

A World Without Prisons: Resisting Militarism, Globalized Punishment, and Empire¹

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THE PAST FIVE YEARS HAS WITNESSED A RADICAL TRANSFORMATION IN the landscape of social movements. We have emerged from two decades of vibrant identity-based formations and a shrinking and beleaguered labor movement and into a moment of radical coalition building around broadly defined social and economic agendas. Three social movements have best captured the “freedom visions” of the young, the indigenous, the black, the poor, the landless, homeless, and disenfranchised. The first is the anti-globalization movement, a campaign against free trade, corporate greed, and environmental devastation that rose to visibility on January 1, 1994, when the Zapatistas declared war on the North American Free Trade Agreement. The second is the popular movement against the prison-industrial complex, a grass-roots movement that has appealed in particular to youth of color in advanced industrialized nations who feel, justly, that they are being prepped in under-resourced schools and over-policed neighborhoods as fuel for the “perpetual prisoner machine” (Dyer, 2000). The third is the antiwar movement that swept the globe after September 11, 2001, culminating on February 15, 2003, when an estimated 10 million people took the streets on five continents to protest the U.S.-led war on terror.

Anti-globalization and peace activists (with perhaps the exception of liberal and religious pacifists in the global North) have identified the connections between U.S. militarism and neoliberal globalization. In the context of the current war on terror, they have pointed to the use of U.S. military might to carve out a space for Western corporate interests. This relationship, activists remind us, is not limited to the wars on Afghanistan and Iraq. From the U.S.-funded military units that quash indigenous resistance to free trade in Latin America to the policing of workers in the free-trade zones throughout Southeast Asia, the repression of popular movements by state militaries has been critical to the introduction of

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sweeping neoliberal reforms across the globe. However, connections remain to be made between these practices and the swelling prison population in the U.S. and internationally. At the same time, the embrace of issue-based, rather than identity-based politics has in some instances led to a return to a myopia concerning issues of race, gender, and sexuality. This article theorizes the connections between neoliberal globalization, U.S. empire building, and the rise of the prison-industrial complex. By placing women of color and “Third World” women at the center, I aim to reveal the racialized, gendered, and sexual economies that are integral to processes of social control and exploitation, yet somehow fall out of many of our activist responses. The article aims to create a space for reflection and generate new directions for activism.

Toward a Transnational Feminist Analysis

As we seek to lay out a theoretical map of the complex political, economic, and social landscape of post-national capitalism, our challenge is to be vigilant about the silences and erasures that have generated struggle and division within progressive scholarship and activism. We need to challenge the tendency for discussions about the global economy and state violence to lose site of the intimate ways in which gender and sexuality are inscribed in macro-level processes of exploitation and violence; we need to be wary of the limitations of single-issue politics that seek to separate racist repression at home from militarism abroad, or gender violence in the family from state violence against whole communities; and we need to actively counter the nationalism that creeps into even the most progressive movements and prevents activists, particularly those in the U.S., from seeing beyond national borders. One way to do this is by building on the radical internationalist tradition in African political thought. I am personally inspired by Claudia Jones, a diasporic intellectual with roots in Trinidad, who was active in anti-racist, feminist, communist, anti-imperialist, and antiwar organizing in the U.S. and Britain (Sherwood, 1999; Davies, 2001).

In 1948, Jones was arrested and convicted on trumped-up charges of advocating the overthrow of the U.S. government. She was subsequently incarcerated in the Alderson Federal Reformatory for Women, where she wrote in a letter to the United Nations:

if we (immigrants) can be denied all rights and incarcerated in concentration camps, then trade unionists are next; then the Negro people; then the Jewish people, all foreign born, and progressives who love peace and cherish freedom.... Our fate is the fate of the American people. Our fight is the fight of all opponents to fascist barbarism, of all who abhor war and desire peace (*Ibid.*).

Jones’ predictions about the U.S. penal system, 23 years before the Reagan administration embarked on the present prison-building binge and over 50 years

before the federal government began rounding up over 80,000 Middle Eastern immigrants and asylum seekers, are frighteningly accurate.² Claudia Jones' praxis was visionary in other ways: Long before the academic community started theorizing about intersectionality, she argued that racism could not be eradicated without also ending the specific forms of racialized and gendered oppression assailing black women (Jones, 1995). She was also a vigorous advocate of multiracial coalition building between people of color, something she practiced as co-founder and chair of the Confederation of Afro-Asian-Caribbean organizations during her exile in England. Lastly, her analysis of the connections between global capitalism, state repression, and racism provided an important radical foundation for international solidarity between oppressed and colonized peoples worldwide. Jones' anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, transnational feminist praxis provides us with a template for our own efforts to challenge criminal injustice, war, and renewed U.S. empire building. Building on Jones' analysis, the rest of this article will lay out a framework for transnational feminist research and activism against militarism, neoliberalism, and the prison-industrial complex.³

The Prison-Industrial Complex: Behind the Slogan

Five years ago, 3,500 activists, students, scholars, prisoners, and their families came together at the first Critical Resistance conference in Berkeley, California, to talk about the possibility of building an international grass-roots movement to end the prison-building boom and rebuild communities devastated by three decades of "tough on crime" sentencing policies. In the following months, Critical Resistance launched a new social movement, with chapters and affiliates in New York, Western Massachusetts, New Haven, Washington, D.C., Kentucky, New Orleans, Miami, Los Angeles, and Oakland, spreading an analysis and model of grass-roots activism against mass incarceration throughout the nation and (to a lesser extent) beyond U.S. borders (Critical Resistance, 2003). Alongside Critical Resistance, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a plethora of organizations opposing the prison-building boom, including Families Against Mandatory Minimums, Justice Now, Schools Not Jails, and the Prison Moratorium Project in the U.S., Justice Action and Critical Resistance in Australia, and Womyn 4 Justice and Joint Effort in Canada. Although these organizations have different foci, from the criminalization of women and young people to drug law reform, they have gained a common vision through the central organizing principle of the "prison-industrial complex." This framework has had immense efficacy as a basis for political mobilization. Nevertheless, if the prison-industrial complex is to be more than a punchy slogan that translates neatly into posters with dollar bills emblazoned across prison walls, we need to map its contours and demonstrate how it expands our understanding of imprisonment in the new world order.

The "prison-industrial complex" concept has often been used with little clarity or conflated with other related entities. It is not, as is sometimes assumed, a

pseudonym for prison labor, or the private prison industry, although both of those phenomena point to the ways in which economic interests have become wrapped up in contemporary punishment regimes. Neither is it a “conspiracy theory” that relies on surmise and suspicion of illicit deals in shady backrooms. The concept is derived from the “military-industrial complex,” a term coined by Dwight Eisenhower to describe the “conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry” (Eisenhower, 1961: 1035–1040). Making visible the corporate interests behind the Cold War arms buildup, Eisenhower called on “an alert and knowledgeable citizenry” to prevent “unwarranted influence” over national policy. The term “prison-industrial complex” was first used by Mike Davis to describe a multibillion-dollar prison-building boom in California that, he argued, “rivals agribusiness as the dominant force in the life of rural California and competes with land developers as the chief seducer of legislators in Sacramento” (Davis, 1995: 229–234). As elaborated by California-based scholars and prison intellectuals associated with Critical Resistance, especially Ruth Wilson Gilmore, Linda Evans, and Angela Davis, the concept helped to explain why California pursued a hugely expensive prison-building binge throughout the 1990s, despite falling crime rates and relatively low unemployment rates. If, as Angela Davis argues, prisons not only *cost* money, but also *generate* large revenues for powerful corporate interests as well as local businesses and real estate owners in the towns where prisons are sited, then the apparently illogical willingness of state legislators to spend billions of dollars on a failing social policy is transformed into a rational — if immoral — economic policy.

The prison-industrial complex is a symbiotic and profitable relationship between politicians, corporations, the media, and state correctional institutions that generates the racialized use of incarceration as a response to social problems rooted in the globalization of capital. The concept captures two related processes in the emerging relationship between state criminal punishment agencies, politicians, and corporations and other economic interests. The first is the transformation of prisoners into profits, which occurs in a number of ways. Construction companies, architects, and the suppliers of high-tech surveillance equipment and other materials earn profits when a new prison is built to create beds for the perpetually swelling ranks of women, men, and children sentenced to time behind bars. The practice by states and the federal Bureau of Prisons of contracting with private corporations like Wackenhut Corrections Corporation and Corrections Corporation of America to build and operate prisons has generated a burgeoning industry that relies on punitive anticrime measures for profits. During the 1990s, prison expansion coupled with a neoliberal privatization agenda generated a multibillion-dollar market for private operators.

New prisons also create profits for the companies that underwrite the costs of construction, with companies such as Lehman Brothers turning prisons into a commodity on the stock market and investors into jailors. Though opponents

to the idea of punishment for profit tend to focus on the privatization of prisons, publicly owned and operated prisons also generate profits for suppliers, catering companies, and telephone companies that charge high rates for reverse charge calls. Prison labor also generates profits for companies that pay less than minimum wage to workers who receive no benefits, paid leave, or maternity pay, and saves money for states that use prison labor to clean highways or dig graves. Less visibly, a plethora of economic interests benefit from mass incarceration and the associated public obsession with crime and punishment. These include feature films and television shows, including MTV's latest Reality TV show featuring a first-time offender in a Texas prison, web sites such as "Prison Cam," which includes intimate video footage of women prisoners in Arizona, and products that cash in on the tough chic of the prison, from Prison Blues jeans to hip hop videos that glamorize the "thug life" inside.

The second process is the cementing of the prison into local economies. For rural towns devastated by economic restructuring and free trade competition, prisons have become a panacea for economic stagnation and population loss. In the context of farm bankruptcies and factory closures caused by the rise of corporate agribusiness and the influx of foreign produce, the jobs and construction contracts offered by new public or private prisons have pit small towns against one another in a bid to offer the most attractive package of tax breaks, cheap land, and other incentives. Politicians and business elites in rural towns in the U.S. and Canada have promoted a policy of "prison construction as economic development," touting prisons as a recession-proof and nonpolluting industry (Dhondt, 2002). With the U.S. prison population increasing 295% in just under two decades, prisons became the primary growth industry in rural areas during the late 1980s and 1990s (Austin and Irwin, 2001: 1). A similar process has occurred more recently in Ontario, Canada, where the provincial government has invested \$325 million in building three new U.S.-style "superjails" in rural communities where seasonal and unstable employment opportunities are the norm.

The prison-industrial complex is thus, as Ruth Wilson Gilmore has pointed out, about surplus land (Gilmore, 1998; 2004). "Industrialized punishment" has become a key economic development strategy for rural towns devastated by the economic restructuring brought about by globalization. Timber, steel, and paper factories, forced into bankruptcy under the new regime of unfettered free trade, have been replaced by the steel and concrete of new-generation prisons. Farmland, vacated by family farms gone bust under competition with multinational agribusiness, has become profitable once more when used to warehouse criminalized bodies. The rise of industrialized punishment has birthed a rural prison lobby in Canada and Australia, as well as the U.S. town councils, business and realtor associations, and organizations like the Association of California Cities Allied with Prisons clamor for new prisons in place of productive forms of economic revitalization. It has woven mass incarceration into the fabric of the global economy.

Capitalist Punishment

Nowhere is this more evident than in the transnational spread of the private prison industry. Although the private prison industry was birthed in the U.S., it has become a multinational entity with even greater significance outside the U.S. Within the U.S., the industry has been plagued by vocal opponents, highly public human rights abuses, escapes and other scandals, and over-building, leading to expensive empty beds and troubled stock valuations (Greene, 2001). Elsewhere, however, it has successfully positioned itself as a helpmate and “partner” to state correctional agencies, and the answer to a whole host of problems. In Britain, it has been embraced as a panacea for crumbling Victorian prisons, a rigid prison guards union, and — bizarrely — institutionalized racism. Despite initially opposing the privatization of prisons, the New Labour government announced that *all* new prisons will be put out to competitive tender and that “failing” prisons will be privatized (Sudbury, 2000). In Latin America and South Africa, foreign private prison corporations have been celebrated as a solution to inhumane conditions, overcrowding, human rights abuses, and government corruption (Nathan, 2000). This investment in punishment is in sharp contrast to the neoliberal spending limits in other areas of social policy. For neoliberal Latin American governments, new high-tech, steel and concrete penal warehouses with 18-year lease-purchase contracts have begun to replace housing, hospitals, and universities as signs of modernization and development (Borden, 2002).

The emergence of shiny new prisons alongside the shantytowns and slums of the global South is a reminder of the hollow promise of trickle-down development offered by proponents of neoliberal globalization. Even as global South governments are being forced to reign in spending on health, housing, clean water, and other basic necessities, they are also under pressure to embark on a U.S.-style war on drugs and law-and-order buildup. For example, the Inter-American Development Bank is currently working to promote “justice reform” in Latin America and the Caribbean. Since a conference in the early 1990s at which its borrower nations were encouraged to modernize their justice systems, the Bank has spent over \$460 million in criminal justice loans and technical assistance in 21 countries. The Bank’s interest in justice reform is driven in part by corporate executives, who, according to a recent report, are concerned that struggling criminal justice systems in the region, “present a major problem for their business operations” (Biebesheimer, 2001: *i*). The Bank’s focus on the criminal justice system demonstrates the connection between the neoliberal development agenda and the politics of law and order. When kidnappings of business executives, popular uprisings, and property crime threaten investments, controlling disenfranchised and insurgent populations becomes a priority. In this context, strengthening and expanding criminal justice systems become an alternative to government funding for programs to redistribute wealth and reduce income disparity, poverty, and landlessness, exemplified by the popular socialist transformations spearheaded by Lula da Silva’s Workers’ Party in Brazil.

Demonstrating the economic connections between prisons and the private sector is not enough to prove a causal linkage between the profits businesses reap from imprisonment and the policies that fuel prison construction. After all, at a time when the mantra of small government is heard in legislative rooms across the globe, it is nothing new for government and the private sector to work “in partnership” to provide public services. Key to Eisenhower’s critique was the “unwarranted influence” waged by the business sector over government policy. A plethora of research reports and investigative newspaper reports testify to the influence of the corporate prison lobby and other economic interests over criminal punishment policies, although scholars have been slower to document this influence. This influence occurs in three main ways: campaign donations, lobbying and funding, and participation in the American Legislative Exchange Council, a New Right foundation that provides templates of pro-incarceration bills to legislators (Sarabi and Bender, 2000). Private operators regularly use campaign donations to win friends and help create a pro-incarceration, pro-privatization environment. A report published by the Institute on Money in State Politics found that private prison corporations donated \$176,733 to House and Assembly candidates, \$185,000 to Senate candidates, \$111,985 to gubernatorial candidates, and \$546,000 to state candidates during the 1998 election cycle (Bender, 2002). Prison corporations use campaign donations as part of a strategy to maximize the size of the corrections market, and to minimize the “risk” posed by decarcerative measures.

The prison industry’s donations have paid off. The report by the Institute on Money in State Politics identified clear evidence of legislators introducing or voting favorably on pro-industry bills benefiting private prison companies that had donated to their campaigns in Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Oklahoma, and North Carolina during the 2000 election cycle (*Ibid.*: 4). Lobbyists working on behalf of the prison industry also influence lawmakers by providing corporate largesse such as gifts, travel, and lavish dinners. In the wake of the Enron scandal, ethics and financial-disclosure laws operating at the federal level have been brought under scrutiny. However, at the state level, disclosure rules are inconsistent, lax, and poorly enforced. Prison corporations have concentrated their largesse on state legislators where relatively small investments can translate into significant profits, and where many transactions occur in secrecy. For example, in February 2003, Correctional Services Corporation (CSC) was forced to pay a \$300,000 fine after an investigation by the New York State Lobbying Commission (Correctional Services Corporation, 2003). The investigation found that CSC had failed to report their lobbying expenditures and gave gifts beyond the legal limit to legislators, including Valentine’s Day chocolates, plane tickets, and free rides. CSC also provided staff free of charge, including drivers, public relations aides, security guards, and workers for political campaigns, and were suspected of inviting legislators to participate in a sex ring. Such tactics have mainly achieved the promotion of privatization in states previously ambivalent or opposed and the generation of

tough-on-crime legislation leading to larger prison populations. Ultimately, the political influence of the prison industry has led to the opening up of new markets and to the creation of more commodities — criminalized bodies.

Of course, the “unwarranted influence” of the corporate prison lobby is not the only reason for the prison boom. The media have fueled a racialized fear of crime and hatred of “black gangbangers” and “criminal aliens,” preventing the emergence of an “alert and knowledgeable citizenry” in relation to crime and punishment. Politicians have played the “race card” of crime to win votes and malign their opponents. Prison guards unions, such as the powerful California Correctional Peace Officers Association, have made an impact through political lobbying, as has the role of the prison as a place where the “losers” of the global economy can be warehoused under close surveillance, and where the collateral damage of failed homelessness, mental health, and drug policies can be hidden from public view. An analysis of the prison-industrial complex does not prevent us from documenting any of these other facets of mass incarceration. However, the theoretical framework offered by the prison-industrial complex offers critical advantages. The “industrial” aspect encourages us to move beyond explanations of mass incarceration that focus only on the ideological sphere, such as those that focus narrowly on racist ideologies or media-fueled moral panics. Two strategies of a narrowly ideological analysis, challenging representations of “the criminal” and correcting public misconceptions about crime and sentencing, will fail to have a significant impact on prison populations if, as I have argued, the prison boom has a critical economic momentum. Second, the “industrial” aspect of the complex encourages us to make connections between prisons and the global economy. Rather than seeing imprisonment as a manifestation of federal and state political processes alone, the prison-industrial complex points to the synergies between corporate globalization and prison growth, a theme that I return to below. Third, identifying the existence of a complex of economic and political interests that benefit from mass incarceration debunks the myth that the primary function of the prison is to keep “us” safe. Once we recognize that prisons promote order and security for a few at the cost of generating violence, inequality, and social disruption for the many, we have taken the first step in developing an abolitionist vision. Abolitionists go beyond arguing for the release of those incarcerated for nonviolent or drug offenses, or the *reform* of penal regimes, and demand a radical restructuring of the way in which we deal with the social conditions that generate “crime.” As such, the politics of abolitionism generates a synergy between prison activism and anti-imperialist and anti-globalization projects.

Finally, due to its roots in Eisenhower’s military-industrial complex, the concept provides a framework within which to identify connections between military aggression and mass incarceration. Arguing that “we are witnessing the consolidation of a powerful military-security-prison-industrial complex that is driving an agenda of policing and aggression at home and abroad,” activists in

Arizona have highlighted the connections between militarism and prisons, from the use of prison sentences to undermine peace activism to the deployment of technology and weaponry developed by the arms industry inside prisons (Arizona Prison Moratorium Coalition, 2003). Angela Davis suggests further that the two systems share important structural features, producing vast profits out of immense social destruction and transforming public funds into private profits (Davis and Shaylor, 2001: 3). An analysis of the connections between militarism and prisons is critical if we are to build an effective anti-imperialist movement to oppose U.S. military aggression and occupation. At the same time, for the prison abolitionist movement to maintain its momentum at a time of brutal and unjust wars, we must develop an integrated analysis of war, imperialism, and mass incarceration. In the following section, I consider Iraq as a case study of the synergy between the military and prison-industrial complex.

From the War on Crime to the War on Iraq, and Back Again

The failure to locate weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and indications that British and U.S. politicians knowingly exaggerated intelligence reports about the potential threat posed by the Hussein regime, have demonstrated that the “war on terror” is not driven primarily by the desire to rid the world of the threat of terrorism. Though antiwar posters that read “No Blood for Oil” accurately identified U.S. corporate and state interests in controlling Iraqi oil deposits, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were not waged simply to feed the U.S. addiction to fossil fuels. Rather, contemporary U.S. military interventions have the sweeping goal of establishing a new world order based on neoliberal globalization. In 2001, two years after the battle for Seattle brought the anti-globalization movement into the spotlight, the imperial project of remaking the global economy for U.S. corporate interests was on shaky footing. The anti-globalization movement was at a highpoint, leading world economic and political elites to meet in ever more secluded locations. Argentina, the Washington Consensus poster child, was in the midst of an economic crisis that would ultimately lead to a popular uprising and the resignation of neoliberal President Fernando de la Rúa. The failure of IMF-led economic restructuring to bring stability or prosperity to global South nations, combined with popular insurgencies against free trade and neoliberal economic prescriptions, presaged the possible collapse of the Washington Consensus and with it, U.S. global political and economic hegemony.

Between the Seattle uprisings and September 11, 2001, the G8 and corporate elites were on the defensive, forced into the position of trying to put a kinder face on free trade and repackaging the World Trade Organization and IMF as agencies dedicated to poverty reduction and debt relief for highly indebted nations. However, the bloody attacks of September 11 provided the ideological fodder for a new aggressive stance. Reinterpreted as an offensive against the people of the United States, rather than one against the symbols of U.S. capitalism and militarism,

the September 11 attacks turned “average Americans” against their counterparts outside U.S. borders. With popular support at home for violent retribution and repression around the world, the Bush administration was given free reign to replace any regime hostile to the vision of a world dominated by U.S. economic interests with puppet regimes. Bush’s National Security Strategy spells out these military goals. The U.S. military, it declares, will “ignite a new era of global economic growth through free markets and free trade” (U.S. National Security Council, 2002: Section VI). Indeed, as the reconstruction of Iraq continues, “Operation Iraqi Freedom” will perhaps be relabeled “Operation Iraqi Free Trade.” For as Naomi Klein (2003) points out, Iraq has become “a blank slate on which the most ideological Washington neoliberals can design their dream economy: fully privatized, foreign-owned, and open for business.”

The elimination of regulations limiting foreign ownership of Iraqi companies and infrastructure, ostensibly to encourage foreign investors to assist with reconstruction efforts, is the first step in the radical opening of Iraq to the global economy. U.S. administrators are pursuing this radical economic surgery, despite the fact that the same process in the former Soviet Union resulted in rampant poverty, social instability, and the rise of organized crime. Iraqi protestors taking to the streets shortly after the fall of Baghdad were more succinct. Their slogan, “We will not sell out our country,” suggested that the Iraqi people were at risk of being “sold out” and “sold off.” U.S. corporations, many with senior political connections to the Bush administration, are the major beneficiaries of the reconstruction effort. Just as the war itself boosted the stock of the U.S. arms industry and private military companies, the rebuilding of Iraq has generated multimillion-dollar contracts for U.S. oil and manufacturing companies. The Bush administration has rejected the idea of a permanent colonial presence in Iraq, but this is hardly necessary for the neoliberal transformation of Iraq. With U.S.-headquartered multinationals receiving a monopoly on rebuilding roads, bridges, water and sewage plants, communications systems, and other infrastructure, it is clear that Iraq will have become a neocolonial outpost long before the last U.S. troops are withdrawn (Ridgeway, 2003). The war against Iraq, and the war on terror in general, reflects a Bush administration decision to use military force to do what the Clinton regime and IMF did through diplomacy, free trade agreements, and the carrot and stick of Third World debt — creating new markets for the U.S. capitalist elite. In this sense, regime change in Iraq is the first step toward establishing a free trade area sympathetic to the U.S. in the region. This “U.S.-Middle East Free Trade Area” would join NAFTA, NEPAD, and the much-contested FTAA in remaking the world for U.S. multinational capital (U.S. Department of State, 2003).

A little noted aspect of the Iraqi occupation has been the centrality of images of crime in generating the aura of legitimacy for U.S. intervention. During the invasion and in the immediate aftermath, while U.S. troops were posing for photo opportunities with “grateful” liberated Iraqis, looters were raiding hospitals,

museums, and libraries and removing priceless antiquities. Although the U.S. authorities in Iraq turned a blind eye during the worst of the looting, suggesting that a repressed people were “letting off steam,” this attitude swiftly hardened when U.S. troops, allies, and infrastructure became a target. When a plethora of groups opposing the occupation — from Ba’athists to Sunni and Shia religious followers — began to take violent direct action, paternalism was replaced with a tough, punitive attitude toward these “criminals and terrorists.” Blaming the violence on “criminals” released by Hussein from Iraqi prisons during the invasion, the U.S. administration sought to mask the extent to which gun violence, armed militias, and a pandemic of violence against women were a direct consequence of the vacuum created by an occupying power with little legitimacy on the streets. At the same time, the focus on “terrorists” and foreign opportunists distracted attention from a growing resistance movement (Ali, 2003). The criminalization of dissent in Iraq has proceeded so rapidly that Paul Bremer’s \$87 billion dollar reconstruction budget announced in September 2003, just four months after the official end of the war, included \$400 million for two 4,000-bed prisons. The replacement of the dilapidated prisons of the Hussein era with U.S.-style multimillion-dollar high-tech superjails will inevitably bring U.S. headquartered private prison corporations into the lucrative reconstruction business.

Facilities housing thousands of prisoners, known as “superjails,” are common in the U.S., yet most other nations have not traditionally constructed these massive structures. The architecture of the superjail is indicative of a particular philosophy of crime and punishment. In the past 20 years, three principles have underpinned penal expansion in the U.S.: penal incapacitation, deterrence, and fiscal efficiency. Rather than conceptualize prisons as places where rehabilitation should take place to prepare a prisoner for reentry into society, the workplace, and family life, “new generation” prisons were designed to meet three goals. First, they should permit the removal from society and warehousing of large numbers of population groups that are considered to be at high risk of committing crime — working-class black and Latino young men and women in particular. Conservative criminologists suggested that the U.S. would need to increase its prison population dramatically to make crime-ridden cities safe (Zimring and Hawkins, 1991: 89–115). Sentencing models like three-strikes-and-you’re-out and mandatory minimum sentences were premised on the idea that the criminal justice system should incapacitate “career criminals,” taking them off the streets *before* they committed a(nother) crime. Second, new generation of prisons was designed to offer a harsh environment that would act as a deterrent to those considering “a life of crime.” Prisons providing educational programs, recreation activities, a decent diet, and adequate healthcare were considered to be “hotels” that did little to scare the inmate straight. Instead, the new prisons were to be austere environments with “no frills.” Sheriff Jo Arpaio’s Maricopa county jail, where inmates are kept in tents in the 110-degree Arizona desert heat and made to work on chain gangs, is

the ultimate “no frills” jail. New generation prisons mirrored this philosophy with austere concrete, steel, and glass environments designed to facilitate control and surveillance rather than meaningful activity or social interaction.

Third, these new prisons should cost as little as possible to incarcerate the maximum number of prisoners possible. Thus, savings were made in the design of prisons, with embedded technology such as video surveillance that permitted reduction in staffing ratios. This appearance of cost efficiency served to mask the real cost to the public of punitive penal policies, enabling legislators who otherwise favored low taxes and small government to appear fiscally responsible while spending millions of dollars to incarcerate nonviolent offenders and drug addicts. The construction of two 4,000-bed prisons in Iraq is an indication that the Bush administration plans to remake the country’s criminal justice system in the image of the U.S. gulag, using incapacitation and deterrence to enforce compliance by a devastated and insurgent population. Given the role of U.S. prisons in warehousing disenfranchised populations and generating corporate profits, it should come as little surprise that the U.S. quasi-colonial administration would need superjails as an integral part of the new “open for business” Iraq. Prison construction and the construction and management of “crime” are thus central to U.S. militarism and empire building.

Where Are the Women? Centering Personal Narratives

As we develop a cartography of the synergies between incarceration and militarism, we face the difficult task of maintaining women’s visibility in two spheres that have tended toward our marginalization. Feminist scholars have examined the phallogentrism of military culture and have identified the ways in which wars are framed as masculine arenas, with men playing leading roles as aggressor and protector (Enloe, 2000). Popular representations and scholarly accounts of the invasion of Iraq, for example, have focused on male soldiers and “terrorists,” while reconstruction efforts were portrayed as the preserve of male administrators and Iraqi politicians. Where women have been made visible in the war on terror, they have been deployed as highly emotive symbols justifying (male) military intervention. For example, Cherrie Blair and Laura Bush’s emotional call for allied troops to save veiled Afghan women oppressed under the Taliban was a carefully timed and orchestrated effort that aimed to win popular support for the invasion of Afghanistan. The effectiveness of this strategy relied heavily on imperial tendencies within Western feminist ideologies, as is noted by activists from the Women of Color Resource Center in Oakland:

The U.S. military was cast as the liberator of Afghan womanhood. Their “salvation” became the softer side of the war. As a consequence, too many U.S. feminists have either been reluctant to speak out against the death and destruction rained down upon ordinary Afghans or, yielding to missionary and imperial impulses, have supported the war.

Despite their visibility, Afghan women were reduced to victims of Taliban barbarism and thus denied any agency or voice. Similarly, the female U.S. soldier captured during the invasion of Iraq was depicted in the media as wounded, vulnerable, and in need of rescue, a depiction that differed greatly from images of men as heroes under fire. Like the military, the prison is represented in the popular imagination as a masculine space, where violence, brutality, and machismo are inextricable. Women prisoners, like women soldiers, are considered an anomaly and are frequently dismissed as simply “too few to count” (Adelberg and Curry, 1987). Although the number of women in prison in advanced industrialized nations has been increasing at a greater rate than the number of men, women remain a relatively small percentage of the incarcerated population (Sudbury, 2003). In addition, the focus on Muslim men for “alien registration” and, in some instances, incarceration and deportation reinforces the impression that men of color are the target of the war on terror.⁴ Women’s imprisonment thus tends to be rendered invisible.

One strategy for challenging this invisibility is to begin with the personal. My methodological approach has been to create a dialog between women’s life histories and a macro-level analysis of militarism and the global economy. Over a three-year period, I have carried out semi-structured interviews with women of color and indigenous women in prisons and halfway houses in the U.S., Canada, and England. I use the women’s narratives as case studies that provide a deep, textured counterpoint to statistical data. Women’s life histories are the hinge that links the micro-level of relationships between mothers and daughters, women and their lovers, struggles with addiction, and self-esteem and identity with globalization, militarism, and the prison-industrial complex. The following three narratives are part of this larger research project.

Marta is a Jamaican woman in her mid-30s serving a five-year sentence for importation of drugs. I met Marta at Her Majesty’s Prison at Westhill. HMP Westhill was originally the young offender annex of a large Victorian male prison in the picturesque town of Winchester in the south of England. During the 1990s, when the women’s prison population began to spiral upward faster than men’s, the annex was painted pink and reopened as a women’s medium-security prison. Winchester’s general population is a predominantly white, but approximately 40% of the women at HMP Westhill are black. Many, like Marta, are noncitizens from Africa or the Caribbean, who will be deported at the end of their sentence. Most, like Marta, have children who they have not seen for many years.

Diane is a 25-year-old biracial African Canadian, serving a five-year sentence for importation in Toronto. Diane served most of her sentence at the Grand Valley federal prison for women, in Kitchener, Ontario, one of five new “women-centered” federal prisons for women built by the Canadian government in the late 1990s. As a teen, Diane left home and moved into a women’s shelter because of an abusive relationship with her father. While she was there, she entered into a

relationship with a Caribbean immigrant who was subsequently incarcerated for selling drugs. Shortly after his release, she gave up her job and started importing for him, not knowing at the time that his previous courier, a prior girlfriend, had been arrested and incarcerated. During the first few days of her sentence, she met and shared experiences with her husband's prior girlfriend/courier and learned that he had already moved in with another woman. Nevertheless, when offered a shorter sentence in return for information about who had supplied the drugs, she refused out of a continued sense of loyalty.

Teresa is a Colombian woman in her early 40s. As a single mother, she struggled to support her three children. Carrying cocaine between Colombia and England enabled her to supplement her meager income. She was arrested at Heathrow airport in England and was given a five-year sentence that she is serving with Marta at HMP Westhill. Teresa does not know what has become of her three children and has not been able to contact them since she was arrested. Her fear is that they will be homeless since she did not leave any emergency funds for them.

Globalization and the Prison-Industrial Complex

What do Marta, Diane, and Teresa's stories tell us about the global political economy of prisons? First, they remind us that mass incarceration is not only a U.S. phenomenon. With very few exceptions, prison populations throughout the global North have risen exponentially in the past 25 years, leading to massive overcrowding and a transnational prison-building boom (Sudbury, 2002). This transnational prison boom is characterized by three elements: first, it is fueled by the criminalization of African diasporic, indigenous, and immigrant populations. Second, it is marked by the exponential rate of growth of women's imprisonment, which in most nations has outstripped men's. And third, it has generated, and in turn is being fueled by the prison-industrial complex — a phenomenon that has become transnational in scope.

Scholars working in a radical tradition of prison studies have developed important analyses about the relationship between neoliberal globalization and the explosion in incarceration in advanced industrial nations (Davis and Shaylor, 2001; Parenti, 1999). Free trade and open borders for some have increasingly made working-class people of color in North America, Europe, and Australia surplus to the needs of the global economy. As corporations relocate their manufacturing operations to Taiwan, Haiti, or the Philippines in search of ever lower costs, cheap, non-unionized Third World women have become the exploitable labor force of choice. Penal warehousing — a dual strategy of immobilization and political disenfranchisement — has become the state's solution to the "surplus populations" left behind.⁵ This solution is part of a broader shift from welfare state to a "law and order" state embraced by neoconservatives and third-way liberals alike (Parenti, 1999). Hence, the well-documented transfer of public spending from education, health, and welfare to policing and prisons, as well as tax breaks

benefiting the rich. The feminization of poverty under this neoliberal economic restructuring interacts with patriarchal gender relations to create specific forms of vulnerability for women of color. Diane's story demonstrates that the state's punishment of women is often the culmination of years of gender violence and exploitation, reminding us that the criminalization of surplus labor works in specifically gendered ways, often taking as its starting point the abuse of women of color and children by men in our communities.⁶

Third World women and men are increasingly at risk of incarceration in new private U.S.-style prisons at home, and they are also filling the cells of penal warehouses throughout the global North. For example, the U.S. federal system has 29% noncitizens detained on criminal charges, while nine percent of the British prison population are noncitizens (Federal Bureau of Prisons, 2002; HM Prison Service, 2003). How can we explain this rise in cross-border incarceration? Marta's story provides some insight. Speaking of her decision to import drugs, Marta told me:

Things in Jamaica is very expensive. It's hard for a single woman with kids, especially anywhere over three kids, to get by without a good support or a steady job. It doesn't mean that I didn't have an income. I did have an income, but having four kids and an ex-husband who doesn't really care much. I had to keep paying school fees and the money kept going down. I did need some kind of support. That's why I did what I did. We don't get child support in Jamaica; three-quarters of the things that this country offers for mothers here we don't have it. This country gives you a house, they give you benefits, we get nothing in Jamaica. We have to pay for hospital, not even education is free. Primary school used to be free under one government hand, but under another government it has been taken away. You're talking about high school, you're talking about fifteen up to twenty thousand dollars a term, for one kid to go to high school. It's difficult in Jamaica.

Since the mid-1980s, the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP), in unequal partnership with the U.S., IMF, and World Bank, has undertaken a radical restructuring of the economy. Following the "Washington Consensus," the JLP has slashed public-sector employment, scaled back local government services, health and education, sold state-owned companies to the private sector, and reduced tariffs on imported goods. The result has been a sharp increase in the cost of living, the decimation of local farms and businesses, and a dramatic decline in real wages. These cuts have hit women particularly hard as they seek to fill the vacuum left by the vanishing welfare state (Harrison, 1991).

While the state cut back its role in social welfare, it stepped up its role in subsidizing foreign and domestic capital. Free Trade Zones established in Kingston and Montego Bay offer foreign garment and electronic and communications companies

equipped factory space, tax exemptions, a cheap female workforce and, for the busy executive, weekends of sun, sea, and sex. Foreign-owned agribusiness and mining companies have also been encouraged, displacing traditional subsistence farming and causing migration from rural areas to the cities, which now account for 50% of Jamaica's population. As the economy has shifted, women working in the informal economy as farmers and "higglers," like Marta, find themselves unable to keep up with the rising costs of survival. Younger women may find employment in the tourist industry as maids, entertainers, or prostitutes, or within the Free Trade Zones assembling clothes or computers for Western markets, but working-class women in their thirties and older have fewer options. Marta's experience exemplifies the increasing economic pressures facing women in the global South under free trade and IMF-led structural adjustment. The failure of the global economy to provide legal means for Third World women's survival guarantees a pool of low-level disposable workers for the criminalized drug industry as well as the global sex trade, and a continual supply of criminalized bodies for the prison-industrial complex.

Militarism, Criminalization, and the War on Drugs

While Marta's story highlights the causal relationship between globalization and prison expansion, Teresa's story helps us understand the connections between militarism and criminalization. When I spoke with her, Teresa was dismissive of stereotypical ideas about dangerous Latin American "drug traffickers" flooding the U.S. and Europe with cocaine. Like many "drug mules" from developing countries, she argued, she was pushed into trafficking drugs by poverty. In her words:

Cargamos drogas porque lo necesitamos. Porque tenemos situaciones de financia. Somos de Colombia, de países del tercer mundo, que son pobres. La situación en lo que viven, por eso lo hicimos. [We carry drugs because we need to, because we have financial difficulties. We come from Colombia, from poor Third World countries. The conditions we live in, that is what pushed us.]

Colombia is shackled by foreign debt, political and social dislocation, violence, war, and kidnappings. As a leading harvester of the "coca" leaf, estimated to produce 80% of the world's cocaine, Colombia has been a key target of U.S. anti-drug interventions. Instead of alleviating horrendous social, political, and economic conditions for women in Latin America, U.S. financial assistance is targeted at building military forces that participate in the war on drugs. These forces have been used to carry out counterinsurgency wars against revolutionary groups such as the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and ELN (National Liberation Army), which have spearheaded the struggle for indigenous and poor peoples rights while perpetuating the violence. The U.S. military alleges that such groups have received millions of dollars per annum for protecting coca plantations, drug

trafficking routes, and airstrips. By labeling these revolutionary groups “narco-terrorists,” the U.S. administration is able to justify providing military expertise and assistance to Colombia, despite its poor human rights record and evidence of collusion between the military and right-wing paramilitary “death squads” that in turn are estimated to control 40% of the drug trade (Human Rights Watch, 2001). In fall 2000, President Clinton announced a \$1.3 billion contribution to Plan Colombia, providing resources to create new units within the Colombian army, train existing units, and purchase state-of-the-art munitions, weapons, and military equipment, including Black Hawk helicopters. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has developed toxic mycoherbicides, dubbed “Agent Green,” that the Bush administration proposes to release in coca and opium producing areas, turning the war on terror into an arena for biological warfare.⁷

To aid military gains against the FARC, the U.S. finances a four-decade-old civil war in which at least 35,000 people have died and two million have been internally displaced or forced to emigrate. The displacement of peasants and indigenous people is further exacerbated by the aerial spraying of herbicides. Undertaken to destroy the coca, it affects large areas of rainforest and groundwater and creates health problems for local people (The Sunshine Project, 2002). U.S. funding also undermines a robust grass-roots popular movement that is demanding an end to state and paramilitary violence, and seeking nonviolent alternatives to the conflict.⁸ Since the inception of Plan Colombia, reported human rights abuses, politically motivated murders and disappearances, and killings and detentions of trade unionists have increased. Women bear the brunt of this atmosphere of violence and instability, as displaced landless peasants, as primary caretakers seeking to feed their children, as victims of military, guerrilla, and paramilitary violence, and as spouses of men killed in combat, murdered, or disappeared. Ironically, then, the conditions that pushed Teresa to risk exporting cocaine are caused in part by the war on drugs, which has spread military and paramilitary violence throughout the Andean region. She, like many other foreign nationals in North American and European prisons, will be deported after serving a long sentence to a homeland where she has no house, no income, and no social welfare.

In the meantime, she will be replaced by any of the thousands of impoverished and desperate women in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa who become drug mules each year. Many more Latin American women involved in the transnational trade in criminalized drugs are apprehended and incarcerated in their countries of origin, fueling overcrowding and demands for penal reform. In the context of sweeping neoliberal reforms, foreign private prison corporations are increasingly being viewed as a panacea that will solve the problems of overcrowding, corruption, and horrendous conditions in overstretched, under-resourced penal systems in Latin America. For example, Chile, the first Latin American country to welcome foreign private prison corporations, describes its privatization program as “a fundamental pillar of the process of modernization of the Chilean justice system.”

Thirty years after a U.S.-supported coup inaugurated 17 years of dictatorship and brutal repression, modern foreign-owned prisons have become a symbol of a new era in criminal justice administration. Under this program, the government has contracted with the French Sodexho group to design, finance, construct, and maintain 10 prisons housing 16,000 prisoners by the year 2005 (Gendarmería de Chile, 2002). Emulating the Chilean example, private prisons are in construction or under discussion in Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and Venezuela. The transnational expansion of the prison-industrial complex is founded on the social devastation caused by U.S. foreign intervention and militarism in Latin America during the past four decades. It is also self-perpetuating, absorbing tax dollars and foreign loans that could otherwise be used for income redistribution or social programs that might provide women like Teresa with other options.

Conclusion: Directions for Future Activism

The globalization of capital is driving prison expansion in four ways. First, it produces surplus populations — black, Latino, indigenous, immigrant, and working-class communities in North America, Europe, and Australia — that are immobilized and disenfranchised in penal warehouses in the global North. Second, it produces surplus land that, in the absence of other economic development opportunities, generates local demand for corrections dollars in the form of new prison construction. Third, the globalization of the private prison industry spreads the U.S. model of high-tech mass incarceration throughout the world and offers global South governments the mirage of modernity via mass incarceration. Finally, neoliberal economic restructuring under the tutelage of the IMF and World Bank is undermining traditional survival strategies, decimating government services, driving women and men in the global South into the criminalized drug industry, and fueling cross-border incarceration.

In addition, global capitalism is deeply implicated in U.S. and allied military interventions worldwide, which frequently target strategic economic interests and natural resources. These interventions are not limited to wars using U.S. troops. From Israel to Bolivia, U.S. funds are used to pay for military equipment, training, and troops. Women are particularly at risk in the environment of violence and displacement caused when regimes with poor human rights records deploy armed forces against civilian or insurgent populations. One outcome of this vulnerability is the displacement of poor women from traditional forms of survival and their subsequent engagement in the illicit economies of sex work or the drug trade. Women in militarized situations are also at risk of criminalization and incarceration when they take up insurgent positions against repressive regimes. Militarism and globalization thus generate a web of criminalization that in turn fuels the prison-building boom and generates profits for the economic interests served by the transnational prison-industrial complex. Penal warehouses for people of African descent, immigrants, indigenous people, and the global poor, as I have outlined,

are central to the new world order. For that reason, even as “small government” is promoted as a prerequisite for competitiveness in the global market, “corrections” budgets continue to skyrocket. That is also why prison abolition remains of vital importance in this time of endless war.

What does this mean for our research and praxis as scholars and activists? First, much more work needs to be done to unravel the complex interconnections between mass incarceration, militarism, and the global economy. As activists in the heart of empire, our priority should be to make connections between radical social movements. Bridge-building between the anti-globalization, antiwar, and prison abolitionist movements provides critical opportunities for sharing strategies. For example, global anti-sweatshop activism against Wal-Mart and Nike can serve as a model of cross-border activism that could be deployed to challenge private prison corporations such as Wackenhut and Sodexo. Such transnational activism might successfully prevent the spread of U.S.-style private superjails from South Africa through the rest of the continent and from Mexico and Chile throughout the rest of Latin America. In addition, cross-fertilization between movements will encourage activists to address wider issues that are not always made visible in issue-based campaigns. For example, intensified analysis of globalization might encourage prison abolitionists to consider the need for anti-capitalist economic models as a prerequisite for a world without prisons. Similarly, an engagement between antiwar activists and analyses of mass incarceration would generate a deeper understanding of the need to simultaneously challenge militarism abroad and racialized surveillance and punishment at home.

An effective challenge to the interlocking systems of militarism, incarceration, and globalization demands the establishment of broad-based, cross-movement coalitions, in the U.S. and internationally. The World Social Forum (WSF) is an important venue where critiques of, and alternatives to, free trade, imperialism, and neoliberalism are developed. Prison abolitionists need to infuse the politics of the WSF with an analysis of the role of the prison-industrial complex in bolstering global capitalism. At the same time, the movement to abolish prisons can learn from the successes of popular movements in the global South such as the Movimento Sim Terra in Brazil and the Ruta Pacifica in Colombia. These broad-based movements involve organized labor, women, the homeless, the unemployed, students, rural campesinos, and indigenous communities. They have developed a sophisticated intersectional analysis of globalization, imperialism, and militarism, as well as race, gender, class, and nation. Most important, they have been successful in generating mass mobilizations by developing a viable alternative to the Washington Consensus model, prioritizing people and the environment over corporations and profits. These broad-based popular movements pay attention to issues of identity while maintaining a radical analysis of, and opposition to, global capitalism. Activists in the global North have the advantage of witnessing firsthand the emergence of the transnational prison-industrial complex as an

important weapon in the armory of global corporate and political elites. Radical prison abolitionists, especially grass-roots activists of color, have a great deal to add to the global movement against imperialism and neoliberal capitalism. Our combined analyses demonstrate that to build *un outro mundo* (a different world), we must first envision a world without prisons.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this essay was presented at Africana Studies Against Criminal Injustice, Columbia University, April 2003.

2. As of March 2003, the Office of Homeland Security had registered 42,954 individuals at ports of entry and 46,035 individuals at domestic INS offices under a Special Alien Registration Program targeting nationals of 19 predominantly Muslim countries and North Korea. Of these, 1,745 were detained, many for minor immigration violations. After national protests and a class-action lawsuit filed by those affected by the roundups, the measure was rescinded in December 2003 (see American Immigration Law Foundation at <http://www.aifl.org/lac>).

3. For a comprehensive analysis of “transnational feminist” practices, see Mohanty (2003).

4. Though women have not been explicitly targeted by the war on terror within the U.S., immigrant women and women of color are nevertheless the unintended victims of the tough immigration controls and enhanced law enforcement introduced since September 11.

5. The argument that state punishment is primarily a tool for social control of the poor was first elucidated by Rusche and Kirchheimer (1939). In this article, I argue that this is one important function of contemporary imprisonment regimes, but that these serve other economic functions as well. The economic function of the prison also needs to be analyzed in articulation with ideologies and structures of race, gender, and nation.

6. See Ritchie (1996) for a detailed analysis of the complex relationship between violence against women, racism, and criminalization.

7. “Agent Green,” otherwise known as Fusarium, was rejected for spraying on marijuana crops in Florida because of its unpredictable mutagenic properties and the danger it posed to the environment (Vulliamy, 2000).

8. Launched in 1995, the Ruta Pacifica de las Mujeres is a women’s peace movement in 10 provinces that links activism against war and militarism to domestic violence.

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