EJIS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Towards anarchist abolitionist futures for violence prevention: Beyond 'counterterrorism'

Priya Dixit 🆔

Department of Political Science, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA, USA
Email: pdixit@vt.edu

Abstract

Recent critical scholarship on terrorism has centred on matters of race, class, and gender regarding how counterterrorism policies are connected to multiple systems of hierarchical power relations. This article builds upon this scholarship and looks towards the future. It engages with understandings of emancipatory futures in critical scholarship on terrorism while drawing upon abolitionist and anarchist political thought to expand understandings of such futures. Anarchist and abolitionist thinking are useful for considering futures beyond the 'global war on terror' (GWOT) because of their anti-state and anti-domination orientations and focus on building alternatives to prevent and manage violence apart from contemporary 'counterterrorism'. After providing an outline of anarchist and abolitionist thought, the article connects these to contemporary examples drawn from the United States and Nepal. In doing so, it theorises and imagines futures for preventing violence and building public security that are linked to anarchist and abolitionist understandings of violence and the state. In contrast to 'power politics' which centres on the state, an anarchist abolitionist approach explores how safety and security can be reimagined and remade in the absence of a state.

Introduction

In May 2023, an unhoused man, Jordan Neely, was murdered on a New York City subway train. While pundits and politicians on either side of the political divide in the United States debated the events surrounding the murder, other subway passengers agreed that Neely was not physically threatening anyone and instead appeared to be in the middle of a mental health crisis.[1] Daniel Penny, a former US marine, put Neely in a chokehold and ultimately killed him. The events were recorded on video by at least one other passenger while other passengers helped Penny restrain Neely on the floor of the subway train.[2] Neely was a Black man; Penny is white. In the immediate aftermath of the killing, Penny was neither arrested nor charged for his actions. It was 11 days later that Penny would eventually be charged and he was bailed out soon after. By June 2024, Penny's crowdsourced defence fund had reached over USD $1million and Penny planned to plead not guilty at his upcoming trial.

[1] Paula Aceves, 'I wasn't thinking that anybody was going to die', *Curbed* (5 May 2023), available at: {https://www.curbed.com/2023/05/bystander-jordan-neely-recording-juan-vasquez-interview.html}.

[2] Emmanuel Felton, Rachel Hatzipanagos, and Ian Duncan, 'After homeless man choked on subway, NYC grapples with treatment of mentally ill', *Washington Post* (12 May 2023), available at: {https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2023/05/05/homeless-chokehold-jordan-neely-nyc/}.

This one particular incident in New York City where one person was murdered is seemingly unconnected to the so-called global war on terror (GWOT) that the United States initiated after the September 2001 attacks in New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania. Apart from the city where these two events of violence occurred, there seems to be very little in common between them; one is a large-scale attack by a non-state armed group and the other is an individual committing violence on a person they determined was a threat. There appears to be even less connection to 'great power politics' in the Neely murder as the actions of individuals in New York City seem unlikely to affect decision-making of great powers.

However, I suggest two aspects of Neely's murder are interconnected with the GWOT. First, despite the US and its allies' framing of global security after September 11, 2001, as the GWOT, it was not terrorism – as officially defined – that continued to threaten the lives of many communities around the world. Indeed, it was (and is) everyday violence such as that which led to the murder of Neely that characterises insecurities for many of us. Feminist scholars and activists have illustrated that domestic violence or violence in the private sphere constitutes a greater threat to public safety than terrorism.[3] Connecting the goals of domestic violence and global terrorism, feminist scholar Pain argues 'the intimate and structural dynamics of terrorism experienced in the home not only reflect violence in the international arena, but have shared foundations and direct points of connection'.[4] Pain frames domestic violence as 'everyday terrorism' and suggests domestic and global terrorism have shared foundations based on psychological impacts on those targeted and a shared goal on the part of perpetrators to 'exert political control through fear'.[5] These everyday violences continue with or without the GWOT and in the presence (or absence) of great power politics.

Second, as historian Kathleen Belew writes regarding men who 'brought the war home' from the Southeast Asia and Central America in the 1970s and 1980s,[6] the decades since September 11, 2001, have been similarly characterised by the US government training a large number of young people to fight in the GWOT. These young people – usually young men – have been trained to commit violence. This was the case for Daniel Penny, who had presumably 'brought the war home' in the form of the training he received, including training on restraining and killing other humans. Penny, more than many other civilians, knew the impact of a chokehold and knew the damage that cutting off air to a person would do. Yet he used a chokehold until he killed another human being.[7] The status of the US military in society is also relevant. The military tops a list of 'respected institutions' in polls about US institutions and it receives high levels of public support and government funding.[8] When one of its former members killed another person in broad daylight, the police did not immediately arrest him or charge him with a crime. The majority of media stories about the incident refer to Penny as 'ex-Marine' or 'former Marine' or 'Marine vet' – all of which are accurate – without mentioning his name. There were no immediate penalties for Penny for killing another member of the community even though the killing occurred in front of many other witnesses.

Of relevance here is also the broader point regarding who gets to use violence and is thus implicitly or explicitly deputised as part of the state and has their violence excused, and who is

---

[3]Annick T. R. Wibben, *Feminist Security Studies: A Narrative Approach* (London: Routledge, 2011), p. 21.

[4]Rachel Pain, 'Everyday terrorism: Connecting domestic violence and global terrorism', *Progress in Human Geography*, 38:4 (2014), pp. 531–50 (p. 531).

[5]Pain, 'Everyday terrorism', p. 531.

[6]Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[7]Aaron Katersky and Kiara Alfonseca, 'Daniel Penny to stand trial in October for NYC subway chokehold death', *ABC News* (20 March 2024), available at: {https://abcnews.go.com/US/daniel-penny-stand-trial-october-nyc-subway-chokehold/story?id=108310019}.

[8]Gallup Inc., 'The crisis of confidence in U.S. institutions', *Gallup.com* (21 July 2022), available at: {https://news.gallup.com/podcast/394904/crisis-confidence-institutions.aspx}. The US federal budget spends more on defence than the budgets of the next 10 countries. Figures from 'U.S. defense spending compared to other countries', available at: {https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison}.

constituted as a target of violence.[9] In other words, even as states claim to pivot away from the GWOT in their policies and priorities, the consequences of the war on terrorism remain central even in seemingly disconnected events such as a subway murder of a young Black man in New York City. Public safety and security are interconnected with counterterrorism policies and the long-term impacts of these policies remain visible. The state remains central especially in discussions of the 'return' of great power politics. This article focuses specifically on this centrality to ask: what if it were not so? While there are differences among abolitionist and anarchist thought and practices regarding their views on violence, they share similarities in not just critiquing state violence, but also proposing and acting towards building alternative mechanisms and practices for managing violence. Indeed, taking anarchist and abolitionist thinking seriously would mean counterterrorism – defined as policies, practices, and laws dealing with 'terrorists'[10] – would be delegitimised and dismantled and alternative forms of providing public safety built.

To address these issues of local and global entanglements of violences and the broader impact on public safety of the GWOT, then, it is useful to focus on terrorism – how it has been conceptualised and managed. In many places terrorism was not central to how violence was conceptualised prior to the GWOT but became a central organising feature around which state actions coalesced during the GWOT. As the GWOT faded in the rhetoric of so-called great powers, its legacies in the form of increased state power and domination, the continued targeting of racialised minorities by security policies, and the constitutions of challengers to the state as 'terrorist' are among some consequences that continue. While critical scholarship on terrorism has illustrated some of these consequences, much of it remains focused on the state and its actions. This is where turning to anarchist and abolitionist thinking and practices can be helpful for considering futures beyond the GWOT because of their emphasis on alternative meanings of violence, anti-state and anti-domination orientations, and focus on building alternatives to prevent and manage violence apart from contemporary 'counterterrorism'.

Anarchists and abolitionists address the question of public safety in two ways: one, they advocate and act for the state or, at the very least some of its key institutions that use violence, to be dismantled. Two, and alongside this, is their call to build different sociopolitical and economic relations that centre on freedom and emancipation. In their view, it is not enough to *end* sources of harm to communities. Instead, the goal is to *transform* social, political, and economic relations that permitted sources of harm to continue in the first place. This notion of building alternatives is especially relevant to consider how violence prevention can occur in the absence of state-led counterterrorism. A main goal of this article is to illustrate how anarchist and abolitionist approaches help explain the ongoing continued racialised, gendered, and global impacts of the 'war on terror', while also providing examples of prefigurative alternatives that provide public safety. Relatedly, anarchist and abolitionist approaches offer ways to think about what the 'end' means when we talk of 'the end of the war on terror'. For anarchists and abolitionists, the end of the war on terror does not mean public safety has been achieved as state-led counterterrorism is unable to lead to public safety.

Anarchist and abolitionist critiques of the state

Critical scholarship on terrorism has focused on state violence and proposed ways of dealing with the violence of the counterterrorist state: one is to reform the state's counterterrorism practices and work within the counterterrorism structures to attempt to enact change. This is the option Toros

---

[9]In Penny's case, leading conservative figures and politicians have expressed support for his actions or refused to condemn the murder. A fundraising site had raised US$2.8 million by 3 May 2023, available at: {https://www.givesendgo.com/daniel_penny}.

[10]Please see 'Introduction' of this special issue for additional discussions of meanings of 'counterterrorism' in the GWOT.

outlines.[11] Another option is to refuse to work with or for state counterterrorism. Taking this view, Jackson writes:

> I would suggest that under these conditions [where state counterterrorism practices have inflicted violence around the world] it is virtually impossible to maintain an ethical commitment to human rights, human welfare, non-violence, and progressive politics – that is, emancipation – while simultaneously participating in an inherently violent and counter-emancipatory regime of counterterrorism. It does not seem possible to work simultaneously for state counterterrorism (which is inherently violent, physically and epistemically, and aimed at maintaining a system of elite domination), and human emancipation.[12]

Jackson's view here is that working for state counterterrorism and for human emancipation are incompatible. This view is similar to anarchist and abolitionist proposals for public safety as they focus on prevention of violence rather than on reforming or improving militarised counterterrorism.

Regarding anarchism, Levy and Adams define anarchism as 'a political concept and a social movement associated with future or here and now politico-social projects without the state'. The state, for anarchists, is the outcome of processes of violence and is itself violent. It is the main agent of domination and oppression and is incapable of providing freedom. It is also incapable of (and uninterested in) reform. Emma Goldman, writing in 1940, said,

> The State, every government whatever its form, character or color – be it absolute or constitutional, monarchy or republic, Fascist, Nazi or Bolshevik – is by its very nature conservative, static, intolerant of change and opposed to it.[13]

She adds, in line with many other anarchists, the state's conservatism becomes reactionary as it continues to hold on to and even expand its power. For anarchists, then, the state has a conservative orientation and refuses to give up its power. This is part of the reason it is incapable of providing security or guaranteeing freedom. By starting with this understanding that state-led or state-guided policies are incapable of providing security and, instead, the nature of the state itself is violent, anarchist-inspired view of the 'war on terror' calls for alternatives for providing security that go beyond the state. This can include community-led violence prevention and building mutual aid and solidarity networks. Dean Spade, an anarchist organiser, defines mutual aid as: 'collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them'. It is such organising to provide for public safety that anarchist approaches can draw attention to.[14] In a similar vein, calls for 'anarchist imagination'[15] and James C. Scott's notion of 'anarchist calisthenics' direct attention to practices that are ongoing beyond the gaze of the state and which often challenge the order and domination of the state's institutions.[16]

---

[11] Harmonie Toros, 'Dialogue, praxis and the state: A response to Richard Jackson', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 9:1 (2016), pp. 126–30.

[12] Richard Jackson, 'To be or not to be policy relevant? Power, emancipation and resistance in CTS research', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 9:1 (2016), pp. 120–5, p. 122.

[13] 'Works of Emma Goldman 1940', available at: {https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1940/individual.htm}.

[14] Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity during This Crisis (and the Next)* (London: Verso, 2020), p. 7.

[15] Carl Levy and Saul Newman (eds), *The Anarchist Imagination: Anarchism Encounters the Humanities and the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2019).

[16] Levy and Newman, *The Anarchist Imagination*, discusses the 'anarchist imagination' in more detail, examining it through various disciplines and topics, including international relations. Benedict Anderson, *Under Three Flags: Anarchism and the Anti-colonial Imagination* (London: Verso, 2005) does a similar task while connecting anarchist and anti-colonial imaginations. Scott's understanding of 'anarchist calisthenics' is as everyday practices that break rules, thus inculcating in the rule-breaker an ethos of small-scale questionings of order and domination. For more on Scott's views on anarchism, please see James C. Scott,

Regarding violence, too, anarchists do not all have the same view but generally agree that the state itself in its practices of government is violent.[17] Anarchists provide psychological and material explanations for state violence with materialist explanations connecting government repression to sociopolitical and economic inequalities. In other words, governments use force to maintain inequalities and continue hierarchies. Government thus is understood in terms of domination.[18] For some classical anarchists like Bakunin, there is no such thing as a "good, just, or virtuous' – in a way *legitimate* – government'.[19] Indeed, for Bakunin, all governments are bad because of their nature, their conditions (of emergence and existence), and their goals. As Jun writes, summarising and quoting Bakunin: 'Indeed, the very concept of government denotes nothing more than arbitrary "violence, oppression, exploitation, and injustice, raised into a system"'.[20] For anarchists, because domination and oppression are to be opposed and because the state – in all its forms – continues to dominate and oppress, it has to be abolished.[21] Adopting an anarchist imagination, then, means conceptualising and working towards public safety from a community-centric grassroots perspective, away from institutionalised state-led policing and counterterrorism.

While anarchists have emphasised the domination aspects of government and the state, anarchist thought (and thinkers) have been criticised for focusing mainly on European contexts and ignoring racialised and gendered global processes that constitute and maintain inequities.[22] This is one of the central differences between anarchism and contemporary abolitionism as abolitionists – especially those who emerged from the Black radical tradition – centre racialised processes in their analyses.[23] By centring how race and racial capitalism are relevant to understanding state violence and state security practices, the abolition movement illustrates how states' security apparatuses are often racist, both in terms of their histories and in contemporary practice. Contemporary abolitionists share anarchists' view about the violent nature of the state and theorise and act to end various state-led institutions that perpetuate racialised and gendered violence, especially policing and incarceration. Similar to anarchism(s), there are multiple understandings of abolition and means to achieve it. That being said, much of contemporary abolitionists draw on the Black radical tradition to theorise and practice a twofold process: abolishing forms of domination and building alternatives to provide security.[24] Ruth Wilson Gilmore clarifies the meaning of abolition as simultaneous dismantling and building.

> [I]nsofar as abolition is imagined only to be absence – overnight erasure – the kneejerk response is, 'that's not possible'. But the failure of imagination rests in missing the fact that abolition isn't just absence … Abolition is a fleshly and material presence of social life lived differently.[25]

Thus, the end of the 'war on terror' and a return to great power politics is not just about redirecting attention away from terrorism, but also offers opportunities to enact 'social life lived differently'.

Two Cheers for Anarchism: Six Easy Pieces on Autonomy, Dignity, and Meaningful Work and Play (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[17] Kinna Ruth, *The Government of No One: The Theory and Practice of Anarchism* (London: Pelican, 2019), p. 22.

[18] Nathan Jun, 'The state', in Carl Levy and Matthew Adams (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Anarchism* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019), pp. 27–45, p. 32.

[19] Bakunin cited in Jun, 'The state', p. 34.

[20] Jun, 'The state', p. 34.

[21] Jun, 'The state', p. 41.

[22] Lorenzo Kom'boa Ervin, William C. Anderson, and Joy James, 'Introduction', in *Anarchism and the Black Revolution: The Definitive Edition* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 1–32, available at: {https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2114fp4.5}. This has Ervin's personal account of how he became part of and redefined anarchism in the United States.

[23] 'Reading List: Abolitionist Futures', *Abolitionist Futures* (n.d.), available at: {https://abolitionistfutures.com/reading-lists}.

[24] Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Abolition Geography: Essays towards Liberation* (London: Verso, 2023); 'Theoretical history of abolition', available at: {https://online.umich.edu/collections/racism-antiracism/short/theoretical-history-abolition/}.

[25] Gilmore, *Abolition Geography*, pp. 350–1.

State violence continues as do impacts of state-led counterterrorism policies, but so do everyday practices of mutual aid and non-state approaches to preventing violence.[26]

Two main areas of connection between anarchism and abolitionism are their views on the state and on violence. On violence, abolitionists point out the state remains powerful and utilises violence for punishment. An example is the prison system. Abolitionists illustrate the unequal impact of mass incarceration upon historically marginalised communities in the United States and globally. In doing so, they illustrate the racialised effects of large-scale incarceration. The United States has a higher rate of incarceration than other industrialised countries.[27] This is connected with another institution – the police. The police are authorised to use force on behalf of the state. In the United States, policing's origins were connected to racism as early police forces were established to surveil and apprehend Black people and immigrants.[28] In the 21st century, US policing is heavily militarised, US police kill more civilians than in other industrialised countries, and 'officers seldom face legal consequences'.[29] By the late 20th century, the US Supreme Court ruled that the police have no legal duty to protect the public.[30] In other words, it is not the job of the US police to provide public safety. Studies have shown that, in the US, militarisation of the police and a subsequent 'warrior mentality' has led to more violence and thus less public safety.[31] If the goal is to build public safety overall, then state-led efforts are not working. Indeed, as anarchists and abolitionists point out, the way states are set up means it is impossible for them to provide public safety for all. As the current counterterrorism strategies shaped by state power are not effective in addressing insecurities, then the structures that permit such states to exist need to be removed and alternatives built. This is at the core of an anarchist and abolitionist-inspired approach to preventing violence.

In an essay titled, 'What abolitionists do', the authors push back against critics of abolition who claim abolition is 'unworkably utopian and therefore not pragmatic'.[32] Instead, Berger et al. emphasise:

> Central to abolitionist work are the many fights for non-reformist reforms – those measures that reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system's inability to solve the crises it creates.[33]

What this means for preventing violence is twofold. One, there has to be continued efforts to reduce and delegitimate state counterterrorism and its dominance in setting the terms of what counts as 'countering terrorism' in the first place. This includes changing the meanings of counterterrorism and reflecting upon questions such as 'what is the end goal of "counterterrorism" policies?' If the goal – as often stated – is to ensure public safety and security, then could other means of achieving these goals be more effective? Two, illuminating the system's inability to solve crises is evident

---

[26]Raquel da Silva and Priya Dixit, 'Countering structural violence through community-led intersectional politics of care: A review of alternative approaches to public safety', Paper presented at Pacifism and Nonviolence Workshop Loughborough University/Zoom (16–18 April 2024).

[27]'Highest to lowest: Prison population total – world prison brief', available at: {https://www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison-population-total}.

[28]Elizabeth K. Hinton, *America on Fire: The Untold History of Police Violence and Black Rebellion since the 1960s* (New York: Liveright, 2021); Alex S. Vitale, *The End of Policing* (London: Verso, 2017).

[29]Amelia Cheatham and Lindsay Maizland, 'What are police like in other countries?', Council on Foreign Relations (29 March 2022), available at: {https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/how-police-compare-different-democracies}. For more data on racism and US policing, please see Human Rights Watch, 'Why more police funding is no route to public safety' (21 June 2022), available at: {https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/21/why-more-police-funding-no-route-public-safety}.

[30]Richard Dahl, 'Do the police have an obligation to protect you?', *FindLaw*, 14 June 2022, available at: {https://www.findlaw.com/legalblogs/law-and-life/do-the-police-have-an-obligation-to-protect-you/}.

[31]Ray Acheson, *Abolishing State Violence: A World beyond Bombs, Borders, and Cages* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2022), p. 27.

[32]Dan Berger, Mariame Kaba, and David Stein, 'What abolitionists do', 24 October 2017, available at: {https://jacobin.com/2017/08/prison-abolition-reform-mass-incarceration}.

[33]Berger, Kaba, and Stein, 'What abolitionists do'.

when critically examining counterterrorism. The policies of the GWOT have contributed not just to millions of deaths but also millions incarcerated, a lack of planning for dealing with refugees and detained persons, children in security camps, a massive global surveillance and policing system, militarised and closed borders, and so on. There is an ongoing climate crisis as well. The current system does not seem capable of addressing these.

Abolitionist calls for transforming society and building something new are echoed by some contemporary anarchists, especially anarchists working within the Black radical tradition. Marquis Bey and other anarchists from historically marginalised backgrounds have engaged with classical anarchism – thought to be a mainly/only white tradition[34] – through the lens of race and racialisation. Bey in *Anarcho-Blackness* responds to the question of what an anarchic future would look like by stating:

> But if anarchism wants to destroy the extant system, and if the extant system dictates what is and can be known, its destruction means that what arises after cannot be known or represented. It will be anarchic possibility, unanticipated and unbeholden to our current tenets of legibility.[35]

The point made here is that, while abolitionist and anarchist practices continually act with the goal of a liberatory future for all, the final form of this future (or even if it will be successful) cannot be predicted.

Means and ends are connected as, for anarchists and abolitionists, abolition is not just a goal to theorise; it is a practical organising strategy that focuses primarily on transformation and building different sociopolitical relations. Angela Davis, discussing abolition, makes this clear: 'And I would say that abolition is not primarily a negative strategy. It's not primarily about dismantling, getting rid of, but it's about reenvisioning. It's about building anew.'[36] For Davis, abolition is an organising strategy that centres on the idea and practices of liberation.[37] An essential part of this praxis is the abolitionist and anarchist understanding of actions as prefigurative. While there are ongoing debates about specific meanings of prefigurative politics, there is general agreement that it refers to living and acting in the present in ways that prefigure the future we would like to see.[38] Anarchist and abolitionist practices illustrate prefiguration that exemplify alternatives to state-led counterterrorism. At the same time, they also maintain focus on how the state remains an obstacle to justice even as the official 'war on terror' ends.

The next section turns to examples from the United States and Nepal to relate the anarchist abolitionist understandings of the state, violence, and liberation in relation to preventing violence. While the connections between the United States and Nepal might seem distant, meanings and provision of 'security' in both areas have been shaped by the GWOT.

---

[34]Historically too, however, this is not fully accurate. There were anarchists and anarchist societies in Japan in the early 20th century. Independence activists in India, Philippines, and other places were inspired by anarchist ideas even if not all would have called themselves anarchists. See, for example, M. P. Acharya and Ole Birk Laursen, *We Are Anarchists: Essays on Anarchism, Pacifism, and the Indian Independence Movement, 1923–1953* (Chico, CA: AK Press, 2019); Anderson, *Under Three Flags*; Nadine Willems, *Ishikawa Sanshirō's Geographical Imagination: Transnational Anarchism and the Reconfiguration of Everyday Life in Early Twentieth-Century Japan* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020). Author Kirwin Shaffer describes how Puerto Rico similarly had a specific cultural tradition that was anarchist in spirit (Kirwin Shaffer, *Black Flag Boricuas: Anarchism, Antiauthoritarianism, and the Left in Puerto Rico 1897–1921* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2020), p. 27).

[35]Marquis Bey, *Anarcho-Blackness: Notes Toward a Black Anarchism* (Chico: AK Press, 2020), p. 72.

[36]Democracy Now!, 'Angela Davis on abolition, calls to defund police, toppled racist statues & voting in 2020 election', 12 June 2020, available at: {https://www.democracynow.org/2020/6/12/angela_davis_on_abolition_calls_to}.

[37]Democracy Now!, 'Angela Davis'.

[38]Uri Gordon, 'Prefigurative politics between ethical practice and absent promise', *Political Studies*, 66:2 (2018), pp. 521–37.

Legacies of the 'global war on terror' and prefigurative practices in Nepal

The GWOT offered states around the world opportunity to utilise the language and framing of 'terrorism' to justify actions against internal and external opponents. The terrorists attacks of September 11, 2001, occurred in the middle of Nepal's decade-long civil war and the government of the time utilised 'war on terror' rhetoric to develop and establish a counterterrorist policy. This was similar to many other states in the international system who designated opponents as 'terrorists' while excluding themselves from the label. Maoists who were in conflict with the state were labelled 'terrorist', a term that does not have a direct translation in Nepali, and state-led actions against Maoists were described as 'countering terrorism'.[39] The Nepali state used this counterterrorism framing to justify using the military against its own people for the first time in Nepal's long history. Despite challenges by the Maoists themselves and by most of the local media regarding the use of 'terrorism' by the state, the state's formulation that Nepal was part of the global 'war on terror' was accepted by Nepal's neighbours and its allies such as the United States. This was a framing that was deliberately adopted and promoted by the Nepali state of the time.[40] The Nepali state then justified the use of violence as well as related repressive measures (surveillance, arrests without charges, etc.) by claiming it was acting against 'terrorism'. Eventually, the king dissolved the parliament and shifted to an absolute monarchy asserting the need for additional authority to deal with 'terrorists'.

Popular protests and a pushback by the people joined by a coalition of opposition parties, especially after the king's move to declare himself the unilateral authority, eventually led to a ceasefire followed by a peace process. After a national election that the Maoists – formerly deemed 'terrorist' by the state – won the majority of seats in, there was hope the peace process would lead to justice for the survivors and families of victims of the war. There were eyewitness accounts of numerous unsanctioned killings by both the state and the Maoists during the conflict and both sides were involved in kidnappings and disappearance of civilians. Over 2,500 people were forcibly disappeared and remain so in 2024, almost 20 years after the official ceasefire.[41]

Connected with Nepal's positioning of itself as part of the GWOT is the related concealment of the effects of the use of force upon Nepal's populations. In other words, the conflict 'ended' with a ceasefire, an election, and a referendum that led to the end of the monarchy and the establishment of a federal republic in Nepal. The process followed traditional understandings of counterterrorism processes after the 'end' of a conflict. Since the official end of the civil war, there have been numerous subsequent elections and political parties have broken up and realigned. While there has been talk of justice and reparations for the families of the disappeared, the state – no matter which party is in power – remains reluctant to engage with the question of what form this justice would take. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Commission of Investigation on Enforced Disappeared Persons were established in 2015 but their actions have not led to reparations or other provisions of justice.[42]

Adopting an anarchist abolitionist standpoint here means acknowledging the role of the state in its involvement in violence in the first place. It also means admitting political parties – once they gain power – are not committed to providing justice or even working with victims and survivors about the form justice could take.[43] From a 'war on terror' perspective, the conflict in Nepal

[39]Priya Dixit, *The State and 'Terrorists' in Nepal and Northern Ireland: The Social Construction of State Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).

[40]Dixit, *State and 'Terrorists'*.

[41]Online Khabar, 'CIEDP releases list of 2,506 persons disappeared during conflict', 17 March 2020, available at:{https://english.onlinekhabar.com/ciedp-releases-list-of-2506-persons-disappeared-during-conflict.html}. Unofficial accounts claim this number is much higher.

[42]Kamal Dev Bhattarai, 'Justice eludes victims of Nepal's civil war' (February 2018), available at: {https://thediplomat.com/2018/02/justice-eludes-victims-of-nepals-civil-war/}.

[43]Local and international human rights groups and diplomats have criticised Nepal's ongoing attempts to delay implementing procedures for justice for victims and survivors of the war with some victims' groups accusing the government of exonerating perpetrators who committed human rights abuses.

'ended' with a peace agreement and subsequent elections. Justice, however, in the form of information about the disappeared and penalties for those who committed violence against civilians, has not occurred, showing the limitations of the 'end of terrorism' formulation. Instead, from an anarchist and abolitionist perspective, the institutions meant to provide safety in communities were the actors causing violence in the first place. Additionally, they are now the same actors prohibiting investigations and penalties about the consequences of the violence.

Some years ago, when I was doing fieldwork for a separate research project in the hills around Gorkha in mid western Nepal, people continued to talk about the people who were 'missing' or 'lost'. The term *harayeko* (lost/missing) was commonly used to describe different groups of young people. One group was youths who went through extensive training and often went into debt for the small chance to join the British Gurkhas (my research at the time). Another included those who went – in the thousands each day – to work in the Middle East and East/Southeast Asia. And then there were the people who disappeared during the long conflict. All these were *harayeko* (lost) and there was general agreement the government was doing nothing to stop young people from leaving their villages to go overseas, whether to fight or to work. The government was not doing much to search for the people who disappeared during the conflict either, or to provide support and reparations to their families. The state was viewed with suspicion with quips about its uselessness shared. It was seen as distant from the people in the villages and with concerns not of theirs.[44] In other words, examining the end of 'terrorism' from places like the mountain villages of Nepal – many of which, during the period of 2001–6 had been considered as 'terrorist' areas by the state – illustrates how security provision has not accompanied the peace agreement.[45]

As with many other examples, 'post-conflict' (or a successful 'counterterrorism' effort) in Nepal meant involving the state in processes where it would have the ability to shape the meanings and outcomes of 'justice'. Justice for the victims and survivors remains elusive.[46] In March 2023, a 'transitional justice bill' was proposed in the parliament but it was opposed by 42 human rights groups for being 'likely to facilitate de-facto amnesty for all those committing gross violations of human rights and international crimes'.[47] The state, therefore, is unable to provide justice for Nepali communities that suffered from violence during the war. This is where an anarchist and abolitionist approach offers possibilities for the future.

Prefigurative potentials of hunger strikes and community memories

From anarchist abolitionist perspectives, alternative ways of acting for community and public safety can be illustrated that work outside of state-led efforts. Because both anarchists and abolitionists are sceptical of the state's role in providing security, they concentrate our gaze on practices that are occurring beyond the state. In Nepal, there is a grassroots-driven process that resists the state's attempts to ignore or render invisible the effects of its and of Maoist violence. For families of victims seeking justice for wartime crimes in Nepal, neither the state nor the international

[44]One interesting observation was how many villagers considered Kathmandu (the capital) to be 'Nepal'. It confused me at first before I realised they used 'Nepal' to refer to Kathmandu while using local area terms to identify themselves. These were areas where the state had minimal presence after the peace agreement, though both Maoists and the government's security forces were active there during the war.

[45]By 'the state' here I mean anyone who is in government at the time. This has often been Maoists and their allies (deemed 'terrorist' during the civil war) who also, despite initial promises, have not done much to address the concerns of the families of the disappeared.

[46]Renee Jeffery, 'Truth commissions and democratic transitions: Neither truth and reconciliation nor democratization in Nepal', *Journal of Human Rights*, 20:3 (2021), pp. 318–38. This news story has narratives from families of some of those who remain missing: Sabrina Dangol, 'Disappearance of justice', *Nepali Times* (27 August 2020), available at: {https://nepalitimes.com/here-now/disappearance-of-justice}.

[47]*Nepali Times*, '"How can we argue that those victims whose loved ones disappeared should simply forget?": Interview with human rights activist Mandira Sharma', *Nepali Times* (21 March 2023), available at: {https://nepalitimes.com/news/how-can-we-argue-that-those-victims-whose-loved-ones-disappeared-should-simply-forget}.

community have been helpful. The state has followed the steps outlined in the current global counterterrorism framework 'post conflict' – it has established commissions, it has drawn up legislation – but most of these practices have not provided the justice survivors are calling for.[48] Instead, we might view victims and survivors' calls for justice as prefigurative politics that disallows silencing of wartime violence by the state and Maoists.[49] By 'prefigurative politics' here I mean political practices that model alternative sociopolitical relations in communities, including illustrating injustices and violence of and by the state.[50]

Prefigurative too are victims' rights advocates' actions that illustrate the state's inability and disinterest in dealing with the consequences of violence. Seventeen years after the official peace agreement, justice for victims and survivors remains elusive even as the state acts in accordance with the conventional 'end of terrorism' process by establishing commissions and laws. Neither the commissions nor the laws have responded to victims' concerns. However, within this context, people continue to protest and draw attention to the state's lack of action – perform anarchist calisthenics – that is, small actions that help them stay in practice to break bigger, unjust rules that may be present in the present or the future.[51] Local communities utilise a series of tactics to call for justice and for economic support, even as the state remains inactive.[52] The case of Ganga Maya Adhikari illustrates the gap between state-centric counterterrorism ways of providing justice and what victims are seeking. Ganga Maya's 17-year-old son was killed by Maoists in 2004. Ganga Maya and her husband, Nanda Prasad, utilised the official channels and asked for an independent investigation of their son's death. The state mostly ignored them. The Adhikaris then participated in sit-ins, wrote letters, and continued asking the government for help in finding out the truth. The state continued to ignore them. Eventually, Ganga Maya and Nanda Prasad went on a hunger strike, a 'fast unto death'. After 334 days of being on a hunger strike, Nanda Prasad Adhikari died in 2014. Ganga Maya continued her hunger strike, suspending it when the state agreed to investigate her son's death and resuming it when the state failed to act.[53]

Two parts of this tragic series of events are relevant to our discussion here: first, Ganga Maya and Nanda Prasad went on a hunger strike not knowing what the outcome of the strikes would be. They acted to create a 'desired future world in the present'[54] in the form of a society where their calls for justice would be heard and responded to. They utilised it as a method of calling for change – as a 'last resort', as Ganga Maya says.[55] The state was unwilling or unable to solve the crisis of injustice it had produced. In terms of prefiguration, the act of hunger striking here also serves as a way the victims of the conflict drive resistance to the state and its (lack of) action,

---

[48] Human Rights Watch, 'Why more police funding is no route to public safety'.

[49] There is ongoing discussion about who is considered a 'victim' in Nepal's post-conflict era with researchers identifying different goals for some victims' rights groups as compared with the goals of communities the victims are from (see Simon Robins, 'Transitional justice as an elite discourse: Human rights practice where the global meets the local in post-conflict Nepal', *Critical Asian Studies*, 44: 1 (2012), pp. 3–30. This article does not enter into that debate except to note the multiplicity of interests of survivors and victims is another aspect the state has disengaged itself from. Overall, as outlined here, the state has been inactive in dealing with the aftermath of violence of the civil war.

[50] For more discussion on prefigurative politics and its role in social change, please see Laura Naegler, '"Goldman-Sachs doesn't care if you raise chicken": The challenges of resistant prefiguration', *Social Movement Studies*, 17:5 (2018), pp. 507–23; Alexander James Brown, 'Translating prefigurative politics: Social networks and rhetorical strategies in the alter-globalisation movement', *The Translator*, 26: 2 (2020), pp. 117–29; Lukę Yates, 'Rethinking prefiguration: Alternatives, micropolitics and goals in social movements', *Social Movement Studies*, 14:1 (2015), pp. 1–21; Paul Raekstad and Sofa Saio Gradin, *Prefigurative Politics: Building Tomorrow Today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020).

[51] Scott, *Two Cheers*.

[52] Simon Robins, 'Towards victim-centred transitional justice: Understanding the needs of families of the disappeared in postconflict Nepal', *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 5:1 (2011), pp. 75–98.

[53] *Nepali Times*, 'Mother on 25th day of hunger strike', *Nepali Times* (15 January 2021), available at: {https://nepalitimes.com/news/mother-on-25th-day-of-hunger-strike}.

[54] Naegler, "Goldman-Sachs', p. 508.

[55] Advocacy Forum Nepal, 'Ganga Maya Adhikari appeal: Reinvestigate my son's murder and ensure my right to truth and justice' (22 September 2021), available at: {https://www.facebook.com/241005274533/posts/ganga-maya-adhikari-appeal-reinvestigate-my-sons-murder-and-ensure-my-right-to-t/10159697257114534/}.

offering alternative politics centred on victims and survivors and their needs. The second relevant point is the use of the human body as a way to disrupt the stabilised and normalised operations of state power. Two elders refused food as their bodies weakened over time. Photographs of Ganga Maya and Nanda Prasad showed them as weak and frail, often connected to intravenous drips or huddled in blankets in a sterile hospital bed. Their bodies became witnesses of state inaction. After Nanda Prasad died, Ganga Maya refused to burn his body or give it last rites as is done in Nepali culture, stating, 'My husband's dead body is still lying in Box No. 4 of Teaching Hospital Mortuary and someday I hope to perform his final rites, after seeing the perpetrators who killed our son, prosecuted and punished.'[56] As of early 2023, his dead body remains in the cold room ('Box No. 4') at a local hospital in Kathmandu. Here, Nanda Prasad's dead body confronted not just the state's inaction, but also the Nepali society who appeared to have moved on from the conflict.

We may seem to have moved away from a discussion about after the GWOT. But this example and the continued lack of justice for the people who were disappeared in Nepal and elsewhere in the GWOT illustrates how state counterterrorism is not interested in providing security and peace, as well as the alternative possibilities alluded to by resistances such as hunger strikes. The Adhikaris' hunger strike is one of a number of actions undertaken by families of victims to call for justice. Victim-run organisations that include victims of state and Maoist violence as members continue to publicise the lack of action by the state and to centre on the lack of justice for victims and survivors. Hunger strikes and the related protests in support of Ganga Maya and other conflict victims brought together a cross-section of supporters that spanned age, genders, and ethnicities, constituting networks outside that of the state-led processes.

Another prefigurative act in Nepal that goes beyond the state is the establishment of various community-driven memorials to victims of the war. These provide acknowledgement of the missing persons even as the state refuses to do so. For example, at one village, there is a water pump with a plaque about the disappeared.[57] Another memorial is described thus:

> In Banke district in south-western Nepal, support groups for the families of missing persons have built a pratichhalaya, a rest area for travellers, to honour the missing. Such memorials serve as a public register of the names of the missing, and also offer the neighbourhood shelter from the rain or sun, or refreshment. 'This is for the whole community,' one family member said. 'When people get thirsty they can drink and maybe they will recall the name of a missing person.' The pratichhalaya celebrates the memory of the missing and acknowledges their families' loss.[58]

If viewed from the top down, from the perspective that expects the states to manage and be part of providing justice for war crimes, Nepal's transitional justice process is a failure. But whatever changes and positive outcomes there have been are due to efforts like the hunger strikes and the community-based memorials that often bypass the state apparatus. The state exists but its actions are less relevant for the makers of these community memorials. Hunger strikes draw attention and publicity; community governance provides opportunities for community-driven discussions and dialogues about the meanings of the civil war. The continued harm of the state – no matter which party (including Maoists) – can be noted herein, as can the uselessness of its (in)actions. Nepal's experiences in the post-conflict, 'end of terrorism' period illustrates that a state might not be needed or useful as it remains mostly absent in rural areas. It also illustrates how the global justice system's insistence on a state-led and state-centric framework for post-conflict justice provision concentrates power in the state while excluding grassroots pressure. In Nepal, the state has not gone

[56] Advocacy Forum Nepal, 'Ganga Maya Adhikari appeal'.

[57] UNESCO, 'Memorial for the victims of enforced disappearance at Khairichandanpur', *CIPDH—UNESCO* (blog), available at: {https://www.cipdh.gob.ar/memorias-situadas/en/lugar-de-memoria/memorial-a-los-desaparecidos-de-khairichandanpur/}.

[58] International Committee of the Red Cross, 'Living with absence: Helping the families of the missing' (1 December 2015), available at: {https://www.icrc.org/en/publication/4152-living-absence-helping-families-missing}.

away but it is being pressured to act otherwise (hunger strikes) or being bypassed (memorials). A similar grassroots effort driving resistance to state violence can be noted in the United States too.

#StopCopCity as prefigurative resistance to militarised legacies of the global war on terror in the United States

A continued legacy of the war on terror within the United States is the implementation of racialised domestic counterterrorism and countering violent extremism policies. These policies ignore white supremacist and far-right threats and disproportionately characterise Muslim and Arab Americans as threats.[59] They also consolidate state power, as in the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security in 2002, the wide-ranging negative effects of the Patriot Act on civil liberties, and increased surveillance and targeting of communities of colour.[60]

An ongoing effect of the development of a large-scale bureaucracy of surveillance and policing has been the increasing criminalisation of (some) protests. The protests calling for racial justice after police killed George Floyd in May 2020 were heavily policed even though the majority of the protests were 'overwhelmingly peaceful'.[61] A *New York Times* review of reports by police and external agencies about policing of the 2020 protests in 14 major US cities found that:

> In city after city, the reports are a damning indictment of police forces that were poorly trained, heavily militarized and stunningly unprepared for the possibility that large numbers of people would surge into the streets.[62]

This use of violence against racial justice protesters is connected with the ongoing militarisation of policing and linked to a so-called warrior mentality among US police.[63] The year 2023 also saw the use of 'terrorism' designation against activists protesting the building of a large-scale police training facility at an important environmental and historical site in Atlanta, Georgia. Police killed an activist in January 2023 and there have been numerous arrests where the protesters have been categorised as 'terrorist', thus constructing these protests as 'terrorism'.[64] A March 2023 report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) states:

[59]Louise Cainkar, 'Racial control under the guise of terror threat: Policing of US Muslim, Arab, and SWANA communities', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 16:1 (2023), pp. 152–75; Nicole Nguyen, *Suspect Communities: Anti-Muslim Racism and the Domestic War on Terror* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Hajar Yazdiha, 'The relational dynamics of racialised policing: Community policing for counterterrorism, suspect communities, and Muslim Americans' provisional belonging', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 49:11 (2023), pp. 2676–97.

[60]American Civil Liberties Union. 'Factsheet: The NYPD Muslim Surveillance Program', available at: {https://www.aclu.org/other/factsheet-nypd-muslim-surveillance-program}; Associated Press, "NYPD Muslim spying led to no leads, terror cases' (21 August 2012), available at: {https://www.ap.org/ap-in-the-news/2012/nypd-muslim-spying-led-to-no-leads-terror-cases}; Priya Dixit, 'Extremists or patriots? Racialisation of countering violent extremism programming in the US', in Alice Martini, Kieran Ford, and Richard Jackson (eds), *Encountering Extremism: Theoretical Issues and Local Challenges* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 279–306.

[61]Erica Chenoweth and Jeremy Pressman, 'Analysis | This summer's Black Lives Matter protesters were overwhelmingly peaceful, our research finds', *Washington Post* (23 October 2020), available at: {https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/10/16/this-summers-black-lives-matter-protesters-were-overwhelming-peaceful-our-research-finds/}.

[62]Kim Barker, Mike Baker, and Ali Watkins, 'In city after city, police mishandled Black Lives Matter protests', *New York Times* (20 March 2021), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/20/us/protests-policing-george-floyd.html}. See also Tobi Thomas, Adam Gabbatt, and Caelainn Barr, 'Nearly 1,000 instances of police brutality recorded in US anti-racism protests', *The Guardian* (29 October 2020), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/oct/29/us-police-brutality-protest}. Also, a 2021 study by *The Guardian*, based on 2020 data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project, found US police were three times as likely to use force against left-wing protests as compared with right-wing/far-right protests, available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/13/us-police-use-of-force-protests-black-lives-matter-far-right}.

[63]Radley Balko, *Rise of the Warrior Cop: The Militarization of America's Police Forces* (New York: Public Affairs, 2021).

[64]AP News, '23 charged with terrorism in Atlanta "Cop City" protest' (6 March 2023), available at: {https://apnews.com/article/atlanta-police-training-site-protest-fire-1ba4362c9337e27ecaf44283fc72fc56}.

Over the past few months, 42 activists have been charged with 'domestic terrorism' under Georgia state law. Their acts of 'terrorism'? Alleged property damage and trespassing while protesting. These prosecutions exemplify a highly problematic trend of both the federal and state government: using domestic terrorism powers to punish dissent.[65]

It should be mentioned here, however, that not all protests have been heavily policed with both the August 2017 far-right march in Charlottesville and the January 2021 attacks on the US Capitol receiving a hands-off approach by law enforcement in comparison to actions against racial and environmental justice protesters. This last is where I'll focus in this section – the militarisation of the police and the ongoing usage of 'terrorism' against racial and environmental justice protests within the United States.

The decades since 9/11 have led to increasing proliferation of weapons of war in the United States as restrictions against high-powered weapons have loosened and the population becomes more armed. One of the key policies that has contributed to increasing militarisation of the US police is directly connected to US counterterrorism abroad. This is the government's expansion of the Law Enforcement Support Office (LESO) 1033 programme. As the website of the Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) ('The Nation's Combat Logistics Support Agency') makes clear,

DLA has the Department of Defense mission of disposing of obsolete/unneeded excess property turned in by U.S. military units around the world. The type of property turned in ranges from military-specific equipment and vehicles to generic office furniture, computers, medical items and shop equipment. DLA Disposition Services, one of DLA's major subordinate commands, disposes of this property in a variety of ways, *including reutilization/transfer to other military components or federal agencies, donating through programs like computers for schools, destruction for scrap metal and resale to the general public.*[66] (italics added)

A significant part of this programme involves transferring weapons and equipment such as high-powered rifles, night vision technology, and armed personnel carriers to police departments throughout the United States. Linked with the Supreme Court judgment that the police do not have a duty to protect civilians or to provide public safety, there is then this large-scale weaponisation of the police. The DLA writes, 'as of June 2020, there are around 8,200 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies from 49 states and four U.S. territories participating in the program.'[67] A CBS report claims, 'Since its inception, more than 11,500 domestic law enforcement agencies have taken part in the 1033 program, receiving more than $7.4 billion in military equipment.'[68] The ACLU, which has been campaigning to end the 1033 programme, describes some of the equipment that is distributed as including:

[65]Sarah Taitz and Shaiba Rather, 'How officials in Georgia are suppressing political protest as 'domestic terrorism' | ACLU' *American Civil Liberties Union* (blog), 24 March 2023, available at: {https://www.aclu.org/news/national-security/how-officials-in-georgia-are-suppressing-political-protest-as-domestic-terrorism}.

[66]Defense Logistics Agency, '1033 program FAQs', available at: {https://www.dla.mil/Disposition-Services/Offers/Law-Enforcement/Program-FAQs/}.

[67]Defense Logistics Agency, '1033 program'.

[68]Juhohn Lee, 'How police militarization became an over $5 billion business coveted by the defense industry', *CNBC* (9 July 2020), available at: {https://www.cnbc.com/2020/07/09/why-police-pay-nothing-for-military-equipment.html}. A list of the agencies that have received equipment is available at: {https://www.themarshallproject.org/mp-graphics/201412-dod/embed.html}. The state I live in, Virginia, has received at least $106,098,284 since the start of the programme (2014 figures). Full data here: available at: {https://github.com/themarshallproject/dod1033}.

combat vehicles, rifles, military helmets, and misleadingly named 'non-'or less-lethal weapons, some of which have featured in police raids and police violence against protesters, including recent protests for racial justice.[69]

As with many programmes that serve to expand the power of the state and its capacity to use violence, the 1033 programme was initially begun as a temporary programme and much of its actions remained secret from the public. This secrecy serves to obscure state power in operation as equipment developed for global counterterrorism is provided – usually free of charge – to domestic law enforcement. Even now, the 1033 programme's full operation remains unclear though we know it remains as US government policy.[70] The 1033 programme is a clear indicator of how the war on terror's counterterrorism policies have extensive global effects but also have ongoing domestic effects that are continuing even after the 'end of the war on terror'. These weapons were initially used against 'terrorists' abroad and are now within the United States, equating the US population with 'terrorists'. This blurs the boundaries of 'counterterrorism' and policing, bringing counterterrorism and counterinsurgency tactics 'back home'.[71] The 'war on terror' thus does not end but continues to impact domestically, further militarising US society and consolidating state power.

While police agencies claim the programme is useful for various public safety reasons, a 2020 research study of 10 years of data from law enforcement agencies in Georgia noted connections between police departments that participated in the 1033 programme and increased police violence:

> A new AJC [*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*] analysis of a decade of records across 651 Georgia police departments and sheriff's offices found departments that took more than $1,000 in 1033 money, on average, fatally shot about four times as many people as those that didn't.[72]

Furthermore, 'only 7% of Georgia's law enforcement agencies received surplus military gear at any time over the 10 years, but those agencies accounted for 17% of the 261 people shot and killed by police'.[73] The militarisation of policing is not just one issue but is connected with a wide range of policing characteristics that provide further power to the state. No-knock raids, qualified immunity, and related lack of penalty for police officers who use violence provide the state with expanded authorisation to continue to use violence. Alongside the ongoing militarisation of US policing is the rise of armed private individuals and groups who use violence in the name of protecting public safety. This is most noticeable in the increasing activities of armed militia. Armed militia have taken over public lands and engaged in armed stand-offs against the state, plotted to kidnap politicians,

[69]Charlotte Lawrence and Cyrus J. O'Brien, 'Federal militarization of law enforcement must end = ACLU', *American Civil Liberties Union* (blog) (12 May 2021), available at: {https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/federal-militarization-of-law-enforcement-must-end}.

[70]A December 2022 newsletter from the National Association of Police Associations congratulates itself from having lobbied to keep the 1033 programme in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023. available at: {https://www.napo.org/files/6116/7121/2482/Washington_Report_-_December_16_2022.pdf}. The National Police Funding Database has more information on the 1033 programme and related programmes that provide military equipment to local police: available at: {https://policefundingdatabase.org/explore-the-database/military-equipment/} Going through the database, I realised the county I live in (population 98,500, dominated by a large public university with a population of approximately 37,000) has a mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicle that costs $733,000.

[71]Stuart Schrader, *Badges without Borders: How Global Counterinsurgency Transformed American Policing* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

[72]Chris Joyner and Nick Thieme, 'Police killings more likely in agencies that get military gear, data shows', *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (8 October 2020), available at: {https://www.ajc.com/news/police-killings-more-likely-in-agencies-that-get-military-gear-data-shows/MBPQ2ZE3XFHR5NIO37BKONOCGI/}.

[73]Joyner and Thieme, 'Police killings'. The authors caution these results do not indicate that the presence of the 1033 equipment *caused* more fatal shootings 'or that the shootings were unjustified but that there is a strong relationship between the two'.

including the governor of Michigan, and participated in the 6 January attack and the Charlottesville march.[74] While the goals of militia movements differ, they aspire to create and maintain a racialised and gendered (with different emphases) hierarchy. In some parts of the United States, armed militia are establishing themselves as non-profits and positioning themselves as providing assistance to law enforcement.[75]

Alongside the militarisation of police and society, however, there is also ongoing resistance to state and state-supported violence. I turn to the example of the #StopCopCity movement to consider its actions as illustrative of prefiguration regarding alternative mode of public safety provision.

The prefigurative potentials in/of #StopCopCity

'Cop City' is the term given by community members and activists to a huge police training facility that the state government is in the process of constructing in the middle of Atlanta. This training facility is expected to cost USD $90 million to build and is located on 300 acres. Of this, 85 acres of currently forested land will be cleared to establish this facility.[76] The facility will have an 'urban training' area for the police, with a site for helicopters to land, a large-scale firing range, and training facilities for riot police and K-9 units. The project is supported by the state government and corporations and led by the Atlanta Police Foundation, which is a private entity funded by corporate supporters. The area where the training facility is to be built has historical and cultural significance as it was the home for Muscogee peoples before they were displaced during European settlement. Part of the area then became the Atlanta Prison Farm, a site central to Atlanta (and United States) history.

During the construction of the police training facility, armed police have routinely 'patrolled' the area and engaged in confrontations with activists who oppose 'Cop City'.[77] In January 2023, police shot and killed an environmental activist, Manuel Paez Terán. Police initially claimed self-defence and said the activist had shot first and wounded an officer, but there is no independent witness of this claim. Furthermore, body camera footage and two autopsies (one official, one commissioned by his family) concluded Terán had no gunpowder residue (one sign of having used a gun) and had been shot more than a dozen times by the police.[78] In protests that followed, many activists have been arrested and the state has charged them with 'domestic terrorism', a charge that can carry a sentence of up to 35 years. This too is an ongoing legacy of the 'war on terror' as state-level terrorism legislation were first established in the 2010s in many US states. The Atlanta police department has also engaged in extensive surveillance of opponents to the training facility, utilising laws established in the GWOT context.[79]

While there has been ongoing state violence and the constitution of opponents of 'Cop City' as 'terrorists', it is the response by communities that I want to focus on here as illustrating prefigurative potential from anarchist abolitionist standpoints. Opposition to the construction of the training facility began at the outset, with community members, environmental and racial justice activists,

[74]Joanna Walters, 'Militia leaders who descended on Charlottesville condemn "rightwing lunatics"'. *The Guardian* (15 August 2017), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/15/charlottesville-militia-free-speech-violence}.

[75]Priya Dixit and Carolyn Gallaher, 'County capture: The role of militias in county governments in central and southside Virginia', *Public Eye Magazine* (10 January 2024), *Political Research Associates*, available at: {https://politicalresearch.org/2024/01/10/county-capture}.

[76]Kiera Alfonseca, 'What is Atlanta's "Cop City" and why are people protesting it?', *ABC News* (6 March 2023), available at: {https://abcnews.go.com/US/atlantas-cop-city-people-protesting/story?id=96716095}.

[77]Adele Hassan and Sean Keenan, 'What is "Cop City"? The Atlanta police center protests explained', *New York Times* (7 March 2023), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/article/cop-city-atlanta-protests.html}.

[78]Amna A. Akbar, 'The fight against Cop City', *Dissent*, 70:2 (2023), pp. 62–70; Timothy Pratt, '"Cop City" activist's official autopsy reveals more than 50 bullet wounds', *The Guardian* (20 April 2023), available at: {https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/20/manuel-paez-teran-autopsy-cop-city}.

[79]LaShawn Hudson, 'Atlanta Police Department surveillance targets "Cop City" opponents', *WABE* (13 August 2024), available at: {https://www.wabe.org/brennan-center-report-atlanta-police-department-surveillance-targets-cop-city-opponents/}.

and organisers occupying part of the area where the training facility is to be constructed. This is a multiracial coalition of different age groups.[80] Camps were set up in the woods near where the facility was to be built. Participants who oppose Cop City utilised tactics such as sit-ins, strategic protests, communicating information about the environmental and cultural harms that would be caused by Cop City, and direct action. Blockades were built to prevent construction access to the forests, one of the largest and oldest urban forests in the United States. Protesters also developed a network of mutual aid and solidarity that explicitly centred on an ethos of care, thus providing an example of ensuring community safety different to militarised policing.[81] Despite this extensive community opposition, the city voted to fund the project.[82]

On the whole, these events could be considered another example of the expansion of state power and control – after all, the project received official approval for funding despite ongoing community opposition. However, it is possible to recognise the #StopCopCity movement as prefiguring politics that prioritise histories, cultures, and the environment and act against police militarisation. There is also prefiguration of illustrating the workings of state power to the public by showing how acting within its framework The protests are ongoing and there is a recognition of the need to continue working beyond the state for a different vision of the future. As author and organiser Micah Herskind writes, the movement that has emerged to #StopCopCity provides an alternative vision of the present and future than that from/of the state:

> It's a struggle over who [Atlanta] is for: the city's corporate and state ruling class actors who have demanded that Cop City be built, or the people of Atlanta who have consistently voiced their opposition and demanded a different vision for the city. It is a fight over who the city belongs to; over who Atlanta is run *for* and who it is run *against*; over who is welcome to live and enjoy life here, and who is expected to simply labor here for low wages and under constant surveillance.[83] (italics in original)

The protests have already provided an example of pluralist solidarity and the development of a social movement. Writing about the tactics of blockade as well as the practices of opposition exhibited by and through the #StopCopCity movement, Chua and Bosworth argue such blockades have a number of functions. These functions include 'refusal', which they describe as, 'Emerging from conflicts over usage, access, territory, or regimes of accumulation and governance, blockades are refusals on both a material and a political register' and a demand for redistribution of resources towards public goods.[84] By providing these emancipatory glimpses of the future in the present, the #StopCopCity movement practises an alternative form of public safety that addresses the harms caused by the state's lack of attention to public services and the by the militarisation of the police.[85]

---

[80]Zak Cheney-Rice, 'Cop City crackdown criminalized the George Floyd protests', *New Yorker Intelligencer* (22 May 2024), available at: {https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/atlanta-cop-city-george-floyd-protesters.html}.

[81]CrimethInc Ex-Workers Collective, 'CrimethInc.: Podcasts: #86: stop Cop City / defend Weelaunee forest, Part Ii: accounts and solidarity: Solidarity statement and first person accounts from Atlanta forest defense', CrimethInc, available at: {https://crimethinc.com/podcasts/the-ex-worker/episodes/86}. This has first-person accounts from participants who describe their experiences and goals/actions for solidarity.

[82]Pamela Kirkland, 'Atlanta city council approves millions in public support for controversial "Cop City" training facility', *CNN* (6 June 2023), available at: {https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/06/us/atlanta-cop-city-council-approves-public-funding/index.html}.

[83]Micah Herskind, 'This is the Atlanta way: A primer on Cop City', *Scalawag* (1 May 2023), available at: {http://scalawagmagazine.org/2023/05/cop-city-atlanta-history-timeline/}.

[84]Charmaine Chua and Kai Bosworth, 'Beyond the chokepoint: Blockades as social struggles', *Antipode* (17 April 2023), available at: {https://doi.org/10.1111/anti.12943}.

[85]Herskind, 'This is the Atlanta way'.

Conclusion: Building anarchist abolitionist practices for public safety

Abolition is about presence, not absence. It's about building life-affirming institutions.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore[86]

These examples illustrate the possibilities of this 'building of institutions' in the wake of the GWOT.[87] They are not fully abolitionist or anarchist as the state remains present in both Nepal and the United States. In both places, however, there are prefigurative practices of institution-building and meaning-making – grassroots protests and remembering in Nepal, mutual aid and solidarity against militarised policing in the United States. Two aspects of anarchist abolitionist practices and theorising can be noted from the examples here: the first is the development of anarchist abolitionist imaginaries such that different forms of prefigurative politics that work towards public safety and justice can be seen. The ongoing inadequacies of the state in providing basic security and dealing with post-conflict issues, the blurring of global counterterrorism and domestic policing, and the continuation of state violence from before the 'war on terror' can be identified. The second is related to the first – an understanding that the state has to be dismantled and/or sidelined and a new form of sociopolitical organisation (or organisations) built for public safety. This is what abolition entails. Counterterrorism itself is then unneeded; instead, the focus is on developing a broader set of practices to prevent violence and to provide community safety. Here, we can note practices such as hunger strikes, community memorials in Nepal, and mutual aid-based protests in the United States as prefigurative even in the dominating (and often violent) presence of the state and its institutions.

Returning to the killing described at the start of this article, we can imagine a different set of events that centres on solidarity and care. Subway passengers saw an individual in difficulty and were concerned about his health. They knew of services that would provide him with assistance and called these services. They stayed with the individual until such services arrived and help was given.[88] Or, even without such response, we could imagine an everyday where people left Neely alone. They noted his agitation but also noted he had no weapons and had not directly threatened anyone. They went on with their lives and Neely went on with his. Both these responses – the first rather than the second – imagine ourselves in relation to each other as neighbours, as members of a broader community of care as (many) anarchists and abolitionists propose. The first response, especially, imagines a present where social services in New York have not been affected in the context of increased austerity and the war on terror. They imagine a New York where law enforcement does not receive more funding than that of many other countries as a whole.[89] And, as *New York Times* columnist Jamelle Bouie pointed out, they imagine an 'us' who have not 'demonized' homeless people. This would be an 'us' who, even if they were made uncomfortable by Neely's actions and words, recognised as Bouie clearly adds, 'fear is not a license to use force'.[90]

[86]Quoted in *Abolition*. 'If You're New to Abolition: Study Group Guide', 25 June 2020, available at: {https://abolitionjournal.org/studyguide/}.

[87]The legacy of the war on terror is part of the global security practices now. See, for example, Heath-Kelly and Haspeslagh's contributions in this special issue.

[88]This article makes a similar point and points out the person who was vulnerable – unhoused, facing a mental health crisis, hungry, and thirsty – was Mr Neely. Albert Burneko, 'Jordan Neely just needed some help', *Defector* (3 May 2023), available at: {https://defector.com/jordan-neely-just-needed-some-help}.

[89]According to the Citizens Budget Commission, a nonpartisan think-tank, the NYPD budget for 2023 was over USD $5 billion (available at: {https://cbcny.org/research/six-fast-facts-about-nypds-preliminary-fy2023-budget}.

[90]Jamelle Bouie, 'Opinion: The demonization of the homeless has vile consequences', *New York Times* (6 May 2023), available at: {https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/06/opinion/columnists/homeless-jordan-neely.html}.

Priya Dixit's research interests are critical security studies (especially terrorism), qualitative research methodologies (especially discourse analysis and ethnography), and postcolonial theory in international relations. Currently, Priya is researching far-right violent extremism in the United States. Some of this research was published in *Race, Popular Culture, and Far-Right Extremism in the United States* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022). A related interest is US foreign policy/national security and its conceptualisation of threats, specifically the use of terrorism by states.