

COLOR OF VIOLENCE

The INCITE! Anthology

Edited by

INCITE!

Women of Color Against Violence

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Rethinking Antiviolence Strategies

Lessons from the Black Women's Movement in Britain

Julia Sudbury

In April 1998, women activists from Southall Black Sisters,¹ a Black² women's organization at the forefront of breaking the silence around violence against South Asian women, picketed the Royal Courts of Justice in London. Their banners proclaimed their slogans: "Our Tradition, Struggle not Submission" and "Free Zoorah Shah!" Five years earlier, Zoorah, a Pakistani woman living in the conservative Muslim community of Bradford in the north of England, was convicted of murder and sentenced to life with a tariff (minimum time served) of twenty years.³ Zoorah's story broke the stereotypes about South Asian women that have been a legacy of the colonial era in India. She was not passive, veiled, or submissive. Instead, she defended herself against a physically violent, sexually abusive, and financially exploitative man by poisoning him with arsenic. Zoorah's case raised a strategic dilemma for women of color involved in activism against violence. The antiviolence movement has directed many of its demands toward the state, campaigning for specialist women police officers, domestic violence training for police and judges, and harsher sentences for abusive men. These demands share a common vision of the state as protector, standing between women and violent males. But for women convicted of defending themselves against a violent partner, the criminal justice system becomes a site of secondary victimization. And for all women prisoners, the state acts as a punitive perpetrator of violence, subjecting women to invasive body searches, emotional and physical isolation, and physical and verbal abuse. The challenge for women of color activists was to conceptualize the campaign for Zoorah's freedom in a way that also created solidarity with other women found guilty of "offending" the state. Meeting that challenge has led to different approaches to resisting the criminalization of survival strategies by women of color.

Colonial Legacies and Patriarchal Violence

Like many violently abused women, Zoorah's story starts many years earlier. In the early seventies, she came to Bradford, England, from rural Mirpur following an arranged marriage. She was beaten by her husband, and forced to undergo several abortions in order to avoid the birth of a girl. She was eventually thrown out by her husband's family and found herself homeless, unable to speak English and without any income to support her young children. When pregnant with her third child, she was befriended by Mohammed Azam, a married man who helped her buy a house since she was unable to obtain a mortgage in her own name. Although Zoorah by then had her own income from working in a factory, she became financially dependent due to this arrangement and Azam quickly used this to his advantage, forc-

ing her to have sex and becoming violent when she refused to obey him. Azam was also involved in trafficking drugs from Pakistan and when she traveled home on a visit, he demanded that she carry heroin. When he received a prison sentence for trafficking, he pimped her to former prisoners on their release. In her words: "I was used as a mattress by all the men in the community."⁴ Zoorah turned to community elders for help, but Azam's brother was a prominent leader in the Bradford Council of Mosques and she was told that nothing could be done. On Azam's release from prison, Zoorah became anxious because he had persuaded her daughter to enter "a business relationship" with him. Zoorah had obtained arsenic in Pakistan believing that in small doses it would make Azam sexually impotent. Instead, she gave him a large dose and he died the same day at the hospital. In her original trial in 1993, Zoorah denied killing Azam and did not reveal her experiences of abuse and exploitation:

She denied it because it was too shameful to admit the kind of abuse she was going through and she was part of the criminal underworld, this man is a convicted drug dealer involved in crime, his brother is a leader of the Bradford Council of Mosques, he's a community leader, he's got all the protection he would want. She didn't feel she could speak up and not risk her life and her children, so she didn't say it.⁵

In 1998, with support from Southall Black Sisters, Zoorah appealed her conviction on the grounds that she was suffering anxiety and severe depression at the time of Azam's death. The court found her testimony about the extensive sexual and physical violence that she had survived "not capable of belief," and upheld the original perception of Zoorah as a dangerous and malicious woman who had willfully planned Azam's death. In 2000, after considering testimony provided by activists, including her daughters Naseem and Fozia Shah, then Home Secretary Jack Straw cut Zoorah's tariff from twenty to twelve years, with a parole date of 2004.⁶ At the time of writing, Zoorah continues to serve time at an open, low security prison in Yorkshire. Her case for release on license was due to be reviewed in 2006.⁷

The failure of the campaign to free Zoorah Shah must be understood against the backdrop of another case that changed the way women who kill their abusive partners are dealt with in English courts. Kiranjit Ahluwalia was born into a privileged Sikh family in rural India. She moved to England in 1979, and settled in suburban London. In 1989, Kiranjit was sentenced to life for the murder of her physically, verbally, and sexually abusive husband. Because Kiranjit had set him on fire and she had appeared detached to authorities immediately after the event, the prosecution attempted to depict her as a calculating and sadistic murderer. In her appeal, however, Southall Black Sisters amassed extensive evidence arguing that the traditional legal construct of "provocation" should be expanded to include the cumulative effects of a history of violence, and maintained that Kiranjit's behavior was influenced by battered women's syndrome. This campaign

revealed Kiranjit's shame about being a battered woman, her unwillingness to seek help due to her sense of *izzat* (honor), as well as her desperation and isolation as an Indian woman, and it helped reconstruct Kiranjit's image. Although the case for provocation was rejected, Kiranjit won her case on the grounds of diminished responsibility, based on psychiatric reports that indicated she was suffering from depression. She was released on time served in September 1992.⁸

Kiranjit's case was publicized through an immensely successful media campaign by Southall Black Sisters working in coalition with Justice for Women, a predominantly white feminist group. Justice for Women grew out of a campaign pressing for the release of Sara Thornton, a white woman serving a life sentence for killing her abusive husband. The two high-profile cases marked a turning point in antiviolence activism:

There was a time, from 1990 onwards, that there was a momentum that grew around women that killed violent partners. Does it make sense for those women to be incarcerated for those kind of crimes when they were effectively going through a double punishment, having gone through domestic violence already, separated from their children? That didn't serve the public interest. We were asking for things like clemency as well as working on the legal cases to overturn their convictions. And it created a momentum in the country [for] a major debate on domestic violence. There were debates in the House of Commons, media talking about it constantly, the general ordinary public was talking about it in a way that they hadn't talked about domestic violence before. So it really did put domestic violence on the national agenda.⁹

Southall Black Sisters converted media interest in Kiranjit's case to support their appeal for leniency. While early stories in the local Crawley press described Kiranjit as a dangerous killer, the national media soon picked up on the image of a submissive woman facing constant oppression within a traditional South Asian community. The South Asian tradition of *izzat*, sometimes used as a defense for men accused of killing their female family members, was invoked to explain Kiranjit's failure to seek help outside the family before events escalated. Finally, she was viewed sympathetically because of her role as an exemplary mother, for her sacrificial decision to stay in an abusive situation in the interests of her two children, and her quiet and nonconfrontational demeanor.

In the end, public opinion swung in Kiranjit's favor not only because of a general rise in awareness about domestic violence and its brutal effects, but also because the case reinforced dominant tropes about South Asian immigrants. In the context of British colonial legacies, the South Asian community, comprised of predominantly rural Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, and Indians—who migrated after the Second World War—and their British-born children, is viewed as a site of outdated traditions, religious fundamentalisms, and political fanaticisms. Racist immigration legislation, such as the 1981 Commonwealth Immigrants Act, was justified in part by an appeal to defend “English values” of common sense,

decency, and democracy from, in Margaret Thatcher's terms, being "swamped" by people of different cultures. Presenting South Asian cultures as alien and unfathomable is one way of erasing the colonial legacy of violence, exploitation, and cultural intermixing.

The dominant idea that South Asian cultures, symbolized by the veil and the arranged marriage, are particularly oppressive to women is one way they are marked as "other," and therefore outside of the realm of citizenship. The implication, then, is that South Asian women need to be protected by British law from brutal South Asian patriarchy. This myth that South Asian women need saving from "death by culture" is one prevailing belief that justified British colonial rule. In India, for example, the British Raj banned *sati*, the Hindu practice of widows immolating themselves on their husbands' funeral pyres. Outlawing *sati* subsequently led to the revival of this formerly marginal practice and its reinvention as a symbol of national integrity.¹⁰ As the British assumed the role of "the white knight," the immense colonial violence against women, the rape of women by British colonial troops, and forced labor in tea plantations was therefore invisibilized. It is this narrative of colonial paternalism that generated support for Kiranjit in the media and subsequently led to her release.

The differential racialization of African Caribbean and South Asian communities in Britain also fed into the presentation of Kiranjit as "not belonging" in prison. The depiction of African Caribbean neighborhoods as sites of civil disorder, violence, and criminality has led to disproportionate rates of police surveillance and incarceration. South Asian communities, on the other hand, have been depicted as rigidly policed by internal religious and traditional rules. While African Caribbean women have been portrayed as matriarchal heads of households—thus "out of control" and in need of external policing—Asian women's subjection to patriarchal males has largely exempted them from official surveillance and control. South Asian women are, in fact, underrepresented in prison statistics, making up only 0.8% of women in prison compared to 3.5% in the general population.¹¹ Kiranjit was therefore racially marked as "out of place," in contrast to African Caribbean women whose disproportionate incarceration has been left unquestioned.

Violent Women: Creation of a Moral Panic

Kiranjit's case and the subsequent release of Sara Thornton were seen by feminists and legal scholars as turning points in the treatment of women who kill their batterers in Britain. Yet six years later, Zoora received little of the empathy offered to Kiranjit. The difference between the two cases can partly be seen as the result of a masculinist backlash after the earlier successful appeals. During Kiranjit's case, a number of editorials appeared in conservative newspapers suggesting that the floodgates might have been opened, and disgruntled women might be allowed to kill their husbands with impunity.¹² Furthermore, stories about violent women and girls were increasingly represented in the media by the early 1990s.¹³ Women's liberation, it was argued, had shifted social and psychological constraints that had previously prevented women's aggression, and led to a violent female crime wave:

It is not unreasonable to wonder whether these women represent the vanguard of a new social phenomenon; women who are no longer willing to see themselves discarded or ill-treated without hitting back ... the tip of a post-feminist iceberg in which women who have learned to assert themselves in everyday life have also begun to take the law into their own hands.¹⁴

Many psychologists believe that the disturbing rise in violence by girls is an inevitable legacy of the women's movement. Women are seizing upon equality in crime too.¹⁵

Academic fodder was inadvertently provided by feminist scholars in Britain and the United States who produced a rash of books on violent women. These scholars were seeking to challenge the paternalistic notion promoted in mainstream criminology that women are inherently non-aggressive.¹⁶ Yet their work was open to cooptation by a conservative law-and-order agenda fueling a moral panic about a dramatic rise in violent crimes by women. As Stuart Hall's work on the invention of the "Black mugger" in the 1970s has shown, moral panics about crime are self-fulfilling. Once a certain type of "offense" is defined as a problem, there is greater media coverage and state intervention, thus leading to increases in "offenses" tried and sentenced in the courts. This increase in sentencing in turn produces dramatic growth in "crime rates" which further fuels the moral panic and leads to public calls for harsher sentencing and increased policing.¹⁷ In the 1990s, the panic over violent women followed a similar pattern. Once the notion of women as perpetrators of violence was seen to sell newspapers and push up TV ratings, there was a spate of articles about "girl gangs," "female muggers," and "violent women." "Experts," including psychologists, judges, and criminologists, were called on to explain why women and girls had become "more violent" and to make the connections between women's liberation, girl power, and women's crime. This focus, combined with a general backlash against feminism, led to hardened attitudes toward women by the police and judiciary who saw women's violence as evidence that women's liberation had gone too far.¹⁸

Anne Worrall argues that when women are not being disciplined by male family members, the state steps in, in the guise of social workers, psychiatrists, and the judiciary, to supervise and punish women who "offend" gendered norms.¹⁹ But the debate about violent women is not only gendered. Articles about "girl gangs" and women involved in fights inevitably focused on either African Caribbean or white working-class girls from impoverished public housing estates. Behavior which deviated from gendered norms of passivity and self-sacrifice was therefore "explained" through racialized and class-based ideologies which depicted Black people and impoverished and unemployed women and men as aggressive, irrational, and alienated. Thus, paternalistic notions of femininity were mediated through prisms of race and class, creating the ideological space for the punishment and incarceration of Black and working-class women.

Karlene Faith points out that the backlash against feminism in the 1990s led to popular representations of women who appropriate power and force—tra-

ditionally seen as masculine characteristics—as pathologically manipulative and evil.²⁰ Against this backdrop of shifting perceptions of gender, violence, and culpability, Zoorah Shah’s life history was utilized to differentiate her from Kiranjit Ahluwalia. Where Kiranjit was seen as an abused and self-sacrificing wife and mother who was pushed to do something entirely out of character, Zoorah fit the image of the new “criminal” woman:

Poisoning is something that people find hard to take. So her image is very different from Kiranjit’s. She’s someone who’s a bad character, and who is seen as very manipulative, the poisoning is seen as quite cold-blooded.²¹

The cultural defense that was used successfully in Kiranjit’s case was ruled out in Zoorah’s:

And they said that she has no honor to preserve, she’s a prostitute basically. That was the implication. So basically what it means is that we can accept that Asian women feel shame and honor and that’s the reason why Kiranjit couldn’t leave her husband. But what does she mean she felt shame, she doesn’t fit the stereotype. That’s why she lost the appeal.²²

While Kiranjit was a middle-class woman whose social circles did not take her into impoverished and criminalized communities, Zoorah was tied into prostitution, drug dealing, and violence in Bradford’s working-class Muslim community. Public reactions may also have been influenced by a rise of what has been termed “Islamophobia,” or fear and hostility toward the Muslim presence in Britain and in the global arena.²³

While much has been made of the “new” anti-Muslim racism post-9/11, Islamophobia has historical precedents dating back as far as the Crusades, and was a feature of British life prior to the September 11 attacks. In particular, it was whipped up during the Second Gulf War when mosques in Birmingham and London were attacked. The sight of Muslim youth demonstrating in protest of Salman Rushdie’s *Satanic Verses* was also read by white commentators as an indication that Islam was undermining the “British way of life.” So while Kiranjit’s life leant itself to white fantasies of colonial paternalism, Zoorah was clearly defined as part of a racialized religious threat to “law and order.” Rather than rescue her, this threat was met with brutal repression by the criminal justice system. Kiranjit’s freedom could be given on terms that did not seriously disrupt the racialized, gendered, and class ideologies of neocolonial Britain. Zoorah’s case, however, demands a rethinking of the criminalization of the racially marginalized, sexually abused, and financially exploited.

Taking off the Blinkers

While activist women of color working against domestic violence have made some impressive gains regarding recognition of the problem of violence in Black Brit-

ish communities, some activists are concerned that the limits of pragmatic politics have been reached. Presenting women who kill their batterers as different from other women prisoners —“victims” not “perpetrators,” and therefore “not guilty” of a crime—won support for the argument that Kiranjit should not be incarcerated. But this argument is not effective if the accused woman, like Zoora, does not fit cleanly into the “innocent” category—meaning she is innocent of any other “offenses” besides the act of self-defense against the abuser. As Hannana Siddiqui of Southall Black Sisters reflects, “Zoora does not sit comfortably with the image of a passive Asian woman ... She is not ‘squeaky clean,’ but that is the reality of many Asian women’s lives.”²⁴ The majority of women who come into conflict with the law are not “squeaky clean,” yet they too have a history of violence and abuse that in some way contributed to their incarceration.

For many poor women and women of color, sexual, emotional, and physical abuse early in life can lie at the root of an addiction that leads to a drug-related charge. In addition, male violence and coercion is often implicated in the lives of women incarcerated for a range of criminalized acts, from drug importation to prostitution. If feminist activists do not embrace a politics of prison abolitionism, their demands for exceptional treatment for a handful of cases do not speak to the majority of women prisoners who are also survivors of violence. In many cases, resources that are racialized or class-based determine whether a woman will deal with violence in “law-abiding” ways (for example, get a prescription for antidepressants or other legal pharmaceuticals, call the police, take out a restraining order, find a new home) or ways which come into conflict with the criminal justice system (for example, use illegal substances, be coerced into prostitution or drug dealing, use physical violence). Without a general campaign to release all women prisoners, speaking for this “innocent” minority limits the politics of antiviolence, cutting it off from its revolutionary potential.

The antiviolence movement has in many ways been complicit in the “law and order” agenda that has emerged as a response to globalization in Britain, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere. White feminist activists generally think of the 1970s as a triumphant period in which second wave feminism brought the personal into the political arena, raising awareness about domestic violence, incest, and rape. Yet the 1970s also marked immense shifts in global capital that were enabled by developments in new technology. As corporations began to relocate their production operations to the Global South, unemployment hit urban communities of color in the Global North, and steady union jobs were replaced by irregular, “feminized,” minimum-wage jobs. Governments responded to the creation of increasingly unstable urban “ghettos” by deploying punitive victim-blaming rhetoric that justified a shift from welfare and social services to policing and incarceration.²⁵ This was facilitated by the growth of a transnational prison industry, first in the United States and then in Britain, Canada, and Australia.²⁶ Corporations such as Wackenhut and Corrections Corporation of America developed sophisticated lobbying techniques to promote the use of incarceration as a “panacea” for social problems. Racialized practices of punishment became central to the political economy and social order of Western nations.

Young men of color, in particular, were criminalized and channeled into

prison, where they disappeared off the unemployment statistics and became a cheap and disciplined source of labor. Women of color, and in particular Black and immigrant women, were labeled as “dole scroungers” (welfare bums) and subjected to surveillance and punitive health and welfare cutbacks that, in turn, freed up funds for prison construction. This shift was most marked in the US, where states like California, New York, and Texas embarked on a prison-building explosion throughout the 1980s and 1990s.²⁷ But Black Canadian, Caribbean, and indigenous communities were increasingly channeled into prisons in Canada too. In Britain, African Caribbean boys and young men were demonized as troublemakers and “muggers” and put in “sin bins” (special educational units) or prison.

Unlike the white-led feminist movement, which at this time viewed coalitions with Black men as antifeminist, the Black Women’s Movement, which emerged in Britain in the mid-1970s, was particularly concerned with the educational segregation and criminalization of African Caribbean boys and young men.²⁸ Groups like the Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent (OWAAD) and Brixton Black Women’s Group led several campaigns against busing, “sin bins,” and overzealous policing. The Black Women’s Movement was also active in making visible and challenging domestic violence and rape in African Caribbean and South Asian communities. Some women pointed out the dilemma facing Black women who looked to the police for protection against male violence when “law enforcement” was a source of brutality toward both Black men and women.²⁹ Unfortunately, this contradiction was not analyzed at a collective level. Instead, Black women in antiviolence work gradually became a part of the Women’s Aid Federation, a national coalition of women’s refuges that advocates more police intervention and harsher sentencing for male perpetrators of violence.

By the early 1990s, there was no effective Black feminist activism against criminalization and incarceration. Instead, most Black women had adopted the logic of incarceration in dealing with perpetrators of male violence. This acquiescence to mainstream “law and order” rhetoric was mirrored in the antiracist movement’s demand for harsher punishment and increased police protection against racist violence. Both demands were co-opted by New Labour’s “tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime” platform after its election in 1996. Radical antiracist and Black feminist voices were therefore united in demanding that the state increase its use of force to “protect” women and communities of color, rather than in challenging the racially repressive role of the police, judiciary, and prisons.

The shift of focus from resisting to reforming the criminal justice system explains why there has been little response from Black British women activists to the significant increases in women’s incarceration. Between 1992 and 2002, the number of women in prison increased from 1,577 to 4,299, representing a 173% increase in ten years, compared to a 50% increase in men’s imprisonment. This has led to the conversion of seven male prisons to incorporate women prisoners and the construction of two new female prisons. And the numbers keep swelling. Prison Service projections estimate that by 2009, there will be 5,600 imprisoned women.³⁰ In common with the United States and Canada, racial disparities in the British prison population are startling. 26% of women prisoners are women of color, compared to 5% of the general population. 24% are African Caribbean

compared to 1.5% of the general population.³¹

Activists who seek longer terms of incarceration for racist and sexist violence seldom recognize that additional resources for policing, surveillance, and prisons inevitably lead to increased repression of Black and working-class communities. Since the early 1990s, African Caribbean women have been incarcerated in ever-greater numbers for poverty and drug-related offenses. Yet the criminalization of poor women of color, and the associated violence of separation from young children, has not been addressed by either the mainstream antiviolence movement or by most Black women's organizations. And while there are a few organizations, such as Hibiscus and Women in Prison, campaigning for women prisoners' rights with an abolitionist platform, they are isolated from other Black women activists and the antiracist movement in general.

Lessons from a British Prison

Zoora's case presents women of color activists in Britain, the United States, Canada, and elsewhere with a number of challenges. Firstly, the criminalization of Zoora as a woman who experienced multiple forms of exploitation and abuse points to the failure of the "law and order" approach to violence against women of color. Women of color who experience male violence are more likely to be criminalized for the survival strategies that they develop than to be protected by the criminal justice system. Advocating for a strengthening of state agencies—such as the police and judiciary—without transforming the racial/class ideologies underpinning incarceration inevitably leads to increased surveillance and policing of poor communities and people of color. This, in turn, fuels prison expansion. Increasingly, private corporations are contracted to staff and manage prisons, and once they are built, private lobby groups, politicians, and prison unions demand a regular flow of incarcerable bodies from the courts. In growing numbers, the bodies of women of color, punished for poverty and drug-related crimes, form the raw material for the prison-industrial complex. If we redefine violence to include the brutality of isolation; deprivation of family ties; psychological, verbal, and physical harassment; and racial abuse associated with imprisonment, then the women of color antiviolence movement must rethink its belief in incarceration as a solution to the multiple forms of violence facing women.

Secondly, the differences between Kiranjit's successful campaign, and Zoora's continued abuse at the hands of the state, highlight complex issues facing antiracist activists. While the details of Kiranjit's personal history and her location within neocolonial discourse on South Asian women facilitated widespread support for her release, that support often did not challenge the racist, classist nature of the criminal justice system. Kiranjit was identified as exceptional and misplaced within a prison population, represented in the popular imagination as a dangerous underclass of racialized women. If campaigns to release battered women who kill their abusers are not located within a broader abolitionist discourse, they may accentuate artificial differences between "battered women" and "female offenders." This distinction obscures the histories of violence and abuse experienced by most women prisoners, reinforcing the legitimacy of incarcerating the silent prison majority.

In fact, Kiranjit's case is similar to other campaigns to release individual pris-

oners. Campaigns for the release of men and women who have been falsely accused, or who are political prisoners, implicitly suggest that the “correctly accused” or “non-political prisoners” exist. But, as Assata Shakur points out, all prisoners in capitalist societies are victims of a criminal justice system that is based on the oppression and exploitation of men and women of color.³² Therefore, campaigns need to be located in, and informed by, a broader political analysis of, and opposition to, the prison-industrial complex.

In the United States, the successful case for clemency for Kemba Smith, who was released in 2000, can be seen as similar to Kiranjit’s as exemplary of the impact of the war on drugs on women of color. Kemba was an African American college student and mother who was forced into involvement in drug dealing by an abusive boyfriend and sentenced to 24.5 years.³³ The brutality of the judicial system’s treatment of Kemba as a battered woman is indeed shocking. However, like Kiranjit, Kemba was presented by such mainstream media sources as *Glamour* magazine as being “out of place” in prison because of her “innocence,” and her exemplary life as a college student and mother. This analysis bypasses the central point: women don’t belong in cages regardless of how they have tried to survive. Until we really embrace this abolitionist position, freedom for Kemba will not translate into freedom for all African American women, including those who are poor and lack formal education.³⁴

A third lesson from Zoor’s case is the danger of replacing the struggle for social justice with the demand for criminal justice reforms. In Britain, feminists involved in the cases of Kiranjit, Sara Thornton, and Emma Humphreys successfully demanded an increased awareness within the judiciary of the differences between violent men who kill their partners, and women who kill their abusive partners. Demands by prison reform groups have led to the establishment of a Women’s Policy Group in the Prison Service with the mission of “transforming the care of women.”³⁵ Criticisms by antiracist activists of racist abuse and discrimination in prisons have also led to the formation of RESPOND, a racial equality strategy for the prison service, and the establishment of a Prison Service Race Relations Group. Yet throughout this period when antiracist and feminist reforms were made, the number of women of color in prison has continued to spiral.

The British antiracist and Black women’s movements of the 1970s and 1980s incorporated a strong analysis of state violence and repression. However, in the 1990s, as Black British communities have made a greater impact on mainstream political agendas, there has been a convergence between progressive movements and the state. Women of color activists have increasingly become invested in the illusion of an “antiracist/antisexist state,” deploying the forces of law and order in defense of women and men of color. While the New Labour government has responded to feminist and anti-racist activism by incorporating some of the movements’ demands into legislation, this has been at the price of a radical analysis of the role of state violence in the lives of women of color. As such, the state-corporate investment in mass incarceration has gone largely unchallenged by Black women’s organizations.

These developments are mirrored in Canada, where penal reformers, such as the Canadian Association of Elizabeth Fry Societies (CAEFS), successfully dem-

onstrated to the Correctional Service of Canada that the needs of women prisoners were not being met in a prison system designed around male imprisonment. After several years of consultation and negotiation, four new regional “women-centered” prisons and a “healing lodge” for aboriginal women were built, designed around the female prison population and staffed, at least in the early stages, by professionals experienced in working with women in refuges, social services, and prisons. Despite good intentions, women-centered prisons revictimize the Black, indigenous, and poor women they house, most of whom are survivors of multiple forms of violence, leading to extensive self-harm and suicide attempts. Continuing abuses indicate that even within the new women-centered framework, the traditional penal culture of racism and sexism has quickly re-emerged.³⁶ Most significantly, the investment of energy into women prisoners has not led to any decrease in the number of women in Canadian prisons and jails.

Reform-based demands risk absorption into the existing racial-class dynamics of state systems of repression and control. Furthermore, progressive activists involved in such demands are in danger of becoming incorporated into the very system that they initially opposed, as they are invited to sit on consultation and implementation committees of “antiracist” or “woman-centered” prisons.

Finally, Zoora’s case requires us to develop an analysis of differential racisms affecting communities of color, and of the interactions between immigration and violence against women. The low numbers of South Asian women in the British prison system have led to little awareness within Black women’s organizations of the impact of criminalization on South Asian women. However, as Islamophobia increases and traditionally paternalistic attitudes toward South Asians harden, Muslim young people in particular are becoming vulnerable to criminalization. In addition, Pakistan’s role within the heroin trade means that some women risk long terms in prison for working as “mules.” Therefore, activists must be aware of shifting patterns of racialization, and how they are shaped by public events. In Canada, for example, the conservative press whipped up a moral panic about the capture of several boatloads of undocumented Chinese refugees, which has led to a hardening of attitudes toward Chinese immigrants. Police in several Canadian cities now have units targeting Chinese gangs and smugglers.

In the United States, activism around criminalization and racial disparity in policing and sentencing has tended to focus on African Americans and Latinos. Native Americans are generally excluded, despite the fact that they also experience disproportionate policing, arrest, and imprisonment.³⁷ Moreover Asian American youth—especially Vietnamese and Laotians—who are increasingly being targeted for gang involvement, are made invisible by the black/white binary. Greater analysis of the intersection of immigration, colonization, and criminalization is necessary, and women of color activists should play a key role in building coalitions between groups traditionally targeted by the criminal justice system and newly criminalized and immigrant groups.

Like corporate agendas under global capital, practices of “law and order” do not develop within rigid national borders. The media, politicians, and penal administrators in Europe and North America form a transnational network of newspaper and magazine conglomerates, television and radio empires, and politi-

cal and professional relationships. This network disseminates ideologies and strategies of control and punishment such as “three strikes,” private prisons, mandatory minimums, and “women-centered” penal regimes. The experiences of women of color affected by state violence and incarceration are fundamentally shaped by these transnational connections. However, as activists, we seldom build transnational coalitions or seek to learn from the experiences and activism of women of color across the border, or across the Atlantic. In order to build an effective anti-violence movement, women of color in the United States, Canada, Britain, and elsewhere need to analyze critically the successes and failures of activists in multiple locations. When we develop the habit of thinking outside of national borders, we open ourselves to new challenges and critiques. These radical critiques bring us closer to building a movement that simultaneously resists male violence, state repression, and the mass incarceration of poor communities of color.

ENDNOTES AND WORKS CITED

Chapter 1 Lessons from the Black Women's Movement in Britain

- 1 The author is very grateful to members of Southall Black Sisters who generously gave their time to be interviewed and provided materials. This article would not have been possible without the important work that SBS women have carried out as trailblazers within the Black women's movement in Britain.
- 2 In Britain, the term "Black" was adopted by the antiracist movement in the 1960s as a political designation for people of African, Asian, and Caribbean descent. The term pointed to shared experiences of racism and common histories of anticolonial struggle. In this paper, I follow the British usage of "Black" when referring to the British situation, that is, the Black Women's Movement.
- 3 Susan Edwards, "Beyond Belief—the Case of Zoora Shah," *New Law Journal* (1999): 667.
- 4 Southall Black Sisters, *Free Zoora Shah!* (London: Southall Black Sisters, 1998), leaflet.
- 5 Interview with Hannana Saddiqui, Southall Black Sisters, June 1999.
- 6 Southall Black Sisters, "Campaigns: Zoora Shah," Web site article, 2006, http://www.southallblacksisters.org.uk/campaign_zoora.html (accessed March 7, 2006).
- 7 Justice for Women, "Current Campaigns: Zoora Shah," <http://www.jfw.org.uk/current.htm> (accessed March 7, 2006).
- 8 Kiranjit Ahluwalia and Rahila Gupta, *A Circle of Light: The Autobiography of Kiranjit Ahluwalia* (London: Harper Collins, 1997).
- 9 Interview with Hannana Saddiqui, Southall Black Sisters, June 1999.
- 10 Uma Narayan, *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Tradition and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
- 11 British Home Office, *Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System—2004* (London: Home Office, 2004).
- 12 Ahluwalia and Gupta, *A Circle of Light*, 361. A commentator in *The Times* of London argued: "To permit women to claim that they were provoked into killing their husbands even though the act was committed with forethought would be to permit premeditated murder. It is no good saying: 'But she couldn't have done it any other way.' The object is not to give everyone an equal crack at murder to level the playing field." (*The Times*, "When Marriage Turns Bloody," September 29, 1992).
- 13 Pat Carlen, *Sledgehammer: Women's Imprisonment at the Millennium* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1998), 51.
- 14 *The Sunday Times*, "All for Love? Violence by Women," July 7, 1992.
- 15 *The Times*, "Girls Gunning for Revenge," July 9, 1993.
- 16 See Ann Jones, *Women Who Kill* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996); Coramae Richey Mann, *When Women Kill* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996); Patricia Pearson, *When She Was Bad: Violent Women and the Myth of Innocence* (New York: Viking, 1997); Alice Myers and Sarah Wight, *No Angels: Women Who Commit Violence* (London: Harper Collins, 1996).
- 17 Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State and Law and Order* (London: Macmillan, 1978).
- 18 Readers familiar with Freda Adler's controversial book *Sisters in Crime* may have a sense of déjà vu. Adler's claim that women's crime was the "darker side" of the women's liberation movement spurred a similar panic in the United States and Britain in the 1970s (New York: McGraw Hill, 1975), 13. Her hypothesis was later discredited at a scholarly level, but not erased from common-sense explanations of crime. See Meda Chesney-Lind, *The Female Offender: Girls, Women and Crime* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), 37.
- 19 Anne Worrall, *Offending Women: Female Lawbreakers and the Criminal Justice System*

- (London: Routledge, 1990), 33.
- 20 Karlene Faith, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Confinement and Resistance* (Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1993), 265.
- 21 Interview with Hannana Siddiqui, Southall Black Sisters, June 1999.
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Tariq Modood, "The Changing Context of 'Race' in Britain," *Patterns of Prejudice* 30, no. 1 (1996): 3–13.
- 24 Hannana Siddiqui, "Black Women's Activism: Coming of Age?" *Feminist Review* 64 (2000): 83–96.
- 25 Angela Y. Davis, "Race and Criminalization: Black Americans and the Punishment Industry," in *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, ed. Joy James (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 61–73.
- 26 Julia Sudbury, *Global Lockdown: Race, Gender and the Prison-Industrial Complex* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- 27 Joel Dyer, *The Perpetual Prisoner Machine: How America Profits from Crime* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000); Marc Mauer, *Race to Incarcerate* (New York: The New Press, 1999).
- 28 Sudbury, *Other Kinds of Dreams: Black Women's Organizations and the Politics of Transformation* (London: Routledge, 1998).
- 29 Amina Mama, *The Hidden Struggle* (London: Race and Housing Research Unit, 1989).
- 30 British Home Office, *Statistics on Women and the Criminal Justice System—2004* (London: Home Office, 2004).
- 31 British Home Office, *Statistics on Race*, 44.
- 32 Assata Shakur, *Yesterday Is Not Too Soon* (San Francisco: Legal Services for Prisoners With Children, 1996), video recording.
- 33 Kemba Smith, "Modern Day Slavery: Inside the Prison-Industrial Complex," in Sudbury, *Global Lockdown*.
- 34 Recognizing the connection between her freedom and that of all women, Kemba has dedicated her life post-incarceration to revealing the devastating impact of the war on drugs on communities of color and transforming drug law. She is founder of the Kemba Smith Foundation, <http://kembasmithfoundation.org/>.
- 35 HM Prison Service Women's Policy Group, *Women and Girls in Prison*, Quarterly Bulletin 5, February 1999.
- 36 Kim Pate, "CSC and the 2 Per Cent Solution: The P4W Inquiry," *Canadian Woman Studies* 19, nos. 1 and 2 (1999): 145–153. Systemic racism in the Canadian criminal justice system particularly impacts aboriginal women, who represent 3% of Canadian women, but 29% of all women serving more than two years of imprisonment and 46% of women in maximum security. Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Protecting Their Rights: A Systemic Review of Human Rights in Correctional Services for Federally Sentenced Women* (Ottawa: CHRC, 2003).
- 37 African Americans are eight times more likely to be imprisoned than whites, and Latinos are three and a half times more likely. See Vincent Shiraldi, Jason Ziedenberg, and John Irwin, *America's One Million Nonviolent Prisoners* (Washington, DC: Justice Policy Institute, 1999). The Native American rate of incarceration is nearly two and a half times that of whites and their confinement in local jails is four times the national average. See National Criminal Justice Association, "Native Americans and the Criminal Justice System," July 22, 2003, http://www.ncja.org/native_americans_and_the_crimi.html (accessed March 7, 2006).

Chapter 2 Disability in the New World Order

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