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# Feminism and the Carceral State: Gender Responsive Justice, Community Accountability, and the Epistemology of Antiviolence

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## **Feminism and the Carceral State: Gender-Responsive Justice, Community Accountability, and the Epistemology of Antiviolence**

Brady Heiner and Sarah Tyson

### **Abstract**

Building on recent feminist scholarship on the complicity of feminist antiviolence movements in the build-up of mass incarceration, this essay analyzes the epistemic occupation of feminist antiviolence work by carceral logic, taking the Gender-Responsive Justice and Community Accountability movements as countervailing examples. Both strategies claim to be a feminist response to violence. Gender-Responsive Justice arises from feminist criminology and has genealogical roots in the American prison reformatory movement. Community Accountability stems from grassroots intersectional and decolonial feminisms that are fundamentally at odds with the professionalization and state-centrism of the mainstream antiviolence movement. We argue that Gender-Responsive Justice is a form of carceral humanism that repackages carceral control as the caring provision of social services, while Community Accountability advances a radically creative abolitionist and decolonial project of an irreducibly epistemological order.

**Keywords:** feminist theory, mass incarceration, prison abolition, decolonization, critical criminology, feminist epistemology, community accountability, critical prison studies, feminist criminology, Angela Y. Davis, Kristie Dotson

### **Introduction**

It can be hard to imagine a world without prisons (Davis 2003, 9–10, 105–106; Garland 1990, 4; Morris and Rothman 1995, vii). Prisons not only confine millions of bodies and occupy vast swaths of land in the United States,<sup>1</sup> they also

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<sup>1</sup> Critiques of settler colonialism from Native American and Indigenous studies and other fields persuasively argue that the occupation of land is an important part of the formation, expansion, and legitimization of settler colonial polities like the United States. Prisons offer a particularly salient manifestation of U.S. state-formation and violence through territorial occupation. As such, the U.S.'s massive incarceration project should be understood as a moment of an ongoing colonial process of dispossessing Native peoples and eliminating Indigenous lifeways. To

have captured, confined, and inhabited our collective capacities for thinking, feeling, imagining, and acting. The practice of incarceration conceals the prison's historical contingency, and crucially, it masks the inadequacy of incarceration as a response to social problems. In the words of community accountability theorists, incarceration has effected an *epistemic occupation* such that many of us encounter profound difficulty imagining and conceptualizing the redress and prevention of violence (including state violence) without recourse to the heteropatriarchal violence of the state (Durazo et al. 2012b, 2; see also Brown 1992; Brown and Halley 2002; Kim 2015; Richie 2012, 88–89; Smith 2012, 41). As a result of this epistemic occupation, it can even seem wrong to consider non-carceral responses to violence, because dominant neoliberal logic delineates only one intelligible schema of accountability for violence—that of an individual (non-state) agent—and only one general form of legitimate response: state-centric punishment (whether confinement, execution, or other form of physical, civil, or social death). Alternative forms of community accountability and redress that break from state-centric carceral systems appear baffling, irresponsible, even monstrous. The choice seems to be confined to either ensnaring an individual with the punitive arms of the state or fomenting complete, unaccountable disorder.

In this essay, we focus on the epistemic occupation of feminist antiviolence work by this carceral logic. Recent feminist scholarship has articulated the multiple ways in which feminist movements—including, if not especially, feminist antiviolence work—have been complicit in the build-up of mass incarceration and the proliferation of state violence (e.g., Bevacqua 2000, Gottschalk 2006, Kim 2015; Richie 2012). Building on this scholarship, we examine a strategy that has come to be known as Gender-Responsive Justice (GRJ), which seeks to reduce state violence against women in correctional settings while also responding effectively to the needs of incarcerated women who have experienced violence prior to incarceration. Our second aim is to highlight the *epistemic de-linking* (Mignolo 2007), world-constituting, and community-building possibilities opened up by radical intersectional feminist antiviolence theory and practice. To accomplish our second aim, we look at the very different strategy of Community Accountability (CA), which seeks to abolish state violence, including prisons and policing, while also ending violence within communities.

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obtain an imaginative sense of the territorial and geographic extent of the U.S. carceral state, see data artist Josh Begley's "Prison Map" project: <http://prisonmap.com/about>. On settler colonialism and its connection to histories of confinement, see, e.g., Corntassel (2012a), Deer (2015), Goldstein (2014), Ross (1998), Veracini (2010), and Wolfe (2006).

Both strategies of addressing violence have arisen in roughly the same time frame (i.e., since the 1990s), both have largely been developed and led by women, and each claims to be a feminist response to multiple modalities of violence (domestic, internecine, civic, governmental). However, their respective theoretical frameworks, methods, aims, social locations, and effects could hardly be more divergent. One, GRJ, arises from interventions in feminist criminology and has genealogical roots in the American prison reformatory movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The other, CA, stems from a radical intersectional feminism that is fundamentally at odds with the professionalization and state-subsumption of the mainstream antiviolence movement. One has predominantly been elaborated by professional white women within departments of correction and criminology, the other largely by women of color in grassroots antiviolence organizations. One fuels policy initiatives to expand the reach of the criminal justice system, the other advocates and organizes for the abolition of the prison industrial complex.

Drawing conceptual resources from grassroots antiviolence activists, we argue that GRJ is a form of *carceral humanism* (Cullors et al. 2015; CURB 2007; Kilgore 2014), a discursive strategy of rebranding or repackaging carceral control as the caring provision of social services. We argue that GRJ initiatives essentialize gender and ultimately tend toward the proliferation of violence and the expansion of the U.S. carceral state by making arrest and confinement necessary steps to receiving “wraparound rehabilitative and reentry services,” which effectively positions the criminal justice system as the neoliberal gatekeeper of social services. CA approaches, by contrast, operate with an intersectional conception of gender, make a more thoroughgoing, systemic critique of violence, and strengthen community relationships by helping people build skills for nonviolent conflict resolution without state intervention. In other words, CA questions the fundamental logic of incarceration. In doing so, CA opens up epistemic and imaginative space for alternative responses to violence and demonstrates how violence can be redressed and prevented by people within their own communities without recourse to the punitive apparatuses of the state.

In the final section of this essay, we offer an explicitly philosophical analysis of the political and epistemic challenge to carceral logics that the theorists and practitioners of CA articulate. From the fields of social epistemology and decolonial thought that address questions of oppression and the politics of knowledge (e.g., Alcoff and Potter 1992; Anzaldúa 1999; Code 1995, 2004, 2008; Collins 2000; Fricker 2007; Medina 2012; Mignolo 2007, 2009; Mills 1999; Pohlhaus 2011; Sullivan and Tuana 2007), we draw upon black feminist epistemologist Kristie Dotson’s analysis of epistemic oppression and resistance to conceptualize the epistemic occupation of feminist antiviolence work in terms of the *resilience of epistemological systems*

(2014, 119). We also offer an account of the *triple-loop epistemic processes* through which the theory and practice of CA works, not merely to solve problems within the frame of existing criminal justice schemas, nor to modify those schemas in response to persistent problems, but to create new possibilities for thought and action by transforming and expanding the shared epistemic resources that constitute our social imaginaries. In short, we conceptualize the irreducibly epistemological ingenuity in virtue of which CA renders the feminist project of prison abolition *thinkable and feasible*.

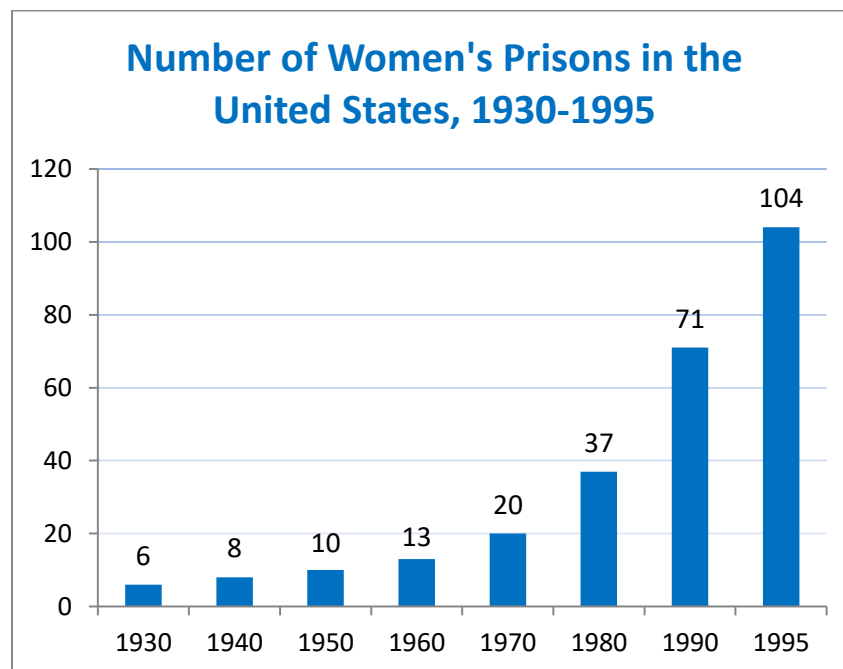
### **Gender-Responsive Justice and Feminist Criminology**

GRJ was initially a response to an earlier feminist reform of prisons. In the late 1980s, on the heels of the “awakening of criminology from its androcentric slumber” (Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988, 17–18), many radical and socialist feminist criminologists began to critique the *equal treatment or parity model* of criminal justice that had been championed by early (liberal) feminist criminologists in favor of a *gender-responsive model* of criminal justice. Early feminist criminologists, influenced by second-wave liberal feminism, challenged the “separate spheres” assumptions operating in law, criminological theory and research, and criminal justice practices. Conceptualizing women’s emancipation in terms of the achievement of formal legal and social equality with men in the public sphere, advocates of the parity model of criminal justice defined gender equality as equal treatment of men and women in juridical and carceral settings. They also in large part allowed male experiences and punishment regimes to function as the norms toward which the procedural and carceral treatment of women ought to conform.

The prison industry’s response to parity-based legal challenges to the repressive and neglectful conditions of incarcerated women was to argue that equal treatment of incarcerated women required the construction of new equal prisons for women. Some in the parity movement supported such proposals, arguing that although equal treatment may hurt women in the short run, in the long run, it was the only way to guarantee that women would ever be treated as equal partners in economic and social realms (Covington and Bloom 2000, 3). As the historical record indicates, the prison industrial complex swelled in the spirit of punitive equity for women.

Combined with the concurrent upsurge of retributive and incapacitative punishment philosophies and policies and the rise of mass incarceration, liberal feminist demands for gender parity in sentencing and prison conditions often led, paradoxically, to increased incarceration and more repressive conditions for women—a trend that critical feminist criminologist Meda Chesney-Lind terms *vengeful equity*. “Vengeful equity . . . emphasizes treating women offenders *as though they were men*, particularly when the outcome is punitive, in the name of

equal justice” (Chesney-Lind 2002, 91; on the idea of vengeful equity see also Bloom and Chesney-Lind 2000; Chesney-Lind 1991, 52; 1998; 2006, 17–20; Daly and Chesney-Lind 1988, 32; see also Davis 2003, 60–83). In fact, the conjunction of the parity model of criminal justice and the war on drugs contributed to women becoming the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. prison population, increasing by 125 percent throughout the 1990s, nearly 1.5 times the rate of men (Lipsitz 2012, 1770; Sentencing Project 2015, 1).

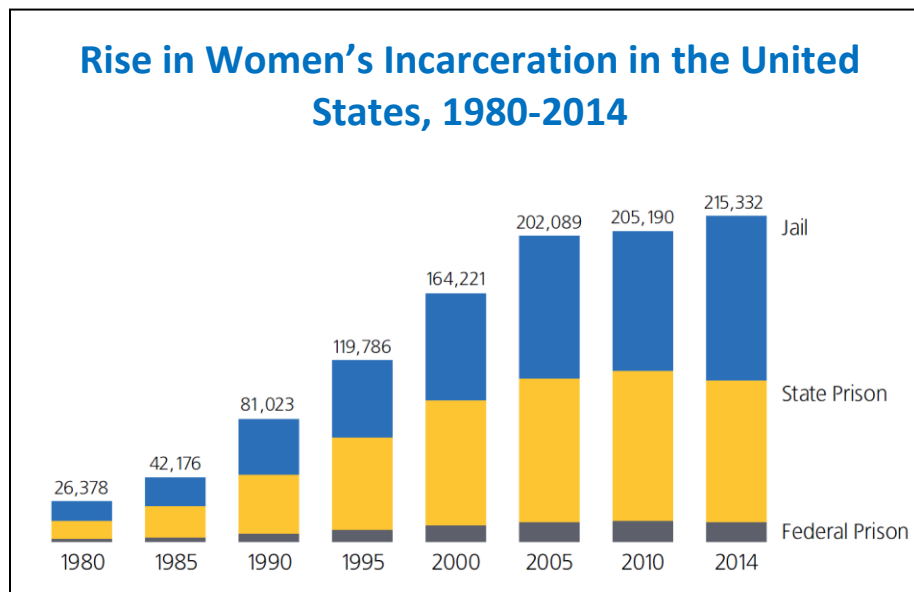


Sources: Chesney-Lind (1998, 66) & Rafter (1990, 181–182)

Every year more than three million women go to jail or prison in the United States (a number which does not include trans women incarcerated in men’s prisons and jails), giving the U.S. the deplorable distinction of confining more than one-third of the worldwide total of incarcerated women (Richie 2002, 137; Walmsley 2015). And this exponential expansion in women’s incarceration, writes Chesney-Lind, has soared “untethered from women’s crime rate.” That is, it is the result of punitive public policy decisions, not an increase in women’s involvement in serious crime (2006, 17; see also 1998).

Feminist critique of the parity model has been diverse. Since the 1990s, there have been calls for the abolition of women’s incarceration entirely, in some instances as part of proposals for generalized prison abolition, in others as a staged experiment in abolition, which would eventually be extended to men (e.g., Carlen

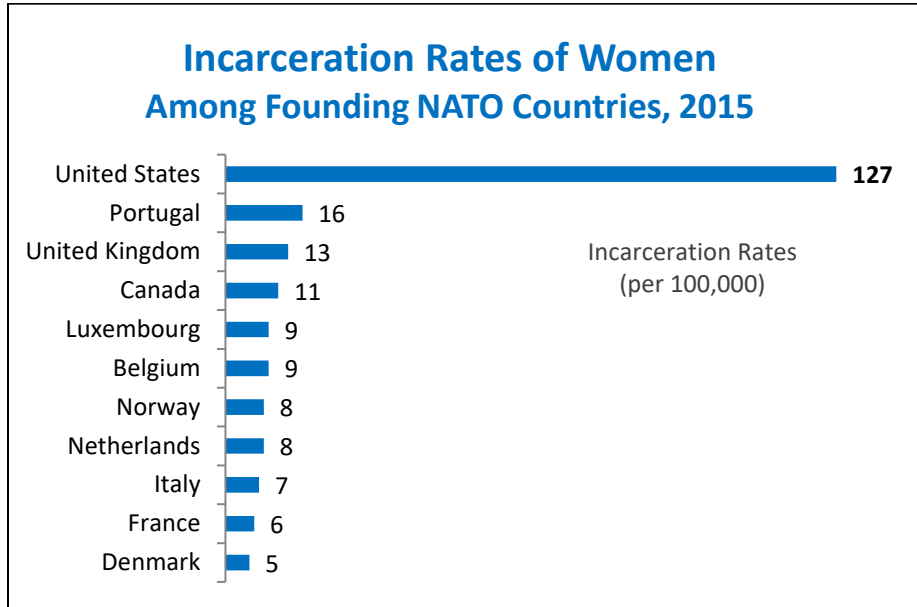
1990; 2010, 292; Chesney-Lind 1991, 64–65; Critical Resistance and INCITE! 2006; Davis 1996; 1998a; 1998b; 2003, 75). Much more influential on penological practice, however, has been the (re)turn to “separate spheres” punishment schemes in the form of gender-responsive justice. The GRJ model is a criminological appropriation of the feminist ethic of care; its guiding principle is that gender makes a criminological difference, that women differ from men in their “pathways” to crime, in their social, psychological, and material issues and needs, and in their experiences of confinement. For instance, the majority (61 percent) of women currently imprisoned in the U.S. are confined for minor illegalities such as property, drug, or public order offenses.



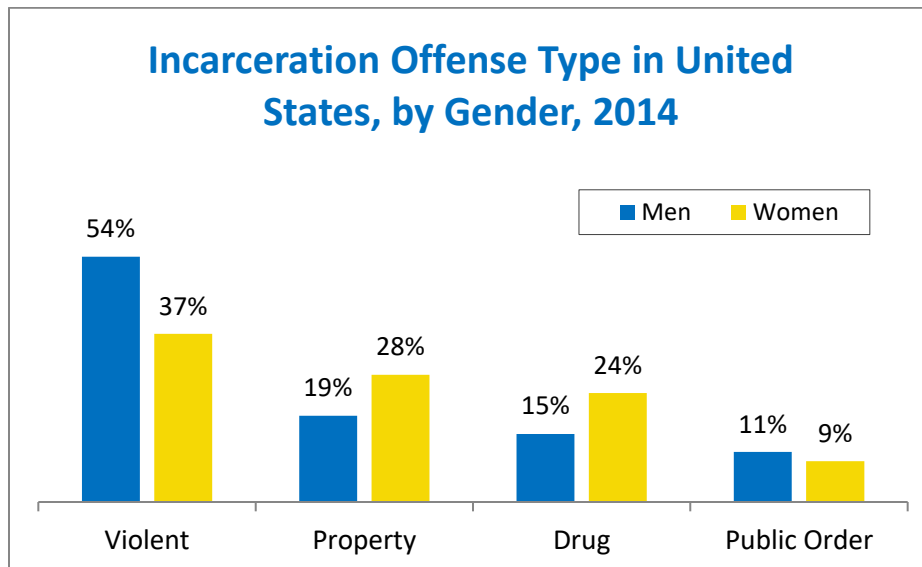
Source: Sentencing Project (2015, 1)

While largely lacking histories of perpetrating violence, incarcerated women are prevalently survivors of violence. Studies by Human Rights Watch and the U.S. Department of Justice indicate that nearly half of all incarcerated women had been physically or sexually abused prior to their imprisonment, and over one-third had been abused prior to the age of 18—roughly twice the percentage among the general population of American women (Harlow 1999; Human Rights Watch 1996, 32; Richie 2000). In fact, sexual abuse is one of the primary predictors of girls’ entry into the juvenile justice system, a fact which the Human Rights Project for Girls and the Georgetown Law Center on Poverty and Inequality recently framed as “the sexual abuse to prison pipeline” (Saar et al. 2015). And in a perverse twist of justice,

many women and girls who experience sexual abuse are criminalized and incarcerated *because* of their victimization (e.g., when victims of sex trafficking are arrested on prostitution charges).



Source: Kajstura and Immarigeon (2015)



Source: Sentencing Project (2015, 4)



In light of the distinctly gendered dimensions of the lives of incarcerated women and girls, GRJ maintains, against the gender parity model of criminal justice, that *equality* of treatment ought not be defined in terms of *sameness* of treatment. Rather, GRJ devises a “women-sensitive” correctional model that emphasizes women’s “empowerment,” a carceral environment based on safety, respect, and dignity, and relational programming that addresses issues of substance abuse, trauma, and mental health, and that promotes healthy connections to children, family, and community (Bloom et al. 2002; TFFSW 1990).

Prima facie these principles seem to aim at unobjectionable feminist goals. And yet, three of the six goals of GRJ cited by feminist criminologists in their report for the National Institute of Corrections, which provides the empirical and theoretical foundation for GRJ policies adopted by corrections departments nationwide, are “to make the management of women offenders more effective,” “enable correctional facilities to be more suitably staffed and funded,” and “decrease the likelihood of litigation against the criminal justice system” (Bloom et al. 2002, v). In other words, half of the goals seek to increase carceral efficiency and system funding, and decrease system vulnerability to legal critique—objectives explicitly aimed at strengthening and shoring up the carceral intensity and reach of the prison industrial complex.

Like the gender parity movement that preceded it, and which it was designed to replace, the separate-spheres feminist demand for gender responsiveness in sentencing and prison conditions has—*yet again*—fueled government proposals for carceral system expansion. For instance, the same feminist criminologists who contracted with the National Institute of Corrections to create the Gender-Responsive Strategies Project also contracted with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to produce *The Master Plan for Female Offenders: A Blueprint for Gender-Responsive Rehabilitation*, which claims that “the ‘mega prison’ approach, which was designed primarily to incapacitate and punish violent [read: ‘male’] offenders, is not effective for the majority of female offenders who are nonviolent” (CDCR 2008, 9). Instead, “a robust system of community correctional facilities” is needed (CDCR 2008, 10). Abolitionist feminists label such modifications as “gendered tweaks to carceral business as usual” (Buchanan 2012, 1685), attempts to construct “kinder, gentler, gender-responsive cages” (Braz 2006, 87), and refer to GRJ as “carceral humanism” (Cullors et al. 2015; Kilgore 2014) and the “gender-responsive prison expansion movement” (Chandler 2010). In the words of abolitionist human rights advocate and formerly incarcerated woman Misty Rojo: “If the state actually cared about women as it claims, it would stop building new gender responsive cages, close down the existing ones, and allow the imprisoned mothers, sisters and daughters to return to their families and build real community-based programs to support them” (2014). In sum, both of these opposing trajectories of

feminist critique—i.e., the gender parity movement and the separate spheres movement—have been subject to the same epistemic occupation. Demands for equal treatment and gender-responsive treatment alike have given rise to the same outcome: demands and plans for building more prisons.

Critical feminists also point to the way GRJ relies on a “flexible rationality of empowerment” that is variously and contradictorily employed to legitimate both carceral and feminist strategies (Hannah-Moffat 2004a). For instance, GRJ theorists acknowledge that most criminalized women are oppressed by intersecting structures of race, class, and gender, but then conceptually and programmatically ignore these social and material realities in devising responses to these women. Employing a neoliberal discourse of individual pathology and personal responsibility, GRJ proposes “corrective” interventions predicated upon “empowering” individuals to make better choices and become more productive, self-regulating agents in order to curb their own criminal behavior and transcend the conditions that cause criminality (Davis 1996; Hackett 2013; Hannah-Moffat 2000; 2004b; 2006; Nixon et al. 2008). GRJ thus conjoins with neoliberal strategies of governance that abdicate state accountability for social welfare and societal responsibility for social justice by individualizing social problems and constructing criminalized individuals as burdened subjects blameworthy for their confinement within intersecting structures of oppression. Lost is the feminist critique of social structural processes—i.e., the materialized effects of past collective or institutional actions and decisions that cumulatively produce differentials in the kinds and range of options that individuals have for their choices (Young 2011, 43–74).

The particular (and contradictory) conjunction of carceral and caring logics and procedures that GRJ embodies also prompts a rethinking of prominent conceptions of neoliberalism. For instance, in his influential account of neoliberalism and the rise of the carceral state, Loïc Wacquant argues that since the mid-1970s the United States has restructured the government of poverty through an overall reengineering and “(re)masculinizing” (2009b, 15) of the state “that couples welfare services and criminal justice administration under the aegis of the same punitive and paternalist philosophy” (2010, 83–84). “Wedding the ‘invisible hand’ of the deregulated labor market to the ‘iron fist’ of an omnipresent and intrusive punitive apparatus” (2009a, 1), this alleged (re)masculinization process constructs a “causal and functional linkage between two sectors of the bureaucratic field”: on the one hand, a systematically atrophied social-welfare sector, which replaces the right to welfare with the obligation of restrictive workfare; on the other hand, a hypertrophically expanding penal sector (2009b, 19). Wacquant refers to this coupling of welfare-turned-workfare and the carceral state as the *carceral-assistential complex*, the aim of which he argues is to discipline, “surveil and subjugate, and if need be chastise and neutralize, the populations recalcitrant or

superfluous to the new economic and symbolic order” (2009a, 83; see also 2001, 97; 2010, 83–84).

Wacquant makes two claims in his account of the carceral-assistential complex of neoliberalism upon which our feminist analysis of GRJ sheds further light. First, he contends that in the (re)masculinization of the state “the punitive and panoptic logic that propels criminal justice *seeps into and erodes* the shielding capacities of the welfare sector” (2010, 84; emphasis added). In addition to the transformation of welfare into disciplinary workfare, he points, for instance, to the inflection of the practices of child protective services in ways that “turn them into adjuncts of the penal apparatus” (2010, 84–85).<sup>2</sup> However, GRJ is exemplary of how the carceral logic of criminal justice has not only invaded the welfare sector, it has explicitly colonized and incorporated state welfare within the confines of state and federal departments of corrections. Furthermore, contrary to Wacquant’s assertion that the carceral-assistential complex is ordered by “a gendered division of labor, with its carceral component handling the men while its assistential component exercises its tutelage over (their) women and children” (2009a, 83–84; see also 2009b, 14–17; 2010, 83–84), GRJ is exemplary of how, for many women, especially those women of color whose strategies of survival are routinely and systemically criminalized, state assistance is (and always has been) deeply imbricated with carceral and colonial technologies.

Throughout penal history, liberal optimists have repeatedly and recurrently claimed that prisons are really assistential technologies of rehabilitation (Morris and Rothman 1995). However, prison is primarily and essentially organized for punitive exclusion by disciplinary containment. The *essence* of a prison is its carceral logic, and this logic inevitably erodes, if not subverts, all custodial attempts at therapy, rehabilitation, or human development (Brenzel 1980; Carlen and Tombs 2006, 340; Freedman 1984, 89–142; Rafter 1990, 74–82). And, because of its intrinsic coercion, the carceral environment produces harm and ruptures in relationships that create the need for a unique set of social resources and therapeutic interventions to help people cope with the trauma of imprisonment itself. Pat Carlen and Jaqueline Tombs, radical feminist criminologists from England and Scotland, respectively, expose the contradictory conceit of what Carlen (2002, 2005) calls the “therapeutic prison.”

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<sup>2</sup> As intersectional (particularly Black and Indigenous) feminist scholarship makes clear, the practices of child protective services, contrary to Wacquant’s historical narrative, have *always* operated as colonial and carceral technologies. See, for example, Deer (2015, 67–75, 84–86) and Roberts (1997, 2001, 2012, 2014).

[The gender-responsive justice model] obscures the fact that therapeutic programming in prison is always buttressed by all the old punitive and security paraphernalia of previous centuries of creative penal governance; and that such an accretion and layering of disciplinary modes and containment strategies effortlessly produce the mixed economy of the therapunitive prison in which any isolated therapeutic attempts to reduce the debilitating pains of imprisonment are inevitably undermined by the punishing carceral context. (Carlen and Tombs 2006, 339)

It is surprising that contemporary GRJ feminists fail to appreciate that prisons—however reformed—cannot and will not bring about the hoped for, even if misguided, therapeutic transformation of individual criminalized women. It is especially surprising in light of early criminological formulations of gender responsiveness, which, prior to adopting the neoliberal conceptual framework of individualistic therapy and case management, had an explicitly intersectional analytic focus on structural social processes. For instance, at the inception of the radical feminist critique of the logic of parity in criminal justice in the 1990s, when Meda Chesney-Lind, one of the most prominent voices of GRJ in feminist criminology, called for a “return to an appreciation of the differences between women and men prisoners” and an embrace of a separate-spheres logic as a strategy for challenging the parity-driven pattern of mass incarceration, she proposed “using the special and unique needs of women offenders *to argue against their imprisonment*” (1991, 59; emphasis added).

Chesney-Lind made four specific normative proposals to feminist criminologists at that time that are a far cry from the contemporary complicity of GRJ with the punitive expansionism of carceral humanism. First, she argued that feminist criminologists “should demand a moratorium on construction of women’s prisons in the United States with *the ultimate goal of abolishing women’s prisons*” (63, emphasis added). Second, she argued that, in order “*to make decarceration thinkable,*” feminist criminologists must shift their research from an individualistic focus on “offender profiles” to an analysis of the ways that *patriarchy* and the intersections of race, class, and gender govern the patterns of women’s incarceration (64, emphasis added). Relatedly, she advocated that feminist criminologists shift from studying criminalized women to studying the system that locks them up (64). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, Chesney-Lind proposed that feminist criminologists look to the grassroots at women “outside the academic mainstream” who are leading community initiatives and “fugitive research” agendas that chart out sustainable, non-carceral, life-affirming alternatives for addressing the needs of criminalized women (the overwhelming majority of whom are poor, of color, and survivors of violence). “In seeking to identify promising community

initiatives in decarceration,” she argued, “*we must make sure that these function as alternatives rather than as mechanisms to expand state control over the lives of women*” (64, emphasis added).

How could feminist demand for gender-responsive justice, in the form of prison abolition and grassroots community alternatives, morph into a movement for state-centered gender-responsive prison and carceral expansion? To answer this question, GRJ must be understood as one element in the larger story of the occupation of the feminist antiviolence movement—an occupation which is at once organizational, political, and epistemic.

### **The Occupation of the Antiviolence Movement**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, antiviolence activists focused on rape, organized self-defense classes, took guerilla action against alleged rapists, inaugurated Take Back the Night collective actions, founded rape crisis centers and organizations, then built alliances across these organizations, and lobbied for legal reforms (Bevacqua 2000, 66–102). Like the early (academic) formulations of GRJ, these early (grassroots) forms of organized feminist resistance to rape were driven by rapidly growing theorizations of patriarchy as the wellspring of violence against women. Only by dismantling patriarchy, many activists argued, could rape be stopped. Many theorized the state as a patriarchal structure that must be massively restructured, if not done away with entirely (Bevacqua 2000; Brown 1992; Davis 1981; Gottschalk 2006).

During the late 70s and early 80s, however, radical critiques of social and political institutions gave way to approaches that focused on the state, particularly law enforcement, to respond to violence against women (Bevacqua 2000; Brown 1992; Davis 1981; Gottschalk 2006; Kim 2015). Beth Richie offers an account of how that occupation became appealing to a certain segment of the antiviolence movement:

Academic research [on gendered violence and antiviolence intervention] followed funding streams, which emerged from legislative reforms that were less interested in social justice than social services, law enforcement, and explaining individual behavior. The emphasis was on creating generalized conclusions which, at best, focused on gender as a unifying category, but did not very effectively account for race, class, age, or other differences. From this conservative academic perspective, poor women who are raped, lesbians who are harassed, and battered women who break the law are understood as ‘troubling cases’ or ‘isolated incidences’ rather than social phenomena related to forms of structural inequality that extend beyond gender. (Richie 2012, 88)

Part of the reason legitimacy and state funding were so strongly tied to law enforcement has to do with the development of the larger victims' rights movement in the United States. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA), for instance, was established in 1968 as part of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act, which many regard as "the master plan for the national war on crime" (Gottschalk 2006, 85; Kim 2015, 7). LEAA was specifically intended to address the treatment of victims and witnesses by law enforcement (Gottschalk 2006, 85). By the time the anti-rape movement began critiquing and organizing resistance to law enforcement responses to victims, LEAA was well enough established within the Department of Justice to fund studies and programs. One study concluded in 1974 that the responses of law enforcement and hospitals to victims were tantamount to a second assault (Gottschalk 2006, 125). However, while the report supported local programs to address the needs of victims, it specifically called into question the work of rape crisis centers as too feminist (125). As Marie Gottschalk notes, "With the help of LEAA money and other public financing, the government successfully absorbed many of the independent rape crisis centers and services, with their radical, volunteer, grassroots orientations, into its professional, hierarchical bureaucracy" (125).

In the U.S., mobilization against domestic violence was organized later than the anti-rape movement and proved to be even more susceptible to cooptation.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, Gottschalk, Kim, and Richie identify both branches of the antiviolence movement (i.e., the anti-rape movement and the anti-domestic violence movement) as major contributors to the build-up of the carceral state. As the editors of a special issue of *Social Justice* on *Community Accountability* describe this transformation: "the politics of antiviolence work . . . were *dislocated and repositioned* into the repressive state's powerful, and largely successful, conservative agenda" (Durazo et al. 2012b, 2).

Many women of color objected to and resisted the cooptation of the mainstream antiviolence movement. Amidst the ascendancy of carceral solutions to violence against women, they continued to organize and risked confronting violence

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<sup>3</sup> It is noteworthy that the convergence of the U.S. anti-domestic violence movement with the state occurred, as Mimi Kim's recent historical and ethnographic research evidences, despite the contestatory orientation of the early mobilization against domestic violence and the critical perspective that many movement participants maintained toward state cooptation and subordination (2015, 7–8). See Gottschalk 2006 for an analysis of the movement's susceptibility to cooptation.

on multiple levels. (INCITE! 2006, 3). Despite the risk, feminists of color resisted the epistemic, organizational, and political occupation of the antiviolence movement and developed many of the abolitionist alternatives to GRJ that we discuss in the next section. These women, working outside and against the mainstream and outside of state funding streams to government, non-profit, and academic institutions, have tended to work within grassroots social justice organizations. Indeed, engagement in social justice praxis is a key element of Black feminist analysis. As Richie argues, a shared assumption of Black feminist theory is “that scholarly work should be in service to activism and that the beneficiaries of research findings, policy recommendations, or theoretical insights should be those most affected.” (2012, 131). Richie emphasizes that those most affected in the work she does are Black women experiencing gendered violence, for whom state agencies and institutions are *sources* of violence in their lives rather than protectors from it. By prioritizing activism and gearing scholarly work toward the benefit of those most affected and burdened by multiple intersecting forms of racialized gender violence, Richie and other women-of-color feminists remain strongly disinclined to permit state violence to recede into the background of their analyses. In other words, Richie shows us how to resist the political dislocation of antiviolence scholarship, advocacy, and organizing, and to refuse the subsumption of such work within state agendas and institutional practices that are complicit in the perpetration and perpetuation of violence. Antiviolence frameworks that center those who are burdened by multiple intersecting schemes of violence will provide greater reason and motivation to resist epistemic, organizational, and political occupation—no matter how tempting the grant or the perceived legitimacy offered by state support.

Although this commitment to centering those whose social position renders them more vulnerable to multiple, intersecting forms of violence (Crenshaw 1989, 1991) could be seen as a safeguard for researchers against cooptation, it should be noted that the people who have maintained a critique of state violence have largely been people whose *experience* (in virtue of structural social position or interpersonal affiliation) does not allow state violence to recede as a problem. Indeed, the continuum of alternatives to law enforcement and prisons that we will discuss in the following sections have largely been developed by people who have lived and continue to live close to state violence and, thus, do not see the police or other mechanisms of the state as potential solutions to the violence in their lives.

### **The Community Accountability Critique of the Criminalization of Gendered and Intimate Violence**

To appreciate the epistemological ingenuity of CA theory and practice and to understand the alternatives that CA activists and theorists imagine and create, it is necessary to understand the CA critique of dominant practices of criminalization and

punishment. CA theorists and activists critique the current mainstream response to gendered violence for engaging in what Norwegian criminologist and prison abolitionist Nils Christie (1977) referred to as *conflict theft*. Once criminalized, a harmful encounter between individuals is recast as the commission of crime by a perpetrator against the state—a reconstruction that effaces survivors of violence, relegating them to the status of observers of an adversarial process administered by criminal justice professionals. This displacement usurps the potential for conflict to serve as an occasion for activity, healing, norm-clarification, and community consolidation by stripping the survivor and her/his community of the power to set goals, negotiate boundaries, and assume a determinative role in the accountability process (CARA 2006; Christie 1977; Durazo 2012, 78; Durazo et al. 2012a, 3; Heiner 2015, 40–42).

The dominant penalizing process also tends to reinforce conceptions of the survivor as forever wounded by the experience, profoundly inhibited from, if not incapable of, building a meaningful life after experiences of harm (CARA 2006). Survivors are often isolated and deprived of important avenues for moving forward. Moreover, a survivor can be “objectified or minimized as a symbol of an idea instead of an actual person” (CARA 2006, 251). The highly stylized role of plaintiff—a status achievable only if the police choose to investigate the report of assault and a prosecutor decides to pursue the case—prevents the survivor from having input into the process. The survivor is objectified, treated as passive and helpless—a process which paternalistically constructs and legitimizes the state as protector. For the state to take on this role, the community must be disappeared, the person who experienced the harm reduced to a victim, and the person who committed the harm transmuted into a monster.

Conventional criminal justice processes also relegate the aggressor to the status of a passive object of state retribution and management—a silent spectator of a discussion of how much pain he or she caused and ought to, in turn, receive, rather than a participant in a dialogue regarding how he or she could actively contribute to restoring equilibrium and well-being (Christie 1977). The aggressor is also often represented as monstrous, bestial, and/or predatory, which constructs the person who has committed harm as an Other, too dangerous to stay in the community (CARA 2006; Hudson 2006). Through this process of “generative scapegoating,” the masculinist institutions of the state are made to appear as a necessary safeguard and protector against such monstrous danger (Girard 1987).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a non-reductionist historical materialist account of oscillating representations of criminality and their co-constitutive relationship to social crisis, see Melossi (2000).



Treating survivors as forever damaged, while individualizing, pathologizing, and dehumanizing aggressors, mystifies the web of relationships within which harm occurs (CARA 2006; Durazo 2012). In doing so, current criminal justice responses obscure the ways that social norms and practices, as well as law enforcement interventions themselves, produce and contribute to the potential for violence. As Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA), a Seattle-based CA organization makes this point: “If we separate ourselves from the offenders by stigmatizing them, then we fail to see how we contributed to conditions that allowed violence to happen” (CARA 2006, 251). Rather than increasing community safety, carcerality perpetuates the norms and practices that contribute to violence within the community (CARA 2006; GenerationFIVE 2007; INCITE! 2006; Richie 2012; Tyson 2015). In other words, criminal justice responses treat non-state violence as *individual pathology* that calls for the incapacitative disappearance or rehabilitative reformation of criminalized subjects, rather than as a *social practice* (connected to state violence), the abolition of which will require the invention and proliferation of alternative social institutions and practices (Durazo 2012; GenerationFIVE 2007; Richie 2012; Tyson 2015; Young 1990), or, in the case of Native peoples, the decolonial resurgence of traditional Indigenous ones (Corntassel 2012a, 2012b; Corntassel et al. 2009; Ross 1998, 11–33; 2002).

From the perspective of many Native Americans, the criminalization and labeling of Native Americans as “deviant” by the legal mechanisms of the U.S. government must be understood as complexly connected to the history and ongoing processes of settler colonialism (Corntassel 2012a; Deer 2009; Goldstein 2014; LeFevre 2015; Ross 1998; Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). U.S. settler colonialism has variously constructed Indigenous lifeways as “savage” in the service of dispossessing Native peoples of their homelands, delegitimizing Indigenous sovereignty, and pathologizing and eliminating the alternative normative orders presented by Indigenous relational, place-based forms of existence (Coulthard 2014; Ross 1998). Reflecting on the historical and persistent collision of Native and settler colonial worlds and their respective legal systems of justice, Luana Ross (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes) argues, “The mechanisms of Euro-American law either are incapable of recognizing the cultural and legal separateness of Natives or are deliberately designed to destroy that independence” (1998, 29; see also 32–33; 2002, 133).

In this context, the theft of Indigenous conflicts by the U.S. settler colonial state reveals a specifically colonial dimension of conflict theft. For instance, addressing the U.S. federal government’s prosecution of instances of sexual assault within Indigenous communities, Sarah Deer (Muscogee) writes, “Defendants, if convicted, are held accountable by a foreign government using foreign mechanisms of justice,” which is part of denying “true community accountability—something

prized in tribal nations” (2009, 151). Indigenous scholars contextualize such conflict theft as part of a long history and ongoing process of occupying and destroying the political, epistemic, and organizational practices of Native communities (Deer 2004, 2009, 2015; Ross 1998, 2002; Smith 2012).

Highlighting the colonialism of U.S. incarceration, as Robert Nichols has recently argued, forces consideration of the ways in which the U.S. settler colonial state “aspires to impose an exclusivity and singularity of command and control that obliterates alternative normative orders beneath and beyond its aegis” (2015, 449). The fact that communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are capable of producing and, indeed, do produce, alternative normative orders threatens the dominance of normative orders encoded in and reproduced by the U.S. settler colonial state (Corntassel 2012a, 2012b). To contain this threat, the settler system of criminal justice and other shape-shifting colonial entities treat alternative normative orders as disordered “states of nature” from which people must be saved by the civilizing influences of capitalism and the settler state. Criminalization is legitimated as a civilizing process—as rehabilitation and development.

In reality, mass incarceration functions ideologically as a one-dimensionally punitive panacea that addresses only symptoms rather than the root causes of violence. In the process, mass incarceration actually exacerbates, deepens, and protracts the very problems that have led to spiraling numbers of imprisoned people by devouring the public resources needed to ameliorate those problems; producing mass-scale social and civic death; disrupting and disordering families, communities, and Indigenous nations; reinforcing gender binaries; and constructing an industrial complex that generates profits for corporations and careers for the politicians they fund. Moreover, in order to function, prisons require whole sectors of service employees and legal, administrative, and correctional bureaucracy whose livelihoods are built upon the commodification of people as criminals (Davis 1998a, 2003; Durazo et al. 2012a; Gilmore 2007; Heiner 2015; INCITE! 2006).

The theory and practice of CA emerges from a critical consideration of these expropriations, mystifications, and harms that the criminalization of violence enacts. Epistemologically, CA theory de-links from the epistemic occupation of mass incarceration by developing a multi-axis analytical framework that scrutinizes the interrelatedness of intimate, interpersonal, and community violence and the violence produced and sanctioned by colonialism and state and social institutions. Organizationally, CA strategies work to de-link from the settler colonial state and the prison and non-profit industrial complexes. Politically, they “seek to transform communities and political conditions rather than buttress oppressive institutions that replicate violence” (Durazo 2012, 82).

### **Guiding Principles of Community Accountability**

Given its critique of mainstream responses to violence and its multi-axis analysis of violence, CA theory shows the need for a multi-track vision in community accountability processes. Effective responses to violence must envisage the accountability of (1) the individual aggressor(s); (2) the community at large for the practices and discourses that cultivate a climate conducive or productive of gender violence (including rape culture, everyday misogyny, and the denial of leadership roles to women, transgender, and gender queer people); (3) violent, colonial, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal social and state institutions; (4) the community accountability process itself; and (5) the survivor(s). To accomplish such complex work, while also resisting the colonial and carceral logics of the criminal justice system, CA organizations have developed guiding principles. These guiding principles are crucial to CA's ability to undertake the social transformation that is required to move beyond ineffective reform of the current system and to address the root causes of violence.

One of the central normative principles of CA processes is to foreground the moral personhood of all the stakeholders involved (CARA 2006; Durazo 2012). Such foregrounding involves respecting and prioritizing the self-determination of the survivor and allowing the survivor to choose to take part in generating accountability demands for the aggressor as well as the community (CARA 2006; Kelly 2012). The survivor's vision and understanding of accountability matter in the process, unlike in current mainstream responses, in which the state's decision to pursue a case can, at best, result in a narrow range of legally codified punitive responses without attention to the survivor's desires.

The community organizing work of CA also requires that aggressors be treated as subjects capable of accountability. Philly Stands Up, a Philadelphia-based CA organization, engages the aggressor in developing a plan for meeting the demands of the accountability process. When aggressors are treated in this way, CA practitioners maintain, "they are reluctant to back out because they do not see themselves as walking out on an externally imposed program" (Kelly 2012, 55).

The decolonial, decarceral, and world-constituting work of CA not only involves de-linking from the settler state's system of justice and the prison industrial complex of which it is a part. CA networks also de-link from the non-profit industrial complex, i.e., a system of symbiotic relationships between the state, philanthropic foundations, and social service and social justice organizations that fashions criminalized populations as "targets" for treatment, surveillance, control, and everyday management in ways that thwart the autonomous, collective organization of marginalized communities (INCITE! 2007; Nixon et al. 2008).

A volume created by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, entitled *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, provides

an illuminating historical analysis of the role that progressive philanthropy and the 501(c)(3) non-profit model of social justice organizing have played in preserving existing social hierarchies and economic inequalities by derailing revolutionary decolonial social movements led by people of color and sublimating them into corporately structured reform movements largely led by professionally credentialed whites. The volume's editors and contributors argue that the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) is the *symbiotic corollary* of the prison industrial complex (PIC).

While the PIC overtly represses dissent, the NPIC manages and controls dissent by incorporating it into the state apparatus, functioning as a 'shadow state' constituted by a network of institutions that do much of what government agencies are supposed to do with tax money in the areas of education and social services. (INCITE! 2007, 9)

Critical of this destructive symbiosis and the persistent threats of incorporation, cooptation, and subordination, CA networks promote non-reliance on professionalized experts and institutions and resist the pressures "to commodify concepts and practices, to adapt to funder-driven appeals to create institutionally identified or 'trademarked' approaches and best practices, and to incorporate CA efforts into the state institutions [that CA networks] have been resisting" (Kim 2012, 32).

The fluidity and flexibility common to CA networks can be seen in the strategic ways they use and approach non-profits in community organizing. For instance, Creative Interventions, an Oakland-based CA organization with 501(c)(3) status, began with the deliberate strategy of striving for a limited institutional life cycle, emphasizing the life of the models, tools, and technologies they could develop, rather than the non-profit organization itself, which they aimed to ultimately dissolve. As Kim writes, "our aim was to contribute other informal and formal indigenous formations that were relevant to a community's local context" (Kim 2012, 24). CARA enacted a strategy of creating and maintaining a "dual identity"—a disguised one for its public and foundation funders, and an authentic one for its constituents. By engaging in a kind of tactical code-switching that is common practice among people of color and poor people navigating spaces dominated by white, middle-class, and wealthy people, CARA developed ways to frame its work to state and foundation agencies in a more palatable cloak of reform (e.g., referring to its community organizing and mobilizing work using the service-oriented language of "community engagement" with "underserved communities," omitting mention in grant reports of the community teach-ins they conducted, which aimed to undermine institutional oppressions that directly contribute to sexual violence). "While we remained consistent in our political work and ideas and

our final accountability to our constituents,” writes CARA activist Alisa Bierria, “oppressed people develop creative strategies for survival as we move across the boundaries of our own communities and communities we do not identify as our own” (Bierria 2007, 157–158). The strategic uses that the CA movement makes of non-profits are tightly linked to the liberatory aims of CA work, its commitment to mass movement building and to centering men, women, and gender non-conforming people of color in its analysis and organizing practice (Bierria 2007, 153–155; INCITE! 2007, 15).

CA de-links from the professionalization of the mainstream antiviolence movement in favor of drawing on the skills and resources of the community and building its capacity for responding to and preventing violence. As Mimi Kim writes, “The people closest to the violence have the greatest motivation to end it and the greatest knowledge regarding its dynamics, context, and the elements that might lead to change” (Kim 2012, 20). We see here a rejection of the idea that people need state intervention to keep them safe from others. Instead, CA theorists and activists tend to treat people’s proximity to violence, and the trauma that may be experienced because of that violence, as a source of motivation, and even skills, to be used in transforming the community to reduce violence.

Hence, the emphasis for CA is on collective grassroots work. While communities have many resources for responding to violence that are not utilized in current mainstream responses, the possibility for violence also exists within those communities. That is, the practices, norms, and structure of a community may all have had a role in the violence. Thus, communities, too, must be transformed through CA processes. Such transformation through collective grassroots work requires multidimensional holism (Kim 2012) and a commitment to the unfinished (Mathiesen 1974).

Multidimensional holism entails “the consideration of multiple perspectives, including those of survivors, community allies, and those doing harm, in the process” (Kim 2012, 19) and “consensus through collective negotiation of goals” (21). Rather than handing the conflict over to a patriarchal power that will adjudicate the proper outcome, CA invites the people close to the violence to respond to that violence together. CARA writes, “Organizing for accountability should not be just about the business of developing a strategy to address the aggressor’s behavior, but also about creating a loving space for community-building and real care for others” (CARA 2006, 252). But this guideline does not assume that everyone in a community will share the same analysis of the violence that has occurred and does occur within it. Rather, CA processes require developing participants’ understanding of how and why violence happens; this understanding helps to develop epistemic and political resources within the community.

Indeed, CA theorists and activists are well aware that resistance to transformation is part of the process—resistance on the part of aggressors, survivors, community allies, and the state (CARA 2006; GenerationFIVE 2007; Durazo 2012; Kelly 2012; Kim 2012, 21). CA activists thus speak of creating plans for safety during the CA process and creating plans for the aggressor’s response to being held accountable, as well as considering the consequences of engaging in a CA process, rather than turning to the state (CARA 2006; GenerationFIVE 2007; Kelly 2012).

A commitment to the unfinished requires recognizing that “community accountability is a process, not a destination” (CARA 2006, 255). Community accountability processes are themselves forms of community-building (Bierria 2007, 161). There must, therefore, be an open goal-setting process that cannot be determined in advance (Kim 2012, 21). Commitment to the unfinished is closely tied to the way CA theorists and activists tend to understand their antiviolence work to be in the service of abolition and liberation. As Durazo writes: “Just as prison abolition is more than an anti-prison project, community accountability is more than an antiviolence project. It is a liberation project that creates the potential and space for autonomous radical transformation in our lives and communities, seeking to transform the roots of violence” (Durazo 2012, 79). Rather than understanding abolition and liberation as states to be achieved, CA activists and theorists tend to describe CA work as a liberatory process, *even when it is not clear what will happen*. In *The Politics of Abolition* (1974), Thomas Mathiesen closely articulates the concepts of abolition, the unfinished, and freedom: “Abolition . . . takes place when we break with the established order and *at the same time* face unbuilt ground. . . . Abolition and the very first phase of the unfinished are one and the same. The moment of freedom is that of entering unbuilt ground” (25).

Through their commitment to the unfinished, CA theorists and activists remain open to the ongoing need for accountability. A group such as CARA can, therefore, produce 10 principles for community accountability, but it presents those principles as the bones of a process that must be fleshed out by the people involved in the process, rather than as a user’s manual (CARA 2006, 250). We can see this commitment to the unfinished vividly in the reflections of Mimi Kim on her work as part of Creative Interventions (CI): “Within CI intervention teams, tensions arose regarding the centrality and expression of gender analysis during an intervention. I normally assumed a gender binary and embraced the doctrine of ‘believing the victim,’ particularly when that person was a woman within a heterosexual dynamic of violence. My inability to suspend these assumptions revealed my own internal challenges, as well as those within the intervention team” (Kim 2012, 27). While Kim calls this inability a symptom of her own “internal challenges” and those of her fellow CA practitioners, it is also possible to read these challenges as indicative of a wider epistemic challenge in which Kim participates. Yet, Kim marks her inability to

understand a situation outside the gender frame she has available for considering violence within a heterosexual relation.

What is remarkable about Kim's account, and what we are identifying as a hallmark of CA's commitment to the unfinished, is her ability to at once identify the gender binarism of her existing epistemic resources and to mark *both* the challenge that a particular CA process poses to those epistemic resources *and* the internal resistance she encounters when that challenge incites her to radically alter her epistemological system. Even though Kim does not in that moment succeed in making such a change, she identifies and stays open to the need for a radical shift in her epistemic resources, rather than simply dismissing challenges to a gender binary frame. In other words, Kim resists the resilience of the dominant epistemic framework within which her theoretical and practical activity is situated.

Such openness to the unfinished involves a kind of vulnerability and attunement that is at once epistemic and existential. Durazo describes the lived experience of CA work as a decolonization process that opens onto the unfinished—a process that involves what in the concluding section we refer to, following Dotson, as a triple-loop epistemic process, which gives rise to third-order social change. What her account reveals is that inhabiting the unbuilt ground of the unfinished inevitably involves complex affect; while a moment of freedom and lightness of being, it is also simultaneously an event infused with fear and anxiety in the face of the unknown. Reflecting on a CA process within a university class that she co-taught, Durazo points to this affective dimension and the epistemic role that it plays in CA processes:

The process is frightening because one enters it without an exact destination; there might be a semblance of a path, method, or guide, but *unknowns characterize the endpoint and places along the way*. Fear has multiple triggers: past experiences with trauma and the possibility of new traumas. The process undeniably depends on courage in the face of an exhausting procession of sweaty palms, nausea, pressing silences, and tumultuous words and gestures. Yet it was as if a ribbon of faith floated above our class, somehow getting us through the difficult moments. There was light and laughter too. The feeling that we were going somewhere and that change was imminent lifted us and inspired the courage that let the fear fall away. When driving home across the Bay Bridge after class, I felt a heaviness that sank the pit of my stomach to the car floor and a lightness in my heart that felt like a cloud of neblina lifting me out of the car. In collective formations and praxis, the weight of suffering coexists alongside the lightness of the possibility of healing and transformation. (Durazo 2012, 86–87; emphasis added)

The affective experience of CA processes as a decolonial praxis can be so profound, Durazo maintains, that it can approach a kind of existential death, risking death of parts of the self/selves that are the product of oppressive systems, but to which an individual or community has become attached. “As those unequally divided through colonial violence and injustice attempt to take account and reconcile through collective and self-reflection, a form of death is beckoned in which the previous version of you/community might be deemed no longer viable” (86). In our concluding argument, we analyze and elaborate on the importance of the sort of epistemic and affective openness that Kim and Durazo exemplify for its role in enabling CA activists to not only question the epistemic resources available to them, but also to develop new resources and, in the process, new, decolonizing forms of subjectivity and community.

### **The Decolonial Epistemology of Community Accountability**

The carceral humanism of GRJ’s coordinated continuum of care and the abolitionism of CA’s continuum of decarcerating alternatives not only differ from one another politically or in the quality and scope of the institutional and/or sociopolitical change that they respectively entail. Their differences are also of an irreducibly epistemological order. To conceptualize these differences and to set the stage for discerning the specifically epistemological dimensions of CA’s radical ingenuity, we will draw from the work of Black feminist epistemologist Kristie Dotson (2014). Working within the fields of social epistemology and epistemologies of ignorance (e.g., Alcoff and Potter 1992, Anzaldúa 1999, Code 1995, 2004, 2008; Collins 2000; Fricker 2007; Medina 2012; Mignolo 2007, 2009; Mills 1999; Pohlhaus 2011; Sullivan and Tuana 2007), Dotson sets out to conceptualize epistemic oppression, which she defines as persistent and unwarranted epistemic exclusions that hinder subjects’ ability to contribute to knowledge production (2014, 115). In the course of her analysis, she creatively appropriates an “orders of change” model of organizational change from the cognitive behavioral science of organizational development (Bartunek and Moch 1987; Walsh 2004) in order to theorize the magnitude of the epistemic shifts required to motivate different kinds of social change—from organizational and institutional change to structural sociopolitical change. Dotson analyzes the specifically epistemic exclusions that hinder subjects’ ability to engage in social change by infringing on their capacity to participate in the requisite processes of imagining uncharted possibilities, producing new knowledge, revising existing shared epistemic resources, and (in some cases) detecting and transforming the limits of the very epistemological systems or instituted social imaginaries within which their shared epistemic resources are situated.



Bartunek and Moch outline three different levels of organizational change, each of which entails progressively more radical alterations to prevailing schemas—i.e., “templates that, when pressed against experience, give it form and meaning” (Bartunek and Moch 1987, 484). *First-order change* transpires as part of a problem-solving strategy that seeks to overcome obstacles to fulfilling goals of already established schemas. First-order change thus leaves established epistemic resources intact, not discerning them as problematic, but focusing on solving problems and reducing inefficiencies “so that established patterns can function more effectively” (Bartunek and Moch 1987, 487). A first-order change, Dotson explains, “does not call for revisions in beliefs and values specifically. Rather, it attempts to make one’s behaviour reflect one’s [already established] beliefs and values” (2014, 118). As such, first-order change primarily involves what Dotson calls *single-loop processes*. Individuals engage in single-loop processes when “they alter their strategies or approaches to solving a problem, without examining or changing their underlying governing values” (118; citing Walsh 2004, 306).

*Second-order change* alters the schemas themselves, “phasing out” one or a set of interpretive schemas in favor of others. It is typically a response to discovering that the shared epistemic resources of an organization are themselves insufficient in some way given the overarching goals of the organization. Second-order change involves both single- and *double-loop processes* in which individuals “hold their governing and often unconscious values open for examination” and shift the conceptual, habitual, and normative constructs and processes upon which they rely in directing, evaluating, and making sense of their actions (Walsh 2004). Second-order change results when individuals shift their behaviors to reflect these altered schemas.

Both single- and double-loop processes aim at increasing individual and organizational effectiveness either by bringing the actions of individuals into alignment with currently prevailing organizational schemas (single-loop processes) or by shifting organizational schemas themselves (double-loop processes). But, in addition to altering individuals’ values and behaviors in the service of greater organizational efficiency, second-order change can also enable individuals to consider new possibilities, such as *third-order change*. Rather than just filling in gaps within one’s epistemic resources or making those resources more efficient, third-order change entails recognizing and, possibly, enabling individuals to alter the operative, instituted social imaginaries or epistemological systems within which cognitive and organizational schemas are situated and through which such schemas are preserved and legitimated (Dotson 2014, 119). An *instituted* imaginary is a cultural system that “carries normative social meanings, customs, expectations, assumptions, values, prohibitions, and permissions—the habitus and ethos—into which people are nurtured from childhood” (Code 2008, 34; cited in Dotson 2014,

119). While “in single- and double-loop processes, instituted social imaginaries may not be challenged or even recognized,” *triple-loop processes* “can aid in producing an *instituting* social imaginary capable of altering one’s entire epistemological system” (Dotson 2014, 119). The epistemic resources of the dominant order are disclosed as inadequate and thrown into question.

When CA activists engage in deep questioning and critique of the criminological framing of violence—when they create non-carceral, life-affirming, decolonial responses to violence—they are creating *third-order change*, which throws dominant epistemological and political systems into question, opens onto the unbuilt ground of the unfinished, and produces new *instituting* social imaginaries. Radical community accountability processes frequently engender triple-loop processes that enable us (as participants and world-traveling readers) to epistemically de-link from the dominant epistemic resources according to which an array of social problems—related to racialized and gendered violence, colonialism, unemployment, education, drug addiction, and public health—are framed through the schemas of criminality and penalty.

As abolitionists and CA theorists/practitioners such as Bierria, Davis, Durazo, Kim, and Mathiesen testify, this is not a simple or easy undertaking. In Dotson’s words, “First-, second- and third-order changes are progressively more demanding”; the *resilience* of dominant epistemological systems is of such magnitude that they can absorb extraordinarily large disturbances without redefining their structures (Dotson 2014, 119). Indeed, in language that parallels that of abolitionists and CA theorists conceptualizing the unfinished (Durazo 2012, 86–87; Mathiesen 1974, 13–27), Bartunek and Moch, when writing about third-order change, compare the experience of encountering the limits of one’s epistemological system to an encounter with “the mystical” (1994). The possibilities opened up by triple-loop processes appear through the grid of intelligibility constructed by prevailing epistemic resources—if they appear at all—as empirically impossible, monstrous, unthinkable, or, to borrow Kim’s description, internally challenging. From within the dominant epistemological systems of the U.S. carceral state, the possibility of prison abolition emerges as just such a monstrosity.

Like the grassroots feminist antiviolence movement that preceded it, GRJ theory, too, constructed a brief epistemic aperture, if not a material doorway, onto third-order change. When, in 1991, at the inception of feminist criminological critique of the “vengeful equity” of carceral feminism and its complicity in mass incarceration, Chesney-Lind called for the abolition of women’s prisons in the United States—when she advocated that feminist criminology move beyond an individualistic analytical focus on “offender profiles” to an analysis of the prison industrial complex and the ways that patriarchy and the intersections of race, class, and gender govern the lives of criminalized women—when she proposed that

feminist criminologists not only *look* to the grassroots for successful decarceral alternatives that sever rather than widen the net of patriarchal social control but *enter the political fray* by joining such social movements (even at the expense of “jeopardiz[ing] their [own] ‘objectivity’, their access to funding, and ultimately even their careers” (Chesney-Lind 1991, 63–65)—Chesney-Lind effectively called upon herself and other feminist criminologists to, in Dotson’s words, “take a step back and become aware of their overall epistemological systems that are preserving and legitimating inadequate epistemic resources” for detecting and redressing the oppressive structural positions of criminalized women (Dotson 2014, 131). Rather than just making existing epistemic resources more efficient or filling in gaps within those epistemic resources, as would be possible with first- or second-order changes, Chesney-Lind urged feminist criminologists to engage in triple-loop processes in order to create and disseminate new epistemic resources that might enable people to de-link from the epistemological systems undergirding mass incarceration—“to make decarceration thinkable” (64, emphasis added).

As the foregoing account makes clear, this did not happen (at least en masse). GRJ did not turn toward and enter the political fray with grassroots women-of-color activists who are engaged in the ambitious, politically marginalized (if not vilified), infinitesimally funded, conceptually and emotionally disorienting, yet revolutionary and epistemological frame-breaking work of third-order social transformation. Instead, GRJ turned toward the National Institute of Corrections and California Department of Corrections. It entered into major research, implementation, and consultancy contracts with the U.S. carceral state, adopted the dominant epistemic resources of neoliberal carceral logic and the systems-of-care “wraparound” social services model, and made mere first- and second-order “gendered tweaks to carceral business as usual” (Buchanan 2012, 1685). GRJ adapted to funder-driven appeals to commodify concepts and practices, created “trademarked” approaches and best practices, and followed the mainstream antiviolence movement in incorporating its efforts into the continually expanding institutions of the U.S. carceral state. The adaptation of GRJ from abolitionism to carceral humanism, its abandonment of what Dotson refers to as triple-loop processes and the third-order social and epistemological transformation to which those processes give rise, is a symptom not only of the cooptative political power of the U.S. carceral state, but also of the epistemological resilience of the carceral logic that undergirds it. The epistemological resilience of carceral logic is such that it can absorb extraordinarily large disturbances without redefining its essential structures.

GRJ, like the mainstream antiviolence movement before it, has been absorbed by the expansive epistemological and political resilience of U.S. carcerality. Like the mainstream antiviolence movement, GRJ distances itself from and objectifies survivors/criminalized women as the passive “clients” of wraparound

social services, and it constructs the gender-responsive prison as the “one-stop shop [!]” at which criminalized (and disproportionately poor and racialized) women survivors could receive access to this network of integrated social services (Bloom et al. 2002, xxv). Far from interrupting society’s reliance upon incarceration and its epistemological confinement within carceral logic, GRJ further entrenches the social centrality of the prison industrial complex by fashioning it as the neoliberal gatekeeper of a continuum of coordinated social services, strengthening and extending the reach of the prison industrial complex by intertwining it with the non-profit and social service industrial complexes.

Thinking radically about antiviolence requires that we shift our attention from the prison, conceived as an isolated institution, to the web of relationships that comprise the prison industrial complex—symbiotic relationships among correctional bureaucracies, corporations, media conglomerates, and governmental agencies, and retributive relationships that are fostered by this web among persons variously caught up in and constituted by it (Davis 2003, 106–108). Positing decarceration as our overarching strategy, we must “let go of the desire to discover one single alternative system of punishment that would occupy the same footprint as the prison system,” Angela Y. Davis argues, and instead “envision a continuum of alternatives to imprisonment” (106–108). The CA and transformative justice movements take just such an abolitionist approach to antiviolence work by theoretically and practically constructing a continuum of alternatives to incarceration that differs decidedly from the carceral feminist “coordinated continuum of care” developed by GRJ. By proposing a “caring” carceral solution that “occup[ies] the same footprint as the prison system,” GRJ reiterates and reinforces the dominant trend of constructing and conceiving of prisons “as the default solution for a vast range of social problems that need to be addressed by other institutions” (Davis and Shaylor 2001, 21).

Gender-responsive prisons are still prisons. Kinder, gentler cages are still cages. The institutions of the punishment industry (however recast) and the professionals that occupy them (however retrained) will never properly and effectively address the needs and issues of colonized and marginalized peoples. Prisons cannot, and should not, be expected to function as vehicles for social change or human development (Braz 2006, 87; Carlen and Tombs 2006; Hannah-Moffat 2004a; Nixon et al. 2008, 33; Rojo 2014). CA activists may not possess a roadmap to an abolitionist future, but they are not only creating spaces in which we can begin to think, imagine, and feel what those future political and epistemological systems might be like; they are *producing* the kinds of communities capable of inhabiting those systems.

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