

# Conversation as a Feminist Praxis: Challenging Institutional Misogyny and Systemic Violence against Women

Maria Silvia D'Avolio, Roxana Pessoa Cavalcanti & Deanna Dadusc

## Introduction: Conversation as a feminist practice

At the time we started writing this chapter we were working together as criminologists in the same institution in the southeast of England. We shared a position of 'other' to some extent, as migrant women whose first language is not English, at early stages of our career inspired by Black feminist theory. This positionality provided a different lens through which we could make sense of our experience of academic institutions in the empire. Together we sketch a challenge to carceral ways of knowing and being in our discipline and in diverse institutions. We began this writing project as a feminist praxis emerging out of regular conversations about feminism, coming from our shared concern about the exclusionary institutional violence and carceral feminist discourses we observed. These discourses consider increasing surveillance, control and law-and-order as solutions to address violence against women. We started writing this chapter one year into the global pandemic while we were reflecting on feminist alternatives beyond state-centric imaginaries (Michaeli, 2020) to address and counter the multiple challenges we were facing. Those relate to the erosion of democracies, the social reproduction crisis, the growing inequalities, persecution that disproportionately affect women, racialised and feminised bodies.

We use *conversation* as a feminist method of relationality to reflect on these issues from a plurality of voices, a method that is increasingly used in feminist literature (see for example Bhandar and Ziadah, 2020, Ahmed, 2016 and Davis, 2016). *Conversation as praxis* puts emphasis on the collective aspect of discourse building. In this chapter, we are in conversation with each other but also with the texts that we quote, acknowledging how feminist anti-racist authors, resistance movements and political discussions influence and shape our positionality. Through this collaborative autoethnography we intend to acknowledge how our "feminist bricks" (Ahmed, 2017: 16) inform our understanding of how important it is to think beyond the state and challenge carceral feminist approaches.

Our starting point questions mainstream and media discourses around violence against women and girls which frame violence as a social problem narrowly defined as attacks that happen on the streets and in the domestic sphere. Commonly proposed solutions revolve around 'educating our boys', criminalising violence and harassment as well as policing and surveilling public spaces. We argue that this hegemonic view ignores other forms of structural and systemic violence that women face. These include invisible, everyday and institutional forms of violence against women, including the role of racism towards women of colour and migrant women, and how austerity and the institutionalised misogyny of the Criminal Justice System (CJS) affect women differently and disproportionately. Multidimensional forms of violence are often erased and ignored in mainstream discourses. Structural and systemic forms of violence suggest that individual-level solutions are not enough to address the root causes of violence towards women.

Feminist groups and movements shed light on the role of intersecting inequalities that challenge the homogeneous understanding of the category 'women'. Reflecting on our practice as feminist scholar-activists, in combination with examples emerging from the pandemic and recent forms of collective action, we argue that diverse feminisms provide fertile ideas to expose institutionalised racism and misogyny within the CJS, and help us understand complex forms of violence against women as systemic.

To address these critical issues, we structured our conversation around three key questions: 1) How do we define and challenge carceral feminism? 2) What are the effects of institutional violence on women? 3) How can we think and create beyond state-centric imaginaries?

## 1) How do we define and challenge carceral feminism?

Marias

After the murder of Sarah Everard by a Metropolitan Police Officer in the UK in 2021 (Cavalcanti et al., 2021), we had various conversations about the extent of violence against women. I would like to start by reflecting on how I find carceral feminism damaging for women and minorities. Feminist geographer Leslie Kern (2020) offers a useful conceptualisation of the use of *fear* as enabler of social reproduction and reinforcer of patriarchal institutions. This is a useful point for understanding fear as embedded in the outside world, a threatening place for women in contrast to the supposedly safe haven provided by home and the domestic space. Fear is displaced onto spaces that require surveillance to be deemed safe. This is when carceral feminism enters the picture: controlling and limiting women to protect them, all in the name of feminism. In this light, challenging carceral feminism means going beyond the rhetoric of 'women need to be protected from violence' by reflecting on the ways in which this approach enables social reproduction and social control of women and marginalised groups. When we think about the use of fear for social control it is clear how this relies on mechanisms of exclusion and segregation, in other words, social cleansing, by pushing minorities to the margins, both physically and metaphorically. This happens through criminalisation of the 'unwanted' - who are considered dangerous and disorderly, pushed away, excluded from accessing services, and punished by the CJS through incarceration.

Deanna

The main problem with carceral feminism, which I encountered in my own experience, is the demonisation of sex offenders and harassers. For instance, in a workshop we had, someone asked 'why did people not call out this guy earlier, I was sitting in a conference room next to this monster and I did not know'. This reproduces the idea that the harasser is a monster, that sexual harassment is exceptional. This creates problems in addressing the issue, as it feeds into a reproduction of fear of an alleged 'evil monster', which points to racialised strangers, it creates fear of the stranger and unknown, and fails to recognise how this monstrosity is the norm, embedded in every-day society. Demonising people also points to solutions such as locking them up and excluding them from society, but it does not acknowledge the need to change the patriarchal infrastructures that enable these behaviours and normalise them, and even reward them. This makes it difficult for women to call out the 'white professor' as a potential harasser because everyone will be saying 'oh I can't believe he did that, he is such a nice guy, he does not look like a monster'. And the same goes for the 'white cop'. He does not look like a monster, but that is exactly the problem with demonising, and erasing the possibility of seeing how this violence is pervasive and institutional. This discourse also creates fear for women walking the streets, while they are much more unsafe in a context where these kinds of actors are in positions of power.

Roxy

Carceral feminism is problematic because no kind of criminal justice solution is a solution. Any kind of criminal justice approach only exacerbates existing inequalities. They are fallacious, because they assume that punishing individuals could be a solution to structural social problems. When I was doing research in Brazil, everyone was celebrating a public security intervention that claimed to 'cut down crime' and they talked about it as a success. The UN gave international awards to this security intervention (Cavalcanti, 2020). But this perspective of 'success' came from white middle class Brazilians who felt safer. There are a number of issues with it. In the communities that are considered marginalised or peripheral, people's experience is different. More people were taken out of those communities and put in prison - not because of violent crimes but because of drug related crimes - and more women struggled financially. There is an escalation of issues. Women are left behind having to deal with inequalities and incarcerated family members. Some feminists think that if you adopt an

abolitionist perspective you mean that nothing should be done about a rapist. They do not realise that when we are talking about abolition or defunding the police, we are not saying that we do not want any emergency services. We are saying that these institutions are putting police in schools, they are using police to deal with social problems, and all this means that more people are being brought into the CJS. But the CJS system is not suited to deal with these problems when they are the institutions that are part of a system reproducing inequalities and creating violence.

Deanna

There is a great reading '*What about the sex offender*' by Adina Ilea (2018), which really shows how discussions around sex offenders are breaking down the abolitionist argument, because many feminists would say 'yes we can have a world without prisons. But what about sex offenders? We do need prisons, we do need police to deal with the sex offenders'. This issue around sex offenders really creates the main fracture within feminist movements and abolitionist movements. Often it is this 'feminist' discussion that opposes abolitionist visions with the argument that women need to be protected.

Marias

That is the main issue with carceral feminism, that it exploits women to justify strong institutional intervention. It is paradoxical how this 'feminist' approach is actually exploiting women for other agendas. An abolitionist approach, instead, argues for a focus on social and economic justice through the investment in support and resources for survivors. Lola Olufemi summarises brilliantly this alternative argument:

"The most pressing issue for survivors is not that their abusers go to prison, but that there is a safety net for them to fall back on that enables them to leave abusive situations. They need refuges, routes to economic stability and adequate welfare support" (Olufemi, 2020: 24).

Roxy

We need to bust some myths. These are deeply rooted problems that come from a racial patriarchal capitalist order so putting more people in prison is not sorting the situation out.

Deanna

Yes, and not only this is not solving problems, but as Marias was saying, feminism is used as a legitimisation for putting more people in prison. So it is a double sword thing.

Marias

It is true, with the discussion around sex offenders, even when people say they do not trust institutions, it is all going back to basic issues. All discourses made on prison abolition go back to a small, minor aspect of that. When we speak about violence and harassment, the focus tends to be on violence that occurs on the streets whereas violence perpetrated by people we know is much higher. The result is that this discourse is being led by smaller dynamics rather than the broader issue. The question is how to deal with criticism that only brings up these minor aspects of a broader problem? How to switch the narrative to argue that this is more than an issue of individual physical violence it is an issue of institutional violence and redistribution of resources?

Roxy

Carceral feminism legitimises punitive approaches, as Michelle Alexander's (2010) book shows these 'security' and anti-crime approaches are applied selectively. The mainstream rhetoric of 'law and order' claims that there is a problem (e.g. drugs, welfare queens) and this is used to justify punitive approaches. What you get as a result is a mass incarceration system that is applied disproportionately to punish, exclude and segregate racialized communities. She also talks about the myth of the black male rapist being used to legitimise criminalising perspectives.

Deanna

Yes, and this clearly comes from a white/citizen perspective, a perspective where women feel safe and protected by the police. And of course as soon as one steps out of this white/citizen bubble then nobody feels that the police are making their communities safer, but the opposite. It is this feeling, this affective relationship, which is not just about discourses but about affects, and how we feel in the presence of a cop, what a cop's presence does to us. Usually, when I see the police I move to the opposite side of the road. As my privilege grows in this society I feel it less, but most of my life I have been feeling threatened by the police. For me this affective experience of the police is so important in developing contrasting approaches. The second issue, related to Michelle Alexander's discussion of myths around black male violence, is that when we speak about carceral feminism we also have to speak about migration and borders. Carceral feminist perspectives are also linked to anti-migrant sentiments fuelled by a demand for greater securitisation of borders and the portrayal of migrants as a threat to women, bringing values that are against women's rights. For instance, what happened in Germany on 2015-16 New Year's Eve, or in Italy, every time a migrant does something it is all over the news. A lot of women advocating for women's safety demand stronger borders and the exclusion of migrants arguing that migrants make 'our streets unsafe'. I think this all links together with the discourses of 'the stranger'.

Roxy

Verónica Gago (2020) talks about many forms of violence being tied together in sexist violence. There is economic violence, countless violence of unpaid and unrecognised domestic and reproductive work, a disciplining that comes from the lack of economic autonomy, the violence of these forms of exploitation, their materialisation into the household, which implodes into domestic violence, the violence of defunding and looting public services, the burden of extra community work which we have seen during the pandemic. This shows how sexist violence is a much wider form of violence.

Marias

Absolutely! It is encouraging to see how these different feminist struggles are merging, creating bridges of solidarity across minorities, challenging capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism. A feminist movement that works is a movement that creates connections between these key axes of exploitation.

Deanna

To bring it back to bordering again, from a carceral perspective comes also the idea that we need war to liberate countries and import liberal values. Women's rights in the USA have been legitimising wars and 'wars on terror', wars against certain cultures and societies, to liberate women. In all these discourses women are put at the centre as victims who need to be protected and liberated through military interventions. Their communities are destroyed and their children killed by these 'liberatory bombs'. This is a very colonial logic. A lot of bordering practices including the militarisation of borders - not only in the form of war - use discourses around women's vulnerability as an excuse to demand more control and more security. Border controls are heightened to arrest and criminalise 'human traffickers' who are exploiting women. Once again, we see women centred as victims who need protection but above all, it is the border regime that exploits, kills and harms them. We know that if these borders were not there and women had freedom of movement, they would not have to rely on traffickers. Freedom of movement, and the abolition, rather than the militarisation, of borders would be the best way to protect women. Carceral feminism amplifies violence against women and legitimises it.

Marias

This happens when the category 'woman' overlaps with other characteristics, because a wealthy white citizen woman will not face these challenges. The mechanisms you describe also relate to trans women and the discussion on toilets, shelters and women's spaces. We witness an exploitation of discourses

of safety in this context. Discourses aimed at creating a univocal category of woman assert that women might feel unsafe in spaces that include trans women. Such rhetoric dehumanises 'othered' women (e.g. migrant and trans women) by securitising female vulnerability.

Roxy

It legitimises violence on 'othered' bodies. It is an intersectional issue.

Deanna

It is the protection of women that creates violence. This is violence in the name of protection. The discussion on trans women is central to carceral feminist discourses. Carceral feminism is not just about prisons but about a language of security and protection. These discourses are the main vectors of a patriarchal state. Carceral feminism reproduces this language. This is not just about the prison, it extends to many areas, including bathrooms.

Marias

Sex work is also under scrutiny. Black trans women become targets of carceral feminists who want to exclude and criminalise them through a social cleansing agenda, without acknowledging broader issues of capitalism, racism, institutional misogyny and so on. For example, the police stigmatises sex workers and discourages them from reporting violence and abuse, and xenophobic attacks and threats of deportation increased in the UK after the Brexit referendum (Oppenheim, 2021). The control and policing of women's bodies, in this context sex workers and trans women, is aimed at obtaining social reproduction (Bhattacharya, 2017) because it is about reproducing patriarchal values by creating this very strict, binary society based on the nuclear family, control and exclusion of diversity.

Deanna

When discussing the conflict around trans women, prisons were also central because, of course we do not want prisons in the first place. A debate arose around whether trans women should be in women's prisons or not. Carceral feminists argued that by putting trans women in prison, women would be unsafe in prison. Besides the obvious transphobic issues of this discourse, this was also making claims that prisons are made unsafe by women. As if prisons can ever be safe. This transphobic feminism argues that we should protect women in prison from women in prison. Carceral feminism conceptualises womanhood as monolithic, assigned at birth, white, citizenly. Any other form of womanhood is perceived as a threat to the white middle class citizen.

Roxy

Ahmed (2017) reminds us that ultimately an anti-trans stance is an anti-feminist stance, it contradicts the feminist project against gender fatalism - the discourse that 'boys will be boys' and 'girls will be girls' that is fatal for many.

## **2) What are the effects of institutional violence on women?**

Marias

Institutional violence is not just about the criminal justice system. Many institutions are violent, like the institution of the family, the workplace, education.

Deanna

If we are to speak about our experience we can start from here, from where we are now, what we have been doing today. We are sitting in this garden, during a pandemic. We just had a conversation about decolonising the curriculum. We discussed how our emails and agenda points in meetings are either silenced, shut down or openly challenged. We come from these conversations where we feel that when we try to do something, the only way is to create formal complaints. We constantly feel like

Sarah Ahmed's *feminist killjoys*. But this is disciplined all the time, with remarks of what is appropriate and what not. This goes back to the carceral logic, because you need to submit evidence for your complaint to have a chance, you need to identify a perpetrator, otherwise your complaint does not have an object. That is how complaint is prevented (Ahmed, 2021): who wants to go through these formal processes of gathering evidence, pointing at a perpetrator, and eventually feeling disempowered by the process which will bring us into question? We know the perpetrators are our bosses who will never be questioned and there will be no change.

Marias

This requires a lot of emotional labour. Also, we are only allowed to work with the tools that are provided by the institution, and this implies a massive power imbalance.

Deanna

Yes, there is a parallelism here on the need to find alternatives to these punitive and carceral approaches, that want a formal complaint, evidence, a perpetrator. Court, appeal and so on.

Marias

And yet again, this is how carceral feminism focuses on individual experiences and solutions of punishment and accountability processes, rather than taking into consideration the support that is needed at a community level outside of institutional structures. It seems that each formal institutional solution is just grounded on individual responsibility to find the solutions, in a neoliberal style. That is why the only way for killjoys to survive within institutional settings is to create a community of solidarity. Imagine if we were not able to share these experiences amongst ourselves and people we have informal support networks with.

Roxy

This fits with Ahmed's point (2017: 257) about how the institution is presented as a solution, when in fact it reproduces violence. Ahmed notes how institutions are "built as promises of happiness", but when we expose this violence, "the violence of organizations that identify speaking about violence as disloyalty", we challenge the happiness myth of neoliberalism and global capitalism.

Deanna

What you say summarises very well what carceral feminism does, it legitimises institutional violence.

Marias

Actually, asking more from the institution, asking the institution to offer safe spaces for women is limited because of issues of power imbalance. You need to expose people you work with, so this practice does not consider imbalances of power that are embedded in the situation.

Roxy

As killjoys, when we expose the problem then we become the problem (Ahmed, 2017).

Deanna

When you show a problem, you are often told 'this is how the institution works'. When you address that the problem is exactly how the institution works, the answer is again 'this is how the institution works'.

Roxy

These logics are mechanisms to maintain the status quo. You are told 'wait for the curriculum review in two years', or 'we cannot talk about this now'.

Marias

It ends up being about discouragement. Discouragement as a means to avoid complaint and effort.

Roxy

It creates a hostile environment.

Deanna

What you said about the killjoy and the troublemaker becoming a problem, and as Sara Ahmed writes, every time you say something you can already see the eyes rolling and nobody listens to you. I feel that the reaction I get to all my emails at work is an eye rolling reaction. This is an epistemological practice. It is a method. It is by resisting power that we can unmask its dynamics. Of course, when you are a white feminist walking on the street and feeling safe next to the police, you cannot see the violence of the police. But when you are a white feminist and you go to the vigil for Sarah Everard, and there is a little bit of critique against the police who killed her, then very quickly you get beaten up by the police. It is in that moment, in the moment of complaint, that white feminists commemorating a white British victim, realise that the police are violent. It is during this moment of complaint - and of reaction to the complaint - that things become visible. The complaint, the trouble-making the killjoy, becomes a method. The resistance to power becomes a method to see power. This is also what activist research means for me.

Roxy

When the killjoy talks then, it is important to support her:

“Don’t let her speak on her own. back her up; speak with her. Stand by her; stand with her. From these public moments of solidarity [...] we are creating a support system around the killjoy” (Ahmed, 2017: 260).

This makes me realise that I am in a different position to other people who claim to be feminists. They would not support us because we do not fit their model of white feminism. If they respond it is always in a defensive way. We need ‘sisterhood as a collective snap’.

Deanna

We are asked to take online training courses about employing correct behaviours in the workplace, but these are only aimed at disciplining people's reaction to abuse.

Roxy

Again, this brings us back to Ahmed’s great questions, about why there is so much secrecy and silence about institutional violence, even among some feminists.

Deanna

Because people, even some feminists, benefit from institutional violence. When I called out someone for abusive behaviour in an academic setting, the most painful thing was that so many women were standing with him. Most of the abuse I got after calling him out was mostly from the women who were standing with him. Saying that ‘he is such a nice guy’ because they had an investment in his power. By being invested in his power, in a broad sense of power, disrupting his power would be disrupting theirs. This is the problem of being invested in white supremacy, being invested in capitalism, refusing to accept a critique that challenges a world view and privilege that are grounded in abuse.

Marias

We need to switch the whole paradigm of how we speak about institutions, and challenge all these bureaucratic processes of bringing evidence, of respecting hierarchies and seeking punishment.

Deanna

What we are doing in this conversation is situating our experiences within broader structures of domination. And what many feminists are doing is speaking about individual experiences without

looking at the role that structures of domination have in shaping these experiences. And that is where I feel we are speaking very different languages.

Roxy

We need alliances and solidarities, informal communities and support network groups to avoid isolation, to be connected in this constant struggle.

### **3) How can we think and create beyond state-centric imaginaries?**

Deanna

For me it is important not so much to talk about crime, but to speak of criminalisation, and how crime is used as a weapon to legitimise certain forms of state violence and to violate communities, to imprison them, and to suppress resistance. It is crucial to study how the notion of crime is used and mobilised to bring forward certain agendas or to protect certain interests. Also, when thinking about feminism, the discussions and conflicts around carceral/non carceral, safety/security/protection, are central also in relation to sex work, to body autonomy, to the stigmatisation of women, to abolitionist approaches.

Roxy

Serious harms and forms of exploitation are not addressed because of the selective nature of criminalisation, a system that is cut and shaped by many social markers - gender, sexuality, class, 'race', nationality.

Deanna

Well, you say the category of crime is applied selectively, but from an abolitionist perspective for me it is not about applying it in a non-selective way, it is about abolishing the category of crime and thinking about something else. Because the category of crime can only be used by the state against the people. It is a weapon of the state which cannot be used in a radical and transformative way. Accusing the state of state crime for me is an oxymoron. The state will never make itself accountable for crimes, and there are international criminal courts but again these mostly punish individuals and it is almost impossible to assess individual responsibilities in certain contexts. We really need to think about other ways to address social justice, and crime has nothing to do with it.

Roxy

I agree that individual 'solutions', like punishing individuals, cannot address deeply rooted massive social problems, such as police violence. But we have to be careful because however problematic, there are 'acts' that do fall into the category of crime - torture, genocide, armed violence - even if they are committed by state actors. Accountability is still important, we are not against that. When we critique the state or state approaches, we do not want to seem like the 'anti-state state' (Gilmore, 2016), that formation where certain people gain political power by proposing rolling back or condemning the state when it comes to welfare provision, spending in education and health care but at the same time they are building and rolling forward the state when it comes to building prisons and spending on security and 'law and order'.

Deanna

When we think about abolitionism, some people say 'yes' to abolition, but actually we cannot really abolish these institutions because there is some 'good' in these institutions that should be preserved. And for me the 'good' of these institutions come at a very high cost. When it is good for some people, it is always based on the exploitation and oppression of other people. The British state reducing inequality within Britain is often at the cost of increasing global inequality, bringing more wealth to Britain at the expense of other countries where wealth is historically stolen from. Solutions cannot



come within the state or from the state because the state as an institution, as a colonial, patriarchal and racist institution is built like that, and it is doing what is meant to do. It is not there to protect people, it is there to maybe protect citizens, some citizens, but at a high cost of exclusion and oppression of other people who are not citizens or who are not first-class citizens. This is what the state is, and what it does historically - the nation state, since its birth. And we have never seen a different way of the working of the state. If we need to think about alternatives, then these must be outside and against the state as a violent institution. Violence is intrinsic to the state, it is not a failure of the state. It is impossible to say that there is a good state or a bad state. And that is why we have to think about autonomous forms of organising and alternative spaces outside and against the state.

Roxy

In some way we are speaking about the same thing, but what we call it might not be the same. Whether we call it the State or an organisation. Maybe that is where we diverge. Coming back to Gilmore, where she proposes and I agree, that we need an anti-capitalist world with water, health care, food, education for everyone and we do not want a carceral state. The question is how can this be done in the cities and in the world as we have it today? There is some interesting feminist work on new forms of collective organising, collective leadership, municipalism (Roth, 2019; Roth and Shea Baird, 2017) that speaks to these debates. We converge on the stance that is anti-capitalist, against exploitation, anti-racist. But do we risk throwing the 'baby' out with the bath water if we only propose alternatives beyond the state? In Brazil, in the 2000s we had a government that was promoting policies and practices aimed at reducing inequality, expanding access to education, expanding welfare spending (e.g. through the *Bolsa Familia* programme) and so on, the programmes were not perfect but they led to the first ever drop in inequality in the country. It is not necessary to oppress others, or colonise and steal from other States, to promote measures through the state that can reduce inequalities.

Marias

Another element to consider is that the concept of state includes differences instead of solidarity. Because it is protecting the interests of someone over someone else. So even a 'good', a fair or a socialist state is still built on borders and is built on the protection of the interests of someone over someone else. Even if there is no inequality globally, it is still built around 'us' and 'them', there is still this difference.

Roxy

Yes, states are founded on violence, from their very origins, the work of Tilly (1992) has examined this. There is also a difference between 'State' and 'government'. The State as a concept is imagined, complex, it is not one unified, uncontested idea.

Deanna

That is really important. The state as an institution is colonial and patriarchal. The government is about organising. The government within the state will follow the patriarchal and colonial logic of the state. But there can be alternative ways of governing our lives, which are not necessarily following the logic of capitalism, the patriarchy or the colonial state. Autonomous organising can be a form of counter-government. It is still a way of governing ourselves.

Marias

It is important to think about a government outside the state rather than within the state.

Deanna

We had a lot of conversations on how the institution is presented as the solution, and how we reached a point of understanding that the institution is not the solution, and the institution of the university, of the prison, of the CJS, of the state - and that if we are asked about possible solutions, for me the

solution is not to demand to fit within these institutions, or to demand for the institution to include us, because the institutions are built around our exclusion. What we need to do is to create spaces that are outside and against these institutions, rather than putting our efforts in trying to reform these institutions. Creating parallel, alternative, subversive and disobedient social relations, communities and practices that are outside the institutions, without demanding or without asking for permission but just doing it. These are the informal communities of solidarity without which we would not be able to survive the institution. Of course we are condemned to be within these institutions, but we also need to create alternatives.

Marias

This goes back to what we were saying earlier, that we do not only need to create spaces of resistance and support networks outside/within the institution, but we also need to be in open contrast with the institution in order to expose its structural barriers. I guess Audre Lorde's "the master's tools cannot dismantle the master's house" is the most used quote in feminism for a reason. This is not just about higher education but about many other institutions, for example the CJS or the family. Creating different patterns and interactions is a feminist struggle, especially if it intersects with other issues. It is a feminist struggle because it is relational. As a movement feminism is about solidarities and relations. It is by challenging relations within institutions that we can change institutions.

Deanna

It is a feminist issue also because it is about social reproduction and it is about refusing to reproduce those social arrangements. Angela Davis says:

"The problem was that many of us then thought that what we needed to do was to expand the category "women" so that it could embrace Black women, Latina women, Native American women, and so forth. We thought that by doing that we would have effectively addressed the problem of the exclusivity of the category. What we didn't realize then was that we would have to rewrite the whole category, rather than simply assimilate more women in to an unchanged category of what counts as "women"." (Davis, 2016: 96).

This links to our previous discussion about the policing of bodies and womanhood. So the question is do you re-write the whole category or get rid of the category and build something completely different? Rather than trying to shape the box around you, or taking the shape of the box, just exist outside the box. This helps us organise an epistemological and organising strategy that takes us beyond the category of women and gender.

"We not only should not try to assimilate trans women into a category that remains the same, but that the category itself has to change so it does not simply reflect normative ideas of who counts as women and who doesn't" (Davis, 2016: 101).

Roxy

This links well with the points Angela Davis raised in *Revolutionary Feminisms* (Davis, 2020), especially when she reminds us that mainstream feminism leans towards assimilation instead of radical transformation. She calls for international solidarity through understanding the intersectionality of justice struggles. These expressions of internationalism have been critical of nationalism and the nation state. The bottom line is that any approach based on exclusion is contributing to exclusionary practices. So, abolitionism can be seen as radical reconstruction (based on Du Bois's work, 1935), a project aiming to rebuild new organisations for liberation.

Deanna

The carceral state is not just a state with prisons, it is a state built on exclusion and repression.

Roxy

It is not just about abolishing a building with bars as prisons, it is about decolonising our minds.

Deanna

Yes, it is about everyday social relations and how they are organised, and how they reproduce the structures of racism and the patriarchy.

Marias

In a simplistic way, an anti-carceral feminist stand that we can pursue in our discussions is to analyse criminalisation as violence, by framing it in a system that overlaps patriarchy, capitalism and colonialism.

Deanna

Capitalism, colonialism and patriarchal forms of oppression are forms of violence that perpetuate harm against people who try to stand up against them. They are forms of violence that are seen as the norm and normalised and use the CJS, historically, as a technique to protect their power, as much as they use borders. These are all tools of colonial, capitalist and patriarchal arrangements to protect themselves and to attack any resistance.

Roxy

Women have a key role in leading this resistance. If we think about all the forms of violence discussed here and how they disproportionately affect Indigenous, Black women and feminised bodies, it makes sense that they are at the frontline of resistance against these forms of oppression and exploitation.

Deanna

In this context carceral feminism is reproducing all this violence using the same weapons. But then there are practices and movements of resistance against all of this, resistances that are criminalised, and that is where we find women being labelled, repressed, discredited at work. The witch always comes back as a freedom fighter who is regularly criminalised, silenced and even murdered by the patriarchal, capitalist and colonial arrangements (Federici, 2004).

Marias

It is quite telling that who is at the forefront of resistance is at the margins of society because they experience this violence, and they do not have a vested interest in these forms of power.

## **Conclusion**

Our conversation reveals that concepts centred on the criminalisation of violence and policing of spaces need to be challenged and rethought, since violence towards women is not abnormal but rather the norm. Violence is not produced by ignorance, but instead is the outcome of a racial-patriarchal social order embedded in institutions and social arrangements. Our analysis suggests that the idea that the police 'protects' women needs to be challenged, since it is founded on delusory claims that Criminal Justice institutions address violence, when in fact they maintain and reproduce the status quo - a social order in which solutions to reduce violence against women often involve increased 'security'. More police power and more resources to the police and the CJS only serve to reinforce the mass incarceration system, and thereby reproduce inequalities that disproportionately affect women, Black communities, Indigenous peoples, migrants and trans people. The complex struggles revealed throughout our conversation are a testament to the importance of continuing this dialogue as a form of feminist praxis.

“Feminism as a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression is alive and well. [...] To ensure the continued relevance of feminist movement in our lives visionary feminist theory must be constantly made and re-made so that it addresses us where we live, in our present. [...] We must courageously learn from the past and work for a future where feminist principles will undergird every aspect of our public and private lives. [...] Feminism is for everybody.” (hooks, 2014: 117-118).

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