to challenging militarism because, as US Congresswoman Barbara Lee states, 'It can only function if one group of people is seen by another as somehow less than human.' As she elaborates, 'Militarism relies on making other people appear different or threatening, making their lives seem expendable, and making their deaths seem inevitable or even desirable.'<sup>105</sup> For this reason, argues Francis, 'We need to develop robust, flexible and multidimensional notions of personal and collective identity and belonging, whose most fundamental aspect would be a sense of being part of humanity – consciousness of a shared existential experience that binds us all and enables us to recognize one another as "kin", and to regard each other with the kindness that this implies.'<sup>106</sup> Security and sustainability activist and scholar Gwyn Kirk also talks about the need to build 'sturdy connections among people' in order to 'develop non-military forms of strength' and articulate 'visions of true security'.<sup>107</sup> The message that these

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authors and activists want to communicate is threefold: 'that militarism is no answer to the violence and injustice that need to be addressed'; that it is in itself at the 'heart of those problems'; and that there are ways in which people can 'act together non-violently to cope with crises'.<sup>108</sup>

Francis concludes that 'Positive peace means far more than the ending of war. It presupposes a worldview that sees the well-being of others as interwoven with our own.'<sup>109</sup> In the words of peace activist Adam Curle, because individual human beings carry the struggles and insights which define the human condition, 'the recognition of the reality of ourselves is inseparable from the recognition of the reality of others.'<sup>110</sup> These commentators all agree that shifting the military underpinnings of our ideas about human relationships and human security would go a long way towards reducing global problems. They agree that there are other ways of valuing and drawing on the human propensity for collective action aside from war and war preparation. In fact, they argue, other forms of social endeavour engage individual creativity and effective human problem solving and coordinative capacities to a much greater extent than war does.

Alongside these authors and activists, Enloe calls for 'alternative ideas' and different trajectories of social and political thought that portray the world as full of 'human creativity', 'human cooperation' and opportunities for 'empathy and mutual respect'.<sup>111</sup> Anarchism speaks to these concerns as one possible source of different visions of self and community that these scholars and activists call for, envisioning relational means of reconfiguring social dynamics in non-militaristic directions. Anarchism may in fact offer some different ideas to 'think other ideas' with and expand our sense of what is possible.

In this book I present anarchism as a connected series of attempts to respond to contemporary problems, linked by an anarchist logic of non-domination and the desire to demilitarize our lives from the ground up and from the inside out. Anarchism suggests that our freedom and security are radically dependent on our relationships with each other; that structures of domination rely on isolation and disconnection behind walls, cages, borders, categories and boundaries; and that making change requires making, repairing or remaking

our relationships with all beings in non-dominating ways. The movements I describe here, and the relationship-building practices they employ, seek to contribute towards building our capacity to connect in the present, to think into the future and to develop strategies that address environmental, human and non-human needs in troubled political, economic and environmental times.

## 2

# Freedom and Association

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Because ... Food is a RIGHT not a privilege!  
Because there is enough food for everyone to eat!  
Because SCARCITY is a patriarchal LIE!  
Because a woman should not have to USE HER BODY to get  
a meal or have a place to sleep!  
Because when we are hungry or homeless we have the RIGHT  
to get what we need by panning, busking or squatting!  
Because POVERTY is a form of VIOLENCE not necessary  
or natural!  
Because capitalism makes food a source of profit not a source  
of nutrition!  
BECAUSE FOOD GROWS ON TREES.  
Because we need COMMUNITY CONTROL.  
Because we need HOMES NOT JAILS!  
Because we need ... FOOD NOT BOMBS.  
Food Not Bombs<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

Anarchism is frequently misunderstood as a principled commitment to confrontation, rule breaking and unregulated, uncoordinated personal licence. In fact, as we shall see, anarchist movements like Food Not Bombs stress the

importance of relational dynamics like ‘reliability’, ‘trust’ and mutual interdependence.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will focus on the Food Not Bombs (FNB) network as an example of anarchist theory in action, particularly highlighting the centrality of relationship and interconnection to the anarchist approach to freedom, as articulated in Bakunin’s counsel to ‘multiply your associations and be free’.

Food not Bombs is an all-volunteer global food-sharing movement dedicated to non-violent direct action, and one of the fastest growing radical social movement organizations in the world, with autonomous chapters sharing food throughout North, Central and South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Australia. The principles of the movement are stated in their literature as follows: (1) ‘The food is always vegan or vegetarian and free to everyone, without restriction, rich or poor, stoned or sober’; (2) Food Not Bombs has no formal leaders or headquarters, and every group is autonomous and makes decisions using the consensus process’; and (3) ‘Food Not Bombs is dedicated to nonviolent direct action and works for nonviolent social change.’ The work of Food Not Bombs activists highlights the extent to which, in a contemporary context, anarchist theory and practice is particularly focused on resisting the political economy of neoliberalism.<sup>3</sup>

The Food Not Bombs movement has its roots in anti-military protests that sought to expose the cruelty of public-spending policies that prioritize spending on nuclear weapons over food security. Figures suggest that if current annual expenditures for nuclear weapons were instead invested into global lifesaving measures the resources would be enough to cover the elimination of starvation and malnutrition, basic shelter for every family, universal health care, the control of AIDS, relief for displaced refugees and the removal of landmines.<sup>4</sup> Food Not Bombs literature also highlights the contradiction between plentiful global food supplies and widespread malnutrition and hunger. Contemporary agriculture does produce a plentiful and sometimes inexpensive supply of food for supermarkets. However, with distribution driven by the criteria of profitability, much of the world’s population does not see this food. According to researchers in the field, ‘There is more food, more waste, and more hunger now than ever before.’<sup>5</sup>

The idea that resources should be distributed, without conditions, according to need has remained stable throughout the history of anarchism. Whose needs (for food, shelter, safety, space, belonging, etc.) get met and whose needs do not get met are understood to be products of relationships of domination in the everyday lives of living things. Eating and not eating, for example, are understood to be produced through uneven global power relations, particularly of class, race, gender and geography. Food Not Bombs groups share food with people who want to eat in more than a thousand cities around the world, providing food to homeless people, political protestors, strikers and their families, survivors of natural disasters, relief workers, people displaced by war and economic crises, and people unable to access food supplies during pandemic shutdown. Each group or chapter of the movement collects or recovers food that would otherwise be thrown away and cooks large collective meals that are shared with anyone in public spaces. In this way, Food Not Bombs volunteers provided food for rescue workers in New York on 9/11, for public protestors for 100 days during the Orange Revolution in Ukraine, for striking car workers in South Korea, at anti-globalization protests, for activists and Aboriginal people seeking to stop gold mines in the Bush of Australia, and FNB volunteers helped organize the food relief for the survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

Increasingly, activists find that they come into conflict with local authorities and new forms of legislation that limit or prohibit free food distribution in these spaces. Volunteers engaged in preparing or distributing food at these gatherings are often arrested, accused of ‘making a political statement’ or engaging in ‘terrorist activities’. There are a number of volunteers currently serving time in prison. Amnesty International has raised concerns about the policing and rates of incarceration of Food Not Bombs activists.<sup>6</sup> As San Francisco police captain Dennis Martel argued in defence of the arrests of FNB volunteers, ‘They don’t want to feed the hungry, they just want to make an anarchist-type statement and we aren’t going to allow it.’<sup>7</sup> He’s right – the volunteers involved in this movement do have an explicit anarchist agenda, but Martel is wrong when he claims that the distribution of food is separate from this agenda for radical social

change. Not least among the connections between sharing food and changing the world is the radical way that these activists understand the potential of everyday, or small-scale, activities to effect important social change, especially when these quotidian initiatives are focused on survival, shared needs and building relationships. As FNB organizer Keith McHenry states, 'Often, the simplest activities, organized in a consistent, regular manner, can be the most effective way to encourage political, economic and social change.'<sup>8</sup>

Food Not Bombs is about food and relationships *and* anarchist politics: 'We are searching for a way to reach a public unfamiliar with alternative ways of organizing society and of relating to our fellow animal and human beings. Every bowl of free food that a Food Not Bombs volunteer shares with their community is a step in that direction.'<sup>9</sup> The 'direction' that activists orient themselves towards is 'transition to a self-governed community' in the anarchist mode, 'filling the power vacuum created by natural, economic or political crisis with a compassionate, community-based system where everyone participates and no one goes hungry or lives in poverty'. 'This', concedes McHenry, 'is one reason why we are considered a threat.' And, as he elaborates on behalf of the Food Not Bombs network of activists, 'Communities freed from corporate domination will need to eat and the skills required to collect and share food can be translated into the growing of food, providing safe fresh water, providing shelter, health care, education, entertainment and all the things a healthy, free community would desire.'<sup>10</sup>

Despite these revolutionary aspirations, the focus of the public food sharing practised by Food Not Bombs groups is not primarily the fuelling of activists. The wider goal is to engage in a politics of survival and thereby launch anarchist resistance to contemporary neoliberal economic and political policies by decommodifying food and politicizing hunger (and other needs). Beyond even this objective is a commitment to a distinctively interrelational anarchist model of freedom, one that also depends on connection to animals and the natural world. Anarchist writers and activists clearly agree that if we are concerned about freedom, then we must focus on needs like hunger. What may not be so immediately visible to observers of anarchist practices is the importance of building

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relationships (collaboration, care, friendship, solidarity, affinity and commensality), through the meeting of needs, for the very realization of freedom. This chapter will focus on the Food Not Bombs network as an example of anarchist theory in action, particularly highlighting the centrality of needs (and of relationships of attention, care and interdependence across species and ecosystems) to the anarchist approach to freedom and the building of a sustainable commons.

#### **‘Fuck neoliberalism’<sup>11</sup>**

Neoliberalism is the name given to the historical trajectory of capitalism since the late 1970s. As a set of beliefs and policy objectives, it has gained a kind of unquestioned status within party politics and public policy. Neoliberalism reconstructed nations, communities and individuals as competitive beings engaged in the endless pursuit of wealth, material goods and consumption, which would somehow lead to an increase in affluence and happiness. This political project began in the United States and the United Kingdom with moves to deregulate the market, financialize the economy and privatize public assets. The model of neoliberal economic development is a story that political and economic elites tell about the benefits of injecting free market relations into as many spheres of social, political and economic life as possible. This narrative contends that free market economic relations create the most efficient, dynamic and morally defensible outcomes. Most important among these outcomes, as the story goes, is the withering away of the overbearing state, the enlargement of the sphere of private freedom and incentive, including greater charitable endeavour.

Whatever the ideals represented by this story might be, critical commentators agree that, in practice, the policies that have been pursued under this agenda at national and global levels actually result in an increase in the discipline and impoverishment of the poor and the ‘concealment of the state’, rather than the elimination of it.<sup>12</sup> Sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman referred to this covert state expansionism as ‘not just the retention, but the expansion,

extensive as well as intensive, of its order-protecting policing functions'.<sup>13</sup> Neoliberalism is both an economic and a political philosophy. As an economic philosophy, neoliberalism seeks to open markets to trade by encouraging deregulation and weakening collective structures that obstruct the free flow of capital (e.g. trade unions, environmental regulations, communities, tribes, collectives, the commons, the welfare state). As a political philosophy, neoliberalism seeks to increase the disciplinary power of government over individuals whilst withdrawing state resources from welfare commitments. Pursuing neoliberal policies (often enforced as part of IMF and World Bank lending or debt recovery practices), states have rolled back social programmes, like education and health care, and withdrawn state support for small and medium-sized farmers, whilst increasing spending on military security and incarceration.

We have seen global neoliberal programmes of structural adjustment, fiscal austerity and free trade supported by the direct use of military force in many cases.<sup>14</sup> Civil unrest in response to structural adjustment policies has been suppressed using military instruments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Paraguay, South Africa and Zambia.<sup>15</sup> Millions of people in these countries are starving because they are unable to grow food due to free trade regulations and unable to buy imported food because it is too expensive. In order to survive, they grow cash crops like cocoa or opium. Colombia, Afghanistan and Burma are the major suppliers of all the illegal opium and heroin in the world.<sup>16</sup> Grassroots food sovereignty programmes have emerged in rural parts of Central America in resistance to the pressure from structural adjustment programmes for cash crop cultivation. Small farmers try to support each other to continue to produce basic foods without exhausting the soil and depleting other natural resources (using permaculture and local practices instead of pesticides, for example).

As well as the very material impacts of neoliberalism on the lives and deaths of ordinary people, commentators have also noted the penetration of neoliberal logics of competition, consumerism and the belief that poverty is the result of personal failure into our experience of our own selves

and our judgements of others. Anarchist writers like Simon Springer vilify neoliberalism in the strongest terms: ‘Fuck the violence it engenders. Fuck the inequality it extols as a virtue. Fuck the way it has ravaged the environment ... Fuck the desire for profit over the needs of community. Fuck absolutely everything neoliberalism stands for, and fuck the Trojan horse that it rode in on!’<sup>17</sup> He argues that neoliberalism as an ideology represents the interests of financial elites and the security of their wealth, and that the unfolding of these brutal policies on a global level is behind current patterns of economic migration.<sup>18</sup>

Alongside other critical commentators, anarchists argue that the corporations and governments that pursue neoliberal economic and social policies also need to hide the impact of those policies in order to defend their continuing implementation. It is for this reason, it is argued, that neoliberalism relies on beliefs and practices that make some beings appear either *more* or *less* worthy or valuable than others. Systems of neoliberal state domination and capitalist exploitation, it is argued, rely in fact on the perpetuation of ideas of ‘natural’ inferiority and superiority (such as class, race, gender and species) in order to normalize the unfair distribution of social goods that they create (and the excessive burdens of labour and harm they impose on some for the benefit of others) and to reconcile them with liberal values such as equality of opportunity. Global development professor and anarchist commentator Richard Day puts it this way:

state domination and capitalist exploitation would be impossible if it were not for the fact that neoliberal societies are divided according to multiple lines of inequality based on race, gender, sexuality, ability, age, region (both globally and within nation states) and the domination of nature. Populations must be sorted into apparently ‘natural’ hierarchies if the differential distribution of social goods that capitalism creates is to be reconciled with the values espoused by a liberal politics.<sup>19</sup>

Food Not Bombs is ideologically based in anarchist principles of mutual aid, primarily associated with the work of Kropotkin. He argued that cooperative norms and behaviours

are organic survival mechanisms at least as powerful as the intra-species competition that Charles Darwin emphasized. Kropotkin argued in *The Conquest of Bread* that a feasible political economy of food, goods and services can be built on practices of mutual exchange and voluntary cooperation. ‘Give the people a free hand’, he wrote, ‘and in ten days [a] food service will be conducted with admirable regularity.’<sup>20</sup> The principle of solidarity through mutual aid, both in the writing of Kropotkin and the practices of Food Not Bombs communities, acknowledges ‘the force that is borrowed by each man from the practice of mutual aid’ and asserts ‘the close dependency of everyone’s happiness upon the happiness of all’.<sup>21</sup> Mutual aid practices and organizations featured prominently in the anarchist and wider community response to the first stages of the pandemic crisis of care and food provision in the United Kingdom in March 2020. Employing these long-standing anarchist forms of organization and security, communities across the country acted quickly to share basic supplies and resources. Anarchist movements like these responding to neoliberalism emphasize our collective capacity to engage in direct action and prefigurative politics in order to survive and to support those who do not thrive (or are deemed expendable) in the neoliberal world. The strong connection between freedom and shared needs in anarchism is about survival, about building communities and shared resources (or ‘commons’) that can meet needs when these communities lack access to resources and support.

Kropotkin makes this point in relation to hunger and the survival of human bodies in *The Conquest of Bread* when he argues on behalf of anarchists: ‘we go to the length of believing that the revolution can and ought to assure shelter, food and clothes to all – an idea extremely displeasing to middle-class citizens, whatever their party colour, for they are quite alive to the fact that it is not easy to keep the upper hand of a people whose hunger is satisfied.’<sup>22</sup> Or, in the words of Simon Springer, feeding people for free is ‘fucking up neoliberalism by doing things outside of its reach’.<sup>23</sup> Kropotkin understood that hunger is revolutionary and that the revolutionary potential of hunger can catalyse through shared experiences of eating. Movements like Food Not Bombs that focus on direct action strategies

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for meeting everyday needs like food also draw on the initiatives of the Black Panther Party's community-based 'survival programmes' of the 1960s and 1970s, organized in the face of governmental unwillingness to provide services to unemployed African Americans. The Black Panther Party (BPP) initiatives, like the Free Breakfast for Children Programme (in turn partly inspired by the community work of nineteenth-century anarchist activists like Lucy Parsons and the protests of the Haymarket anarchists), highlight the political resistance embodied in meeting everyday needs and the idea of survival as revolution. The radical politics of the BPP were fundamentally about the ability of humans to exist under racialized capitalism, and their free breakfast programme was a grassroots direct-action campaign that responded to the contradictions inflicted upon raced and gendered bodies. Elaine Brown, former chairman of the BPP, expressed their understanding of the revolutionary importance of hunger in the following way:

Because we are so used to the capitalist construct, it doesn't occur to us that we have a human right to eat; because if you don't eat you will die, it's not complicated. So, if there is a price tag to eating, then there is a price on your head, because the minute you don't have enough money to eat, you're slated for death.<sup>24</sup>

It is the BPP perspective on survival that the Food Not Bombs movement has inherited and woven into their anarchist practice: 'with bread and carrots in our clenched fists [we] demand that people not be made to jump through the disciplining hoops of neoliberal and neoconservative capitalists alike, but that when they struggle for food, that they be fed.'<sup>25</sup>

Asserting that 'food is a right not a privilege', anarchist Food Not Bombs communities collect some of the 'abundance of edible, recoverable food being thrown away', cook and prepare it, and share it with anyone who wants to eat with them. As their literature argues, 'There is an abundance of food. In fact, in many countries, every day in every city, far more edible food is discarded than is needed to feed those who do not have enough to eat. Yet, over a billion people go hungry every day.'<sup>26</sup> This is no accident, they argue, because

policies of scarcity are necessary to sustain hierarchical economies, low wages and high food prices on a global level. Food Not Bombs literature quotes World Food Organization reports of rising global rates of chronic hunger, caused by food consumption practices in rich countries, doubling of rice and grain prices caused by market speculation, and the high cost of seeds and chemicals from the introduction of genetically modified products that have forced many farmers into bankruptcy (and suicide).<sup>27</sup> FNB activist literature also argues that 'Hungry people are children and single parents (mostly women), the working poor, the unemployed, the elderly, the chronically ill, and those on fixed incomes (such as veterans and people with physical and mental challenges/differences/disabilities).'<sup>28</sup>

The FNB movement seeks to politicize these needs by decommodifying food, by making poverty visible (resisting the containment of the poor in less visible areas) and by challenging the criminalization of survival strategies like sharing food, begging and rough sleeping in public spaces. Activists position themselves against urban gentrification projects, anti-homeless policies, the global treatment of food producers (such as the criminalization of seed saving and the imposition of Monsanto seed patents), militarized state spending, meat production and, in a wider context, capitalism, state coercion and the commodification of food and housing.<sup>29</sup> They aim to aid those who are hungry, defending their right to eat and survive, whilst resisting the global power structures that underpin inequality. Eating animals and animal products is seen as collaborative with an unjust social order and linked to corporate capitalism, patriarchy and environmental collapse.

As a key part of their political project, Food not Bombs communities explicitly state that they are participating in mutual aid, not offering charity. The means of survival are not offered as gifts (or charity) from those with resources to those in need. Instead, need becomes the focus of building and sustaining relationships of care and solidarity (mutual aid). This distinction between mutual aid and charity is absolutely vital for our understanding of anarchism and its anti-neoliberal agenda. In Food Not Bombs communities, the emphasis is not just on facilitating collaboration between

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people to create shared meals but on resisting the regulation and containment of people and their needs through austerity economics, the criminalization of the poor and the privatization of public space and other common resources.

The model of solidarity through mutual aid rather than charity places anarchist needs-meeting movements like Food Not Bombs in direct and conscious opposition to neoliberalism. Under the rhetoric of incorporating the benefits of free market relationships into public institutions, state actors have ‘outsourced’ governmental roles and social provision to non-profit and voluntary agencies. Charity has become the means by which the welfare state has been rolled back. Commissioned and coordinated by state agencies, social services are provided by non-profit groups that are increasingly reliant on capitalist foundations for economic support. This leads to the professionalization of charity, the increase in the legal regulation of non-profit organizations, and the heavy dependence of social service providers on corporate donors. In this context, charities have become tools of corporate and state interests, managing and controlling marginal and dissenting populations, accepting authority and surveillance as a necessary condition to getting needs met, turning activists into state agents and social movements into masks for exploitative work practices.

Thus neoliberal governmental restructuring has ‘declawed’ the non-profit and voluntary sectors, depoliticizing social needs like food, housing, health and care. In order to address needs in this context, social movements are required to model themselves on corporate or state structures rather than seeking to critique or transform them. They must refrain from engaging with structural, systemic and institutional explanations for poverty, homelessness, addiction, crime and illness, and avoid commenting on political and social issues. By individualizing social problems like these as failures of effort, drive or resilience, this neoliberal agenda of social care hides the causes of suffering and undermines the truth that collective social needs require collective social solutions. Through charitable and non-profit collusions, the neoliberal state ‘maintains disciplinary power’ whilst ‘de-centering the target of resistance’ and more fully incorporating the interests of capital into public policy.<sup>30</sup>

Food Not Bombs intentionally rejects neoliberal conceptions of charity in the first instance by making no distinction between the beings who collect, cook and share a meal. In fact, there is none to be made, as a large percentage of activists are homeless or formerly homeless. Further, activists seek no legal sanction or political approval for their activities, often facing imprisonment as a result. Critical of charity as a 'mode of political containment' and a 'transformation in the mode of regulating the poor',<sup>31</sup> the aim of Food Not Bombs is to provide a service whilst politicizing the needs at stake, actively challenging the structures of inequality that underpin them. Since it does not seek the support or funding of economic elites or politicians, it is able to engage in a more confrontational political stance towards city policies that harm the hungry and homeless and a more egalitarian democratic organizational structure. As commentators have noted, Food Not Bombs 'blurs the line between social service provider and radical political movement'.<sup>32</sup> It actively rejects the neoliberal charity explanations of poverty, hunger and homelessness as the results of personal failings or bad decisions, focusing instead on the wealth that is funnelled towards economic and political elites through social and economic policies and institutions. Following the radical adage to 'break the law, not the poor', anarchists work from the assumption that it is the economic model that is faulty and broken, not the people who suffer from it.

## The commons

The mutual aid philosophy of Food Not Bombs is based on an understanding of interdependence in the meeting of shared daily needs that goes beyond the capacity or ambition of other food-providing organizations, like food banks. In the practice of actually eating together, these anarchist communities believe that they are laying the foundations for other ways of organizing social life. In this alternative way of life, security is understood as safe and reliable access to a community of equals and vital shared resources. This way of thinking is fundamental to anarchist objections to neoliberalism and

privatization, and the related commodification of social goods, a spirit identified by journalist and author Naomi Klein as ‘a radical reclaiming of the commons’.<sup>33</sup>

The idea of the commons refers to real or imagined social systems in which resources are shared by a community of producers and users, managed for individual and collective benefit. The concept is connected to long histories of land sharing and sustainable or subsistence production and social practices of fellowship and mutual aid. Historically, and on a global scale, these ways of life are interrupted by the enclosures of communal land, the constriction of kinship to small isolated nuclear family models and the movements of natural resources into private hands that have accompanied colonialism and the structural entrenchment of capitalism. The Enclosure Movement in England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries resulted in the rural poor losing access to woodlands, grazing and farmland; enclosure in North America deprived indigenous people of access to land and resources; and in the global South enclosure has restricted rights to land, water, seeds and forms of knowledge.

In *The Magna Carta Manifesto*, historian Peter Linebaugh recalls the significance of a particular section of this celebrated medieval charter of English freedoms, a section known as the Charter of the Forest, which sought to secure the rights of peasants to common forest and grazing lands. These traditional rights gave peasants access to food and other resources, and also secured shared spaces within which to build relationships, organize communities and resist feudal authorities. The seventeenth-century withdrawal of these popular rights of access to land and other resources underpinned the agricultural and industrial revolutions in Europe. Enclosure and privatization (and ultimately capitalism) thus entrenched and protected feudal social hierarchies, finally removing the support structure of anti-feudal peasant resistance movements.<sup>34</sup> The mythology and inspiration of Robin Hood grew out of the fight to protect common forestland from enclosure. Linebaugh encourages his readers to expand the concept of the commons to all collectively shared resources and spaces.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, anarchists frame their social experiments in food sharing, squatting, urban gardening and other self-organized groupings as anti-capitalist commons. As Food

Not Bombs activists also clearly understand, this idea of the commons includes a radical engagement with current politics of public space.<sup>36</sup> Communities around the world are currently engaged in efforts to reclaim or create new commons in pursuit of survival and better security of access to life goods like land, water, shelter and community (such as struggles over water privatization in Bolivia and indigenous land use in the Amazon).

The work of Food Not Bombs reflects what some see as the deeper political significance of the shared everyday experience of eating together at the same table (commensality) for the building of a commons:

The work of our hands in producing food, preparing a meal, and setting the table, just like the labour of eating and drinking, may feel futile and recurrent, but both are essential for the creation, slow and arduous to be sure, of an enduring community of individuals who are free and equal and tied to one another with bonds of solidarity, care and friendship.<sup>37</sup>

Eating together traditionally symbolizes equality, interdependence and community. The shared meal can be a manifestation of shared effort, companionship, care and kinship, a 'form of social practice lodged in needs with emancipatory potential'.<sup>38</sup> Crucially, commensality can forge bonds that do not depend on shared or fixed identities, or 'sameness' in any other respect than shared needs for food and company. It is a practical expression of kinship and companionship and a visceral experience of trust and intimacy, upon which important bonds are built. It can be a common experience and an 'important resource for opposing existing hierarchies and inequalities' as well as 'a practice that allows us to take charge and organize our own lives'. As part of the experience of preparing food and eating together, it is argued, we remember and re-learn 'commoning' skills; communicative and deliberative abilities, affective bonding habits and relational subjectivities.<sup>39</sup>

For anarchists, one of the important things about the contemporary invocation of the commons, including the idea of commensality, is to face and embrace shared vulnerability and to walk towards ways we can take responsibility

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for the security of ourselves and others through a politics of needs and care. As Silvia Federici puts it, ‘No common is possible unless we refuse to base our life, our reproduction, on the suffering of others, unless we refuse to see ourselves as separate from them.’<sup>40</sup> This ‘model of empathic sociality’ is firmly connected to the work of Kropotkin and others, and it reflects the anti-militarist seam of nurture and sustenance that runs through anarchist initiatives.<sup>41</sup> The emphasis in these contexts is on the relationships that constitute these groupings. Characteristically, this involves a variety of informal norms and values employed for the purposes of egalitarian governance. Social norms tend to govern the egalitarianism of those spaces, norms that favour cooperation over competition, listening over speaking, gift economies over profit and linguistic inclusivity. These norms are also put into practice in other anarchist spaces, workshops, discussion groups and events such as Anarchist Bookfairs. As one commentator notes:

These [norms] include: no behaviours that exhibit sexism, racism, heterosexism, colonialism, ableism or other forms of oppression; taking turns and being respectful when others are speaking; raising one’s hand to be on a speaker’s list which prioritizes marginalized and first-time speakers; twinkling or making jazz hands rather than interrupting when one likes what someone is saying; self-facilitating by being aware of how much space one is taking up and limiting interventions if speaking too often; and doing go-around check-ins where everyone in a workshop introduces themselves, says what pronoun they go by, and speaks about how they are feeling, their organizational work, and/or what they expect from the meeting or workshop; and explicit processes for addressing dominating behaviours.<sup>42</sup>

These norms embody a clear set of relational values (and learnable skills that can support those values). In a sense, the relationship building *is* the anarchist work in these contexts. An opposition to interlocking systems of domination is at the heart of this idea of the commons, the explicit attempt to build a secure world of equals. Caring and acting in solidarity with one another within and beyond the coronavirus pandemic, argue anarchists, necessitates the constitution and defence

of the communing practices that emerged in that time. Otherwise, they warn, these practices may be re-integrated into novel expressions of privatization, dispossession and precaritization in whatever new legal and economic systems that attempt to establish themselves during and after the crisis. The idea of the commons describes a web of reciprocal interdependence between people, animals, resources and the land. It is through building and sustaining the relationships themselves that communities like these attempt to achieve greater security, sustainability and freedom. This is partly in order to strengthen their resistance to neoliberal forces that create scarcity for the poor, but it is also because freedom itself is rooted in relational experiences, from an anarchist point of view.

## Freedom is a relationship

In the words of Proudhon, ‘The freest man is the one who has the most relations with his fellow men.’<sup>43</sup> For anarchists, freedom depends on relationships of care and interdependence. On one level, this is because these relationships support material survival; our strong dependence on each other means that it is impossible to be free alone (even when this dependence is hidden from us by conventions of exchange, such as money, which mask interdependence). For the poor or marginalized, freedom requires us to create relationships of greater material equality because freedom without access to the resources necessary for survival and other needs is meaningless. In fact, everyone needs help from others. It is hard to think of any challenge we might face that does not require human and non-human assistance. ‘It is unselfconscious privilege,’ writes anthropology professor Anna Tsing, ‘that allows us to fantasize – counter-factually – that we survive alone’.<sup>44</sup> But there is another, deeper sense in which anarchists see freedom as relational that goes to the heart of the anarchist world view.

What anarchists like Bakunin understood was that those very experiences or senses of ourselves that we understand as freedom – individuality, uniqueness, creativity, expression

or selfhood – are the result of our deeply relational needs (psychological, physiological, social and spiritual) being met in connection with and in reaction to other beings. Human individuality depends on the collaboration of other beings through relationships with them. Intense experiences of ‘selfness’ are the product of the communities and networks of relationship that support and nurture, antagonize and challenge, develop and create us. In this tradition, freedom and individuality are the result of mutually sustaining connections with others, we are ‘we’ before we are ‘I’.

The desire or ability to communicate itself presupposes the developmentally significant presence of others. It has long been understood, for example, that severe childhood harm, neglect or isolation dramatically compromises an individual’s capacity to communicate, speak, conceptualize or develop a sense of self. Even less dramatic episodes of early emotional or physical isolation or domination can inhibit vivid experiences of selfhood in later life. Beings are social from the very beginning. Even in more conventional political theory debates, established theorists like Philip Pettit and Axel Honneth have emphasized the connections between social recognition and freedom. Authors like these have argued that individuals will not be able to develop the capacities for self-determination and self-realization (which rely on self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) without appropriate relations of social recognition, like love, respect and esteem from others.<sup>45</sup>

The insights of developmental psychology into childhood and adult attachment provide a useful sort of metaphor for the anarchist relational view of freedom. The field of attachment theory concerns the importance of early experiences of safe and consistent care and interaction with nurturing others for the development and growth of personality. A safe network of bonded relationships forms a secure base from which the individual explores and experiences the wider world. In fact, psychologically speaking, one of the greatest harms of childhood neglect (or lack of empathic connection with caregivers) is the great struggle experienced in adult life in perceiving connections and attachments, leading to a range of mental disorders associated with shame, imagined isolation

and loneliness. This separateness is not freedom in any meaningful sense of the term.

Attachment theory forms a close parallel with the anarchist sense of the importance of non-dominating community (connected relationships) for individual flourishing (or freedom). As the anarchist CrimethInc. collective argues, ‘freedom is not a tiny bubble of personal rights’ because ‘[w]e cannot be distinguished from each other so easily’:

Yawning and laughter are contagious; so are enthusiasm and despair. I am composed of the clichés that roll off my tongue, the songs that catch in my head, the moods I contract from my companions. When I drive a car, it releases pollution into the atmosphere you breathe; when you use pharmaceuticals, they filter into the water everyone drinks. The system everyone else accepts is the one *you* have to live under – but when other people challenge it, you get a chance to renegotiate your reality as well. Your freedom begins where mine begins, and ends where mine ends. We are not discrete individuals. Our bodies are comprised of thousands of different species living in symbiosis: rather than closed fortresses, they are ongoing processes through which nutrients and microbes ceaselessly pass. We live in symbiosis with thousands more species, cornfields inhaling what we inhale. A swarming pack of wolves or an evening murmuring with frogs is as individual, as unitary, as any one of our bodies. We do not act in a vacuum, self-propelled by reason; the tides of the cosmos surge through us. Language serves to communicate only because we hold it in common. The same goes for ideas and desires: we can *communicate* them because they are greater than us. Each of us is composed of a chaos of contrary forces, all of which extend beyond us through time and space. In choosing which of these to cultivate, we determine what we will foster in everyone we encounter.<sup>46</sup>

Through statements like this from the CrimethInc. collective, we can perhaps better understand the notion of freedom as a relation between individuals, rather than as a property which isolated individuals may or may not possess. We can only be free, it is argued, through engaging with the web of reciprocal interdependence that is the reality of our lives. Anarchist scholar Simon Springer quotes Einstein in support of this world view:

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A human being is a part of the whole called by us 'Universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest, a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.<sup>47</sup>

Further, recent research emerging from the field of quantum mechanics on 'relative information' in the natural world suggests that 'the world is a knit tangle of interacting events' and in fact no variables in the physical world are independent or self-contained: 'The color of the light carries information about the object the light has bounced from; a virus has information about the cell it may attach to; and neurons have information about one another.' So neither social nor physical relations are comprised of 'self-absorbed entities that do their selfish things'. All are in fact 'tightly knitted net[s] of relative information, where everybody's state reflects somebody else's state'. As Italian theoretical physicist Carlo Rovelli writes: 'We understand physical, chemical, biological, social, political, astrophysical, and cosmological systems in terms of these nets of relations, not in terms of individual behavior.'<sup>48</sup>

An important part of relationality on social and political levels, according to Bakunin, is the experience of recognition. 'It is untrue that the freedom of the individual is bounded by that of any other individual', he argued, for humans are only 'truly free' to the extent that their freedom is 'freely acknowledged' and 'reflected as in a mirror' by the free conscience of all others and 'finds in their freedom the confirmation of its infinite scope'.<sup>49</sup> As Malatesta puts it, 'No man can achieve his own emancipation without at the same time working for the emancipation of all men around him.'<sup>50</sup> To be free, then, means to be recognized and treated with respect and to recognize and treat others with respect. So, for Bakunin and Malatesta and others, freedom requires the entire reorganization of society from below on the principle of free association and federation in order to develop human potential through education and material well-being, revolt

against existing political authority and, crucially for Bakunin, to resist the cultural and intellectual limits to freedom imposed by custom, tradition and prejudice.

Bakunin was concerned about the potential tyranny of the outdated or oppressive social norms and habits with which we are imbued as social beings. These inner constrictions, apparently emerging from our own thoughts and preferences, can limit our freedom just as seriously as external sources of domination. This is the dilemma of voluntary compliance or willing servitude (or false consciousness) that troubles all radical traditions of thought. If my life experiences and education have led me to believe that my servitude (or that of others) is inevitable or desirable, or if I cannot even perceive my own oppression (or that of others), there is no way I can be free (or that I can work towards the freedom of others). It is the most intimate kinds of relationships that can often contain the deepest forms of structural violence.

Bakunin was sure that the growth of education and scientific knowledge would undermine these potential inner restrictions to the development of freedom. More recent thinking, however, would lead us to doubt his confidence in this respect. As French historian and social theorist Michel Foucault has shown, the production of scientific knowledge is no exception to the tyranny of society, often leading to the discipline and domestication of human beings rather than their liberation. Foucault warned that as individuals we can engage in programmes of self-creation or self-regulation that we believe to be enactments of our freedom, striving to meet our 'potential', or seeking to be recognized as 'healthy', 'successful' or 'good', when in fact we are making ourselves into non-combative, compliant subjects and creating ourselves as highly governable citizens. We are imbued with dominant modes of thinking (or knowledge) which narrow our options within a system-sustaining range of possibilities. Like turkeys that vote for Christmas, we come to take responsibility for their own self-government according to internalized logics of competitive markets and possessive individualism. These regulations appear to us as if they are our own desires, and we adhere to them believing ourselves to be 'empowered' or free from power and coercion. Foucault coined the term 'governmentality' in order to include these processes of

self-control, soul-searching and professional monitoring of the body into his wider understanding of government or rule.

‘The problem’, for anarchists, in the words of Foucault, ‘is not of trying to dissolve [relations of power] in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one’s self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination.’<sup>51</sup> This means building movement strategies around disruptive behaviours that can destabilize all forms of domination (through pursuing relationships of growth with all beings and greater connections to our environments). The anarchist focus on relationship, conflict and dialogue, and the grounding of our selves in the experiences of our own bodies (including our emotions), aims to do the work that Foucault calls for here of resisting domination whilst recognizing and understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of power in social relations. Thus, we might argue, in line with recent work by philosopher and writer Chiara Bottici, for a more fully relational reading of Bakunin’s federalist instruction to ‘multiply your associations and be free’.<sup>52</sup> As she argues, this motto captures the anarchist commitment to the liberating impact of broadening, multiplying and deepening our relationships with others across as many imagined boundaries as we can reach.

The dialogical existentialism of early twentieth-century Austrian philosopher Martin Buber is often invoked in support of this position. In works such as *I and Thou*, Buber argued that it is through genuine dialogue with another being that a person becomes conscious of themselves as a being sharing in being.<sup>53</sup> Dialogue is the art of listening without judgement, with cognitive and existential significance. Through listening to the other without judgements and assumptions, one learns about the world and the self. This means endeavouring to see the world through someone else’s eyes and also being willing to be affected by what you hear and striving to connect through a disagreement. It is in this sense, for Buber, that we absolutely need each other for our experience of being, or sense of self. In the words of early twentieth-century Indian Hindu monk Sri Yogananda, ‘Only that which is the other gives us fully unto ourselves.’<sup>54</sup> Or, in

the words of the eighteenth-century Romantic poet and artist William Blake, 'Without contraries is no progression.'<sup>55</sup> Or, according to contemporary poet, philosopher and leadership facilitator David Whyte, 'all reality is a conversation.'<sup>56</sup> The multiplication of our connections with both the familiar and the unfamiliar world views of others thus expand our experience, insight and knowledge beyond any point where one particular 'regime of truth' can dominate or limit our understanding.

If we can 'multiply our associations', we can multiply our knowledge of the truths that inhere in the lives of others, and in this way 'the tyranny of society' breaks down.<sup>57</sup> This requires a commitment to what Richard Day has called 'infinite responsibility'. Infinite responsibility is a sort of unending receptive vigilance, always being ready to hear voices and perspectives that do not fit with our own or have not been recognized as legitimate, 'always being open to the invitation and challenge of another Other', and 'always being ready to hear a voice that points out how one is not adequately in solidarity'.<sup>58</sup> This work will always be incomplete, but to consistently attempt to acknowledge the voice of another Other, to try and hear something that has been ignored, is the best way to avoid reproducing unconscious patterns of thinking that perpetuate domination.<sup>59</sup> In the words of the CrimethInc. collective, 'To see beauty is to learn the private language of meaning which is another's life.'<sup>60</sup>

Day describes this relational work as a form of Bakhtinian polyphonic dialogue. The concept of polyphonic dialogue was introduced by twentieth-century Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, using a metaphor based on the musical term for composition that consists of two or more simultaneous lines of independent melody (as opposed to a musical texture with just one voice, or one dominant voice). Dialogue in this sense relies on two or more voices that are harmonically related but don't share the same contour and rhythm, each part being independent and equally important to the overall composition. Bakhtin used the term to describe works of literature in which the voices and viewpoints of many characters develop independently without being subsumed within a single authorial voice.<sup>61</sup> Polyphonic dialogue presupposes a 'plurality of consciousnesses of

*equal value*', and a radical equality between 'independent and unmerged voices'.<sup>62</sup> This concept of polyphony also commits the anarchist to 'groundless solidarity', a view of the intersecting nature of related but different privileges and oppressions (voices, stories and experiences) that does not understand one form of domination (such as class) as the root cause of all the others (such as race, ability, gender or species).<sup>63</sup>

Activist researchers have tracked how this polyphonic view of dialogue lives in anarchist movements, in particular the way that conflict is valued as a positive and constructive force in consensus decision-making practices. Social researcher Marianne Maeckelbergh notes that in the networks of meetings organizing the anti-G8 mobilizations, European Social Forums and World Social Forums, extensive space was made for conflict and disagreement.<sup>64</sup> In this movement practice of 'creating conflictive spaces', 'connectivity' or the communication between differences was prioritized over 'unity' or agreement. This is based on the belief that conflict is constructive, transformative and creative, and that it can communicate hidden exclusions and insights as well as allowing for sameness and difference to coexist. Working from within these conflictive spaces opens the way for many different possible ideas, choices or options to emerge, incorporating multiple forms of knowledge into new solutions to dilemmas that themselves become new political structures. That is, so long as no centralized power is able to compel agreement or transform conflict into winner-takes-all competition.

The value placed on diversity and friction is also understood as a mode of resistance to the potentially oppressive power of unity, resolution or compromise, especially when considering the experiences of enforced homogenization imposed on subject populations over five hundred years of colonial history. Resisting the imperative for unity or universal agreement acknowledges that even routine unintentional interactions can impose pressures to conform or agree in the name of 'solidarity' and thus reproduce the familiar unseen hierarchies of power, exclusion and disconnection. The muting of conflict can mask the use of force to encourage people to conform. To capture all these possible benefits

of conflict, it needs to be understood not as an adversarial dynamic but as a cooperative and productive one, i.e. no one should win and no one should lose an argument. In this way, as Simon Springer notes, 'Dissent becomes the lifeblood of anarchism precisely because it is not treated as divisive.' In fact, he argues, dissent becomes a way of doing politics and an 'unremitting and unbreakable thread that ties the people together by recognizing, rebuking and rescinding hierarchical and oppressive power relations in society as and when they form'.<sup>65</sup> Sometimes this means that a conflict cannot and should not be resolved.<sup>66</sup> Anarchist criminologists Tifft and Sullivan express something of the spirit of this idea: 'The possibility exists that there is no social order which we can conceive of or bring about which will not produce genuine contradictions and social change. Perhaps social life is a permanent contradiction and there are no resolutions.'<sup>67</sup>

From a social movement perspective, if anarchists embrace conflict in this way, then the task for them is to remain connected and avoid fragmentation whilst pursuing different projects, organizations and solutions by communicating across networks of different organizations. It is conflict and disagreement across diverse interests and aims that holds these networks together as much as it is the shared overlap of ideals. The important point about communication and non-oppositional conflict is that movement actors come to understand the value of the other person's perspective, even if they do not agree. One thing that can help is to delink the problem at hand from an attachment to one particular solution or preferred strategy in order to make space to hear alternative possible solutions as they are offered by others (without doubting the commitment of the other person to making life better for everyone). Once we see that many different courses of action are possible in order to address a problem or meet a particular need, our diversity or difference just becomes a more complex form of connection as we circle the issue together. In practice, this means working with decision-making processes that can lead to multiple courses of action or outcomes.

This constructive approach to conflict, this commitment to polyphonic dialogue, requires us to understand the importance of incorporating the perspective of the other into our

own understanding, to connect even when we don't agree. Sustainability researcher and activist Paul Chatterton extends the value of this non-oppositionality to those members of the public with whom activists more profoundly disagree, particularly in the course of movement activities. Making the relational point that finding self comes through the co-presence of the others within a conversation, he argues, 'We are already connected emotionally to those we think we oppose or are different from.'<sup>68</sup> Thus he urges activists to resist identifying themselves as experts or specialists in social change and find 'connections and commonalities' rather than 'dwelling on divisions and despair' in order to embrace 'the potentialities of everyday connections' and collectively challenge the 'social relations in our daily lives which we all continually help to reproduce'.<sup>69</sup>

This non-oppositional approach is hard work, but there are learnable skills and practices that can assist with the challenge. In particular, much emphasis is placed on learning how to really listen.<sup>70</sup> Authors and activists who see themselves as working within anarchist traditions often must work hard to challenge themselves, revise their practices and question their assumptions in order to pursue this ideal of connection. This means that anarchists are on the lookout for ways of relating that build connection rather than undermine it. In the words of feminist academic AnaLouise Keating, activists need to learn to 'make connections through differences', embrace 'radical interrelatedness' and listen with 'raw openness'.<sup>71</sup> Thus, we cannot seek freedom by attempting to maximize our separation nor by subsuming ourselves into some sort of collective identity. Neither of these strategies can build connection between different selves.

In this view, then, freedom is a quality of connected relationship between unique individual beings. Author and activist Jamie Heckert describes this quality as 'direct relationship', and he argues that it requires an unending commitment to 'the potentially messy and emotionally challenging work of actually relating'.<sup>72</sup> According to Heckert, too, this entails 'a radical commitment to listening', 'a radical commitment to care' and 'a radical commitment to becoming'.<sup>73</sup> Just as it was for the ones who decided to leave Omelas in Ursula Le Guin's story, this 'becoming' might

mean taking large uncertain steps towards the unknown. It also entails a care for the self that naturally becomes a care for the other. If this is the case, and caring for others is grounded in caring for the self, then as Heckert writes ‘this process might begin with learning to listen to oneself, [and] to the authority of one’s own experience’.<sup>74</sup> This is profoundly countercultural in societies where we have learned to think of ourselves only as either *more* important than others or *less* important than others.

If, as these authors claim, honestly and directly relating to others in decentred polyphonic dialogue is itself a mode of liberation and resistance to domination, then all our relationships enter a new anarchist light as potential modes of political activism. Contemporary philosopher Todd May argues, for example, that the relational qualities of friendship constitute a form of political resistance to neoliberalism. He argues that the kinds of relationships (personal as well as economic) that pertain to neoliberal societies are modelled on the individual as consumer (defined by what they buy rather than what they create) or investor (placing resources where they will yield best return). These identities inform all aspects of our lives and reinforce the grip of neoliberalism. But friendship is a mode of relationality that can cut across these identities and resist what neoliberalism is ‘making of us’. The consumer relationship is rooted in the present and the investor relationship is rooted in the future, while friendship is rooted in the past, and this is part of why it resists the economism of neoliberalism. Friendship happens without calculation, through the passion of shared activities, meeting of needs or acts of care. It may be pleasurable to perform these tasks because they are for a friend, but they are not just enjoyments to be consumed or simple investments performed with an eye on the return they will yield. Friendship is a bond between equals who support and challenge each other while respecting each other’s autonomy. Thus, May argues, ‘We can imagine what a world not dominated by the figures of neoliberalism would look like, because its seeds already exist in some of the most significant relationships we have with others among us.’<sup>75</sup>

Richard Day scales this relational commentary on anarchism up to a more explicitly political level when he

talks about ‘affinity groups’ as the characteristically anarchist form of political connection and organization across a number of social movements, such as Food Not Bombs, ACT UP, migrant support, ecological protest and animal liberation. Affinity in this context refers to the connections between beings who share interests or concerns (interestingly, the meaning of the term in a wider sense tends to refer to the ties between beings not connected by blood relationships). Emerging in Spanish anarchist circles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, affinity groups became the preferred anarchist organizing tool at major anti-globalization protests in the late 1990s and 2000s. Affinity groups tend to be small, based around groups of people who are connected to each other through a shared desire to accomplish a specific task, consensus driven and decentralized.<sup>76</sup> Like friendship, affinity is a form of emotional connection implying trust, respect, and closeness. According to these authors, affinity is the emotional foundation for a society of free and equal individuals. Feelings are necessary for political action, they argue. New social structures are created by radicals who construct new structures of feeling and emotional bonding. Social change requires emotional connection.<sup>77</sup> This can be difficult work, especially as we encounter the feelings we may have as we become aware of our own subjectivity or complicity in systems of domination. This is why anarchist politics requires ‘trust’, ‘comradely connection’ and a ‘non-hierarchical organization’.<sup>78</sup>

Freedom, as it is understood from this relational viewpoint, fundamentally asks us to be aware of connections on human and non-human levels. Food Not Bombs as a movement takes this sense of interrelatedness with the world of more-than-human beings very seriously through the literature they circulate and the practices that they endorse. As Keith McHenry, one of the founders of the original FNB grouping, writes:

We try to avoid using any animal products because we see the damage it does not only to the animals being exploited, but to ourselves, the environment and the economy. Mainstream food production is an inherently violent process, involving cruel living conditions and the slaughter of millions of

animals and the poisoning of the air, water, soil and our own bodies with chemical fertilizers, pesticides and genetically engineered food. The meat and dairy industries control government policies that primarily serve their own financial interests and not those of the public. We couldn't work for peace and ignore the violence of corporate food production that defines living beings as commodities and products to be manufactured and sold for profit.<sup>79</sup>

The breach in the human relationship with animal life and the ecosystem represented in these practices is a serious impediment to freedom from the anarchist point of view. As anarchist ecofeminist writer and activist Patrice Jones puts it, 'We're damaged animals acting out cultural practices forged by centuries of dislocation and dissociation. We barely know how to get along with each other, let alone live in harmony with other species and in balance with the biosphere.'<sup>80</sup> Ecosystems are webs of relationships between humans, non-human animals and other parts of the ecosystem in which members solve problems and communicate those solutions to other members. They are the living relationships within which human relationships happen, which are very small in number by comparison. The estrangement of people from other parts of the ecosystem is an emotional, political and environmental emergency, she argues.<sup>81</sup> The human disengagement with that web of relationships means for example that the human perception of the climate change crisis has little of the 'felt fear' that the emergency ought to generate. As Jones notes, 'Animals flee inland when they sense a tsunami,' and she adds that 'it might be a good idea to follow them'. Because for anarchists freedom is connection not separation, both our lives and our liberation depend on restoring these relationships.<sup>82</sup>

Radical geographer Richard White also adds that human flourishing depends on mutually empowering engagements with these ecosystems and the 'remarkable beauty', 'deep intelligence' and 'rich emotional capabilities' of non-human sentient animals.<sup>83</sup> The anarchist interrelational view of freedom requires us to take the wider web of relationships between humans, non-humans and the earth very seriously and more fully explore our connections with other species.<sup>84</sup>

This begins with honest accounting of the unimaginably cruel treatment of animals on an epic scale in industrialized farming industries, referred to recently in the mainstream media as ‘the worst crime in history’.<sup>85</sup> It’s worth noting in this context that most viral epidemics and pandemics (including coronaviruses) occur when new viruses cross over to humans from other animal species, a process known as zoonosis. Intense food production based on domesticated animals is the main conduit of zoonosis. The creation and propagation of these diseases has intensified in the context of the broader disruption of ecosystems and the expansion of commodity production.<sup>86</sup> As evolutionary biologist Rob Wallace puts it, ‘Agribusiness as a mode of social reproduction must be ended for good if only as a matter of public health. Highly capitalized production of food depends on practices that endanger the entirety of humanity, in this case helping unleash a new deadly pandemic.’<sup>87</sup>

Wider critical literature that emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interdependence of human and non-human needs, and the connection of both to the flourishing of natural environments, argues that we must reframe our notion of ‘progress’ in a way that prioritizes the inter-relatedness of all aspects of planetary ecology. Not least this is because ‘If nature goes down, we go down with it.’<sup>88</sup> Humanity is currently facing a sprawling tapestry of environmental destruction ranging from ocean dead zones, overfishing, the blight of plastic rubbish and the mass extinction of species to soil degradation, the rapid depletion of non-renewable natural resources as well as crippling air, water and soil pollution.<sup>89</sup> Human extermination of animals devastates the habitats and ecosystems that humans also need to survive, exacerbating global warming, loss of biodiversity and water scarcity, destroying rainforests, turning grasslands into deserts, contaminating air, land and water with toxic wastes, and aggravating world hunger with poor use of remaining land. If we do not revise our practices of meat production and consumption, argue critical animal scholars, we will continue to experience the ever-worsening effects of these practices, including the immense suffering and pain of billions of animals, control of ever more land by powerful elites and agribusinesses, repression of resistance movements,

irreversible global warming and water scarcity and intensified global hunger.<sup>90</sup> As public intellectual and activist Stephen Best argues, ‘Human, animal, and Earth liberation are inter-related projects that must be fought for as one.’<sup>91</sup> Thus, argue the anarchists, animal liberation, plant-based eating and the elimination of industrialized agribusiness based on mass mechanized animal slaughter is in everyone’s interests.

According to anarchists, and in the wider critical literature, the belief that non-human animals exist to serve the needs of humans or that their suffering doesn’t matter is the foundation of both human abuse of and disconnection from animals and also the foundation of the pernicious interpenetrating structures of justification upon which human domination over other humans is built. This structure of justification bears a family resemblance to the justifications of racism and sexism in which ‘difference’ is made to justify one group mattering more or less than another. The same logic that defines animals as beneath compassion is also used to exclude or exterminate people of colour and inflict harm on women or other groups. In this understanding, violence against humans is modelled on violence against animals. This is a pattern we see repeated in all instances of genocide (including European imperialism, American colonialism and German Nazism); the group marked for violent treatment are first identified as less-than-human. What humans do to animals they also do to other humans. We have seen that once you create a hierarchy of worth of living things based on the concept of the ‘animal’ or the ‘other’, any group of beings can be moved to a category beneath compassion or concern based on alleged animal characteristics, such as irrationality, intelligence, physical capacity, posture, physical appearance, language, beliefs, characteristics, behaviour and a range of other malleable criteria. The more we strive to justify harm to animals according to a hierarchy of worth, the more we justify harm to all others. Efforts to distance humans from non-human animals, morally, scientifically, intellectually and physiologically, actually strengthen the justifications for the oppression of both; they all hinge on reasoning that the other is less in value.

Much has been written about the intersection between the domination of animals, patriarchy and racial supremacy.<sup>92</sup>

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Farmed animals are mostly female, and their bodies are used in ways that incur the most severe physical violence, particularly during forced breeding and slaughter. This happens as part of a global system of food production and land use that originated in the colonial expropriation of the land and resources of other peoples. In short, this literature firmly asserts the mutual interdependence of animal and human liberation. Anarchist movements like the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) fundamentally recognize the revolutionary significance of animal liberation in these terms, bypassing politicians and existing laws in order to engage in non-violent direct action tactics to put pressure on industries that inflict harm on animal bodies and free incarcerated animals contained in the plant of those industries. The ALF asserts that non-human animals are not property, despite any legal or politically endorsed claims to ownership. Animal liberation in general represents a radical acceptance of the importance of liberating otherness, which, as we have seen here is, in the eyes of the anarchist, an important foundation of the non-dominating principle. According to the anarchist, a vibrant and connected life is only possible when we step away from dominance, not least because openness to the other is how we find ourselves. *Freedom is relational not possessive.*

# 3

## Harm Reduction

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‘Remember then: there is only one time that is important – Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power. The most necessary man is he with whom you are, for no man knows whether he will ever have dealings with anyone else: and the most important affair is to do him good, because for that purpose alone was man sent into this life.’

Leo Tolstoy<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

At first glance, anarchism can seem like a dramatically nihilistic rejection of existing social order and a rather infantile refusal to engage with the pragmatics and complexities of modern life. This is largely because, as we have seen, theorists, writers and activists who identify themselves as anarchists attack or disrupt what has apparently already been justified and legitimated by mainstream political thought, social contract theory and representative liberal democracy. At second glance, we might describe anarchism more broadly as a politically activist set of philosophies and practices focused on challenging perceived social injustices, hierarchies of power and harms inflicted on various life forms by what

are seen as the militarized structures of political power and global capitalism.

If we investigate anarchist practices even further, we find an emphasis on non-dominating dialogue, relationship building and the meeting of needs as key anarchist methodologies. As we have seen, this emphasis brings anarchist activists into conflict with laws concerning homelessness, vagrancy and the use of public space; international regimes of border policing; national law; and legislation that criminalizes animal liberation activities. We can develop our insights into anarchism's approach to social and political transformation even further by looking in more detail at movements that have sought to address the health of marginalized communities and slow the spread of infection in the context of an epidemic. A revealing episode of anarchist practice emerged in the context of the early years of the AIDS epidemic in Europe and America. A special aspect of the history of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s in these contexts was the community-level activism that poor people, people of colour, gay men and lesbians, drug users and others undertook in order to build social movements that could address the impact of the disease in the face of government inability or unwillingness to fund research, prevention and care. The anarchist logic that informed the strategic inventions devised by the group Prevent Point to limit the spread of the AIDS virus reflects what health researcher and community studies professor Nancy Stoller has described as the 'lessons to be learned from those damned by society to face the brunt of [an] epidemic'.<sup>2</sup>

Prevent Point devised a service provision and disease prevention model that is now referred to as 'harm reduction', a public health philosophy that prioritizes doing what is possible within a potentially dangerous social context to reduce harm, even if one cannot remove the entire threat. Harm reduction was a political response to the perceived inadequacy of government and mistrust of their handling of the public health situation. This pragmatic strategy recognized that in order to do what was possible in a given context (in this case affect individual behaviours so as to slow the spread of the HIV virus in affected communities), interventions and interactions had to be framed in non-judgemental, non-stigmatizing and non-punitive ways (i.e. *non-dominating*

forms of relating). The harm reduction movement thus emerged as a set of illegal voluntary self-help activist practices that aimed to meet the infection-prevention needs of drug addicts for clean needles without imposing judgement, blame or punishment on participating drug users. Whether or not we are convinced by harm reduction as an approach to care and health, the rationale for this approach lies in the anarchist and prefigurative roots of the movement. If we look in detail at the harm reduction philosophy of Prevent Point, we can gain some useful insights into how anarchist movements balance the imperative to take remedial action in the present with their desires for a radically transformed future.

The prefigurative orientation is important to contemporary anarchist theory and practice, and particularly to the way that anarchism is understood and practised in modern actions and movements. It rests on an anti-determinist approach (that no present or future is already fated, determined or inevitable), a logic of immanence (that the values they seek can be found, at least in embryonic form, in what already exists) and a strict resistance to vanguardist hierarchies (which require powerful leaders to create change from outside or above grassroots movements), as well as a strategic commitment to needs over an attachment to particular tactics (i.e. meeting needs is the most important guide to action).

Prefigurative politics are so called because they work on the understanding that present actions shape, prefigure or even define future outcomes. Prefiguration is a way or means of creating social change by building practical alternatives in the present with an eye on making sure that those alternative experiments reflect what anarchists would like the future to look like. As the harm reduction model shows, prefiguration is also a way of reconciling the radical structural goals of anarchism (anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, etc.) with more immediate pragmatic attempts to meet unmet needs as they are lived in the present. The praxis of prefiguration defines the appropriate sphere of action as here and now whilst looking to the future and directing our agency towards reassessing the contexts and structures that shape and constrain individual lives.

Harm reduction practices like needle exchange, safe injection sites and emergency overdose strategies demonstrate

a prefigurative approach by combining a focus on immediate pragmatic needs with a critical understanding of the structural and historical contexts of individual choices like drug use. This represents a deep engagement with the present and with the lives of living beings as they are experienced right now. The principle is that no one is left behind, no one is sacrificed to the future or condemned to the past, everyone's needs matter the same and no living being is treated as beneath compassion or as collateral for some wider good or objective. The origins of the harm reduction movement provide a clear illustration of the relationship between the pragmatic and transformative agendas of anarchism, a sort of radically reformist approach to social activism. Put simply, prefigurative politics are forms of political action that combine struggles for tangible pragmatic immediate improvements (reform) with attempts to restructure society (revolution). Harm reduction means that addressing suffering in the present (care) is profoundly revolutionary because the model offers a framework to ensure that pragmatism (the immediate meeting of a need) is linked to socially transformative goals. Anarchism is committed to this dual emphasis on both meeting needs and addressing the structural causes of unmet needs. The engagement with structure is important because it gives critical social movements a deep and historically contextual understanding of suffering, harm and unmet needs.

The focus on structure builds a deeper understanding of the needs that drive individual behaviours like drug addiction, and this facilitates interactions that are equal, non-dominating and non-judgemental. This kind of non-judgemental and non-punitive relationality was a key strategic value in the efforts of Prevent Point to slow the spread of HIV in vulnerable communities and the wider population. In the case of a rapidly spreading virus, the anarchist conviction that the flourishing of everyone is at stake if any being is treated as disposable or beneath compassion receives its most vivid and epidemiological vindication.

As author, academic and social activist Naomi Klein commented in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus crisis, 'If we don't take care of each other, none of us is cared for.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Professor of Accounting at the University

of Sheffield, Prem Sikka, observed in the same month that ‘The coronavirus pandemic shows that we rely on society for our health and wellbeing.’<sup>4</sup> Attempts to contain the AIDS epidemic, or any epidemic, on a global level need to be strategically rooted in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable and most dismissed populations in order to contain its spread. Perhaps nothing is so revealing of our porousness to each other as an epidemic. Likewise, maybe nothing so much as an epidemic is so revealing of the importance of acting in the present to address suffering whilst also envisioning and prefiguring radically better structural circumstances for the future. In revealing these things so starkly, an epidemic has the potential to open a window of possibility through which radically egalitarian solutions and mutual aid initiatives enter as future-shaping common-sense measures.

## Prevent Point

It was widely understood from the early stages of the AIDS epidemic that a key conduit for the spread of the virus was the sharing and reusing of hypodermic needles. However, anti-paraphernalia laws and the illegality of various drugs made it risky and expensive for intravenous drug users to obtain clean syringes. At that time, government drug policies in America and Europe ran counter to strategies known to prevent HIV infection. The Reagan and Bush administrations gutted federal support for drug rehabilitation programmes and prohibited clean needle distribution on moral grounds. They were unwilling to concede that needle exchange programmes could be lifesaving. This was despite mounting evidence from the early 1980s onwards in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands of their potential effectiveness for slowing infection rates.<sup>5</sup>

Prevent Point began as an act of civil disobedience in 1988 by a group of anarchists who initially aimed to force the state to provide clean needles to the criminalized injection drug users of California. Luis Kemnitzer, long-time Prevent Point volunteer, describes the start of the movement as the activists saw it: ‘On the one side there was responsibility and

commitment. On the other side, there were the police.<sup>6</sup> The activists all had experience with civil disobedience in the anti-nuclear movements of the 1980s. In the face of continued government resistance to needle distribution, Prevent Point continued with its own illegal needle exchange activities. Organizing as a large group of decentralized volunteers, it continued to do that work for more than a decade. The group became an anarchist network of small service organizations. As well as exchanging needles, activists provided information on safer sex and drug use, referrals to other agencies, disinfectant wipes, cotton wool and condoms. By 1996, services were being provided by Prevent Point four evenings a week for two hours at ten stationary locations in areas of the city with sizeable needle-using populations. These were all multi-ethnic, low-income neighbourhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Prevent Point consciously worked against prevailing stigmas, stereotypes, moral condemnations and legal barriers. They argued that the deadliness of the epidemic required of the larger society that all judgements were put aside in order to allow everyone to protect themselves from the virus, regardless of circumstance. Even if drug use was illegal, they argued, the state had not mandated a death sentence as the penalty.<sup>8</sup> They initially invited drug users from the downtown district of San Francisco to use their services by handing out flyers that stated: 'We are tired of waiting for the needle laws to change. We are willing to be arrested in order to make clean needles available to people who need them.'<sup>9</sup> The organizers knew they wanted to have an 'anonymous, non-judgemental, user-friendly model with no requirements for participation other than the possession of a syringe and the willingness to exchange'.<sup>10</sup> Within a year, Prevent Point had exchanged more than 100,000 needles. By 1992, it had exchanged over one million needles at five San Francisco sites.<sup>11</sup>

The practices and philosophies of Prevent Point are associated with the beginnings of the harm reduction movement. They illustrate one way in which prefiguration can come to life in a social movement. In line with a prefigurative logic, the early harm reduction movement expounded a radical model of health care premised on unconditionally addressing the lived needs of individuals and communities,

catysed by an underground, oppositional network of people living, working and dying in the streets.<sup>12</sup> As long-term volunteer Alex Kral commented, ‘the first wave of volunteers was basically a group of civil disobedient, anarchist people that kind of saw a need and just went ahead and did the work’.<sup>13</sup> As a model, harm reduction in the field of drug addiction refers to policies, programmes and practices that aim to reduce the harms associated with the use of psychoactive drugs in the lives of people unable or unwilling to stop. The model calls for a focus on the autonomy, knowledge and experiences of people who continue to use drugs. There is an overt discourse of affinity, respect, collaborative autonomy and mutual aid. Front-line service providers elevate the value of users’ experiential knowledge over political and biomedical authorities.

Needle exchange programmes are the archetypal example of harm reduction practice. Historically, needle exchanges and other harm reduction practices have been underground, illegal practices, staffed by activist volunteers self-consciously practising civil disobedience to contest a politics that excludes drug users, ‘often with little more at their disposal than a curbside table, cache of sterile needles, and a bucket for the disposal of used works’.<sup>14</sup> The historical and theoretical core of the movement rests on an anarchist political philosophy, and these early illegal needle exchanges reflected the radical and officially contested status of harm reduction practices. Harm reduction focuses especially on meeting those needs that result from the illegality or public condemnation surrounding particular practices. This can include providing basic survival supplies, underground crack kit distribution, syringe distribution, peer-based naloxone training, safe injection sites and clandestine ibogaine treatment teams.<sup>15</sup> The movement seeks to offer services for people ‘where they are at’ and in relation to the needs and choices they live with as part of their drug use, alcohol use or sex work. Harm reduction treats these needs and choices as lived realities, not moral issues. In particular, harm reduction opposes the punishments, exclusions and vulnerabilities inflicted on people who use drugs in the name of drug control and drug prevention, and it promotes responses to drug use that respect and protect individuals and their communities. In line with its anarchist

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roots, harm reduction does not delimit the right to care or treatment according to law or government policy, especially not as embodied in an abstract metaphor such as the ‘war on drugs’.

Mental health and addiction researcher (working in the field of social work) Christopher Smith has described harm reduction as an ‘emergent anarchist model of care for capitalism’s most oppressed, yet symptomatic victims’.<sup>16</sup> This view incorporates a wider structural understanding of the social and economic contexts of drug use and addiction (I will explore this below). The harm reduction stance is not just a pragmatic approach to immediate life-threatening need; this pragmatism runs alongside a respect for the individual autonomy of drug users, a community-building impulse, a social and political awareness of the context in which drug-use choices are made, and sometimes even a celebration of the individual drug users’ desire for heightened or joyful experiences. As such, harm reduction is understood to be a platform for broader structural change<sup>17</sup> and a mode of struggle against the ‘dangerous politics of prohibition and criminalization’.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, some elements of the harm reduction approach have been incorporated into official drug and alcohol treatment policy in a number of countries, and this has resulted in the dilution or abandonment of its characteristic priorities. Nonetheless, the anarchist-inspired core principles of harm reduction focus on the actual, immediate needs of individuals (for clean needles, non-industrial alcohol products, condoms, HIV tests, safety, community) as a form of direct action, whilst simultaneously politicizing addiction, ill health and crime as outcomes of structural social injustices and the systemic destruction of meaningful relationships in structurally violent societies. As such, harm reduction demonstrates the spirit and actuality of a prefigurative methodology, which is at once pragmatic and revolutionary. In this case, immediate harm-addressing tactics are linked to a wider critique of the neoliberal ‘war on drugs’, and to a wider systemic critique of the links between capitalism and drugs, drug law and race, sexuality and poverty (and the unjust policing of drug use in these contexts).

## Contexts of drug use: dislocation, isolation and pleasure

Harm reduction debates around drug addiction focus on the core unmet needs that drive compulsive or addictive behaviour. These needs are for supportive relationships, understanding and acceptance in social groups and a confident sense of place, sources of psychological, social and spiritual support. Addiction psychology professor Bruce Alexander writes, 'The current dominant paradigm assumes that addiction is either an individual disease or an individual moral breach. But this individually oriented paradigm has failed. Instead, addiction needs to be understood socially, as a way that large numbers of people adapt to the breakdown of psychologically sustaining culture under the global influence of free market society.'<sup>19</sup> He argues that 'People must belong to their society, not just do business with it.'<sup>20</sup> The kinds of social separation that are necessary for free, unregulated, competitive markets to thrive in labour, management and consumption practices cannot grow in fields of social life where people are safely connected to each other. These connections include loyalties to family, friends, animals, environment, collective customs of land use (commons), trade unions, friendly societies, customs and traditional obligations.

Free markets, especially under the intensified standards of globalizing neoliberalism, are created by systematic dislocations, from land, from people, from communities and from culture. These mass dislocations are caused by enclosing the commons of a peasant society for export-oriented agriculture; expropriating the land of a tribal culture; or undermining any sphere of life where needs are met collectively (such as the food-sharing practices described in the last chapter). Historical evidence apparently shows that dislocation accompanies the development of free market economics, and that addiction follows dislocation.<sup>21</sup> According to researchers into drug addiction, these 'dislocations' are the 'precursor of addiction'.<sup>22</sup> This is as true during the current phase of intensive globalization as it was in the early nineteenth century, when alcohol was 'the quickest way out of Manchester' for the labouring poor,<sup>23</sup> and when alcoholism began to

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blight indigenous populations following their colonization by European powers.<sup>24</sup> Following the anarchist insights of the last chapter into the ways in which individual freedom and selfhood are fundamentally rooted in experiences of supportive relationship and interdependency in both the human and non-human spheres, this socio-psychological view of the human trauma of dislocation highlights the relationship between autonomy and community:

The delicate interpenetration of person and society enables people to simultaneously satisfy both their needs for autonomy and their needs for community – to feel free and still belong. It enables society to simultaneously benefit from the diverse, creative abilities of its individual members and still maintain order and collective purpose ... Severe dislocation eventually leads to depression, anxiety, shame, rage, anguish, boredom, bewilderment, and suicide.<sup>25</sup>

Drug use is not just about numbing the pain of dislocation, it is also about seeking pleasure. Thus harm reduction is also an exercise in what practitioner and academic Ben Shepard calls ‘pleasure activism’. This has been one of the key themes of movements that have championed greater freedoms in marriage, for example, and also anti-militarist campaigns, feminist causes and movements challenging laws against homosexuality. Legal constraints on pleasure-seeking activities, it is argued, form part of the way in which prohibitive and abstinence-oriented policies disconnect subjects from their bodies, their impulses and their feelings (and ultimately from other beings) and seek to more fully monitor and police them. A pleasure-seeking activist approach instead aims to engage honestly with needs, desires and risks, meeting people where they are whilst prioritizing safety and freedom. This involves deeply accepting conversations about what people ‘are doing’ rather than what they ‘ought to be doing’. These are spaces for care and solidarity that seek to assist people without using shame, punishment or coercion as tools. From his activism in this field, Shepard writes that the goals of this work are ‘to do away with shame and the repression it fuels’ and to ‘transform the social order’ by means of ‘self-determination, choice and pleasure’.<sup>26</sup> Whether drug use is driven by trauma, loneliness or pleasure seeking (or a combination of

these), addiction research indicates that ‘Dislocated people strive to compensate for their agonizing lack of psychosocial integration by clinging desperately to the best substitutes that they can find ... because, without them, they have terrifyingly little reason to live.’<sup>27</sup>

The point here is that addiction is not a medical problem, nor is addiction a criminal problem; properly understood, it is a political problem, the result of globalization’s ‘mass produced dislocation’.<sup>28</sup> Or, to put it another way, drug use is a perfectly rational and sometimes empowering response to current social and political conditions. From this point of view, addiction is not seen as a flaw or illness but a ‘direct symptom’ of the current phase of ‘insidious neoliberalism’ and ‘(late-)capitalist modernity’.<sup>29</sup> As well as the economic, environmental and socially negative consequences of free market capitalism, argue these authors, capitalism fragments culture and destroys the social ties that sustain people’s sense of belonging, meaning, purpose and identity. Psychologists argue that we find this kind of long-term dislocation from cultural support psychologically crippling and ultimately unbearable.<sup>30</sup> This is what anarchists, critical researchers and harm reduction practitioners refer to as the ‘structural roots of addiction’ and the ‘mutually constituting relationship between capitalism and addiction’.<sup>31</sup>

This is why some of the most effective approaches to addiction put connection at the centre of their practices and emphasize the importance of building relationships. From this perspective, the opposite of addiction is not sobriety. Rather, the path to recovery is to experience more meaningful interactions with self, others and the environment. The relationship between addiction, politics and economics has long been understood by race activists. As imprisoned member of the Black Panther Party Michael Tabor wrote in the pamphlet ‘Capitalism Plus Dope Equals Genocide’ in 1970, ‘drug addiction is a social phenomenon that grows organically’ from the capitalist system. ‘The government’, he continued, ‘is totally incapable of addressing ... the true causes of drug addiction, for to do so would necessitate effecting a radical transformation of this society.’<sup>32</sup> Thus Shepard has described harm reduction as ‘a challenge to a status quo bent on multiple social controls’.<sup>33</sup> It offers a radical anarchist model of health

care in the context of global neoliberal restructuring and the concomitant ‘war on drugs’, which, anarchist commentary argues, is a ‘smokescreen’ for a wider war on society.<sup>34</sup>

## Prefiguration: combining immediate goals with ultimate ends

Anarchism focuses on immediate goals over distant or abstract ones and emphasizes current, tangible projects, believing that this is how people can connect to each other, improve their social environment and affect the future. Nineteenth-century Russian novelist and anarchist essayist Leo Tolstoy emphasized the present in his parable, ‘The Three Questions’, in which a king goes in search of the answers to what he considers to be the three most important questions in life: ‘when to act’, ‘who to listen to’ and ‘what is the most important thing to do’. This is the wisdom he learns from a simple woodsman after they both take care of an injured man who, it turns out, had intended to assassinate the king (the passage is quoted in full at the opening of this chapter): ‘Remember then: there is only one time that is important – Now! It is the most important time because it is the only time when we have any power.’<sup>35</sup>

Anarchist criminologists Sullivan and Tift capture something of this Tolstoyan idea in their reflections on the connections between the present and *being present* to connections with others: ‘To be human, to be sensitive to what is innermost in one’s person and in others, is to be present, not to be futured or basing one’s presence on future possibilities, which while they may actualize, always do so at a time other than now.’ They argue that we must stay rooted in the present in order to be fully human. The present is where the human situation is being experienced, to seek escape from the present by focusing on the past or the future means that we will not be alive to possibilities for community, care and relationship that are unfolding right now. As Sullivan and Tift put it, ‘In the present one constructs, relates, acts and *is*: now is real, and meaningful,’ whereas ‘The future is unknown and elusive as it will always be.’<sup>36</sup>

In Sullivan and Tift's formulation, the focus on the present is also an anti-authoritarian impulse: 'External authority and hierarchy as exhibited in capitalist and party dictatorship state institutions reinforce relationships in the abstract and suppress the power to be present to self and others. Community, a life of present sharing through relationship, is never a possibility within such arrangements.'<sup>37</sup> The call to stay firmly connected to the present prioritizes connection with self and others. Connection is conceptualized as a community-building, self-liberating and reality-transforming intention. Now is the only moment that connection is a possibility. So, argue these thinkers, connection requires putting our attention in the present. This emphasis on the here and now is deeply rooted in anarchism's non-dominating impulse.

This view is based on a contingent understanding of historical change, one that is 'open and explicitly not predetermined'.<sup>38</sup> If change is contingent, in that it is not preordained by a determined or prescribed logic of some sort such as that proposed by religious or Marxist teleologies, then the only way we can influence the future is to shape the present in such a way as to make it resemble as closely as possible the future that we desire (at the most intimate level, this means taking care of ourselves as the foundation work for caring for others). To put it another way, if anything is possible and nothing is inevitable, then what happens next is a direct consequence of what we do now. This is the meaning of the anarchist insistence that means must be consistent with ends. The anarchist warns you never to do what seems to you to work against the goals you are striving for just because someone tells you that you have to break eggs to make an omelette, or that the ends justify the means, or that we must dirty our hands to achieve progress, or bomb civilians as collateral damage in order to achieve peace, or witness poverty in the name of economic growth, or refuse the needs of addicts in order to fight a 'war on drugs'.

According to the anarchist, these compromises are not what real community or real security looks like. For some anarchists, but not all, prefiguration demands a strictly non-violent approach to political action, as violent means can only lead to violent outcomes. For some critics, however, both within and outside of anarchist circles, the non-violent

approach has been vilified as insufficiently revolutionary and a failure of will to stand on the side of the most oppressed. Either way, rather than wait to be told when and how social change can happen, anarchists are very focused on acting now in a way that mirrors what they want in the future.

Historically, in terms of political theory, the prefigurative approach reflects one of the most important points of tension between Marxism and anarchism. In his essay 'Modern Science and Anarchism', Kropotkin argued that the rift between anarchism and Marxism in the late nineteenth century centred on their disagreement over the possibility of radical transformation of the circumstances of alienation and exploitation in the present.<sup>39</sup> For Marx and his adherents, the dynamic of revolution had to play out its historically determined logic in clearly defined materialist stages. They understood that this was going to take some time and an unspecified period of readjustment, given the deep entrenchment of the social and economic relations of capitalism. Anarchists were 'compelled to separate' from the Marxists, claimed Kropotkin, when they began to say that 'there is no possibility of abolishing capitalist exploitation within the lifetime of our generation'. Against this, he stated, anarchists 'maintain that already now, without waiting for the coming of new phases and forms of the capitalist exploitation of labour, we must work for its abolition'.

Kropotkin's essay put this immediacy and impatience at the centre of the anarchist tradition. Anarchists resist the deferral of transformation that authors like Kropotkin read into Marxist ideas. They also resist the related idea of revolution 'from the outside' or 'from above', or led by a vanguard, an idea that is associated with the political projects of Trotskyism or Leninism. In what some see as a naive position, anarchism maintains that moral responsibility for what happens (who suffers and why) in the present cannot be abrogated in the name of an abstract future 'after the revolution'. In contrast to these interpretations of Marxist practices, anarchist prefiguration is said to create or prefigure utopian alternatives in the present.<sup>40</sup> Twentieth-century anarchist writer Colin Ward adhered to this immediacy when he argued '[a] goal which is infinitely remote is not a goal at all, it is a deception. A goal must be closer ... the end of each generation must be itself.'<sup>41</sup>

Thus anarchists also tend to make a radical interpretation of the everyday things that people do, or that people try to do differently, in order to bring a different world into being. Anarchists see revolutionary meaning in the apparently small details of daily actions and choices. For example, choices about how to relate to others, how to engage in the economy and how to use work and leisure time all have transformative meaning from this perspective. In this way, starting here and now, anarchists claim to ‘combine immediate aims with ultimate ends’.<sup>42</sup> In the words of one commentator on contemporary prefigurative politics, ‘the real and the ideal [...] become one in the present’,<sup>43</sup> and for another ‘action is the expression of theory’<sup>44</sup> and, for yet another, prefiguration means ‘act[ing] out a vision of a better world’.<sup>45</sup> Most importantly, for these movements, prefiguration is about creating alternatives to capitalist and hierarchical practices and structures. This entails experimenting with alternative ways of living and organizing alongside mobilizing for political projects. According to a prefigurative reading of radical politics, the direct experimental actualization of a social and political alternative should be considered an inherent part of activist practice itself. This means building counter-institutions, transforming relationships and constructing communities at a grassroots level.<sup>46</sup> These experiments are seen as potential new political forms that can replace existing structures of power.

The creation of alternative practices and structures is not primarily focused on the abolition of the state but instead on the ongoing reconfiguration of relations of property, production and communication outside of the state. In contemporary usage, the concept of prefiguration thus refers to the radicalization of everyday life, and choices, including the idea that it is the very formation of new norms and identities around these choices that can instigate social change. This involves thinking about ‘new collective norms’ and ‘actions which embody those norms’, like ecological toilets, communal cooking, constructing roadblocks and staging occupations.<sup>47</sup> This lived, experimental construction of alternatives has played a significant role in contemporary political movements, including the alter-globalization movement, environmental direct action, the public space

occupations of 2011 in Egypt, Greece, Spain, the United States and the United Kingdom and various alternative modes of consumption or provisioning and ‘free spaces’. An example of prefigurative action that features in these movements is the use of consensus or other mechanisms designed to promote egalitarian decision making and the organization of collective action among diverse groups. In this way, and through other practices, protest camps or occupations, from the Indignados in Spain, to the occupation of Tahrir Square, to the Israel social justice movement, activists have tended to represent a ‘complete alternative society under construction’ and ‘an alternative miniature society’, including health care and first aid, food distribution, security, communication, education and information.<sup>48</sup>

These communities work as social laboratories in which new political communities are shaped with a particular focus on meeting basic needs. This requires a careful emphasis on organization, not as centralized chains of command but as non-hierarchical social networks. As David Graeber writes, ‘This is a movement about reinventing democracy. It is not opposed to organization.’<sup>49</sup> According to Maeckelbergh, this requires constant work because power tends to centralize and become hierarchical, so the work of horizontality is to be vigilant about decentralizing structures and procedures.<sup>50</sup> This work is important to activists because it honours the desire for diversity (including diversity of goals) within movements, and in society generally, and the resistance to uniformity and imposed unity (characteristics of military organization). The aim is to keep recreating a permanently open process that can remain open to future needs and goals. Harsha Walia makes the important point, however, that ‘nonhierarchical is not synonymous with structurelessness’, and she highlights forms of leadership at work in movements, like No One Is Illegal, that are anti-authoritarian *and* structured.

As legal scholar Amy Cohen writes, ‘[anarchists] are a group of global subjects who believe that it is precisely through cultivating intensively consensual social and legal relations that they can begin to live outside the logics of imperial law’.<sup>51</sup> Anarchist movements and literature focus in detail on the micro processes and interpersonal skills of voluntary collaboration. Alongside other movements,

anarchist organizations seek social transformation inside our experiences of selfhood, within our social relations and through our organizational practices. They organize themselves around a set of shared social norms and moral ideals that guide these practices. They formulate explicit, general rules that govern how a group should make decisions about collective actions, how to determine when these decisions are valid and how to revise and resolve disagreements about those decisions.<sup>52</sup> These codes of rule-making and dialogue practices blur the distinction between means and ends as process itself becomes a mode of relating differently and social/self-transformation. In this way, ‘anarchists speak (legal) process to power’. Hence for anarchists, social, political and economic changes are built ‘step-by-step, in the spaces of (unequal and sometimes incommensurable) interpersonal relationships’.<sup>53</sup>

Their agenda is to learn to share power as broadly as possible by continually reflecting on processes of dialogue, conflict and decision making, and adopting carefully considered procedural rules and interactional techniques. This is why, in the words of anthropologist and anarchist activist David Graeber, ‘When anarchists talk to each other, they tend to talk endlessly about “process.”’<sup>54</sup> Anarchist groupings and collectives tend to adopt carefully deliberated decision-making procedures set forth in training pamphlets, websites and books to facilitate their relational vision. These procedures guide the generation of proposals to undertake various actions, the raising of clarifying questions and concerns, the generation of amendments and alternative proposals, and facilitate dialogue between advocates of a proposal and those who oppose it. Additional guidelines and techniques are designed directly to manage power dynamics and embedded structural hierarchies.<sup>55</sup> As Cohen remarks, ‘constructing consensus-based relationships is extremely serious work for anarchists’. Process is political action in this context because it is this work of dialogue and action that knits unique and individual beings to each other and to the values and goals that they want to manifest through the ever-shifting contexts, conflicting perspectives and clashing ideologies they encounter. As we have seen, this dual commitment to individual autonomy and the care of the whole is action orientated and pragmatic. The process is as

important, if not more important, than the outcome of any action or decision.<sup>56</sup>

Recognizing that people who have historically been denied a voice have also generally been socialized to doubt their ability, and recognizing that people who have experienced systemic marginalization (along the lines of race, class, gender and sexuality, for example) also tend to be very knowledgeable about how injustice and power operate, anti-authoritarian leadership foregrounds the opinions of those most impacted by decisions in a particular context. Anti-authoritarian processes actually encourage leadership, according to this context-based logic, whilst engaging in collaborative group discussion in order to ensure accountability and transparency. Walia writes that, 'Instead of assuming that only some people are capable of being leaders, or dogmatically adhering to the notion that no one should be a leader,' this model assumes that 'we are all leaders', and that 'we are all capable of becoming even more skilled as leaders'.<sup>57</sup> In this understanding, leadership represents a willingness to take responsibility for the whole, working towards a vision of the world that works for all beings, with absolute transparency about what you are doing and why. This is a non-hierarchical and collaborative model of leadership rather than a command-and-control model of leadership. It is compatible with anarchist values, but it asks anarchists to think carefully about the intentions and accountability processes that frame leadership roles. So the prefigurative approach is about offering a challenge to current political structures whilst also constructing alternatives to take their place. Or, to put it another way, prefiguration (understood as 'means–ends equivalence') is about 'building alternatives' and 'prolepsis' (the representation of a thing as existing before it actually does so).<sup>58</sup>

In *Paths in Utopia*, Austrian philosopher Martin Buber identified this prefigurative feature of anarchism as concerned with 'structural renewal' in the given conditions of the present, and he argued that it bridges the distinction between revolution (large-scale structural transformation) and reform (small-scale piecemeal adaptations of the current system).<sup>59</sup> The idea of prefiguration also represents a unique fusion of concerns about the present and the future. The kind of

small-scale experimental construction of alternatives that we see practised by prefigurative political movements are motivated by the impatience of the desire to act now without waiting for the revolution of the future, as well as by the fear of merely tinkering with the worst excesses of suffering and thereby perpetuating existing structures. As Richard Day puts it, ‘if one more family is allowed to penetrate the fortress of the global North’, or ‘if one more forest is saved from destruction’ in the present, then that might lead to ‘greater possibilities for more radical forms of social change’ in the future, or ‘simply a greater ability to survive until such forms take deeper root’.<sup>60</sup>

The harm reduction movement provides a clear illustration of this facet of prefigurative political action. Citing an ethics based in pragmatism and social justice, harm reduction practitioners aim to reduce the immediate harms experienced by ‘those who would otherwise be lost to care’,<sup>61</sup> such as drug addicts. This stance is charged with a passionate drive to address unmet needs and a radical emphasis on the present and the people who are experiencing harm right now. In line with this, harm reduction builds peer support and community solidarity networks whilst contextualizing drug use in a way that is fiercely critical of current economic and power relationships (including poverty, punitive welfare systems, racism, structural violence, homelessness, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and related personal traumas).

One way to understand the present *and* future balancing emphases of prefigurative and harm reduction approaches is through terminology offered by twentieth-century French social philosopher and journalist André Gorz. In his book *Strategy for Labour*, Gorz asked, ‘Is it possible *from within* – that is to say, without having previously destroyed capitalism – to impose anti-capitalist solutions which will not immediately be incorporated into and subordinated to the system?’ He concluded that it was. He argued that whereas a ‘reformist’ reform is one which has subordinated its objectives to the criteria of rationality and practicability of a given system, a ‘not necessarily reformist reform’ is ‘one which is conceived not in terms of what is possible within the framework of a given system and administration, but in view of what should be made possible in terms of human needs and demands’. A

structural reform is ‘by definition a reform implemented or controlled by those who demand it’. Non-reformist reformism thus aims to capture possibilities for political change through reforms that aim to make concrete gains within capitalism whilst also building further movement against capitalism.<sup>62</sup> This is a visionary pragmatism that does not stabilize or support current power structures (reformist reform) but politicizes them (non-reformist reform). For example, the No One is Illegal migrant support network strategically navigates the state apparatus in a careful balancing of radical and reformist strategies in order to win tangible victories for those facing detention and deportation. At the same time, the name ‘No One Is Illegal’ emphasizes that all humans are inherently worthy and valuable and that policies that illegalize human beings are legal and moral fictions. Activists attempt to challenge existing regimes of legality while prefiguring social relations and forms of leadership they want to invoke. These movements are trying to ‘seek another way of being from the state while having to navigate our way through it’.<sup>63</sup>

## Structural violence

The principle of harm reduction offers a guide to prioritizing both non-dominating care for individuals *and* transformative political action. Harm reduction as a guide to action points to a wider understanding of how social and political contexts affect individual lives. It is prefigurative in the sense that it links engagement with other beings in the present with wider goals of reducing the harms caused by structures of domination. Immigrant rights attorney Amy Gottlieb, whilst not an anarchist, has also argued the idea of harm reduction helps rights activists and legal reformers to grapple with ‘the really tough question of distinguishing between reforms that strengthen the system and reforms that don’t’.<sup>64</sup>

Sociologist David Nibert tries to capture the essence of this important transformative territory between reform and revolution in his work on animal rights. He argues here that this important political opportunity sits between ‘complicity’

and ‘violence’ and can be exercised through highlighting the suffering of beings whose experiences have been hidden or dismissed and through politicizing unseen or ignored social relations: ‘We must create a system in which oppression is not naturalized and rationalized but is *visible* and thus can be seen and remedied.’ He argues that we need to politicize and thus raise the visibility of workers in global sweatshops, the working poor and the homeless in isolated neighbourhoods, the pain and death that animals suffer to become meat, and the diseased hearts and plaque-laden arteries of meat-eating humans in numerous cardiac wards and nursing homes.<sup>65</sup> This project to *politicize* suffering, to make it visible and to de-normalize it is an important part of the activist territory of harm reduction.

To look at harm or suffering through the lens of wider structures, of race, of capitalism, of militarized states, of neoliberal resource-accumulation projects and of regimes of policing and surveillance associated with these structures, is to *politicize* or de-naturalize some experiences of suffering in the way that Nibert suggests. Importantly, this politicized definition of harm points to a wider structural understanding of how social and political contexts affect the individual beings that live within them (the dominant economic system hides itself so well that people believe that what happens to them is the result of individuals alone). Some experiences of ill health, addiction, depression, pain, death, trauma and distress are the results of exploitation, domination and oppression. To politicize these experiences in those cases is to make them visible and to show that the harms that are suffered are *avoidable* in a specific sense of the term.

The concept of structural violence as it emerged in the peace studies work of Johan Galtung is a useful way to navigate this politicization and identify which patterns of suffering and harm are political or *avoidable* (in that they are caused by relations of domination and exploitation).<sup>66</sup> The term ‘structural violence’ refers to social, political and economic patterns of behaviour, norms and laws that tend to reduce or remove access to the means of survival for a particular group of beings. The violent effects, such as ‘the slow wounds of ecological violence’, ‘the crumbling cityscapes of austerity’ or ‘the mental trauma inflicted by

capitalism' need not be dramatic or sudden; they may 'burn in the background of daily life'.<sup>67</sup> Movements like Food Not Bombs and the other anarchist organizations discussed in the chapters of this book draw on this concept of structural violence to highlight the harmfulness of social systems that create and enforce the differential meeting of needs for different members of those systems.

From the anarchist point of view, harms are avoidable in the sense that they are caused by projects of political domination and economic exploitation (including the recurring short-term squeezing of natural resources on an industrial scale which over time has led to a global environmental crisis). Harms could thus be avoided by political and social arrangements which do not operate via these means, such as the non-hierarchical projects proposed by anarchists and other egalitarian movements. Harm in this context relates to the suffering caused by the inability of individuals within certain social structures to meet their needs. Galtung (whilst not an anarchist) created a typology of forms of violence that could more fully capture the experiences of beings who are unable to exit, influence or transform social and political systems that harm them. His typology also captures the normalization and *not-mattering* of the avoidable suffering and death of those beings within those systems.<sup>68</sup> According to Galtung's structural account, violence 'shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances'. It is the unequal distribution of resources, and the unequal distribution of the 'power to decide over the distribution of resources', that creates structural violence.<sup>69</sup> Resources are seen as being not just material or economic but also non-material, such as education, health care and respect.<sup>70</sup>

In his book *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*, academic and prison psychiatrist James Gilligan defines structural violence as 'the increased rates of death and disability suffered by those who occupy the bottom rungs of society'.<sup>71</sup> Philippe Bourgeois highlights the related experiences of 'physical and emotional distress' experienced by those beings.<sup>72</sup> Structural violence can operate on local or global scales; examples include exploitative international terms of trade, abusive working conditions, precarity and reduced public health services. Its effects can be seen in high

infant mortality rates, shortened lifespans, poverty, food insecurity, illness and pandemic.

Doctor and medical anthropologist Paul Farmer defines structural violence as ‘social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm’s way ... structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world, [and] violent because they cause injury to people’.<sup>73</sup> His work explicitly links individual life expectancy and health to the structures of the global political economy, and he sees individual experiences of disease, hunger and suffering in countries like Haiti and Panama as literal *embodiments* of global inequality.<sup>74</sup> Farmer looks at the individual suffering of his patients in Haiti through the lens of the history of slavery on the island and the subsequent burden of international interventions in the region, including the international demand for reparations for French slaveowners’ income losses after the Haitian slave rebellion and the later American occupation of Haiti. These histories are the cause of poor educational infrastructures, soil erosion, economies of export agriculture, inadequate roads, water systems, sewerage and medical services.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, journalist and author Garry Leech describes the health implications of conditions placed by the IMF and World Bank on loans to African countries that require those countries to produce non-food crops for export in order to generate enough foreign reserves to service their debts. As a result, more than three million children in sub-Saharan Africa die annually from hunger-related diseases.<sup>76</sup>

These accounts of structural violence help reveal the fracturing prejudices and cultural violence of dominant beliefs in natural hierarchies of worth, freedom through competitive and accumulative resource ownership, and security as dominance. They show that free markets are not free for everyone, and they illustrate the ‘amount and varieties of power it takes to form and sustain’ the brokenness of these relationships and the beliefs that support them.<sup>77</sup> Educational systems and mainstream media sustain these beliefs, partly by hiding the historical and material links between wealth accumulation in the global North and suffering in the global South. (According to Farmer, ‘Erasing history is perhaps the most common explanatory sleight-of-hand relied upon by the

architects of structural violence.<sup>78</sup>) Educator and academic Sue McGregor describes this ongoing state of relational disconnection in her account of the ignorance of consumers in the global North regarding their impact on the lives of people in the global South: ‘Under the spell of consumerism,’ she writes ‘few people give a thought to whether their consumption habits produce class inequality, alienation, or repressive power.’ As she continues, ‘We teach children capitalistic consumerism yet tell them nothing about the lives of the workers who slave to assemble designer clothing, toys, and electronics; nor the animals that suffered to create fashion or food; nor the environmental impact of the trash we create. And by no means do we tell them that these situations are inextricably linked.’<sup>79</sup>

In *Pathologies of Power*, Farmer writes, ‘I have grappled, as have many others, with conditions that could only be described as violent – at least to those who must endure them. Since the misery in question need not involve bullets, knives, or implements of torture, this misery has often eluded those seeking to identify violence and its victims.’<sup>80</sup> Whether people see systems or not is a fundamental hurdle on the path to creating transformation. Health statistics have long revealed the consequence of these violent structural conditions. For example, the so-called ‘Glasgow effect’ (the low life expectancy and poor health in Scotland’s biggest city) produces an almost 30-year difference in male life expectancy between two areas only 12km apart.<sup>81</sup> Multiple conditions feed into the shortened life expectancy in the region. Statistics also track a slump in life expectancy in England since 2010 when the policy of austerity began. One 2017 study claimed that 30,000 excess deaths in the United Kingdom during 2015 were a result of austerity-driven cuts to the NHS and social care.<sup>82</sup> Men are also killing themselves at the highest rate for more than fifteen years, especially in deprived areas of the United Kingdom.<sup>83</sup> The idea that social structures like gender, race and class have a decisive impact on the lives of individuals and of social groups has long motivated egalitarian politics, whether these structures are thought of as the institutions of the market and of private property, patriarchal social norms or racist social attitudes. In his 1845 study, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels

argued that English society routinely commits ‘social murder’. Workers, he writes, are placed ‘under conditions in which they can neither retain health nor live long’. The condition under which they labour ‘undermines the vital force of these workers gradually, little by little, and so hurries them to the grave before their time’. Moreover, he adds ‘society knows how injurious such conditions are to the health and the life of the workers, and yet does nothing to improve these conditions’.<sup>84</sup> The notion of ‘social murder’ gained popularity in the wake of the Grenfell Tower block fire of 2017 and at the beginning of the global coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Galtung depicts cultural, structural and direct violence as the three corners of a conceptual triangle, a graphical representation of the way different forms of violence are linked. In this view, structural violence and direct interpersonal violence are seen as highly interdependent, including family violence, racial violence, hate crimes, terrorism, genocide and war.<sup>85</sup> Systemic power asymmetries require the use of some form of direct violence to keep them in place.<sup>86</sup> In this vein, feminist research on domestic violence has argued that direct violence in the home is an instrument for the wider social control of women.<sup>87</sup> Research also points to the strategic rape of women in war, emphasizing the links between power asymmetries at an interstate level and direct violence at an interpersonal level.<sup>88</sup> In this context, interpersonal violence is not a private crime that can be explained only according to the proclivities or personalities of individual men but a political act which produces particular social arrangements.<sup>89</sup> Even outside of war, Beverly McPhail notes that sexual violence is both ‘a political, aggregate act whereby men as a group dominate and control women as a group’ and ‘a very personal, intimate act in which the body of a singular person is violated by another person(s)’.<sup>90</sup> This is why the final document of the UN World Conference on Women in 1985 (the ‘Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women’) included a definition of peace as inseparable from ‘the broader question of relationships between women and men in all spheres of life and in the family’.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, historians agree that the torture and lynching of black individuals through the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the American South were methods of

social and racial control meant to suppress black resistance, to terrorize black Americans into submission and into an inferior racial caste position.<sup>92</sup> Structural violence is always *embodied* in some intimate way: ‘injustice embeds itself in the flesh and bones of the world – a world that is never above or below the human subject but threaded into its very fibres.’<sup>93</sup>

In Galtung’s typology, direct violence is violence with a specific subject, structural violence is violence within a system of norms, and cultural violence is the cultural and intellectual means by which both direct and structural violence are legitimated. Examples of cultural violence are: ‘scientific’ defences of racial hierarchies of worth that legitimated slavery, segregation, lynching and exclusion; the demonization of working-class people as ‘chavs’; categories of rich and poor countries as ‘developed’ or ‘undeveloped’ respectively; species categories that deny that animals suffer in industrialized meat-producing industries (or that their suffering is not morally significant); and ideas that women are responsible for sexual assault because of the way that they dress, or that they are legitimate targets for harassment in the workplace if they are ‘uppity’.<sup>94</sup> This language and these ideas or beliefs are culturally violent in so far as they normalize or conceal or justify direct and structural forms of violence (if, for example, they enable us to hear the cries of a cow separated from her calf and to dismiss what would otherwise strike us as evidence of deep distress or to dismiss a bruised and exhausted homeless individual as ‘lazy’ or insufficiently motivated to seek work). This is the politics of dismissal that animal rights advocate Carol J. Adams refers to as a ‘war on compassion’.<sup>95</sup> In the words of political geographers Emma Laurie and Ian Shaw, this culture of dismissal serves to ‘maim and truncate life through indifference, exclusion and abandonment’.<sup>96</sup> In this vein, Bourgeois writes that cultural violence operates through emotional experiences of shame, humiliation and low self-esteem as ‘the internalised humiliation and legitimations of inequality and hierarchy’ enter the minds and bodies of the dominated.<sup>97</sup>

If it is indeed true that ‘being connected is the true state of being human’,<sup>98</sup> then, for anarchists, cultural violence also turns the unmet needs of the other into an attack on our own selves (through languages of judgement, dismissal and

blame) as we try to separate ourselves from the suffering of others and to isolate and abandon them (and us). This is a lonely process. If the relationships that form our everyday life and experiences are underpinned by structures of property ownership and ingrained assumptions about mattering more or less than others, which are reinforced by culture, laws, police and armies, then we do not come to experience the vibrant intensity of selfhood that is part of the anarchist project. If, as anarchists argue, non-dominating relationships are the conditions for selfhood, then relationships that are framed by structures of injustice will not lead to individuality or the flourishing of individual potential for anyone. Structurally violent conditions then warp and destroy the possibilities of individual flourishing and ‘togetherly realization’ for everyone. In this context, then, the term ‘structural violence’ acts as a conceptual instrument for releasing the ‘rush of troubled stories’<sup>99</sup> that reveal the disruptions to our human/non-human/environmental interconnections. These disruptions have happened across generations, across continents, between species, between individuals and in different times and places, and the troubling stories help us to understand how these relationships have come to be as painful as they are and how the world of disconnection comes to be experienced from within particular living bodies. For the anarchist, accounts of structural violence tell us the stories that help us to reconnect our lives to the lives of others in what some hope could be a step towards reversing this disconnected ‘dance of death’.<sup>100</sup>

## ‘Capitalism is the virus!’

Viruses highlight the profoundly interconnected nature of our individual lives. The health of the poorest impacts the health of the richest, and in a pandemic it becomes clear that we are highly dependent on innumerable others through complex networks of production and reproduction. The lesson to be learned from the prefigurative mutual aid organizations that have formed to respond to the spread of both AIDS and coronavirus is that community organization is essential

to care and survival. Community organization and mutual aid networks have been a necessary part of developing the resources and norms needed to facilitate infection-limiting changes in individual behaviour. As mutual aid activists argue in the era of coronavirus, ‘Do not let those who have traditionally held power tell you that you need to wait for their orders – you don’t need them, you never have, and you never will.’<sup>101</sup> Calls for rent suspension, guaranteed basic income and the development of mutual aid networks (including efforts by anarchist organizations to establish a National Food Service) reflect prefigurative efforts to create support for people who are struggling for food and resources and also to look to the future and build a new commons that can support those without security, capital or resources. These endeavours are built on acute prefigurative and structural sensitivities.

A pandemic is not just a collection of viruses, argue the anarchists, abolitionists and socialists, it is a set of social relations mediated by viruses. Viruses expose the violent structures that encourage the transmission of pathogens from animal to human populations (the global environmental and health consequences of factory farming) and that then turn that transmission into a pandemic. Epidemics and pandemics happen in social, political and economic contexts, which intersect with other processes such as the mutation of viruses, their passage from one host to another and their impact on living organisms. The impact and meaning of an epidemic (and its passage to becoming pandemic) cannot be grasped without examining the underpinning configurations of structural violence.

Poverty, nutrition, worker precarity, inadequate public health care, stress and inadequate housing increase a population’s susceptibility to disease and ensure that it spreads rapidly. Tracking these structures, experts have long warned that a pandemic was inevitable. As far back as 2005, urban theorist and historian Mike Davis wrote in *The Monster at Our Door* that a viral catastrophe was brewing in the intersection of the combined dangers of global capitalist production, ecological devastation and the intentional neglect of public services the world over. As author and activist Arundhati Roy wrote in April 2020, ‘The tragedy

is immediate, real, epic and unfolding before our eyes. But it isn't new. It is the wreckage of a train that has been careening down the track for years.<sup>102</sup> What erupted into the acute crisis of a pandemic was, in fact, the result of a long-building crisis of both worker precarity and the ecological limits of perpetual growth. During March and April 2020, it was repeatedly proclaimed in news reports and on social media that 'viruses don't discriminate' and 'we are all in this together', but there are many ways that COVID-19 acted upon, intensified and produced new inequalities.

In more recent work, Mike Davis invites us to consider the global experience of the Spanish flu in 1918–19 in order to understand the ways in which virus transmission synergizes with pre-existing structural conditions (starvation, health conditions, diseases of poverty, health infrastructures) to create devastating pandemics. A pandemic is, in this sense, a political event. Almost 60 percent of the global flu fatalities (at least twenty million deaths) occurred in western India, where grain exports to Britain and brutal requisitioning practices coincided with a major drought. Widespread malnutrition suppressed immune responses to infection which resulted in rampant bacterial, as well as viral, pneumonia.<sup>103</sup> In the current era, the pandemic also travelled along the pre-existing fault lines of social inequality and neoliberalism. Arundhati Roy commented on the more recent impact of viral infection in India in 2020: 'The lockdown worked like a chemical experiment that suddenly illuminated hidden things' in the context of 'a vast anaemic and malnourished population vulnerable to any number of minor [but fatal] illnesses'.<sup>104</sup> All over the internet, anarchists are arguing that the pandemic crisis laid bare the essential conflict between people's well-being and quality of life and the exploitation that underpins capitalism.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, abolitionist writers and activists have pointed out that from the outset of the coronavirus pandemic in America a disproportionate number of deaths was concentrated in four of the southern states: Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. They note that health experts attributed this disproportionate mortality rate to what they call 'comorbidities', the existence of multiple pre-existing conditions that would make one susceptible to COVID-19.

The environmental conditions of (highly precarious) labour and residence exposed inhabitants in these regions (majority black and working-class communities) to toxins and particulate matter through pollution or work that contributes to diabetes, respiratory issues and a whole host of other health complications and chronic illnesses that increased the likelihood of developing severe or even fatal complications from a virus like COVID-19. These conditions are part of what political economists and academics have identified as the racially marked 'selling of the South' as a region for low-wage, non-unionized and undervalued work that is the direct result of the history of plantation slavery in the political economy of these regions. This history includes land dispossession, exposure to toxic environments, failed and racist education systems, abandonment of social services, anti-worker and anti-union organizing, company towns and a concentration of prisons, jails and detention centres.

Economic interests in the South traditionally argued that slavery as an institution was essential to the economic well-being of the region, the nation and the consuming public. After emancipation, this logic merely intensified as cotton interests successfully argued that racial domination and starvation wages were necessary for the production of cotton. This logic is referred to in abolitionist and academic literature as the 'plantation mode of social organization' and is founded on a structural devaluation of particular people and places as 'resources'. This neoliberal racism structured the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives and deaths in the American South and elsewhere.<sup>106</sup> These are the sorts of violent structures that turn a virus into a pandemic. A study from the UK Intensive Care National Audit and Research Centre released on 4 April 2020 revealed that of the 2,000 patients critically ill with the virus at that time, 35 per cent were black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME).<sup>107</sup> This is despite the fact that ethnic minorities make up 14 per cent of the UK population.

Despite popular rhetoric, viruses *do* discriminate. Patterns and rates of infection reflect racial, gendered and class-structured (i.e. avoidable) exposures to harm. Anarchist and abolitionist strategic interventions to politicize these avoidable vulnerabilities to the virus seem again to be

informed by a deep engagement with the present and with the lives of living beings as they are experienced right now, and also by what Nancy Stoller has described as the ‘lessons to be learned from those damned by society to face the brunt of [an] epidemic’.<sup>108</sup> What we have learned according to anarchists, abolitionists, socialists and others is the fact that the same conditions that already place certain communities at greater proximity to death are detrimental to the health of all. They argue that we have also learned that marginalized communities will always engage in practices of mutual aid and community care to create safety outside of those structures that they have never been able to rely on. In an open letter posted in March 2020, a broad coalition of abolitionist, migrant-support and community-based organizations aligned themselves with the anarchist ethos of affinity, care and structural resistance in the following statement: ‘The world we need now is one that we have always needed: a world where everyone can access healthcare, where everyone has a safe place to live, where no one is locked in a cage, where there is no imperative to work – a world that is accessible to disabled people.’<sup>109</sup>

# 4

## Until All Cages Are Empty

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‘While there is a lower class, I am in it, and while there is a criminal element I am of it, and while there is a soul in prison, I am not free.’

Eugene Debs<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

In her examination of the moral justifications for punishing criminals, legal philosopher Deirdre Golash writes, ‘The deliberate doing of harm in the mistaken belief that it promotes some greater good is the essence of tragedy.’<sup>2</sup> She concludes that current practices of criminal punishment are ‘tragic’ in this sense because they do not achieve a greater good and tend instead to cause further harm. The case made by Golash and other non-anarchist legal scholars against the efficacy of punishment for addressing the harms experienced by individuals and groups forms an important part of the anarchist case against incarceration. In short, it is argued by some writers in the legal and criminological fields that punishment for crime does not address the social needs (for safety, deterrence, moral reform, perpetrator remorse and care for victims) that it is supposed to meet; it merely creates new victims.

As punishment for crime is one of the primary justifications of state power and the state monopoly of violence, these arguments against punishment and incarceration as effective ways of meeting needs and generating social order are an important lens through which to view the anarchist case against the state. From the anarchist perspective, prisons and all systems of incarceration and containment are merely tools used by the powerful to further their control and the domination of capital. In the words of Peter Kropotkin, “There is only one answer to the question “What can be done to better the penal system?” Nothing. A prison cannot be improved ... there is absolutely nothing to do but demolish it.”<sup>3</sup> Confronting the prison system plays an important role in anarchist movements for social transformation. Historically, prison abolitionism intersects with movements for the abolition of slavery and other mobilizations against racialized and class-based social control, including campaigns against police violence, migrant detention and campaigns for animal liberation.

Along with others, anarchists argue that the very origin of the prison is entwined with eighteenth-century histories of enclosure, slavery, dispossession and genocide and, further, that it has developed to defend capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy in the twenty-first century. From the early twentieth century, anarchists specifically identified prisons as mechanisms for silencing dissidents and maintaining unjust class relations. In the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, they have argued that contemporary trends of mass incarceration around the world play a central role in maintaining state and global capitalist power and allow the state to pursue unpopular neoliberal economic policies, including resource privatization, welfare withdrawal and curtailment of worker rights.

The Empty Cages Collective is an anarchist movement focused on prison-related struggle and prisoner support, with a wider prison abolition, or decarceration, agenda. It argues that the prison system is growing at its fastest rate in history. The Empty Cages Collective is organizing against the building of ‘super prisons’, such as HMP Berwyn in Wrexham, and UK government plans to build nine new prisons.<sup>4</sup> Another related movement, the Community Action on Prison Expansion

Campaign, was launched in autumn 2014. It is a grassroots coalition of groups fighting prison expansion in their own communities and in solidarity with others across Manchester, Rochester, Wellingborough, London, Bristol, Birmingham, Liverpool, Leicester, Hull and South Wales.

The Empty Cages Collective joins other abolitionist movements in condemning what it sees as the mass incarceration politics of the current era, from accelerating rates of imprisonment to the intensifying politics of migrant detention. These Walls Must Fall and We Will Rise, two collectives aimed at dismantling the immigration detention system, work alongside the No Borders and No One Is Illegal movements in resistance to border and immigration controls. Fighting campaigns of migrant solidarity, against migrant enforcement raids and against G4S (the private British multinational security services company implicated in human rights violations across the world), they see the struggle against border controls as one part of a fight against all forms of incarceration, exploitation and domination. Decarcerating organizations work in collaboration with organizations like Inquest, which monitors incidents of death and harm caused by policing and custody in the United Kingdom. Anarchist animal liberation movements also see their work as decarcerational and abolitionist. These movements all embody core anarchist beliefs (variously shared with other abolitionist movements) concerning systemic oppressions (including race, class and gender), principles of justice and social order, and prefigurative politics.

Anarchist movements like these not only ‘point out how prisons don’t keep us safe’, they also aim to ‘point to real alternatives that do’.<sup>5</sup> There are other ways, they argue, to secure the safety of individuals and communities, and more restorative ways to respond to harm than inflicting further harm. As we shall see, authors working within anarchist indigenous, feminist and transformative justice paradigms draw on visions of social order premised on relational, community processes instead of punishment and imprisonment. They envisage mutual aid communities of connected individuals who are capable of navigating difference, conflict and harm (when they occur) without engaging punitive state institutions of criminal justice. The emphasis is on

restoring the damaged relationships between offenders and victims and between offenders and the community. It is an approach that takes the causes and the impact of crime very seriously. The reclamation of conflict by the communities in which they occur (rather than as mediated and legislated for by the centralized state) is understood by anarchists to be part of the process by which individuals and communities learn to find and negotiate collective solutions to social problems, and it is an important part of the anarchist vision of social order (without prisons, borders or cages). This radical position insists that no being must be caged; it fully tests the limits of our intuitions about justice, community, safety and compassion. From a mainstream perspective, it is a challenging part of anarchist thinking, and perhaps for this reason it is most revealing of anarchist ideas.

## Abolition democracy

Contemporary anarchist decarceration movements take their inspiration from black liberationist (or abolitionist) analyses of the prison industrial complex. Critical authors from various fields agree that since the invention of prisons in western countries in the 1700s, they were inequitably applied to people of colour and the economically disadvantaged.<sup>6</sup> Throughout the world, these authors argue, racism has become embedded in criminal justice and imprisonment practices, not least through unjust sentencing, racial profiling, police brutality and juvenile justice. From the United States to Australia to Europe, a disproportionate number of people of colour and people from the global South are incarcerated.

Abolitionism was, in the first instance, the name given to the movement to abolish slavery, and prison abolitionists highlight the historical and legal continuities between slavery and contemporary patterns of racialized incarceration. As recent work on these links by legal scholar and civil rights activist Michelle Alexander argues, ‘We have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it.’<sup>7</sup> The concept of the ‘prison industrial complex’ is an important component of these debates. It is a term that emerged in the 1990s

in response to the growth of the (increasingly privatized and profit-driven) prison sector and the accelerating rates of mass incarceration of the 1970s and 1980s. The term embraces prisons, migrant detention centres and military prisons, as well as corporations that profit from migrant detention, prison labour and the sale of products that enable imprisonment. The term also includes government and media promotion of the idea that prisons are necessary to democracy and the proper response to social problems.

The term is a direct reference and link to the concept of the 'military industrial complex', a formulation that emerged in the 1960s in the context of the Vietnam War to capture and critique the links between foreign policy, military spending, economic policy and the increase in political surveillance and control at home and abroad (particularly in response to civil rights movements and anti-colonial movements). For anarchists, the two concepts point to the increasing global militarization of social order and political economy, based on social and political dominance and the criminalization of the 'other' as an enemy and a threat. The implied relationship between prisons, the military and corporate growth is deliberate and important for our understanding of anarchism as it captures the link between war and 'normal' state politics (discernible most overtly for example, they argue, in the militarization of police forces) that is central to the anarchist critique of centralized, hierarchical power.

Much of the black liberationist work that underpins this kind of analysis is associated with the work of Angela Y. Davis. In her work on the links between prisons, capitalism, racism and empire, she urges her readers to widen their thinking beyond incarceration and punishment as the 'inevitable' consequence of crime and to understand imprisonment more fully as the consequence of other political forces. She is not arguing here that people in prison have not committed 'crimes' as such. She is prompting us to think more broadly about whose activities are understood to be 'criminal', whose crimes are seen as more dangerous, which criminals are more violently 'othered' and demonized and which communities are more intensively policed. 'Increased punishment', she argues, 'is most often a result of increased surveillance.' And she goes on to add that those communities that are subject

to police surveillance are much more likely to produce more bodies for the 'punishment industry'.<sup>8</sup> Statistics suggest that police and prisons actually under-protect and over-police racialized women, youths, and queer and trans people. Mass incarceration is also understood in this analysis to be the result of the criminalization of social movements (notably the Black Panthers, the American Indian Movement, anti-colonial movements, environmental protest and, more recently, anti-austerity, anti-fracking, Extinction Rebellion and animal liberation movements) and a response to the unmanageable politics of neoliberal economic restructuring.<sup>9</sup>

Incarceration rates began their dramatic increase in the late 1970s, it is argued, in the wake of the Black Liberation movement, the American Indian Movement, the Chicano movement, the Puerto Rican independence movement, the movement against the war in Vietnam and the toppling of colonial governments in the global South. Alongside the direct targeting of revolutionaries, the state and corporate interests built up militarized police forces and expanded prisons and jails across the nation. The first SWAT (special weapons and tactics) teams were designed to target the Los Angeles Black Panthers, and the early Supermax prisons and control units were built to incarcerate political prisoners. The purpose of this, argue anarchist commentators, was to repress existing movements and to prevent future movements from emerging.<sup>10</sup> In the 1980s, state policies pursued under the banner of 'law and order' and the 'war on drugs' further transformed the landscape of criminal justice. This included longer prison sentences (with less consideration of mitigating factors), vast new prison construction programmes, new policies that rewarded drug-related arrests, high-volume militarized arrest strategies like 'stop and search', the erosion of rights within prisons, diminished access to activities, education, mental and physical health services in prisons, and huge injections of government funding into policing. All this was happening alongside major shifts in the structure of the global economy, as neoliberal policies of economic deregulation and privatization started to strip away health services, social services and welfare funding and to redistribute wealth upwards.

From an abolitionist, decarcerationist and anarchist point of view, this 'tough on crime' domestic militarization and

the expansion of the carceral state dovetails with neoliberal restructuring, offsetting resistance from the people of colour and poor communities most affected by the results, and criminalizing their dissent and their economies of survival.<sup>11</sup> The criminalization of economies of survival in the context of the disestablishment of welfare systems has seen women and immigrants emerge as the fastest-growing sector of the prison population. This ‘imprisonment binge’ hides the social problems caused by neoliberal economic restructuring in the areas of housing, education, unemployment and the dismantling of welfare.<sup>12</sup> In the post-9/11 context, anarchist authors have referred to this as the ‘terrorization of dissent’, drawing attention to the ways that many forms of dissent are now labelled by the media, law enforcement, politicians, corporations and institutions as ‘terrorist action’.<sup>13</sup> Examples of this are the limiting of animal advocacy activists’ freedom of speech by means of the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) and the inclusion of the activities of climate activist group Extinction Rebellion in the UK government’s counter-terrorism Prevent policy watch list.

Authors like scientist and social critic Noam Chomsky argue that the ‘war on terrorism’ provided the perfect cover for governments and corporations to use the law and the criminal justice system to attack civil liberties, free speech and domestic dissent.<sup>14</sup> ‘Terrorization’, like criminalization, stigmatizes and demonizes opponents of the state, maligning their causes and goals as ‘deviant’ and creating a widespread fear of the ‘threat’ that they pose. It also legitimizes the use of any means necessary to ‘secure’ the state from that threat. Anarchists draw on the discipline of critical criminology in order to support these sorts of arguments. From the perspective of critical criminology, those with political and economic power create laws to defend their interests. Crime is thus an expression of the conflict between groups with power and those that are powerless.<sup>15</sup> This analysis of criminalization reminds us that questions of ‘who crossed the line’ are often far less important than questions of ‘who drew the line’ and ‘who has the power to move and reshape the lines in question’.<sup>16</sup> As Ruth Gilmore puts it, ‘The way the system works is to move the line of what counts as criminal

to encompass and engulf more and more people into the territory of prison eligibility.<sup>17</sup>

## War on drugs: militarism, racism and social control

The 'war on drugs' is a campaign of drug prohibition, military aid and military intervention, with the stated aim being to reduce the illegal drug trade. The initiative includes a set of drug policies that are intended to discourage the production, distribution and consumption of drugs that the participating governments and the United Nations have made illegal. The term was popularized by the media shortly after a press conference given on 18 June 1971 by President Richard Nixon, during which he declared drug abuse 'public enemy number one'. Nixon declared a 'war on drugs' that would be directed towards eradication, military action and incarceration. The problem of drug trafficking was framed as poor, violent countries producing dangerous drugs and people. The rhetoric around these policy initiatives conflated drug trafficking with immigration, terrorism and national security and ignored their real impact on the targeted populations who were already suffering the consequences of neoliberal structural adjustment and hostile interstate interventions.<sup>18</sup>

The war on drugs, argue critical commentators, directs attention towards 'enemies' abroad and away from 'us', the societies commissioning and consuming the drugs.<sup>19</sup> From an anarchist point of view, these wars of metaphor, the 'war on drugs' and the 'war on terror', represent an interlinked, militarized extension of state conflict and colonization across international borders under the guise of enforcing and policing 'drug-free' and 'terror-free' areas, even at the same time as those governments profit from the international drug trade, the arms trade and the incarceration industry.<sup>20</sup> Data apparently indicate that since the outset of the war on drugs, there has been both a proliferation of drug use across the world and an enormous growth in the numbers of consumers.<sup>21</sup> The use of these metaphors, it is argued, has enabled governing forces to extend conflicts across international boundaries without

declaring war in a conventional sense. This means that these military interventions have not been subject to the constraints imposed by the international rules of engagement in warfare. Recent US administrations have pursued aggressive foreign policy projects under the umbrella of the war on drugs, especially in Latin America but also elsewhere.

The terminology and policy formulation of the war on drugs has framed drug use as an act against society. From various critical perspectives however, it is claimed that the impact of this political project has been to fragment communities and to provide a cover for domestic and international military projects of expansion and surveillance. Rather than protecting communities, it is argued, the war on drugs is in fact a war against society and against the class and race groups most likely to suffer from and dissent from neoliberal economic restructuring.<sup>22</sup> In critical debates, the war on drugs is understood as a war against people of colour, poor people, non-conforming people and political dissidents, who are all subject to ever-increasing monitoring, surveillance and repression. It is argued in these debates that controlling populations and engaging in warfare in these covert ways helps to reconcile the democratic political expectations of liberal societies with the inequalities generated by global neoliberalism.<sup>23</sup> Changes in policing, prosecution and sentencing policies associated with the war on drugs (such as three-strikes laws mandating life in prison for a third felony conviction, mandatory minimum sentencing, little or no eligibility for parole, and other guidelines) have led to the mass incarceration of non-violent drug offenders, who comprise most of the prison population in the United States, affecting millions of poor people and people of colour. Black and Latino drug users are far more likely to receive custodial penalties than their white counterparts.<sup>24</sup> This is despite evidence that drug use is fairly equal across racial groups. More people are serving longer sentences for mostly non-violent crimes that could have been addressed through drug treatment programmes.

Since 1980, eight times as many women have been imprisoned, most of them for petty drug crimes, theft or self-defence against abuse. In the 1970s and 1980s, legislators cut treatment and rehabilitation programmes for drug

offenders in favour of increased imprisonment and longer sentences, as well as designing legal instruments to dramatically restrict the rights of people once they are released from prison (including access to housing, education, employment and voting rights).<sup>25</sup> It is argued that these policies are in effect a ‘multidimensional process of exclusion from participation in social activities’, which, it is argued, has further institutionalized the structures of classism, racism and sexism already woven into our societies.<sup>26</sup> Anthropologist and social movement researcher Laura McTighe describes the carceral impact of these structures as a ‘war on relationships’. The women and men who are imprisoned are parents, caregivers, community members and providers. McTighe points out that an estimated 1.5 million children in the United States have at least one parent in prison.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporary anarchist abolitionists also argue that prison abolition is a queer issue. Evidence suggests that gender-non-conforming people have consistently been the most visible members of the queer community; among the most likely to be beaten, raped and killed; among the most likely to be criminalized and labelled deviant; among the most likely to be denied housing, employment and medical care; among the most likely to be rejected and harassed as young people; and among the most likely to be separated from their own children. By many accounts, to be gender-non-conforming in prison entails the denial of medical care, isolation cells, and rape and abuse by prisoners and staff. Prisons and correctional programmes also play a major role in reinforcing gender and sexual norms.<sup>28</sup> As criminology scholar Sarah Lamble argues, ‘prison activism that does not consider the gender/sexuality dimensions of imprisonment will be unable to undo the roots of our caged-obsessed cultures.’<sup>29</sup> Gender coercion (both violent and normalized enforcement of gender norms, inside and outside of the prison system) and intense surveillance mostly affect already marginalized people: poor people, immigrants, people of colour and people without access to health care and education.

The experiences of gender-non-conforming people highlight the extent to which government and other agencies track and document our bodies and identities for various purposes. According to anarchists, these experiences reveal the extent to

which bodies are routinely categorized and policed, precisely because they do not fit the imposed categories. Transgressive identities generate the most intensive forms of social and political surveillance and policing.<sup>30</sup> From an anarchist point of view, these experiences 'expose and target the state's greatest points of weakness' because they show the extent to which the state and capital rely on the surveillance and categorization of individuals.<sup>31</sup> From schools to health care, to banking, to employment, to prison and to conscription, anarchists and others argue gender categorizations are used to manage and control the labour and reproduction of working populations and make them easily manageable. Those with 'ambiguous', 'suspect' or 'unruly' bodies are most intensively subjected to the scrutiny of the nation-state because they offer the biggest challenge to the power of the state to regulate and control bodies. Gender or sex-non-conforming bodies also disrupt the categories and borders that separate social groups in natural-seeming hierarchies of sex.<sup>32</sup>

Anarchists also include in their abolitionist programme the billions of incarcerated animals that currently live, suffer and die in industrialized processes designed to imprison and use their bodies for profit. They argue that 'just as class, race, and gender weigh heavily on our chances of ending up in prison, species is the deciding factor for who will end up on a factory farm or in a slaughterhouse.'<sup>33</sup> These caged animals are often driven to self-destructive anxiety and insanity from the boredom and from the captivity and the distress of nearby creatures. Animal liberationists emphasize the routinely violent treatment of captive animals, the normalization of mass excruciating pain and brutality inflicted on animals who are stressed, scared, scalded, butchered and skinned alive, tortured, starving, sick, infested and burned across all industries which use their bodies, meat, milk, pelts, hides and wool. Whatever illusions we might have for example about wool, dairy or leather industries, literature exists in the liberationist field which details the unsettling specifics of the routine processes which pertain to the handling of living flesh in these industries, as well as the extreme techniques employees use to keep animals functioning beyond the limits of their physical endurance. Activists also highlight the experiments inflicted on animal bodies for trivial research

gains, for example, those designed only to prove that sentient beings can die from loneliness. All these industries also brutalize the humans who work in them, who are themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder.

Any politics of decarceration is incomplete, anarchists argue, that does not extend to the bodies that are abused, neglected, tortured and murdered for food and other uses. For their analysis in this context, anarchists draw heavily on the fields of green criminology and ecofeminism, which focus on the links between the subjugation of nature, non-human animals and marginalized groups of people.<sup>34</sup> From this perspective, all treatments of living beings as commodities are interlinked. For example, authors make links between animal experimentation and the brutal treatment of low-income black research subjects in the Tuskegee Syphilis studies of the 1930s. This literature extends the intersectional approach of recent feminist and black scholarship to our understanding of dominance over animals and the enclosure of nature. For example, the lives of animals that are exploited for their reproductive capacities and related commodities like milk and eggs are intimately connected to the experiences of females of every species, not least the normalization of rape, trafficking and assault. This literature also highlights the parallels between the use of animal bodies and the use of migrant bodies for low-wage undesirable work without health care or protection.<sup>35</sup> The anarchist animal liberation movement seeks the total abolition of human and animal exploitation, 'Seeking empty cages not bigger cages'.<sup>36</sup>

## Empty cages and no borders

Angela Davis, in common with other abolitionist writers and anarchist decarcerationists, understands prison abolition as a critique of society that goes beyond the prison buildings themselves. She employs African-American sociologist W. E. DuBois's concept of 'abolition democracy' in this context. With him, she argues that substantive democracy calls for the abolition of institutions that advance the dominance of any group over any other, and it also calls for the creation of

social institutions that address the problems that set people on the track to prison.<sup>37</sup> DuBois argued that when slavery was abolished, black people were set free to some extent, but they still lacked the material resources that would enable them to live fully free lives, and Davis argues that prisons have thrived because of the absence of those resources. Thus abolition requires: dismantling economic, social and political inequalities; understanding the links between eroding educational opportunities, poverty, global capitalism, war and imprisonment; and building alternative institutions based on equity, mutual aid and self-determination. Abolition is '[n]ot so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society'.<sup>38</sup>

Prison abolitionist Dean Spade puts it this way: 'We see the abolition of policing, prisons, jails, and detention not strictly as a narrow answer to "imprisonment" and the abuses that occur within prisons, but also as a challenge to the rule of property, violence, racism, alienation, and disconnection that we face every day.'<sup>39</sup> Reducing harm in the present can involve attempts to roll back mandatory minimum sentences, decriminalize drug use and sex work, pursue reforms to parole practices and other efforts to shorten people's time in prison or stop them going to prison in the first place. Aiming to reduce the power of the incarceration system for the future can involve mounting larger challenges such as changing the way society understands crime and criminals, re-humanizing people who have been incarcerated, highlighting the racism of prison structures, demilitarizing schools, physical and mental health care for all, a justice system based on reconciliation, not vengeance, the defence of migrant rights, eroding the barriers that people perceive between them and others, building different kinds of relationships and creating structures and support for addressing conflict and harm within the communities in which they happen.

The Empty Cages Collective believes that organizing with prisoners and prisoner families is a real opportunity to build the power of these groups. These potentially include the thousands of children that are in care, the thousands of families that are affected by the prison system and the

thousands of people who are subject to the institutionally structured violence of the prison as it operates through class, race, gender and mental health.<sup>40</sup> Other perspectives on policing and detention in the United Kingdom also reveal patterns of institutionally structured violence along these lines. Inquest is a charitable organization founded in 1981 which provides specialist advice and support to bereaved people, lawyers, other advice and support agencies, the media, MPs and the wider public concerning contentious deaths in custody and their investigation (including police, prison and immigration detention, and deaths of detained patients). The organization has expressed particular concerns about the disproportionate number of deaths in custody of women, people from black and ethnic minority backgrounds, young people and people with mental health problems. This includes the dramatic rise in the number of self-inflicted deaths.<sup>41</sup> Statistics quoted by the Empty Cages Collective highlight arguments such as these concerning the structural injustices reflected in UK incarceration trends. As of 2016, more than a quarter of prisoners were people of colour, one in ten prisoners was black and the number of Muslims in prison had more than doubled over the thirteen years preceding 2016. In addition, 12% of the prison population were also 'foreign nationals' facing deportation. More than 80% of prisoners had mental health problems, two-thirds had issues with addiction, alcoholism and drug use, and 36% were also estimated to have a physical or mental disability. More than a fifth had a learning disability that affected their ability to cope with the criminal justice system. Nearly half of the children in prison had been on the child protection register, and of adults in jail more than half had been emotionally, physically or sexually abused as children. Of women in prison, 46% reported a history of domestic abuse.<sup>42</sup>

In its workshops on prison abolitionism, the Empty Cages Collective focuses on dismantling the idea that prisons are natural, normal and necessary, and it attempts to challenge concepts of punishment and social domination in everyday life. It does this through community and relationship-building activities that run alongside its more direct attacks on the dramatic prison-building plans of the UK government. So a big part of its decarcerating or abolitionist work is in

building radical educational alternatives, stronger relationships through community gardens, squatting and occupying buildings to defend domestic violence services. Mostly, the Empty Cages Collective sees its work as supporting each other to 'learn to love people without abusing them'. For collectives like this, 'the work is in the now' through all these initiatives. 'This for us is anarchism,' they argue. 'A new society that makes prisons obsolete.'<sup>743</sup>

Closely allied to anti-detention and anti-prison activism, anarchist migrant justice networks like No One Is Illegal and No Borders work to support and decarcerate refugees, undocumented migrants and indigenous communities. Movements like these see migrant detention as part of not just the expanding prison system but also the militarization of national political communities and the increasing scope of government complicity in the generation of private corporate profits. More than this, they see border control and migrant detention as part of the ongoing post-colonial exploitation of the peoples of the global South. Thus anarchist and migrant justice movements refer to the military policing of borders and the related generation of corporate profits from migrant detention as 'border imperialism'. This term takes us into the history and current practices of state bordering, neoliberal capitalism and post-colonialism. They argue that border imperialism isn't just about the lines that demarcate territory, it's about the practices of colonialism, state power and capitalism that determine who will enjoy the spoils of economic growth and who will be refused access to them.

Drawing on her experiences with the No One Is Illegal movement; anarchist author and activist Harsha Walia identifies four overlapping and concurrent structures that together make up the global regime of border imperialism. First, the displacement and impoverishment of whole communities through colonialism (dispossessing communities in order to secure land and resources for state and capitalist interests) and the unequally weighted terms of trade between the global North and the global South, enforced by national and international institutions (including the refusal to trade on fair terms, to relieve debt, to extend loans or to lift trade barriers against food and manufactured goods). Second, the militarization of borders and the criminalization and

punishment of attempts by those displaced peoples to migrate out of their impoverished regions. Third, the establishment of racialized hierarchies of citizenship and, fourth, the exploitation of vulnerable migrant labour through low wages, poor working conditions and non-existent rights.<sup>44</sup> According to this argument, the deliberately limited inclusion of migrants into western states through processes of criminalization and racialization works to justify the commodification of their labour. The critical claim here is that migration is not illegal because the state does not want the workers to come (in fact, it is not in the interests of states to close borders); it is illegal precisely so that migrant workers are vulnerable and precarious and available for exploitation by domestic capital. Controlling borders is about controlling people and making money.<sup>45</sup>

Refugees die in the tens of thousands across Europe by drowning and suffocation in containers in their perilous attempts to flee regions of the world blighted by legacies of slavery, civil wars fuelled by western geopolitical interests, ecological crises and the privatization of land and resources. Their plight is part of the same global economy of unequal capital relations that compels people to try and move *and* makes western countries very rich. Anarchist movements for migrant solidarity question the territorial logics of statehood. For immigration to be a problem, people must live in a propertied relationship to the land. In this condition, land is a commodity that can be owned and controlled by one group of people. This proprietary understanding of land is what colonialists used as the excuse to invade indigenous nations. Colonialism ultimately depends on an exclusivist concept of nation based on control and ownership of land and territory that is demarcated by borders. Through this lens, the nation-state and its reliance on control and ownership of territory is the problem, not the free movement of people between different territories.

Just like prisons, argue anarchists, borders are a function of states. They produce an inside and an outside, insiders and outsiders, and establish 'a system to control whose movement is acceptable and whose is not'.<sup>46</sup> Borders are not just at the militarized boundaries between nation-states, they argue, but also in our everyday lives. Removing borders is relational

work.<sup>47</sup> This work, they argue, must offer direct support to migrating people and challenge the internal borders that police people's access to health care, education, housing, welfare support and the assistance of charities where successive new waves of legislation require workers in these sectors to check immigration status.<sup>48</sup> The No One Is Illegal movement works to defend spaces (including women's shelters, food banks and hospitals) where undocumented migrants can access services without threats of deportation.<sup>49</sup> This logic also underpins the work of the activist project WatchTheMed Alarm Phone. Activists involved in this project flout the global order of sovereign territoriality and attempt to counter the violence of the EU border regime by making themselves available to offer direct assistance to migrants in distress at sea via an emergency phone hotline.<sup>50</sup>

Anarchist groups insist that 'Borders don't protect us, they divide us.'<sup>51</sup> It is argued that, like prisons, borders and boundaries are created and maintained by people who are dominant in their societies. Critical boundary studies scholars view borders as 'artefacts of dominant discursive processes'.<sup>52</sup> They are used, it is argued, to separate beings and impose inequalities, and they are inevitably maintained by violence. Boundaries represent the point at which 'we' end and 'they' begin.<sup>53</sup> This is the case, agree anarchists, whether we are talking about: the partitioning of Africa into countries according to colonial power dynamics<sup>54</sup>; the hardening of linguistic boundaries by Croatian nationalists during the Serbo-Croat war<sup>55</sup>; the separation of 'us' from 'them' on every scale (rich and poor, black and white, human and non-human, Self and Other)<sup>56</sup>; the binary constructions of gender, sex and sexuality; or the bifurcation of a person's identity into a 'rational responsible' Self, and an Other of 'feelings and desires' (translated into ideas of the 'rational' Self and the 'emotional' Other).<sup>57</sup> Boundaries and borders are constructed and maintained, it is argued, to justify the damage or harm done to that which is deemed Other, even if it is a part of ourselves. *And it is always a part of ourselves.*

## Anarchist criminology

For anarchists and abolitionists, decarceration work is primarily an exercise in building different models or ideas of social order. At the intersection of all these anarchist, abolitionist and decarcerating movements is the belief that there are other ways of addressing harm, acts of violence, injustice, assault and even murder; ways that care for and protect those that have been harmed, hold people accountable for their actions and make room for understanding why they acted the way they did. This belief is often rooted in examples of conflict resolution practice that are observable in indigenous cultures, utopian experimental communities and (some) restorative justice movements. These alternative models of justice work from a view of crime as a sort of ‘natural disaster’ or ‘tragedy’, a painful breakdown in relationships that has had a destructive and harmful impact on the community as a whole as well as on the individual victims and perpetrators of crime. The appropriate response from this point of view is to bring the affected individuals and communities into a sort of carefully structured restorative dialogue or conversation in order to decide how to deal with the harms that were caused and the reasons that they happened, without recourse to retribution. The focus is on repairing the harms that have occurred by privileging the voices of those who have been most affected, including the communities which have been impacted. Theorists of restorative justice often argue that when the state acts as the voice of the community in judicial processes, the voices of the individuals and communities who actually experience the harms of particular crimes get silenced or erased. This emphasis on moving away from state-based legal processes has led anarchist writers like Coy McKinney and Duane Ruth-Heffelbower to claim that restorative justice is the definitive ‘anarchist criminology’.<sup>58</sup>

Restorative justice ideas and methodologies do form part of a wider transformative package of aspirations for anarchist writers and activists. These restorative ways of addressing problems appreciate that harm, abuse and assault are often the result of histories of oppression and/or personal traumatic histories. This approach also follows the previous

analysis presented in this chapter concerning the ways in which the notion of crime and the ways in which crime is defined tend to serve the needs of political and economic elites by protecting private property, supporting capitalism, criminalizing migration and dissent, disguising the root causes of social problems and protecting the privatization and appropriation of the commons. Whether or not all crime can be explained this way is, of course, open to debate. Still, the deeper conviction of anarchist and abolitionist movements is that non-hierarchical, participatory community organizations and practices are better placed to decide how to meet the needs of the victims and perpetrators of crime, and how to make larger changes that might prevent harms of the same character occurring again.

The accountability process model has been one of the primary tools used by anarchists to address assault and abuse in their own communities. Accountability processes are grassroots, dialogue-based responses to harm that are founded on principles of restorative justice. This may be a finite project that forms in response to a particular incident or a longer-term, open-ended endeavour. In an accountability process, affinity groups form around the survivor and the perpetrator, with other community members assisting in the communication between those groupings, in order to support those individuals in meeting their needs for safety and support on the one hand and needs for insight, accountability, understanding and change on the other. Philly's Pissed and Philly Stands Up are long-standing separate but collaborating collectives based in Philadelphia and devoted respectively to survivor support and assaulter intervention along these lines.<sup>59</sup> These ideas do not necessarily imply that anarchist justice demands that victims must forgive those who have harmed them or that offenders must apologise. What 'restoration' means for an anarchist methodology in this context is that justice practices be grounded in genuine listening, non-domination, equal concern, power sharing and interconnectedness.<sup>60</sup>

This kind of thinking, which explicitly explores alternatives to state/police/court-based strategies for dealing with violence in communities and interpersonal relationships, has been inspired through collaboration with anti-racist feminists

in the anti-violence against women movement. What these thinkers and activists recognize is the need to deconstruct the systemic beliefs and norms that underpin violence against women. This is something which the prison system is not equipped to do, they argue. If gender violence was the remit of a few crazed individuals, they argue, then locking them up might address the problem. But the problem is a culture of violence in which an increasingly large number of people are harming their partners. It is not possible or useful to imprison them all.<sup>61</sup> From the anarchist point of view, in the words of Layne Mullet, 'justice recognizes that real harm, violence, and trauma happen and deserve a meaningful and serious response, but that prisons and cops do not offer a sustainable solution'.<sup>62</sup> Not only is state-administered criminal justice an 'unsustainable' response to crime, from the point of view of post-colonial feminist and women-of-colour writers like Andrea Smith and Julia Chinyere Oparah, it is not a legitimate collaborator in anti-violence work due to historic state perpetration of gender violence in the contexts of colonialism, slavery, border patrols and prisons. As Smith argues, 'there is an inherent contradiction in relying upon the state to solve those problems that it is responsible for creating'.<sup>63</sup> The contexts for much of the interpersonal harm that happens within families and communities are longer-term histories of colonialism, patriarchy, intergenerational abuse and economic exploitation; and the violence and loss experienced in these traumatic histories must feature in accountability dialogues in the present.<sup>64</sup>

The anarchist resistance to punishment and retribution, suspicion of state-administered justice, hostility to the law and fears about police violence are underpinned by an idea of human interconnectedness reflected in Kropotkin's 1887 essay 'Are Prisons Necessary?' in which he argued that 'society is responsible for the anti-social deeds committed in its midst' and that 'we have our part of shame in the deeds of our assassins'. Kropotkin also argued that 'Human fraternity and liberty are the only correctives to apply to those diseases of the human organism which lead to so-called crime.'<sup>65</sup> In these statements, Kropotkin points to a deeply relational ethic underpinning anarchist criminology, evident also in the work of Sullivan and Tiftt.<sup>66</sup> In his work on anarchist criminology,

Anthony Nocella makes a similar, related point: ‘Alternatives to punitive justice are possible if we take from ecology the reality that all elements and life are interwoven and interdependent.’<sup>67</sup> It is an ethic which has found resonance and further inspiration in some African political philosophy, indigenous scholarship and other sources which have recently been more fully recognized as important parts of a network of current anarchist scholarship and activism. Ubuntu is a Southern African concept that refers to the shared humanity that comprises our own selfhood. The insight is that our individuality and independence (as we understand them) depend on solidarity, interdependence and community. The concept is often depicted by means of the Nguni saying: ‘A human being is a human being through (the otherness of) other human beings.’<sup>68</sup> The idea brings us into a much closer relationship with the needs, actions and motivations of others for, if indeed my humanity is connected to the humanity of others, then I have a share in their capacity for love or cruelty or compassion or violence. This means that we can relate to the actions of the criminal *and* the experiences of the victim.

Anarchist communities and activist groups often attempt to engage in a lived way with restorative, transformative and relational ideas, employing restorative measures and models of justice-in-practice to regulate order within their groups or in the wider projects that they undertake, as well as challenging dominant conceptions of criminality and legality on a theoretical level. In the words of Kropotkin, anarchists are ‘not afraid to forgo judges and their sentences’ or to ‘forgo sanctions of all kinds’ because, he argues ‘we are persuaded that the great majority of humankind, in proportion to their degree of enlightenment and the completeness with which they free themselves from existing fetters, will behave and act always in a direction useful to society’.<sup>69</sup> This, indeed, may feel like a very oversimplified, idealized and even unworkable approach to as complex a problem as social order. A broader reading of anarchist perspectives on crime, cohesion and conflict gives a more complicated and engaged sense of anarchist attempts to learn about alternative models of functional collective life, informed by studies of communities operating without coercive authority or codified law.<sup>70</sup> But the fearlessness of Kropotkin’s faith in naturally occurring

human social order does live on in the anarchist tradition and its responses to harm, crime and conflict. It also lives on in the central role that is granted to conflict as a useful and productive social dynamic.

Anarchist theories of law and authority, notably the anarchist legal scholarship of Nils Christie, frame crime as social conflict and depict social conflict as a community resource in so far as it provides important information about whose needs are not getting met in a given community.<sup>71</sup> Christie's idea of 'conflict as property' articulates this distinct and characteristically anarchist belief in the spontaneous and organically emerging nature of social order and the anarchist faith that conflict is something better trying to happen (something better than exploitation and domination). Other authors writing in a same vein talk about conflict as a 'resource', conflict as a 'possibility for the release of counter-power energies' and conflict as an opportunity for 'establishing dialogue and seeking solutions, in a process leading to wider relationships and wider mutual knowledge'.<sup>72</sup> According to the anarchist criminology of Nocella, we need to begin to have 'truly transformative critical dialogues' with those we do not agree with or deem an enemy in order to 'listen, share and learn'.<sup>73</sup> Police are not 'machines' he argues; they are often 'working-class people, many of whom want to make their communities safer', so they too are needed in the work of critical transformative dialogue.

In the optimistic spirit of Kropotkin, Nocella concludes that a just community is possible when we build 'critical' and 'holistic' dialectical bridges against all systems of domination, including those against other species, in the hope of ending 'police, prisons, property, and punitive justice'.<sup>74</sup> These are the dialogues that need to happen in order to create alternatives to the prison system because it will not be enough just to dismantle prisons and disband police forces. Anarchists and others realize the wider necessity to engage in deeper learning about how to create safety and justice when we have all been taught by the media and in schools, colleges, and police academies that the only way to make everyone safe is through control, force, weapons and punitive justice.

## 'What about the rapists?'

Decarceration groups like the Empty Cages Collective carefully note the common questions and uncertainties that arise in this kind of work. 'What about the rapists?', they are asked, and also 'Don't some people deserve to be in prison?' 'As a collective,' goes the Empty Cages' response to these questions, 'we are not blind to the fact that acts committed by many people who end up in prison can and do harm other people.' They go on to emphasize that, 'We would never downplay the trauma of being raped, the feeling of violation when robbed or the life-long memory of an assault.' The activism and community-building work of decarceration activists in the Empty Cages Collective is focused on identifying all these harms as part of the same problem, noting that it's often the same communities being criminalized that are most likely to experience these forms of harm.<sup>75</sup> The problem, according to abolitionist, decarcerationist and anarchist groups like Empty Cages, is that prisons, police and courts do not offer safety or restoration for survivors and victims of harm, violence and abuse. Interacting with the police and courts is, they argue, disempowering and ineffective at meeting survivors' needs because the law doesn't place the survivor or victim at the centre of the process but rather seeks punishment for or restitution from the perpetrator on behalf of the state. So, they argue, 'Our work as abolitionists and anarchists' is about the 'pains-taking work of healing and finding more nourishing ways of being in the world with each other'.<sup>76</sup>

How can we keep each other safe from these kinds of harms? What does accountability look like in that context? These are questions that have been at the centre of prison abolitionist work since Fay Honey Knopp co-authored the important 1976 work on prison abolitionism *Instead of Prisons*.<sup>77</sup> Following the publication of this book, her work focused on sex offenders and sexual abusers and resulted in the Safer Society Program and the Safer Society Foundation, dedicated to providing services and resources for preventative and restorative responses to sexual and social violence. Further critical work on sex offending also highlights the

distorted nature of public discourse about perpetrators. It is a very few predators that commit the most serious harm, it is argued, and few of these are ever identified or apprehended. Yet policies and sanctions for all sex crimes are based on emotional responses to these high-profile disturbing cases and offer little of use for handling the vast majority of violations. Critical work suggests that most individuals convicted of sex crimes are young, non-violent males who could be reached and rehabilitated before being caged or labelled. Once labelled, these young people then experience extreme levels of abuse and violence at the hands of staff and residents within the correctional machinery.<sup>78</sup> Following incarceration, it is almost impossible for them to find work, housing, privacy and meaningful relationships. None of this serves the greater good, it is argued, not least because this process does not prevent or deter violent crime, foster individual rehabilitation or reduce the likelihood of reoffending. This is because prison reproduces experiences of violence, isolation and intimidation. Writers and activists involved in rehabilitative and restorative work argue that what does make a difference is the building of safer communities that can respond to harm without relying on prisons and punishment.<sup>79</sup>

The most sophisticated restorative and transformational justice processes attempt to incorporate gendered understandings of power. This means that they understand that community spaces and communicative practices are not free from the trappings of domination. Communities, families and informal spaces are in fact 'riddled with [gendered] power relations'.<sup>80</sup> This becomes particularly apparent in the case of domestic violence. In this context, both legal and popular discourses tend to trivialize such offences, challenging the credibility of the victim or suggesting that the victim was complicit in various ways, including allegedly provocative behaviour.<sup>81</sup> A number of contemporary feminists have raised concerns about the potentially coercive nature of 'community', including Nire Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, Iris Young, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, Elizabeth Spelman and Gloria Anzaldúa.<sup>82</sup> Communities are not necessarily well informed about abuse, and popular discourses can collude with violence. Social and cultural forces can

authorize or sustain gender-based violence, partly by placing a high value on privacy and family.

The tendency for perpetrators to rationalize and trivialize their own violence has been found in a number of studies.<sup>83</sup> Victims will often fear the consequences of speaking frankly about their experiences, especially in the presence of the offender. Further, embedded gender-role expectations place significant pressure on women to maintain relationships, offer compassion and support the emotional well-being of partners, often assuming guilt or responsibility for outcomes. Culturally, women are judged harshly for anger or self-protection. Women are generally socialized to repair relationships, often at the expense of their own needs.<sup>84</sup> They are more likely to apologise or accept apologies in order to sustain a relationship. Abusers, on the other hand, often have control over the meanings and explanations of violence or may apologise in order to control a situation and foreclose further discussion.<sup>85</sup> If restorative justice practitioners are not cognisant of these dynamics, they risk being complicit in ongoing abuse when they pursue agendas for participation, restoration, apology and trust. In fact, experts are clear that mediation must not be used in cases of partner abuse. The need here is for accountability, not conflict management. Counsellors for domestic violence survivors learn that couples counselling should not be undertaken in a clear situation of partner abuse because abusers will usually manipulate the process, leaving the abusive and unequal dynamics underlying the relationship unaddressed.<sup>86</sup> Restoring troubled relationships in an already unequal society can mean restoring those unequal relationships and reinforcing inequality.

Community-based strategies for dealing with domestic and sexual abuse also struggle partly because communities lack the will, the resources or the capacity to create supportive and meaningful networks of committed participants. The work is hard and demanding, and the gravity of it can be overwhelming or intimidating for participants, especially when there is conflict. The community may in fact be the problem if it has condoned or ignored the violence. Even the more intentional and robust attempts at community that occur inside anarchist groupings struggle to operationalize models of collective responsibility that are strong enough

to facilitate satisfying experiences of justice and healing. A group of anarchist activists expressed their frustrations with community-accountability processes in the zine 'What about the Rapists?' They argued there that the ideal of supportive, free 'community' is a longing and an aspiration and not necessarily real enough, solid enough or safe enough to support the work of accountability or justice. Community accountability only works when the community has the will or capacity to unite in holding perpetrators accountable *and* to support both victims and perpetrators. Subcultural bonds in anarchist scenes can be too weak or transient, without strong, long-term commitments. As the writers of the zine argue, 'Folks who've been called out often just pick up and leave town, sometimes even preemptively before they're called to account for their shitty behavior.'<sup>87</sup> As one of the authors adds, 'The more we try and pretend safety can exist at a community level, the more disappointed and betrayed our friends and lovers will be when they experience violence and do not get supported.'<sup>88</sup>

The trouble identified here is that it is impossible to draw on the resources of the community to support accountability processes and victim support because whatever community solidarity exists tends to fall apart when it comes to incidences of sexual abuse and assault. Anarchists recognize the need to address this important issue by really engaging with the problems of community. What is a community based on? Do we choose to be in it? Or can we leave? What holds a community together when things get difficult? The main problem is that there is no accountability or justice or care without some robust and stable egalitarian grouping that we can call 'community'. Without answers to these questions, they argue, 'we find ourselves banging our heads against the wall again and again, when a slimy assaulter just skips town or drops out of the scene after being called out, or when someone wields enough power in the scene to gerrymander the boundaries of community to exclude survivors and allies'.<sup>89</sup> This problem is crucially important to our thinking about anarchism because finding some kind of answer to the problem of community is fundamental if anarchists want to convince us that their political approach is equipped to really address domination. As one activist has asked, 'Can

we realistically apply these models [of justice] to our diffuse, fragmented, mostly unstructured associations of misfits?’<sup>90</sup>

Anti-violence activist Andrea Smith writes that ‘we face a dilemma’ in this context. On the one hand, she argues, ‘the incarceration approach for addressing sexual/domestic violence promotes the repression of communities of color [and class] without really providing safety for survivors’. Yet, on the other hand, she continues, ‘Restorative Justice models often promote community silence and denial around issues of sexual/violence without concern for the safety of survivors of gender violence, under the rhetoric of community restoration.’<sup>91</sup> As we have seen, anarchists, feminists, abolitionists, anti-racist activists and class-based movements need to face the problem that ‘The community support that victims ardently desire does not presently exist.’<sup>92</sup> The criminal justice system is in fact the only real system in place that can be used to address violence. But this does not change the fact that, first, from the point of view of these movements, the state has demonstrated its reluctance to protect those most vulnerable to violence and, second, that the state is a primary perpetrator of violence against those communities.

Alongside other anti-violence activists and scholars, authors like Smith highlight the harms done to women (especially women of colour) by the criminal justice system. Her work addresses in detail the intersections of (colonial) state violence and gender violence, making the key point that we are not in fact faced with a choice between resisting state violence or resisting gender violence because addressing gender violence is part of the work of ending state violence. She points to histories of colonial encounter that show that ‘it is through gender violence that colonialism is successful’, noting that ‘sexual violence was a tool by which the bodies of Indigenous peoples became marked as inherently violable ... and by extension, their lands and territories became marked as violable as well’.<sup>93</sup> And she also points to tougher anti-crime legislation that has meant that abused women are more likely to find themselves in prison if they are coerced into illegal activity by partners or defend themselves against partner violence. It is not a choice between compassion for perpetrators who harm women or compassion towards those who have been harmed; the work is to understand

the ways that the two experiences are tied together. The task is to support the victims of violence without increasing state control over those people who experience violence by addressing state and family violence together as linked problems.<sup>94</sup>

## Transformative justice

In response to the issues identified by Andrea Smith, anarchists, decarcerationists and abolitionists call for the greater development of models, methods and skills for engaging in dialogue and for addressing conflict across a wide range of needs, conflicts, problematic behaviours and harms. They talk about this as ‘setting a precedent of collective engagement with less intense conflict’ in order to frame conflict resolution as a collective responsibility and gain ‘valuable experience to serve us in a crisis situation’. They argue that ‘if there’s a precedent, language, and skill set for addressing a wide range of conflicts and harm, and being asked to participate in a conflict resolution process becomes common and less threatening, perhaps we’ll be able to respond less defensively when we learn that our actions have hurt others’. These anarchists call for deeper engagements with dialogue skills that build community by drawing us all into lifelong processes of collaborative self-and-other transformation. This includes creating ‘more nuanced language’ that ‘neither idealizes nor demonizes people’ so that we can offer ‘empathy towards folks who have done harm’ and ‘create space for them to own up to their behaviors and heal’.<sup>95</sup>

The aim is to broaden the range of conflicts that a community can address through deep engagement with dialogue-building skills, whilst recognizing that an individual-to-individual conflict resolution framework is not applicable to situations of partner abuse and sexual assault. This means that, rather than assuming ‘community’ exists and trying to hold people accountable based on that ‘fiction’, anarchists need to think about building affinity, responsibility and commitment on a collective level. Connection, shared beliefs and common ground are the forces that shape behaviour.

These powerful transformational forces inhere in relationships. From the anarchist point of view, we manifest the kind of society we want through the relationships we create, and in turn these relationships support the values that we build our communities upon. Thus building relationships around new, shared anti-militarist and non-dominating values is crucially important political-movement-building work for anarchists. Political organizing, cultural transformation and base building are the necessary strategies for ending violence. A transformative approach to justice looks to active political organization and advocacy along these lines in order to build connections based on shared values of resistance to violence and accountability. As activist authors argue:

If we can create stronger ties with each other and understand our affinities more concretely, perhaps we'll have the basis to make community accountability something more than a vague and contentious dream ... making our expectations of and commitments to one another as explicit as possible ... [whilst also] pursuing anti-sexist men's groups and gender-based organizing to undermine rape culture, or broadening our focus on conflict resolution and mediation.<sup>96</sup>

The task in this context is to create more committed community consensuses against violence by active organizing to build cultural values and political structures based on mutual trust and interrelatedness. Smith argues that if survivors are the base of such political organizing, this kind of approach can both 'challenge state violence' *and* 'build communities that would actually provide safety for survivors by challenging the sexism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression that exist within them'. She points to a number of anti-violence organizations that work to this model, including Incite!, Women of Color Against Violence, Friends are Reaching Out, Communities Against Rape and Abuse, and Generation Five. Incite! and Communities against Rape and Abuse, for example, have developed a model for addressing violence that does not rely on the state for community accountability: 'Our understanding of community accountability ultimately transcends the idea of simply holding an abusive community member responsible for his or her actions, but also includes the vision of the community itself.' Their principles include:

recognizing the humanity of everyone involved (they argue that community accountability can be confrontational but not dehumanizing – it must recognize that everyone is capable of abusing power); prioritizing the self-determination of the survivor; identifying a clear plan of safety and support for the survivor and others involved in the strategy; organizing collectively not individually; developing a political analysis of sexual violence; and communicating what they want the aggressor to do, not just publicly shaming them (also involving their friends and family).<sup>97</sup>

Similarly, Generation FIVE is an organization that aims to end child sexual abuse through community action and collaboration with social services personnel and other social justice movements. It is its belief that meaningful community response is the key to effective prevention, observing that current protective services do not keep children safe. When children are being abused, it points out, the state often does not have sufficient evidence to prove abuse, and if abuse is proven children are generally put into institutional or foster-care settings that are often as dangerous as the homes they left. They argue the wider political point that, ‘To address child sexual abuse, we need to look at the bigger picture: the social norms in which it is happening.’ By social norms they mean ‘the beliefs and practices regarding power, sexuality, ideas about children and ownership’, and ‘the institutions that perpetuate these ideas and practices’. They advocate for an individual and systemic understanding of child sexual abuse in the hope that, by addressing the root causes of abuse, they may be more effective in eliminating its occurrence.<sup>98</sup>

Generation FIVE argues that ‘systems of oppression and child sexual abuse have an interdependent relationship’ that is ‘a power-over system that benefits some at the expense of others and uses violence’. These systems of oppression (gender inequality, class exploitation, racism, violence and threat), it argues, create the conditions for child sexual abuse. Further, the prevalence of child sexual abuse in our societies ‘fosters behaviours (obedience to authority, silence, disempowerment, shame) that prevent people from organizing effectively to work for liberation, healing and change systemic forms of violence’.<sup>99</sup> We are living in a broader social context, it argues, that teaches ‘power-over’

relations, 'private ownership' of children, a 'dismissal' of children's accounts, 'mixed messages' and 'little education' about human sexuality ('it is bad, shame based, and it is used to sell us everything from cars to deodorant'), and the 'ongoing mixing of sex and violence'. 'We are not taught to address pain and trauma deeply,' they observe, 'but rather mask symptoms or blame the individual for their distress.' The norms that allow for abuse, they argue, are 'sadly, ever-present in our society'. As well as reinforcing these norms and tending to cause further violence and harm, the criminal justice solutions that exist are not relevant enough to the experiences children are having, the dilemmas they face as a result of speaking up or the dynamics and roots of abuse.

The conviction that unites these transformative justice movements is that ending violence requires societal transformation. There are four more specific principles at work in these radical anti-violence organizations: (1) the work of ending violence must come from a 'political organizing' rather than a 'social service model'; survivors are the ones who have the power to organize to end violence by engaging in base-building and by developing relationships that already exist and making new ones; (2) this work entails 'humility, experimentation, and sharing of stories and struggles'; (3) the work is political, 'developing alternative governing structures that are not based on violence, domination, and coercion'; (4) these groups recognize that 'all forms of violence are related' and that 'any anti-violence struggle must also be part of a struggle against empire, against capital, against war, against all forms of oppression'. According to these principles, any transformative approach to justice and care must be directly connected to political organizing strategies that seek to change the ways in which our society, our thinking and our world is governed through domination, violence and control.<sup>100</sup> This is anarchist, demilitarizing work.

# 5

## Closing Thoughts

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In the twenty-first century, there are a number of phenomena that, for anarchists, illustrate and demonstrate the brutality and cruelty of nation-states, structures of domination and capitalist (neoliberal) economics. These include war, environmental destruction, mass incarceration, police violence, abuse, homelessness, dispossession, crippling poverty, torture of humans and animals, pandemic, suicide and addiction. The 85 richest people in the world have as much wealth as the poorest half; in a comparatively rich country like the United Kingdom, 1.25 million people, including more than 300,000 children, are destitute, meaning they do not have access to the basic essentials they need to eat, keep clean and stay warm and dry; more African Americans are in the US prison system than were enslaved in 1850; environmental changes are threatening all life on this planet; female and gender-non-conforming people are significantly more likely than others to be victims of sexual and domestic violence; more than 200 million land animals are killed for food every day; and rich nations support military interventions into other countries seemingly in order to exploit their resources (and they also prevent legal exit from those countries). What links these phenomena, from the anarchist point of view, is not that they are violent aberrations or accidental anomalies within a well-intentioned but besieged global system of government and economics, but that they are

the most visible manifestations of the militarized logic of top-down, centralized economic and political administration. Militarism is, they argue, a paradigm of social regulation by means of which power radiates from a central source and operates according to chains of command, legal and illegal violence, imposed homogeneity within rigid categories, enforced obedience, the depiction of the Other as enemy or beneath compassion, and the principle of ‘collateral damage’ (or the ends justify the means).

Militarism is a ‘dominator model’ rather than a ‘partnership model’ of social relations.<sup>1</sup> Militarism itself, they argue, serves the historic needs of colonizing, dominating elite interests who use oppressive hierarchies to discipline people and places. The very foundation of nation-statehood has been shaped, they claim, by violent histories of empire, colonialism, gender and class domination, and brutal practices of exclusion (from prisons to police murders, benefit sanctions to detention centres, border policing to immigration raids). The enormity of suffering threatened by climate catastrophe and the failure to form climate change policies that address the problem are, they argue, rooted in the preferences of power interests acting in defence of capitalism and sovereign states. In the words of critical environmental writer Robert Albritton, ‘To a large extent, the history of the past 40 years is a chronicle of ethical, political, and economic regression and wasted time that could have been devoted to the advancing of human and environmental flourishing.’<sup>2</sup> In many cases, the losses incurred during this time are irreversible and irredeemable. So what might we do now?

In the context of the catalogue of perceived dominations and frustrations, anarchism seeks to demilitarize our lives at a granular level. Rethinking our relationships may in fact be the only power that most people have in this context. The consideration of the other as a subject with interests that are worth valuing, defending and promoting may be, argue the anarchists, the only route through the crisis we face. This entails connecting to enemies, to people we disagree with and to any being or creature we may have deemed unworthy, undeserving or unimportant (including ourselves or parts of ourselves). These connections may lead to conflict (according to the CrimethInc. collective ‘There are more conflicts within

us than between us.<sup>33</sup>). But conflict through dialogue can be dynamic. ‘Our enemies are not human beings,’ writes the CrimethInc. anarchists, ‘but the institutions and routines that estrange us from each other.’ And, as the CrimethInc. writers elaborate, ‘The same fault lines that run through our civilization run through our friendships and our hearts; this is not a clash between people, but between different kinds of relations, different ways of living.’<sup>34</sup> And, remember, anarchists tell us that we have choices about our relationships, choices that give us the best chance of manifesting the kind of societies we want to live in and the kinds of values we want to live with.

The self and relationships between selves are both the subject and the object of anarchist revolutionary concerns. Anarchism, as a daily practice, engages in an ethic of care rather than an ethic of control, and it employs a notion of power (as opposed to domination) as ‘power with’ rather than ‘power over’. This ethic, it is argued, forms the basis for the radical and egalitarian transformation of power that makes the creation of a caring, non-coercive community and economy possible. The fundamental idea here is that it is our bonds with others that keep us safe, not our protection from them or our power over them. Feminist international relations theorist J. Ann Ticker described this kind of power as ‘mutual enablement’ and ‘the human ability to act in concert’.<sup>35</sup> Elise Boulding, one of the founders of the academic discipline of peace and conflict studies, described it as power ‘in relationship’, not in hierarchy.<sup>36</sup> On this basis, anarchists attempt to develop social practices that build or transform relationships along the lines that they hope to manifest on a world-historical plane. This is in the global context of a ‘widening spectrum of pathologies’ that has, in the minds of some commentators ‘drastically reduced the likelihood of the future flourishing of human life’.<sup>37</sup> Through relational processes, they hope, we can act to orientate ourselves and our communities towards the radically democratic goals of care for all beings and care for the whole ecosystem.<sup>38</sup> Precisely at the moment when life on earth is ‘confronting its darkest hours’,<sup>39</sup> these ethics place significant emphasis on listening (as the relational counterpoint to domination, disconnection and discipline) and on practices of non-violent conflict and

dialogue (as the relational embodiment of connection and creativity).

In a thought piece, ‘This is Not the Apocalypse You Were Looking For’, written during the 2020 coronavirus epidemic, UK journalist, columnist and author Laurie Penny mused on the difference between the crisis as it actually unfolded and the competitive ‘all against all’ Hobbesian cultural and media images of catastrophe that we have become used to. ‘For one thing,’ she noted, ‘it’s so relentlessly social.’ The mutual aid groups set up around the country to offer community support and solidarity during the COVID-19 crisis largely revolved around the work of social reproduction. As she wrote, ‘Shit-hits-the-fan escapism – a big part of the alt-right imaginary – never predicted this.’ Contrary to the fantasies expressed in ‘internet back alleys’, where ‘young men excitedly talk about the coming end of civilization’, she observed, when the ‘world-inverting crisis finally showed up, we weren’t given an enemy we could fight with our hands’. What happened was not ‘an instant reversion to muscular state-of-naturism’. Instead, ‘women and carers of all genders quietly exhaust[ed] themselves filling in the gaps, trying to save as many people as possible from physical and mental collapse’. The people on the front lines were healers, carers, cleaners and drivers. As she writes, ‘Emotional and domestic labour have never been part of the grand story men have told themselves about the destiny of the species – not even when they imagine its grave.’<sup>10</sup>

Wider anarchist commentary on the gendered implications of the realities of crisis focus on both the importance of social reproduction (food, cleaning, shelter, care, and emotional support) and the inadequacy of the nuclear family model as a means of living together (‘COVID-19 has revealed that domestic bliss isn’t really all that.’<sup>11</sup>). Feminist anarchism in particular looks to emphasize the fundamental importance of the work of social reproduction and the limitations of a privatized family model for dealing with personal, social and emotional needs. The pandemic highlighted the problems which were already present in our social and welfare services, such as the inadequate provision of medical care, food and benefit systems, and the lack of protections for precariously housed and employed people. It also highlighted the extent

to which we rely on social connections and interactions, and emotional intimacies, beyond the family and the home to meet many of our most fundamental needs.

Further, during the period of lockdown, domestic abuse charities and campaigners worldwide reported surges in calls to helplines and online services. Karen Ingala Smith, the founder of Counting Dead Women, a project that records the killing of women by men in the United Kingdom, identified at least 16 killings between 23 March and 12 April 2020, including those of children. Past figures suggest that the average rate for the time of year is five deaths for the same period. In response to these figures, Smith said, 'I don't believe coronavirus creates violent men. What we're seeing is a window into the levels of abuse that women live with all the time.'<sup>12</sup> The Anarchist Communist Group argued online that the spike in reports of domestic abuse highlighted 'the whole nature of a patriarchal system that has been incorporated into capitalism, and raises questions about the essential nature of families as they exist at present'.<sup>13</sup>

According to feminists, socialists, historians of the commons and anarchists, the privatization of social reproduction has been a key element of capitalist society and the transfer of the shared resources of the commons into the hands of the privately wealthy. Collaborative methods of food provision, childcare and mutual aid were dismantled through the historical process of land enclosure and the accompanying isolation of women from wider social, political and knowledge networks enclosed them in the nuclear family home to provide invisible and individualized domestic labour.<sup>14</sup> As nineteenth-century industrialist, historian and political philosopher Friedrich Engels noted, the confinement of women within the family was a direct result of the development of private property.<sup>15</sup> Alongside the containment of women's lives and labour in the home came the devaluing of the work of social reproduction and the further devaluing of women themselves for their association with that work.

Urban researcher, academic and anarchist blogger Rowan Tallis Milligan has argued that now is 'a good time to be thinking about the historical devaluation of the work of social reproduction', the labour of care, food, emotional support, cleaning and health for children, the elderly and the sick,

that is low paid and has historically been largely feminized and isolated within the home.<sup>16</sup> De-privatizing our everyday lives and creating cooperative forms of reproduction, argues feminist theorist of the commons professor Silvia Federici, could ‘pave the way to a world where care for others can become a creative task rather than a burden’, and ‘also break down the isolation that characterizes the process of our reproduction, creating those solidarity bonds without which our life is an affective desert and we have no social power’.<sup>17</sup>

In the introduction, I suggested that anarchist experiments with alternative forms of thinking about power and organizing collective life may have something unique to offer to a growing community of activists and scholars from across the disciplines of international relations, security studies, community activism and peace studies who are increasingly concerned about interpersonal, domestic and global militarization. If societies and individuals can be militarized, they can also be demilitarized. If war is an invention, then militarism is an invention, and punishment, incarceration, borders, factory farms and all the ways in which violence is normalized are inventions too. Just as societies and communities create space for violent behaviour, they can also create new norms that say that violence is unacceptable using dialogue and consensus-building as means to rehabilitate connective and inclusive social habits and codes.

I framed anarchism’s possible contribution to the project of finding ‘alternative ideas’ to ‘think other ideas with’ as connected to its critical reimagining of security. I said there that an anarchist approach focuses on forms of security that are directly responsive to the needs of those involved. This, I said, is an idea of security that is not built on the fiction that others must be excluded in order for us to be safe, nor on the myth that security depends on compromises to equality or freedom. As academic and activist Chris Rosedale argues, ‘State storytelling depends on the myth that the failure of its security apparatus will lead to insecurity.’ And, he adds, ‘Anarchism subverts precisely this myth.’<sup>18</sup> He writes about the activities of those who attempt to subvert state security by organizing non-hierarchically; educating local communities on police violence and their rights in response; and working to undermine international borders. He argues

that what these activists create in these activities could not correctly be termed ‘insecurity’.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, what we have seen in the work and thinking of anarchists discussed in these chapters, and in these focused debates on security, are attempts to think beyond the idea of security altogether. These writers and activists warn us to be wary of the ways in which logics of security and insecurity are used to discipline and control populations. They suggest that we focus on the insecurities and ‘micropolitics of fear’ that are created in the context of atrophied welfare and health care and employment instability. In this context, a logic of care might be employed to resist the coercive logic of security.<sup>20</sup> In a wider sense, security as a political orientation is infused with projects of mastery (over resources, people and places), categories of being (insider or outsider, belonging or exclusion, safe or dangerous, protected or expendable), and logics of compulsion (fighting, fleeing, obeying, complying, surveillance, registering, reporting). Anarchist politics expresses a desire for community that does not seek to be ‘secured’ in these senses. This rejection of security is in the spirit of ‘The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas’. As Rossdale writes:

To question security, then, demands that we come into question as ourselves. It involves interrogating what it means to feel secure, to experience (and respond to) fear, to reduce the political world to a series of friends and enemies. It demands that we subvert sedimented ideas about how we experience order, safety and stability – values which may work more to legitimate the current state of affairs than to signify any more transcendent quality.<sup>21</sup>

On 23 March 2020, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a UK lockdown to curtail the spread of the virus COVID-19 with the assurance that ‘in this fight we can be in no doubt that each and every one of us is directly enlisted’. During the coronavirus epidemic, national populations were told that the crisis required a military mentality because ‘this is war’, we must ‘mobilize’, ‘fight’, ‘defend’ and ‘attack’ (‘If it really were a war,’ argued Arundhati Roy, ‘then who would be better prepared than the US? If it were not masks

and gloves that its frontline soldiers needed, but guns, smart bombs, bunker busters, submarines, fighter jets and nuclear bombs, would there be a shortage?<sup>22</sup>). What we saw in fact was that public cultures quickly shifted away from militarist mentalities. In the United Kingdom, the initial public response to a crisis framed in a terminology of competition, fighting for survival and necessary collateral damage, was panic buying and individual stockpiling of food, hand sanitizer, canned food, toilet rolls and essential items (even at the risk of inflicting hardship on others). According to University of Sheffield Professor of Accounting Prem Sikka, this is perfectly rational behaviour according to the terms set by forty years of Thatcherite neoliberal social and economic policy.<sup>23</sup>

In the context of the eviscerated commons of social health care, workers' rights and environmental flourishing, it is no wonder that people were terrified about gathering the resources they needed. According to Sikka, neoliberal policies have not brought 'social stability' or 'happiness', and, at the outset of the crisis, they threatened the supply of food and services.<sup>24</sup> As Naomi Klein argues, 'Different ways of organising society light up different parts of ourselves.' So, as she contends, 'If you're in a system you know isn't taking care of people and isn't distributing resources in an equitable way, then the hoarding part of you is going to be lit up.'<sup>25</sup> During the coronavirus crisis, unlearning militarist ways of thinking included unlearning Hobbesian models of competitive survival; unlearning possessive individualism; and unlearning visions of well-being which pit people against each other. This process is ongoing and it includes re-learning to celebrate common resources that cannot be individually owned; re-learning to notice and support mutual aid; re-learning that the fate of the most vulnerable impacts the health and well-being of everyone; and re-learning the importance of genuine non-dominating connection. Some of the ideas and practices described here may be of use in this endeavour.

# Notes

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## Chapter 1 'The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas'

- 1 C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: From Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).
- 2 Robert Michels, *Political Parties – A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books, 2016); E. S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989); Philip Manow, *In the King's Shadow: The Political Anatomy of Democratic Representation* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010).
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