

## “AIN’T NO JUSTICE ... IT’S JUST US”

Girls Organizing against Sexual and Carceral Violence

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This chapter seeks to interrogate normative notions of at-risk girlhood and violence, offering a roadmap for a broader terminology and reconceptualization of gender in girlhood studies. I argue that studying the knowledge produced by girl-driven activist organizations enables activist-scholars to rethink what constitutes girlhood from a perspective critical of how criminalized, homeless and street-involved, and incarcerated girls and gender non-conforming youth<sup>1</sup> have been disciplined, managed, corrected, and punished as prisoners, patients, mothers, and victims of multiple, interconnected forms of violence through imprisonment, medicalization, and secure care. By showcasing case studies of anti-violence and abolitionist activism that contest sexual violence, colonial state control, and carceral state violence undertaken by girls whose identities stretch far beyond normative gender and racial binaries, I aim to frame a transnational discussion of girls’ community activism within and against exclusionary notions of what constitutes girlhood and girls’ social justice activism.

Specifically, I showcase how girls organizing to represent the communities on whom interlocking forms of interpersonal and state violence in Canada and the United States have the most impact are at the forefront of developing transformative justice models that conceptualize what it means to bridge social movements organizing against racial, sexual, and gender violence—both at the individual and institutional levels. The Young Women’s Empowerment Project, Chicago (YWEP) and Sista II Sista, Brooklyn (SIIS) are autonomous community organizations that seek not only to take power but to make power by building community accountability structures that are not reliant on criminal legal and punishment systems, state funding, private foundations, or professionalized social services.<sup>2</sup> Transformative justice is an umbrella term used to define “any strategy to address violence, abuse or harm that creates safety, justice, reparations, and healing without relying on police, prisons ... or any other state systems” (Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-

Samarasinha 2011: xxiii). After highlighting two of these girl-driven collectives' transformative justice work, I focus briefly on how girls are mentored and trained to become "radical bridge builders" (Sudbury 2003: 134) who engage in intersectional, inter-movement praxis in their organizational contexts.

These aims necessitate an interdisciplinary analysis and methodology to interrogate the social constructs of girls and girlhood since social science research centered on girls assumes that gendered developmental categories are fixed and neutral, rather than invented and elastic signifiers. My primary approach was the collection and textual analysis of various organizational and movement documents produced by the YWEP and the SIIS collectives. I obtained these materials largely through my participation at movement building conferences where these organizations and their participants led workshops and presented on panels.<sup>3</sup> I analyzed these texts to examine the organizations' agendas and used them to provide background and context for the girls' political engagements and practices. Both collectives have co-authored and published critiques of their own organizational dynamics and transformative justice processes, incorporating this process into their documentation (see *Sista II Sista* 2006; Burrowes et al. 2007; Russo and Spatz 2007). I also use their own critiques of their work to address the conflicts that occur in organizing. In this way, I read their documentation as authentic co-publications, rather than emblematic or tokenistic forms of activist knowledge production. I also approach their documented critiques as forms of truth telling that they engage in the context of their activist work.

By describing some of the concrete pedagogical activities girl activists develop and the questions of politics and process with which they grapple, this chapter amplifies the dynamic process whereby girls learn how to maneuver strategically within their own organizations and between and among different anti-violence movements. To this end, I pose the following questions: How do girls who face as much interpersonal violence as they do institutional and structural violence understand and represent where the carceral state ends and the so-called benevolent community begins? How do intimate, interpersonal forms of violence interlock with structural and state forms of violence in the girls' own understanding of their daily lives? How do they strategize to disentangle themselves from the expanding prison regime and other systems of state-sponsored control when patterns of dependency, medicalization, and infantilization persist in the surveillance of girls labeled at risk? What places are left for them to go to?

For criminalized Indigenous and racialized girls who have spent the majority of their lives under some form of state control, the bound-

aries that separate intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and mass incarceration are porous at best, and nonexistent at worst. I approach violence against girls and their organized resistance to it from multiple intersections: as a queer mixed-race Chicana from an urban, working-class background; as a survivor of sexual violence and incarceration; and with an anti-violence activist and prison abolitionist perspective. I aim to denaturalize intimate and interpersonal violence and its state-supported structures by refusing any neat distinctions between personal and state forms of violence, proposing instead a more layered analysis of intersecting structures of oppression and privilege and the social relations they foster.

By drawing on frameworks developed by critical race feminists, my analysis of girls' activism interrogates how they represent the raced-gendered logics through which sexual and structural violence operate, and the role violence plays in producing *differently* gendered, raced, and classed subjects. Girls' activism demonstrates how prison abolitionist and anti-sexual violence movement participation requires us to move outside of the geographical and psychological boundaries set by the carceral state and its affective economies. The courts, federal and state legislation, therapeutic models, and even some domestic violence shelters presume that violence against women is synonymous with domestic violence and that it affects all girls and women equally and in the same ways (Richie 2012). In order to understand violence against girls as a fundamentally heterogeneous phenomenon that requires a heterogeneity of interventions, it is essential to go beyond such universalizing constructs of interpersonal partner violence to consider how sexual, institutional, and structural violence work together.

Additionally, heteronormative, Euro-Western white perspectives of girlhood constitute another form of violent confinement from which criminalized girl activists must free themselves. The transformative justice processes and community accountability strategies generated by girl activists to disrupt interlocking forms of violence under the carceral state alert us to their complex and contradictory relationship to what constitutes girlhood and what it means to be a girl, potentially offering a means of rejecting exclusionary notions of girlhood in order to escape the category's analytic limitations.

## Spaces of Subjectivity and Subjection

Barbara Cruikshank argues that we must not separate "subjectivity from subjection in order to imagine political resistance" (1999: 120).

The interpersonal, sexual, and state violence targeting Indigenous and racialized girls is located within the geographical and political boundaries of white settler societies. In her influential paper on the brutal murder of Pamela George, a young Indigenous woman in Canada, Sherene Razack (2002) argues that gendered and sexualized violence against racialized others and specifically against Indigenous girls and women is a defining hallmark of *all* white settler societies.

In North America, Indigenous and racialized girls have historically been the primary targets of law enforcement violence and are overrepresented in the adult prison and juvenile detention systems. Since the late 1990s in Canada, Indigenous girls' and women's rates of imprisonment have doubled; they are five times more likely to be victims of femicide than are non-Indigenous girls and women, and many experience sexual victimization at the hands of police (see Human Rights Watch 2013). Not only has the carceral state historically criminalized girls' sexual behavior, it has widened the net to include criminalizing non-heteronormative and racially marginalized girls as violent predators (Richie 2005; Schaffner 2006). Even so-called benevolent alternatives to punishment such as gender responsive training, educational and therapeutic programs inside girls' facilities, and healing lodges for incarcerated Indigenous women (see Hayman 2006) expand and deepen the intrusive reach of punitive carceral controls into the everyday lives and onto the marked bodies of criminalized girls. Anke Allspach (2010) argues that these controls are transcarceral, forming beyond the permeable walls of prisons and constituting a reconfinement of women after their release. Dominique Moran (2013) furthers this analysis by arguing that transcarceral spaces exist alongside an embodied sense of the carceral that similarly moves beyond prison walls through the corporeal reinscription of formerly incarcerated women. The transcarceral continuum manifests itself primarily under the guise of localized mental health agencies, welfare and child protective services, professionalized social services, as well as in individualizing, pathologizing, and self-responsibilizing educational and therapeutic projects. This continuum blurs the boundary between the prison's outside and inside, extending its control through stigmatization and the embodied markers of imprisonment of criminalized girls who have spent the majority of their lives under some form of state control.

As targets of state regulation and containment, the girls I discuss in this chapter are deemed deserving of discipline and punishment but not worthy of legal protection. These girls would be, as Lisa Cacho argues, "*ineligible for personhood*—as populations subjected to laws but refused the legal means to contest those laws as well as denied both the

political legitimacy and moral credibility necessary to question them" (2012: 6). Because they are subjected to laws based on their illegal status, these girls are unable to comply with the rule of law since, as Cacho explains, the North American legal system targets their very being—but not their behavior—for legal elimination and social death (2012: 6). Given that the law neither protects nor defends these girls, they experience enforcement violence by local and state police and immigrant detention systems. While the discourse around police violence excludes the girls' experiences, Andrea Ritchie argues that racialized girls in particular "are sexually assaulted, raped, brutally strip-searched, beaten, shot, and killed by law enforcement with alarming frequency, experiencing many of the same forms of law enforcement violence as men of color, as well as gender- and race-specific forms of police misconduct and abuse" (2006: 139). As Canadian organizations like the youth-led Native Youth Sexual Health Network and the intergenerational Families of Sisters in Spirit have recently documented in their "Police (In) Justice" collaborative statement and resource guide (2013), violence by state bodies extends far beyond police and border enforcement (Bhattacharjee 2002). These youth-led and intergenerational Indigenous collectives underscore how transcarceration and enforcement violence have historically permeated the culture of many institutions in white settler societies.

Throughout this chapter, in addition to the concepts discussed above, I use the terms *carceral state* and *prison regime* interchangeably. I use the term *carceral state* to highlight the multiple intersecting state agencies and institutions that punish and effectively regulate poor communities. In order to discuss how the *carceral state* emerges, functions, and reproduces itself, the concept of the *prison regime*, as that which "possesses and constitutes the state," rather than the other way around, is also useful here (Rodriguez 2006: 43). Both concepts point to how the logic of punishment itself shapes civil society and the State. This framework brings attention to how the cultural and institutional site of the prison is no longer a place "outside and apart from our everyday lives, but [is] instead [one that] shape[s] and deform[s] our identities, communities, and modes of social interaction" (Rodriguez 2010: 9), uncovering the affective economies set by the prison regime. Emotions are an economy in that they do not just affect individuals; they actually bind people and drive interactions that serve to either bolster or dismantle the prison regime.

Because this regime is an increasingly integrated system, prison abolition is a necessarily expansive project that articulates with the holistic anti-violence agendas engendered most centrally by Indigenous and

race-radical women of color feminists (Sudbury 2003). An abolitionist project is a positive rather than a negative project (Davis 2003). As panelist Andrea Smith argued, prison abolition is “not simply about tearing down prison walls, but it’s about building alternative formations that actually protect people from violence, that crowd out the criminalization regime” (Critical Resistance 2008a: 5). In short, it is a political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance—and the ideological structures of white supremacist capitalist hetero-patriarchy that shape institutional violence—and creating lasting alternatives to the carceral state. One such alternative is transformative justice, which seeks to develop strategies to address intimate, interpersonal, community, and structural violence from a political organizing perspective in order to move beyond state-imposed, institutionalized criminal legal and punishment systems. Within our current carceral landscape, abolition and transformative justice praxis emerge as essential epistemic and organizing tools utilized by girl-led feminist of color collectives.

### **Resisting Enforcement Violence: YWEP**

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence has been instrumental in identifying and challenging multiple intersecting forms of violence. INCITE! was founded as “a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue, and grassroots organizing” (2006: 3). Instead of establishing a hierarchical structure that might lead toward co-optation by the nonprofit sector, members of INCITE! conceptualize it as a movement that emerges out of grassroots struggle. In 1998 and again in 2001, members of INCITE! and Critical Resistance—a national organization dedicated to abolishing the prison regime and building genuine and durable forms of justice and security—came together to write an action statement challenging both gender violence and carceral state violence (Critical Resistance 2008b). The statement was a bold articulation of critical race feminist politics about the intersections of gendered and racialized violence against Indigenous and racialized girls, women, queer, and trans people. Moreover, it has helped anti-violence activists and advocates move beyond concerns regarding overreliance on the prison regime.

According to Mimi Kim (2010b) of Oakland’s Generation FIVE and Creative Interventions, the INCITE! and Critical Resistance collectives have inspired other organizations to move beyond the language of reli-

ance to challenge the liberal notion of the State as a viable partner in the struggle against violence against women and children. In particular, the statement calls on social justice movements concerned with ending violence to develop community accountability models that respond to intimate violence without ceding girls' ability to hold their abusers accountable to the prison regime. The possibility for engagement with the perpetrator of violence is by no means a necessary component of this organizing model; it is considered just one of many possible options for individuals or communities that have been harmed. Many collectives like Creative Interventions, SIIS, and the YWEP also challenge the primacy of individualistic and state-based remedies, noting that, for the girls on whom interlocking forms of violence have the most impact, the possibility of individual safety is a myth or a luxury afforded to the privileged few (Creative Interventions 2008; Kim 2010a). Their work is anchored in the belief that resistance to intimate and community-based violence, sexual assault, and enforcement violence are inseparable.

At a workshop held at the 2011 Allied Media Conference in Detroit, one sixteen-year-old sex worker, single parent, and lead organizer for the Chicago-based YWEP, who has been in and out of child protective services and juvenile facilities for most of her life, bluntly stated, "Cops, teachers, and social workers have hurt me worse than any pimp has." The workshop identified enforcement and transcarceral state violence as a problem for girls of color and encouraged them to broaden their definitions of violence and to mobilize their peers in a community-driven resistance movement against it.

Chicago's YWEP is a youth leadership organization grounded in harm reduction and social justice organized by and for girls and trans youth of color (aged twelve to twenty-three) who self-identify as sex workers—"people doing what we have to do to survive"—and those who have been trafficked into sex work and other forms of labor in the street economy. As experts in their own lives, YWEP organizers are at the forefront of developing a harm reduction approach for girls in the sex trade at the same time as they create collective community-driven strategies to hold accountable both people and institutions that have done harm. Promoting a movement- and capacity-building approach, YWEP's current campaign is based on the findings from their youth-led participatory action research project entitled "Girls Do What They Have to Do to Survive: Illuminating Methods Used by Girls in the Sex Trade and Street Economy to Fight Back and Heal: A Participatory Action Research Study of Resilience and Resistance" (Iman et al. 2009). The project found that the individual violence that girls experience at the hands of boyfriends, johns, pimps, family members, and foster care

families is exacerbated by the institutional violence that they experience from systems and services. Enforcement violence carried out by doctors, government officials, social workers, therapists, and foster care workers included emotional, verbal, physical, and sexual abuse, as well as exclusion from access to services.

On the heels of this report, YWEP members created a “Street Youth Rise Up!” campaign that focused on building the autonomy, self-determination, and resilience of street-involved girls. Their campaign includes an anonymous “Bad Encounter Line” for girls to fill out if they have been denied help from a social service worker, doctor, or police officer (a follow-up to their “Bad Date Line” created by sex workers to share incident reports on violent clients) and a “Street Youth Bill of Rights” aimed at training professionalized service providers and educating street-involved youth about their legal rights when interacting with schools, health and social service providers, and the police.

In addition, through their long-term “Healing in Action” program, YWEP embraces a radical harm reduction and reproductive justice approach that does not presume how street-involved girls should live, but provides tips on how they can ensure their own safety, however defined. For example, in their zine, *Toolkit to Owning Your Own Life*, collective members provide information on how to conduct self-examinations including pap smears and breast exams, how to stitch oneself up after a bad date without going to the hospital, and how to self-cut, squat, turn tricks, panhandle, inject drugs, and smoke crack in safer ways.

Lastly, collective members feel that many of the decriminalization or legalization strategies proffered by sex worker rights organizations presume that these workers are adults without considering the particular vulnerabilities faced by youths. When girls are forced to call the police, the latter never actually arrest traffickers or pimps; they simply criminalize girls and trans youth of color, making it more difficult for them (and their children) to survive. As Emi Koyama (2013) explains in her essay “Rescue is for Kittens,” anti-trafficking policies that “rescue” youth in the sex trade actually translate into involuntary detainment of minor victims by the police. Although some jurisdictions in the United States have passed safe harbor laws that abolish prostitution charges against minors, young people are still often arrested under some other criminal charge, then forcibly sent back to the families or institutions that they had run away from in the first place (see also INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2011).

YWEP offers a more complex analysis than the dangerously simplistic framing of child sex trafficking, which paints all girls as victims in



need of rescue by the State. YWEP members understand that the decriminalization of prostitution will not end transcarceral state violence against them. Instead, it has been sex workers organizing among themselves who have challenged and transformed exploitative and abusive working conditions, not police officers, social service providers, or politicians. Given the reality of enforcement violence in street youths' lives and the fact that many youths in the sex trade are pimped by family, friends, partners, and community members, YWEP members develop sustainable transformative justice strategies to hold social service providers, family members, and loved ones accountable for the harm inflicted upon girls.

For many currently or formerly incarcerated and street-involved girls struggling with enforcement, domestic, interpersonal, and sexual violence, support centers and shelters are also complicit in this transcarceral continuum. Organizations like YWEP expose the abuse of genderqueer and trans, racialized, poor, and working-class survivors within the domestic violence shelter system. In many communities, lack of access is embedded into program practices and policies, such as screening processes designed to exclude clients who are deemed difficult or nonconforming (Kim 2010a). Because they are not recognized by the State as either rights-bearing citizens or as *good* or *innocent* (read multiply normative) girls, street-involved girls are not protected by the paternalistic enforcement agencies and domestic violence support services that speak and act on their behalf. While the anti-sexual/domestic violence movements have been vital in disrupting the silence around intimate and interpersonal violence against girls, these movements have been co-opted by the State and are reluctant to address sexual and domestic violence within the larger context of the carceral and enforcement violence. Unlike these organizations, YWEP advocates alternative community accountability and radical harm reduction approaches that would not require survivors to act like model citizens in order to receive support, but would recognize, interrogate, and work within the conditions in which girls actually live.

### **Transformative Justice: SIIS and Sistas Liberated Ground (SLG)**

Instead of legitimizing a liberal, rights-based politics of recognition, girl-driven organizations are inspired by militant, race-radical, and Indigenous movements for sovereignty and by various women of color-led prison abolitionist movements. Their organizations reimagine what

it would mean to turn their gaze away from the carceral state and focus their reflection inward in order to build what Glen Coulthard calls a politics “fashioned toward our own on-the-ground practices of freedom” (2007: 456). Instead of framing overresearched girls as belonging to deficit, depleted, and damaged communities ravaged by intimate and institutional violence, these collectives counter “damage-centered” (Tuck 2009: 409) narratives and research by showcasing how girls can become organizers rather than merely passive academic research subjects or the clientele of social services. Unlike the mainstream anti-violence movement, this movement demands *and* expects accountability.

Located in Brooklyn, New York, SLG is a community-based accountability and transformative justice project of the SIIS collective aimed at creating violence- and harm-free zones for girls in their community without relying on the State, cops, or courts. Early on in their organizing work, SIIS asked the following questions: “What if we said a section of Bushwick, Brooklyn, was a no-go zone for rape and partner abuse? What if we sat on the stoop, talked to folks on the block where our office was, and began weaving a web of folks who agreed to try something other than calling the police when it came to violence?” (Chen, Dulani, and Piepzna-Samarasinha 2011: xxv). This intergenerational collective of working-class black and Latina women wanted their own community to stand up against racialized and gendered violence in ways that no longer depended on the police. Sparked by the sexual assault and murder of two teen girls of color in Bushwick by two police officers, young women identified both interpersonal and law enforcement violence against girls in Bushwick as their main area of organizing work. They created SLG as a local alternative to the police. Since then, they have declared their territorial zone as a space where violence and harm against girls, women, and gender non-conforming people are not tolerated, where girls and women can turn to each other for help. As a part of the SLG project, Sista Circles were created to serve as transformative justice support and intervention networks among groups of girls who are friends, neighbors, and coworkers. SIIS members learn transformative justice strategies as they go and experiment with sustainable community accountability strategies to address community members’ abusive behavior, creating a process for them to account for their actions and transform their behavior. In addition to providing immediate safety, shelter, and support to people who have been harmed, SIIS members are also committed to the ongoing development of the community itself in order to transform oppressive conditions and violent structures. These girls learn about and train new members in the principles of transformative justice as a long-term process.

In 2001, SIIS focused their youth-led participatory action research project on girls' experiences of violence in Brooklyn. They conducted a community survey of four hundred girls and produced a video documentary entitled *You Have the Right to Break the Silence*. Out of the four hundred young women surveyed, 57 percent had been raped or knew someone who had been. In 90 percent of those cases, the girls were not helped by the police or by service agencies. The video project included interviews with young women from the community about physical violence and sexual harassment by the police. SIIS screened the documentary at a community speak-out to transform the survey data into a tool for building coalitions with community activists and neighborhood youth, as well as regularly performed skits about sexual harassment throughout New York. SIIS argued that documenting the experiences of racialized girls victimized by law enforcement was just as important as monitoring police brutality against young men of color. On Action Day, they organized a well-publicized street fair at which girls performed spoken word and guerilla theater about police harassment, surveillance, and brutality, and projected the video on a large wall across the street from the local police precinct. Their political organizing work against enforcement violence made them and their allies a target for heightened police surveillance in the wake of 9/11.

SIIS members were undeterred, however, and continued recruiting new members through their daily organizing work and by creating freedom schools. These girl-led popular educational programs provided political education from an integrated mind-body-spirit framework that trains girls and transgender youth to become activists on their own behalf. Like their sista circles, freedom schools focus on building leadership capacity by collectively engaging in transformative justice. Through their dedication to community accountability processes, SIIS remains process-oriented rather than result-driven, practicing ongoing critical reflection rather than assuming that there is a moment of finishing or arriving. By rooting itself in the principle of self-determination and remaining a volunteer-run collective, SIIS has resisted becoming co-opted like other anti-violence organizations beholden to the criminal injustice system (Sista II Sista 2005, 2006; Burrowes et al. 2007; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2009; Smith 2010). Organizations like SIIS engage in "a kind of seemingly impossible political project that is not only attainable but has deeply transformative potential" (Spade 2011: 197). They continue to engage in the interconnected processes of knowledge production and informal learning in the everyday world of abolitionist movement-building in order to address harm while resisting exile as a solution.

## Reconceptualizing Girlhood and Girlhood Studies in Carceral Societies

By centering case studies of anti-violence and abolitionist activism that contest colonial state control and surveillance undertaken by girls, I trouble the very notion of girl and girlhood as a colonial legacy that privileges white, upper-/middle-class, heterosexual, able bodies via Euro-Western theories of normative child development that were and continue to be violently imposed upon Indigenous and racialized girls. Girlhood studies scholars assert that girlhood is an invented construct that has everything to do with race, class, ability, sexuality, and settler society contexts (Jiwani, Steenbergen, and Mitchell 2006). As Erica Meiners argues, within our current carceral landscape, constructions of “*the child* can get us all into trouble, including those bodies that qualify as children.” Inspired by Meiners’s influential analysis of how the “influx artifact” (2013: 3) of the child gets invoked in political work across the carceral landscape—both by proponents and opponents of carceral state expansion—I am interested in how deconstructing normative constructions of the *girl-child* can work in the service of abolitionist, de-carceral praxis.

To contribute to a more politicized and inclusive girlhood studies in an era of increasing carceral state violence, we must better account for and conceptualize the work that girls who are criminalized, incarcerated, and street-involved do; the risks of *not* doing so are high. Normative constructions of girlhood bolster the broader racialized logic that drives the transcarceral continuum. In the contemporary carceral state, very few Indigenous and racialized girls have privileged access to the racialized and hetero-gendered production of innocence, sentience, respectability, personhood, and full humanity. Making a case for the centrality of girls and girlhood to North American racial formations starting in the nineteenth century, Robin Bernstein argues that “childhood innocence—itself raced white, itself characterized by the ability to retain racial meanings but hide them under claims of holy obliviousness—secured the unmarked status of whiteness, and the power derived from that status” (2011: 8). In stark contrast to the “angelic white girl,” black girls were defined “out of innocence and therefore out of childhood itself” (16).

Not only are (white) innocence, consent, and protection at the center of discussions about girls, they are also the foundation of our criminal legal and punishment systems. Throughout North America, the carceral state is at the forefront of reshaping the boundaries of girlhood;

it has historically appropriated and channeled the idea of girls in need of protection. This protection of the girl centers sexual violence, while obscuring state violence and the ties that suture these together. For Indigenous girls—deemed by the white colonial welfare State as primitive, unreachable, and beyond reform—protection has historically meant increased rates of incarceration in residential boarding schools and prisons (see Ross 1998; Smith 2005).

In an expanding prison regime in which racially marginalized and gender non-conforming girls are still targeted for containment and sexual surveillance, it matters, urgently, who is viewed as valuable or disposable. Girlhood studies scholars need to continue to deconstruct the normative, universalizing category of girlhood in white settler societies in order to promote thought about the necessity of engaging in radical structural and systematic change in solidarity with the girls whose activism is showcased here.

Instead of organizing collectively to become better democratic subjects or “citizens in the making” (Gordon 2010: 8), criminalized Indigenous and racialized girls at the forefront of anti-sexual violence and prison abolitionist movement-building proudly embody what Soo Ah Kwon calls “uncivil youth” (2013: 130). Because of their identity as “uncivil subjects” and their “ineligibility for personhood”, SIIS and YWEP organizers possess an acute understanding that “legal recognition is not and cannot be a viable solution for racialized exploitation, violence, and poverty” (Cacho 2012: 8). Their collective movement work proposes a model of mutual responsibility and accountability not based in calls for recognition from the State as the perpetrator of violence, a stance that challenges the politics of visibility and recognition upon which so many settler-identified and State-centered political models depend. Their activism necessitates a reconceptualization in girlhood studies of what constitutes the political when girls organize resistance.

The groups profiled here do not arrive at the forefront of transformative justice activism by choice but out of necessity. Marked as devalued and unworthy subjects of care, these girls participate in transformative justice praxis because there is no other viable option available to them to confront intersecting forms of violence without being subject to further criminalization and surveillance. Their empowerment is not contingent on taking political power, securing small legal victories, or winning the next big private foundation grant. As Cacho argues, “in the spaces of social death, empowerment ... comes from deciding that the outcome of struggle doesn’t matter as much as the decision to struggle” (2012: 32). For these young activists, the stakes couldn’t get much higher.

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## Notes

1. This chapter focuses specifically on Indigenous girls and racialized girls of color who self-identify as women, queer, Two-Spirit, lesbian, bisexual, genderqueer, or gender non-conforming. My research works to purposefully disrupt white heteronormative scripts that erase the identities and bodies of non-normative raced and gendered subjects.
2. Both SIIS and YWEP share certain key principles for structuring their work to be participatory and centered in racial and economic justice, and to resist many of the tropes of non-profitization. Dylan Rodríguez defines the non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) as a “set of symbiotic relationships that link political and financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology, including and especially emergent progressive and leftist social movements, since about the mid-1970s” (2007: 21–22). Rodríguez argues that the NPIC is symbiotic with the policing of multiply marginalized communities. SIIS became aware of this symbiotic relationship between the NPIC and the carceral state when their foundation funding was slashed after their collective started the SLG project, which directly challenged carceral and imperialist state violence at home and abroad. SIIS was able to transition from being a non-profit organization chasing after foundation grants back to being a volunteer-run, non-hierarchical collective in the wake of 9/11 (see Burrowes et al. 2007).
3. I participated in workshops led by SIIS and YWEP organizers from 2007 onwards at the Allied Media Conference (Detroit), the Critical Ethnic Studies Association Conference (Chicago), and the United States Social Forum (Atlanta and Detroit), and community-based activist trainings throughout Canada and the United States.

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