

Interview

Anarchist Criminology

On the State Bias in Criminology

Mark Seis and Stanislav Vysotsky Interviewed by Václav Walach

Anarchist criminology is not a new approach to the critical study of harm, crime, and criminalization, but it has been largely overlooked and gained serious impetus only in recent years. This interview features two scholars who have been at the forefront of this development. Mark Seis co-edited the volumes *Contemporary Anarchist Criminology* (Nocella, Seis and Shantz 2018) and *Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology* (Nocella, Seis, and Shantz 2020), which bring together some of the key texts that utilize anarchist theorizing to challenge the status quo, both in society and in criminology. Stanislav Vysotsky has recently published his book *American Antifa* (Vysotsky 2021), where he explores, inter alia, militant antifascism as informal policing. The interview emerged somewhat unconventionally. Stanislav was interviewed first on March 22, 2021. The resulting transcript was edited and sent to Mark who was unable to join the online meeting due to technical difficulties. I received his answers on May 24. The following is a slightly shortened and edited version of the interview.

Václav Walach: Anarchist criminology – to some this sounds as a surprising combination. Why are some people so amazed when hearing about anarchist criminology?

Stanislav Vysotsky: Probably because people associate anarchism with not the actual philosophy and the tenets of anarchism but with nihilism. They see anarchism as fundamental lawlessness and as the Hobbesian war of all against all, where without law we are simply free to engage in any acts of anti-social harm that we feel like engaging in. I run into this all the time, teaching criminological theory. Just last week we covered anarchist criminology. My students had this assignment where every week they have to find an example in popular culture of the concepts from the paradigm we are covering. In anarchist criminology, what I got were literally dozens of essays on the *Purge* (DeMonaco 2013), a film about how people will start killing each other if law is suspended for 12 hours. This is what people understand as anarchism: violence and chaos.

For anarchists, such misunderstanding has been a challenge since time immemorial. Since they started using the label, they have had to argue against the way in which the philosophy is constructed by dominant forces in the society.

Kropotkin argued that the people, institutions, and structures that have power in society have a reason to label this variant of socialism as a destructive force; anarchism is fundamentally antithetical to the world they envision, a world of hierarchy and domination. Anarchists offer a vision based on liberation and egalitarianism, which is, by the way, not so foreign to people. As anthropologists such as David Graeber have pointed out, we already live our lives along some anarchist principles. So, there is an appeal, and that appeal is dangerous and scary for people who maintain power, hierarchy, and control. It is no surprise that these people stigmatize the beliefs and movements that are going to challenge that.

And that is why anarchist criminology seems oxymoronic to people, because they cannot understand how a philosophy that they have spent their entire lives being taught represents chaos and disorder and Hobbesian violence is a philosophy that has anything to say about crime, criminality, and criminal justice; that is not this *Purge*-like do-what-you-like sort of approach.

Mark Seis: I would agree with Stanislav's explanation of why anarchist criminology seems oxymoronic to many people. I would add that his explanation demonstrates just how much institutional energy is expended on legitimizing the power of states while undermining the legitimacy of human agency to organize for mutual aid and do so as free agents without coercion and compulsion. What amazed me most about students when teaching anarchism was their inability to feel comfortable questioning the legitimacy of monopolized violence committed everyday by the state, starting with the main functions of the criminal justice system.

Nobody says it better than Proudhon: 'To be governed is to be, at every wheel and turn and every movement, noted, registered, inventoried, priced, stamped, rated, appraised, levied, patented, licensed, authorized, annotated, admonished, thwarted, reformed, overhauled and corrected. It is to be, on the pretext of public usefulness and in the name of the general interest, taxed, exercised, ransomed, exploited, monopolized, brow-beaten, pressured, bamboozled and robbed: then at the slightest sign of resistance, at the first murmur of complaint, repressed, fined, vilified (...) hounded, reprimanded, knocked senseless, disarmed ... imprisoned, shot, mown down, tried, convicted, deported (...)' (Proudhon 2005, 97). How much institutional effort is spent on infantilizing full-grown adults to conform to the dictates of a handful of ambitious, corrupt, and self-interested politicians?

As noted by Stanislav, David Graeber was fond of pointing out the many ways that humans organize effortlessly because of our social and cooperative nature to do so. I used to ask my students how they negotiate who is the first to go when they all come to a four way stop sign at the same time? How do people know how to regulate distribution of resources like food and beverages at social gatherings where there is no state presence? Why are people generally gracious, generous, and kind in situations where there is no compulsion to be so? How do people negotiate the trials and tribulations of everyday living without agents of the state

present? Once people begin to think about what guides their behaviors to cooperate freely around principles of direct democracy and egalitarianism, they begin to realize that they are practicing anarchism consciously or unconsciously.

VW: What is anarchist criminology then? How would you describe it?

SV: As I see it, much of the anarchist approach to criminology and criminal justice is aligned with the project of critical criminology. There are certainly overlaps between anarchist and Marxist criminology because they have similar socialist origins and critiques of capitalism as a criminogenic system. That is to say, the fundamental inequality of capitalism creates the necessity for people to engage in survival strategies that then become criminalized, and this then acts as a further element of oppression. Jeff Ferrell made this point more recently, echoing Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman who were making the same argument about criminogenic capitalism.

But anarchists emphasize that hierarchy is itself criminogenic. If societal values are based on ability to assert control over others, then we are constantly going to be engaging in some sort of activity that asserts power and control. Some of those activities are criminalized, even in anarchist societies. Anarchists would not envision a society where there are free-for-all assaults and sexual violence. Maybe they would not use the term ‘crime’; but in the Durkheimian sense it would be a crime. So, anarchist theory contributes to the understanding of how power is creating harm.

And obviously the anarchist critique of the state more broadly goes all the way back to Proudhon, to the way in which the state imposes arbitrarily the idea of criminality and criminalization and simultaneously provides protection for certain kinds of entities that construct harm versus punishing harms created by people who lack power in this society.

MS: Again, I would agree with most of Stanislav’s comments about some of the similarities between Marxist criminology, critical criminology, and anarchist criminology. I would like to add that in some ways, however, Marxist and critical criminologists have been somewhat dismissive of anarchist criminology, especially when it comes to acknowledging the critique of state power, whether democratic socialist or otherwise. As Lord Acton stated so eloquently ‘Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely’, regardless of who holds the reins. More state law and regulation, regardless of ideological orientation, have never solved the problems of individuals and cultural differences. Empathy, compassion, communication, reconciliation, and restoration have done much more for bringing peace to conflictual situations. Our capacity to utilize these attributes as free associating individuals is revolutionary in scope. What we lack is the imagination to make our world a peaceful and pleasant place to exist.

With respect to the difference between anarchist criminologists and Marxist criminologists, I am prompted to mention the controversy between Bakunin and Marx regarding the Paris Commune and its need for a replacement state when revolutionary actions have dismantled one. Bakunin points out this glaring Marxist contradiction of a democratic state: ‘If their State is indeed a “people’s State” on what grounds would it be abolished? And if, on the other hand, its abolition is necessary for real emancipation of the people, how could it be described as a “people’s State”?’ (Bakunin 2005: 196). In short, much of critical and Marxist criminology while critically valuable relies on state sanctioned institutional power to make things right.

Contemporary Anarchist Criminology (Nocella, Seis and Shantz 2018) and *Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology* (Nocella, Seis and Shantz 2020) were conceived to counteract the state bias in criminology. Anarchism’s distrust of institutional hierarchical governmental power and socially organized patriarchal hierarchy allows for alternative visions of organization. When Anthony Nocella, Jeff Shantz and I first conceived the idea for the book it was going to include both contemporary and classical criminological anarchists’ perspectives, but for practical reasons of size, we ended up working our ideas into two books. *Classic Writings* made sense because anarchists were among the first to not only critique criminal justice state power but to critique power in general. A pure critique of power is something missing in criminology with respect to the inherent disciplinary bias that states represent the inevitable outcome of human nature and serve as the neutral baseline rules for society. Humans lived without states for most of their time on this planet. *Classic Writings* was designed to critically demonstrate the historical forces that normalized in the minds of contemporary people the perceived need for state power.

Contemporary Anarchist Criminology was designed to demonstrate strategies to rethink state and patriarchal hierarchical solutions to problems of human conflict. Of course, many of these solutions entail the dissolution of capitalism and replacing it with forms of mutual aid socialism and other cooperative collective styled mutual aid organizations without grand designs. Anarchist solutions needs to be fluid and loosely organized to meet ever changing societal needs.

VW: Stanislav, you mentioned Jeff Ferrell and I know he had an impact on you as an anarchist criminologist. Can you tell us more about it? Who else has inspired you in this regard?

SV: What I find truly inspiring about Ferrell, my friend and mentor, is that he was very open about his anarchism, and yet he had managed to achieve a fair amount of scholarly success and recognition in academia. Just compare this to the experience of Howard J. Ehrlich, probably the best-known anarchist sociologist and another mentor of mine, who was ultimately denied tenure because of his ideological and theoretical orientation and ended up being primarily an

independent scholar throughout much of his life. Ferrell in this sense has gotten very lucky and his success has certainly paved the way for other people who wanted to be explicit about their ideological position.

But Ferrell has also inspired me through his influential essay ‘Against the Law’ (Ferrell 1998), which outlines the broad contours of anarchist criminology, and his approach to methodology. He has done a lot of ethnographic work and in particular auto-ethnographic work, so he has lived his life and has been able to use his life experience to make wider arguments and points about not just criminology, crime, and deviance but larger, wider social dynamics. And that is something that I aspire to, ultimately.

I believe that my work in criminology and sociology is an extension of my political orientation. I view it as a means of not just critiquing the existing structures and the existing systems of the society we live in, but also as a means of trying to think about the kind of structures that we want to have in a society built in a non-hierarchical manner. Social theory has been really informative for me to understand the feasibility of an anarchist society and the way in which people can build an anarchist society. That drives a lot of how I think about doing research.

I also draw from the anarchist criminological work of Hal Pepinsky, Larry Tifft and Dennis Sullivan. Pepinsky argued that any criminal justice system based on processes of deployment of power and control is going to be fundamentally unjust and fundamentally unfair. If we are to have justice, we must have a just society. So, he ultimately makes the argument for radical transformation to anarchist communism. That is a crucial element and one that in many ways is fundamental to an anarchist criminology: some sort of future vision must be included, as well as practices that can realize such a vision.

This is where Tifft and Sullivan come in because they have also critiqued the fundamental injustice and unfairness of the law. Tifft famously refers to criminal justice and the state as being a legitimate protection racket, drawing attention to the fact that the state can take anything from people, from fines to property, to the means of survival, to their lives. And, again, Tifft and Sullivan make the argument that there must be some sort of functional alternative that we can create, that can transform the way in which we think of those processes. They theorize restorative justice approach that would radically transform our understanding of how we are to address the wrongs and harms that do come from people committing what we understand to be crime.

VW: Mark, can you tell us about your inspirations in anarchist criminology? Which authors would you recommend to those who would like to know more about this approach?

MS: Unlike Stanislav, I cannot say I was so lucky to have Jeff Ferrell as my mentor. I had a mentor named W. Byron ‘Casey’ Groves as an undergraduate who inspired me in radical approaches to criminology. In fact, Casey co-authored the first two editions of *A Primer in Radical Criminology* (Lynch and Groves 1989). Casey left the earth much too early, but his passion for social justice lived on through me and others who were lucky enough to have him as a mentor. Casey’s critique was Marxist, however. I was also inspired by the work of Hal Pepinsky, especially his anarchist leanings and peacekeeping approaches to criminology. I acquired my interest in anarchism through punk rock. I taught myself anarchism by reading everything on the subject that I could get a hold of until I was able to design my first college class titled *No Gods, No Masters*, borrowing from a widely used anarchist slogan.

Reading the classics is really important to get a proper historical foundation for understanding the conflicts that brought anarchism into serious consideration: William Godwin, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman, to name a few. With respect to contemporary writers, I would recommend everything by David Graeber, John Zerzan, Frank Harrison, Robert Paul Wolff, the *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader* by Dark Star Collective (2012), James Scott, Sam Mbah and I. E. Igariwey, some Noam Chomsky, Murray Bookchin and there are many others I am not thinking of right now.

VW: *Stanislav associated anarchist criminology with restorative justice. But is restorative justice, the way in which it has been implemented so far, really the change that anarchists would like to see? To me, restorative justice seems to be more of a reform initiative, well within the state parameters, rather than anything else.*

SV: Restorative justice can be fundamentally reconstructive, but it has to be paired with an abolitionist approach, it has to be something more than simply a structural reform. And, certainly, people have started to move away from the use of the term ‘restorative justice’ to ‘transformative justice’. So, there is a fundamental rethinking of the very notions of how we understand crime, criminality, what it means to be labeled or identified as criminal, what it means to experience life as a victim, what it means to think about community as a whole.

One of the things that Tifft and Sullivan talk about is that restorative justice has to be located within a context of wider community and a wider kind of understanding of community. And that is *the* essential anarchist component to their vision of restorative justice: if it is simply a practice that we use in order to change the levels and practice of penalties in the existing criminal justice system, we are missing that notion of community both in terms of community inputs and in terms of the way in which the people are involved, whether they are identified

as the perpetrator or the victim. If it is simply atomized individuals, then we are just reproducing the existing system, one that makes us live as atomized individuals. So, it must be done in some community context.

And here we also increasingly see practices of Indigenous criminology where there is this desire to create transformative processes that do involve the perpetrators, victims, and wider community context as an alternative to existing colonial systems of law and criminal justice. And this is in many ways informative and inspirational to thinking about what those transformative practices can look like.

MS: I would echo Stanislav's comments here as well. Ultimately, transformative justice is to a large degree abolitionist in nature with respect to making justice about human relationships within a community of interdependent human beings. The battle to bring the process of justice back to the people is fundamental in weakening the monopoly hold that the state has on normalizing and enforcing injustices and inequalities in the current moral order. I served on a restorative justice board titled *Braided River* for many years, and the struggle with the state to release the most minor offenses for restorative justice resolutions proved to be a Sisyphean task. There is little doubt that transformative justice is at its core an example of anarchist principles at work. But when it is an addendum to be used at the discretion of the state, it is, as you suggest, little more than a reform initiative practiced within state parameters.

Many Indigenous peoples utilized restorative justice practices to keep their stateless societies functioning with some semblance of peaceable order. Any mutual aid-based community strategies which seek to mediate and restore freely associating individual relationships involving conflicts between humans is anarchist in principle. What taints this process is state involvement and oversight.

VW: *There is a chapter on political crime in the seventh edition of Steven E. Barkan's Criminology (2017), which includes both crimes by the government and against it. Most criminological textbooks are fine with distinguishing between violent crime, property crime, and white-collar or corporate crime, etc. How would you interpret this inclusion? Is it a sign of the time, or what is it?*

SV: There has certainly been a considerate effort to interrogate the ways in which policing, and our understanding of protest is developed in criminology. Particularly because classical criminological model or orthodox criminological theories are terrible at understanding and explaining protests. Not just in terms of their attempts to explain motivations for protest because they fall on a lot of explanations that would have been discredited in social movement theory, but also because classical and orthodox criminology would ultimately side with the repressive tendencies and repressive elements of protest. So, critical criminologists have been increasingly engaging in the issue of protest policing and even in protest

tactics, in the way in which protestors are engaging in disruption as a creative means of dissent. I think about some of the work of Luis Fernandez in this area and in writing about protest especially from the activist perspective.

From my perspective, this is a great development in the way in which we think about challenging conventional notions of crime and criminality and especially as we are moving into an era of mobilization, certainly in the US and North America, there are issues of police violence and police killings, particularly over-representation of African American, Indigenous and Latinx people in police killings. We are going to see sustained protest and mobilization around these issues in the coming future. We criminologists really need to engage with protest and engage in the analysis of protest that is understanding and sensitive to the experiences of protestors rather than taking at face value the claims of the criminal justice system, of the law enforcement, and of the state more broadly. So, any kind of critical engagement with understanding of protest and political activity should definitely be applauded.

MS: I would echo Stanislav's comments and fully agree with the need for criminology to recognize the significance of political activity and protest. This conversation reminds me of an excellent book I used to use titled *State Crime: Governments, Violence and Corruption* by Penny Green and Tony Ward (2004). The book did an excellent job of highlighting state crimes, ranging from basic corruption to police violence, to state terrorism, to torture, to war crimes, to political economy, to genocide, to natural disasters. The entire text was dedicated to crimes committed by the state often representing how states repeatedly violate their own laws. I would also add environmental crime here as well. States are notorious for violating their own environmental laws, especially the military and the environmental agencies designed to enforce environmental laws. I wrote a chapter in a book edited by Marry Clifford and Terry Edwards (2011) titled *Environmental Crime* that explores the scope and complexity of environmental offenders, including federal, state, and local governments (Seis 2011). It is simply unimaginable that anyone teaching criminology does not explore in some detail the hypocrisy of states when it comes to committing crimes, especially biocide, ethnocide, and genocide.

VW: Good examples of the criminalization of political dissent are climate justice movement and anti-fascist movement. How can anarchist criminology contribute to our understanding of the criminalization dynamics in these cases? And why are there attempts to criminalize these movements in the first place?

MS: I will comment here on the criminalization of the environmental movement in general. The FBI has been waging a war on radical environmental groups in the US going back to the early 1980s with the rise of *Earth First!* With a host of

new environmental laws created in the 1970s by the US government to address declining air quality, water quality, land quality, forest quality, ocean quality, and wildlife habitation, it seemed a new consciousness was on the rise. For many people it was, but for corporate and state actors not so much. Most of the new legislation was ignored or was slow to be enforced, creating a level of frustration among many stalwarts and advocates of the new environmental legislation. This frustration translated into a need for direct action, especially when it came to issues of logging, mining, grazing, and other destructive uses of public lands. With state capitulation and agency capture to corporate needs and wants, environmental laws took a back seat to economic growth. Groups like *Earth First!* began a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience aimed at bringing attention to the wanton destruction of our ecosystems. These activities included tree protests, tree spiking, sit-ins, occupations, tree sits, and some heavy equipment property destruction. The movement was adamantly opposed to harm or violence toward humans and nonhuman life. With further environmental degradation brought on by the emphasis on neoliberal capitalism, the radical environmental movement escalated its tactics with the rise of the Earth Liberation Front and the Animal Liberation Front in the 90s continuing into the 21st century which began with the same ethic of no harm to human and nonhuman life, but destruction of property used to commit environmental violence was fair game. This led to conflagrations of some buildings and the freeing of captive animals used for experimentation, clothing, and other nefarious ends. The federal government immediately seized on this activity, labeling it ‘eco terrorism’ and classifying it on the same level as non-state actor terrorism, with some right-wing politicians equating ecotage with the likes of Al-Qaeda. At one time, the FBI labeled eco terrorism the number one domestic threat to the US.

Anthony Nocella, Sean Parsons, Amber George, and Stephanie Eccles (2019) edited a book titled *A Historical Scholarly Collection of Writings on Earth Liberation Front*, exploring this movement in detail. I wrote a chapter in this book, exploring the desperation of organizations like ELF using their communiques which were extracted from Jay Hasbrouck’s (2005) dissertation *Primitive Dissidents: Earth Liberation Front and the Making of a Radical Anthropology* to understand their grievances and actions aimed at raising awareness of the nihilism inherent in government ineptitude in dealing with the environmental crisis we are encountering. It only stands to reason from the perspective of the economic interests of growing the state that it would protect the interests of corporations over the interests of people to live in a healthy environment and to criminalize people’s attempts to end this violence to human and nonhuman life. Every attempt to counter neoliberal capitalism’s perceived right to profit off the destruction of the planet will certainly involve criminalization of counter hegemonic movements designed to preserve the integrity of our environment, especially if they hurt the bottom line.

It is interesting to note Trump’s condemnation of the climate activist Greta Thunberg. Thunberg, who was named Time Magazine’s person of the year, was

openly mocked by Trump, who claimed she had anger management issues. Trump said something to the effect that ‘she should chill and watch a good old-fashioned movie with a friend.’ Here is a young woman fighting to make people aware of the catastrophic nature of climate change to her and her generation’s future. Climate change caused by global warming is already being experienced on every continent on our planet, and she is patronized by a walking buffoon whose understanding of the scope of this problem is that of an infant. With young people inspiring the climate change movement you can bet with certainty that there are unwanted state eyes on their evolution as activists.

SV: I touched upon this in a brief claim on the criminalization of antifascism that I made towards the end of my book *American Antifa* (Vysotsky 2021). The role of anarchist theory in understanding the criminalization of protest is really to highlight the ways in which the protests that are criminalized and repressed are motivated by issues that are fundamentally challenging to the dominant order and to dominant structures and systems. And that the people who are engaging in those protests are members of historically subordinated and marginalized groups and people who are in solidarity with these groups. This is what is threatening about these protests, what generates the repression.

We have certainly seen this in the asymmetrical response of law enforcement to far-right protests versus left-wing protests in the US over the last year. Protest by left-oriented or critical protestors aligned with Black Lives Matter were three times more likely to be repressed than protest by right-wing actors, anti-mask protests and other Covid-related protest. So, this is crucial to understanding the way in which the state acts in the interest of domination and hierarchy, subordinating certain categories of people.

Further, criminalization is not just what the state does, it has a social movement component. There has been a considered campaign on the far right to criminalize Antifa and antifascism more generally. They have had limited success with people from the political center or even on the left. You could see think pieces by those people trying to delegitimize and critique antifascist protest as just rioting, vandalism, and violence. But they have been very successful within the right-wing media and political discourse. As a result, Antifa becomes a shorthand on the right with rioter, with criminal political violence. These criminalization efforts may indeed be very cynical; just think of how some people on the far right tried to divert the attention of law enforcement and the repressive capacity of the state from their movements and activities by trying to claim that it was really agents provocateurs from Antifa who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

VW: American Antifa conceptualizes antifascism as self-defense to fascism. The use of violence and other tactics then can be seen as the form of informal policing that is practiced by those who, for a variety of reasons, do not rely on the state for protection. How is this justified?

SV: Militant antifascists, in particular those who are willing to use force, make two arguments. The first argument is one that hinges on the fact that the fascist or far-right movements are built on violence, they seek to deploy violence both as a means and as an end. So, from this ideological perspective a non-violent response is effectively an invitation to become victimized. Fascists believe that if they cannot win by argument, they can revert to the use of force; and to use force against an opponent that does not resist them, ultimately means that the opponent will lose. The antifascist use of violence is precisely a reaction to this way of thinking. If there are no practical means of resisting that force through non-violence, then that force needs to be met with some sort of counterforce in order to resist them. Militant antifascists believe that if one cannot argue or reason away something that is going to assert its domination through violence, it has to be defeated through counter-violence.

The other thing that we can see – whether it is through historical research by people like Nigel Copsey or the admission of fascists like Richard Spencer – is that the use of force works. It demobilizes fascist movements because it raises the costs of participation. These costs may include actual physical harm or the literal costs when someone like Spencer was having to come up with hundreds of thousands of dollars for security for his events, and other far-right actors had to come up with hundreds of thousands of dollars in security costs to their events. They start having fewer and fewer events. Milo Yiannopoulos who notoriously caused the Berkeley protests that first put Antifa in the public consciousness in 2017 does not do speeches anymore. He is fighting for attention at this point. So, it seems that the use of force works.

VW: Mark, you focus on environmental degradation in your research. Can you tell us more about how anarchist criminology contributes to its analysis?

MS: I think anarchism's critical capacity to understand the destructive nature of power greatly aids us in understanding the evolution and structural nature of environmental degradation in several ways. Serious environmental degradation really begins with the rise of sedentary agriculture, which creates a huge shift in the way humans interact with nature and each other. It is a scientific fact, continuously being confirmed in the anthropological and environmental literature,

that indigenous gathering/hunting cultures were far more sustainable than agricultural societies. This begs the question why?

Agricultural society creates a binary between civilized (agricultural) and primitive (gathering/hunting) and a binary between tame nature and wild nature. These binary divisions lead to a host of changes unforeseen by the accidental discovery of agriculture. Sedentary agriculture marks our alienation from the natural world insofar as anything viewed as a threat to our sustenance, like weeds, insects, competitor species, all become threats and enemies. This includes people who freely occupy lands by living on them as nomads, making their living by gathering and hunting from the huge garden called earth. Indigenous people are not at war with the planet, they live in a garden where there are many things to eat. Indigenous cultures reflect uncanny reverence for the interconnectedness of all life in their spirituality and cultural traditions and structures. They do not see themselves as masters of the earth but rather as participants in the grand pageantry of living. In most cases, humility, generosity, and graciousness are considered virtuous attributes. This is not to romanticize all indigenous people because, like all people, they are human and experience greed, jealousy, and conflict. However, attributes that worked against mutual aid and free association endemic to most indigenous societies were not sustainable and, therefore, discouraged and censured.

With agriculture came the rise of population growth and serious alterations in the landscape caused by irrigation and deforestation and the need for endless expansion pitting agricultural expansion against nomadic people who often occupied desired lands. To make a very long story short, the ability to produce surplus food led to population expansion, private property, patriarchal organization in the form of social hierarchy, and increasing domination over nature and humans through fostering the rise of slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. Simply put, the domination of nature and humans is the product of a radical shift in how we produced our food.

Understanding the historical origins of the normalization of hierarchal power helps us understand why we are destroying our planet. Capitalism coupled with the ideological belief of human supremacy has produced a civilization that exceeds the carrying capacity of our planet as demonstrated by climate change and the host of other environmental problems plaguing the earth. More laws are not going to prevent the economic, political, and cultural forces of ecocide from devouring the planet. They may mitigate and even slow the timeline down for ecological collapse, but they are powerless to address the fundamental problem. The environmental crisis is a cultural and spiritual crisis and requires a change in our cultural ethos as well as our social construction of economy, governance, and relationship. It is a spiritual crisis insofar as we cannot extricate ourselves from the health of our water, air, soil, climate, and from the biological functions of the multitude of forms of non-human life. It is simply an irrefutable fact that we are

inextricably bound to the health of this planet, and our future depends on establishing mutual aid relationships with the biosphere.

VW: Now when we talked about what is anarchist criminology and your contributions to the discipline, I would like to ask how big is this field? How many anarchist criminologists are in academia and how do you see their position there?

SV: Publicly open ones maybe half dozen that I can think of right now... Probably more but they do not have to make their ideological or philosophical orientation an explicit aspect of their work. If I am writing about Antifa, it is hard not to engage with it. But if you are writing about another topic, it may not be germane to engage with anarchist philosophy. You can study those things without explicitly identifying yourself as an anarchist, especially if there is some structural disadvantage to being public about being an anarchist. It is more difficult to get your explicitly anarchist work published in recognized, high-impact factor journals, even compared to Marxist criminology. There are anarchist journals, but no one is going to take that seriously when you go on the job market, and you have been published in anarchist journals. And if you go for tenure, it is the same dynamic: great, you have published in this anarchist journal, but you are supposed to publish in *Criminology*, *Social Forces* or, at least, the regional equivalents thereof. If you do submit to a more mainstream journal, you can get desk rejection immediately or a reviewer who is either unfamiliar with anarchism or familiar but often biased against it. These are all structural impediments ultimately to being an open anarchist academic.

I really believe there is a stigma associated with anarchism in academia, although the problem goes much beyond that. Job security is increasingly hard to find in academia due to the shift to adjunct labor and loss of tenure track positions. If you get secure employment, then there may be a lot of pressure to engage in high-volume teaching, which makes it harder to engage in a sustained production of scholarship. This is something that people struggle with across a number of different ideological orientations and identities that have been historically marginalized and historically subordinated (people of color, women, LGBTQ+, etc.). So, the same process applies to almost everyone, but it compounds intersectionally and certainly does not create a lot of opportunity to be open and public about being somebody who is radically oriented and engages with very radical methods and scholarship.

MS: There is a definite stigma attached to people touting anarchist perspectives in their disciplines, especially in a field like criminology. As Stanislav notes, job security is increasingly difficult to obtain in higher education, and with the tenets of neoliberalism making their way into the administration of higher education, radical perspectives are under serious ideological scrutiny. Nikole Hannah-Jones was just denied tenure at the University of North Carolina for her work on the

‘1619 Project.’ The ‘1619 Project’ is an effort to reexamine the history of African American slavery and how it has led to the systemic racism deeply embedded in US culture. She has been honored with a MacArthur Fellow grant. David Graeber was denied tenure at Yale for his anarchist leanings. There are many such cases.

Neoliberalism’s impact on public higher education is now becoming widely recognized as a serious force undermining department and curriculum autonomy at universities around the world, especially here in the US. My favorite definition of neoliberalism is by David Harvey who notes that neoliberalism is an effort to undermine welfare state capitalism by replacing it with ‘a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (Harvey 2005, 2). Neoliberalism has worked its way into the existential fabric of meaning in the 21st century. The way this translates into higher education is through socially constructed budget crises requiring the need to restructure higher education around neoliberal tenets of serving quantifiable, marketplace values, needs, and objectives. This means declining budgets, fewer tenure-track faculty, more adjunct faculty who are granted neither academic freedom nor security, higher student tuition, and academic restructuring with new surveillance metrics designed to rank and sort the worth of departments and universities based on their utility to serve the values of neoliberalism.

How do anarchists’ perspectives serve neoliberal capitalism? Quite simply they do not, and, in fact, they do the opposite, challenging the core set of values guiding the administrators overseeing the neoliberal university. The new administrators constitute a technocratic class, increasingly well compensated and skilled in using financial austerity to restructure the university. With education becoming ever more politicized in the US, the future of all radical critiques is tenuous, and explored and taught at our own risk.

VW: How do you see the future of anarchist criminology?

SV: I would like to see more interaction between anarchist criminologists in terms of philosophy and other tendencies in critical criminology, because they both have really important things to contribute to each other in terms of building theory and critique of existing practices and structures. In addition to the anarchist and Marxist criminology that I discussed before, there are clear overlaps between anarchist criminology and feminist criminology. They share the critique of power and domination and the role of patriarchy, rape culture, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia and other dynamics of power in constructing our society. There are also shared interests between anarchist criminology and criminological critical race theory in the power dynamics of race and racial oppression and the role of colonial processes, which then also overlaps with Indigenous criminology. Anarchist criminologists, like the wider movement, should engage with these issues

and questions, and in discourse with theorists in these related fields and paradigms.

MS: Yes, I agree that there should be more dialogue between anarchist criminology and critical, radical, and feminist criminology. Given the problem that all these perspectives seek to examine, which is the monopolization of power, there seems to be much to talk about. While agreeing the problem is monopolized power, the true work begins in seeking viable solutions that will not create the same power dynamics that are in question. In order for this to happen, anarchism's perspective on decentralized power has to be taken seriously. Peacefully reorganizing society in ways that make hierarchical structures inconceivable is one of the ways to acknowledge the unique issues these different critical perspectives are making.

Anarchists are not for chaos and disorder, but rather they are, as the first definition in most dictionaries implies, for the absence of government. The assumption that the absence of government implies chaos and disorder is due to a well 'schooled' lack of imagination. People freely organize and exercise mutual aid, socialized activities all the time, whether it is a party in the backyard or a response to a weather disaster. What should strike us as problematic is using force and coercion to make people do things they prefer not to do. People organize to solve problems and get things done, which is normal, but to use coercion and force requires external structures which tend over time towards corrupt special interests and bureaucratic entrenchment.

Bios

Stanislav Vysotsky is Associate Professor at School of Criminology & Criminal Justice at University of the Fraser Valley in Abbotsford, Canada. His research interests include the contemporary fascist and antifascist movements and the relationship between threat, space, subculture, and social movement activism. Vysotsky's papers have been published in journals such as *Critical Criminology*, *Journal of Political, Military Sociology* or *Journal of Crime and Justice* or *Sociological Focus*. His monograph *American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and Practice of Militant Antifascism* has been recently published by Routledge.

Mark Seis is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, USA. He has co-edited two volumes on anarchist criminology '*Contemporary Anarchist Criminology. Against Authoritarianism and Punishment*' and '*Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology. A Historical Dismantling of Punishment and Domination*' and published papers on various topics, including environmental crime, sustainable communities or the death penalty for juveniles.

Václav Walach is a postdoctoral researcher at Charles University in Prague, Czechia. His current research interests range from racialization and antigypsyism to housing as a site of harm, to disablist hate crime. Walach's work has appeared

in journals such as *Deviant Behavior*, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, *Slovak Ethnology* and *Trends in Organized Crime*.

References

- Bakunin, Mikhail. 2005. "Controversy with Marx." In *No Gods, No Masters. Complete Unabridged, 189-197*. Edited by Daniel Guérin. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Barkan, Steven E. 2017. *Criminology. A Sociological Understanding*. 7th Edition. Boston, MA: Pearson.
- Dark Star Collective, eds. 2012. *Quiet Rumours: An Anarcha-Feminist Reader*. 3rd Edition. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- DeMonaco, James. 2013. *The Purge*. United States: Universal Pictures.
- Clifford, Mary, and Terry D. Edwards, eds. 2011. *Environmental Crime*. 2nd Edition. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Ferrell, Jeff. 1998. "Against the Law: Anarchist Criminology." *Social Anarchism*, 25. Available at: <https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/jeff-ferrell-against-the-law-anarchist-criminology>.
- Green, Penny, and Tony Ward. 2004. *State Crime: Governments, Violence and Corruption*. London: Pluto Press.
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hasbrouck, Jay. 2005. *Primitive Dissidents: Earth Liberation Front and the Making of a Radical Anthropology*. Dissertation. Los Angeles, CA: Faculty of the Graduate School, University of Southern California.
- Lynch, Michael J., and W. Byron Groves. 1989. *A Primer in Radical Criminology*. 2nd Edition. New York, NY: Harrow and Heston.
- Nocella, Anthony J., Mark Seis, and Jeff Shantz, eds. 2018. *Contemporary Anarchist Criminology. Against Authoritarianism and Punishment*. New York: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b14254>
- Nocella, Anthony J., Mark Seis, and Jeff Shantz, eds. 2020. *Classic Writings in Anarchist Criminology. A Historical Dismantling of Punishment and Domination*. Chico, CA: AK Press.

- Nocella, Anthony J., Sean Parson, Amber E. George, and Stephanie Eccles, eds. 2019. *A Historical Scholarly Collection of Writings on the Earth Liberation Front*. New York: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b14465>
- Proudhon, Pierre-Joseph. 2005. "The Authority Principle." In *No Gods, No Masters. Complete Unabridged*, 81-98. Edited by Daniel Guérin. Oakland, CA: AK Press.
- Seis, Mark. 2011. "The Scope and Complexity of Environmental Offenders." In *Environmental Crime*, 307-328. 2nd Edition. Edited by Mary Clifford and Terry D. Edwards. Burlington, MA: Jones & Bartlett Learning.
- Seis, M. 2019. "Nihilism and Desperation in Place-Based Resistance." In *A Historical Scholarly Collection of Writings on the Earth Liberation Front*, 59-75. Edited by Anthony J. Nocella, Sean Parson, Amber E. George, and Stephanie Eccles. New York: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/b14465>
- Vysotsky, Stanislav. 2021. *American Antifa: The Tactics, Culture, and Practice of Militant Antifascism*. Abingdon: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429265174>