

White Feminism and Carceral Industries: Strange Bedfellows or Partners in Crime and Criminology?

*Ann Deslandes*¹, *Marlene Longbottom*², *Crystal McKinnon*³ &
Amanda Porter^{4,i}

Abstract

In this article, we examine the existing policy and academic literature on punitive responses to gender-based and family violence, focusing, in particular, on women's police stations. Specialist women's police stations have been a feature of policing in Argentina, Brazil, and other South American as well as Central American countries since the late 1980s. They are considered to be a phenomenon of 'the global South', having also been set up in some African and Asian countries including Sierra Leone and India. In this article, we critique research on women's police stations as well as the public discourse within which women's police stations are being proposed as a solution to domestic violence – looking at questions of research design, methodology, empiricism, ethics, and criminological claims to knowledge or 'truth'. We reflect on the significant dangers posed by the potential transfer of women's police stations to the Australian context, especially for sovereign Indigenous women and girls. Finally, we critique what we see as deep-seated contradictions and anomalies inherent in 'southern theory' and white feminist carceralism.

Keywords: women's police stations, carceral feminism, domestic violence, state-sanctioned violence, epistemic violence.

¹ Dr Ann Deslandes is an Australian journalist, writer and researcher.

² University of Wollongong, Australia

³ RMIT University, Australia

⁴ University of Melbourne, Australia

Introduction

In recent times, the Australian media has focused increasingly on punitive responses to domestic violence – women’s police stations, the criminalisation of coercive control, the expansion of police powers and the growth of police resources. In this article we examine the existing policy and academic literature on carceral responses to domestic violence, focusing on women’s police stations more specifically. As an intervention into high levels of violence against women in Australia, the proposal for women’s police stations, based particularly on current models at work in South America America, has become a regular feature in public debate about the issue. The proposal has, for example, received increasingly frequent coverage in the Australian media (Cunningham, 2020; Kelly, 2019; Hill, 2020, 2021a, 2021b; Ruddick, 2021a, 2021b), academic fora (Carrington, 2020, 2021; Hill, 2021a), and debates on policy development, both nationally and internationally (Carrington et al., 2021).

Much of the public attention focused on the proposal for women’s police stations in Australia is ostensibly based on one original academic study undertaken in Argentina (Carrington et al., 2020a), grounded in a nascent body of literature dominated by studies conducted in Argentina and Brazil (Carrington et al., 2020a, 2020b). Both the original study and the existing literature are incomplete in the task of justifying a comparable system of women’s police stations as a transferable policy ‘solution’ to domestic violence in the unique context of the 238-year-old white settler colony known as Australia.

In this article, we critique Carrington and colleagues (2020a) and the surrounding public discourse within which women’s police stations are being proposed, looking at questions of evidence, research design, methodology, ethics, and communication of research findings. In writing this article, we have been motivated by a deep concern about the damaging consequences of these proposals for sovereign Indigenous peoples (Bond, 2021; Longbottom & Porter, 2021; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smallacombe, 2004; Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services, 2022; Watego et al., 2021; Sisters Inside & The Institute for Collaborative Race Research, 2021b). We have equally been alarmed by the rise in popularity of a particularly punitive brand of white settler feminism – carceral feminism – which advocates for the expansion of police powers and an increase in police resources, and the ease with which punitive solutions find a platform in the Australian mainstream media, along with the interest and attention by policymakers.



Finally, we are concerned by how current academic discussions and public debate on women's police stations have ignored, silenced, and, indeed, actively dismissed the significant body of research by Indigenous scholars and organisations on domestic and state carceral violence.

Women's Police Stations in the Australian Mainstream Media

Australian news coverage on women's police stations in South and Central America emerged against the backdrop of the beginning of the national crisis of domestic violence. The increased media attention on domestic violence has been accompanied by a focus on how to find solutions to the national crisis. The idea of specialist women's police stations has emerged against this broader backdrop of carceral solutions to domestic violence. The first media reporting on women's police stations appeared in an *ABC Online* article by Matt Eaton in 2015. Eaton (2015) interviewed Professor Carrington who stated that women's police stations have:

had major success both in enhancing women's willingness to report, enhancing conviction rates and enhancing the satisfaction of women who've sought these services. But mostly they've also been more effective in being able to corral what is an integrated policy response to domestic violence. (Carrington as cited in Eaton, 2015, n.p.).

From then on, the ABC media group – which consists of digital platforms, radio, and television – has provided a particularly consistent platform for Carrington's advocacy for women's police stations in Australia. Since 2015, Carrington has been advocating in the Australian media for women's police stations to be established in Australia, with high-profile investigative journalist Jess Hill taking up the issue around 2019. In 2019, senior ABC journalist Fran Kelly interviewed Carrington on *Radio National*. During the interview, Carrington states that “Argentina's unique approach to the issue might be the game changer Australia needs, as there are hundreds of police stations staffed almost entirely by women” (Carrington as cited in Kelly, 2019, n.p.).

The work of women's police stations continued to receive coverage from Jess Hill, including in her book, *See what you made me do: Power, control and domestic abuse*, published in 2019. The book reports at length on the motivations and behaviours of perpetrators of violence against women

in Australia, where at least one woman per week is murdered by her intimate partner. It also explores the workings of the criminal legal system in prosecuting and punishing the abuse of Australian women in their homes. Since winning the high-profile women's literary award – the Stella Prize – in 2020, Hill has been a regular expert commentator and is often invited to make comments in media stories about domestic abuse. Hill has widely promoted essays and articles on the subject and is a regular guest speaker at community events, academic and policy conferences, media events, and policy meetings at all levels of government. Of women's police stations, Hill (2020) states:

We don't get cops to fight fires or drive ambulances, because that's considered specialist work. So why don't we just take the police who love responding to family violence [...] and create a parallel force? I'm not talking about making specialist family violence units, but an entirely new family violence force: one in which the front desk is always manned by police with a complex understanding of domestic abuse and family violence [...]. This isn't some utopian fantasy. It's a proven model that's existed across Latin America (and various other countries) for 35 years (n.p.).

Drawing on research led by Carrington since 2015 on the work of women's police stations in Latin America and elsewhere in 'the global South', Hill advocates for stations based on an Argentinian model to be established in Australia as an intervention into domestic violence.

This increased media attention to women's police stations has occurred in tandem not only with the accolades given to Hill's book but with the debates and discussions surrounding the criminalisation of coercive control. For example, women's police stations have been featured in the three-part documentary series *See what you made me do* (aired 6 May 2021) and in *The Guardian* (Smee, 2021a; 2021b; 2021c; 2021d).

Women's police stations have been central to public discussions on law reform and responses to domestic violence in the state of Victoria. For instance, in Victoria, journalist Geraldine Doogue (2021), for ABC Radio National, discusses the role of women's police stations in the context of the Victorian Law Reform Commission on Legal Responses to Family Violence and interviews three white settler experts – Kerry Carrington, Andrea Durbach and Anthony North QC. In the state of Queensland, ABC journalist



Baz Ruddick (2021b) interviews Kerry Carrington and the police commissioner. Ruddick (2021b) notes that Katarina Carroll, the Queensland Police Service Commissioner, remains “unconvinced” and that Queensland Police Minister Mark Ryan was reluctant to comment. The media talent interviewed includes academic experts, police commissioners, and women’s rights advocates – none of whom were Indigenous. We return to this point in part four of this article.

To date, the Australian news media reporting on women’s police stations have primarily and almost exclusively relied on research by Professor Kerry Carrington and a team of researchers based at the Queensland University of Technology and abroad. This journalistic content consists of interviews and materials provided by Carrington and others (2020a) and discusses the findings of an article in the peer-reviewed journal *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* (2020a), of which Carrington is Editor-in-Chief. Journalists and commentators have used this article as an authority in their advocacy for the establishment of women’s police stations in Australia (Hill, 2020, 2021a; Kathuria, 2021).

Women’s Police Stations in South America: Interrogating the Evidence

Academic and policy research into the effectiveness of women’s police stations in South America and elsewhere in the Global South is limited and ad hoc in nature. Both Carrington and colleagues (2020b) and Hill (2019) cite a substantial 2017 study of women’s police stations in Brazil which found that, where they existed, the female homicide rate dropped by 17 percent for all women, and, for women in metropolitan areas aged 15 to 24 the reduction was 50 percent (Perova & Reynolds 2017). The study was conducted by economists and published in the journal *Social Science and Medicine*. In attempting to fill the significant gap in the literature regarding “quantitative evaluation of their impacts on the incidence of intimate partner violence”, Perova and Reynolds 2017 joined just a handful of others, such as Jorge Aguëro’s 2013 study of Peru’s Women’s Emergency Centres (CEM), which found that “the presence of a CEM in the district alters the probability of suffering from domestic violence by reducing the chances, especially for younger women” (cf. Kavanaugh et al., 2018; Ellsberg et al., 2014).

Another study, an analysis of public opinion data from more than 100 municipalities in Brazil, found that the presence of women’s police stations increases the legitimacy of the police and state institutions – they “produce positive feedback effects among women, resulting in higher trust in the

police among women than men and closing the gender gap in perceptions of police effectiveness.” (Córdova & Kras, 2020, 775) Notably, “women’s police station’s positive effects on women’s views of police legitimacy are driven by improved perceptions of personal safety, and not perceptions of government responsiveness” (Córdova & Kras, 2020, 775). To be sure, in a reflection on her 2007 book-length study of women’s police stations in the majority Afro-Brazilian state of Bahia in Brazil, Sarah Hautzinger (2007) observes that:

The triple-cocktail of all-women police, all-women complainants, and attending exclusively to violence against women has proven itself to be a powerful symbolic and political formula for simultaneous interventions in the masculinist gendering of police cultures and a concomitant normalization of male-to-female domestic violence in broader, surrounding cultures. However, these purist separatisms can create unnecessary rigidities and unforeseen consequences: institutional ghettoization and backlog, impediments to police women who are uninterested in specialization and to police men with such interest, and getting conventional police stations off the hook by suggesting conventional stations need demonstrate no accountability to women citizens. What is called for in any particular national or regional setting is neither lockstep integration of women across all police roles nor puritanical separatism, but ongoing, critical monitoring for what arrangements can be most responsive to the variable and changing needs of gendered citizenries, gendered police officers, and ways gender serves national imaginaries and gets deployed for symbolic and political ends (p. 586).

Importantly, as Carrington and colleagues (2020a) acknowledge, legitimizing the police and state institutions in ‘post-dictatorship’ contexts in Argentina and Brazil was a major aim of setting up women’s police stations in these countries. That is, the legitimation of state institutions was arguably the greater aim into which the feminist demands of women for safety from men’s violence were folded (Nelson, 1996). Within this, as Carrington and colleagues (2020a) also note, an ongoing criticism of women’s police stations across Latin America concerns the lack of resources.

Finally, there is minimal, if any, evidence from the academic and policy literature on women’s police stations that Indigenous women and



communities have been well served by the women's police stations that operate in Latin America. There appears to be no research on the experiences of Indigenous women, racialized and minoritized women and communities. As Jubb (2010) observes,

Women's police stations have contributed to an increase in access to justice in general, but women still face significant limitations to exercising their rights. For example, the WPS are only open 24-hours a day in Peru, while women in urgent need of protection or other services elsewhere must rely on unspecialized police units. In all 4 countries, most WPS are located in and serve urban areas, making them challenging for rural women to access. Indigenous and Afro-descendent women have limited access because few operators come from or understand those cultures and few speak their languages. There is also a lack of provisions to guide the stations in ensuring the rights of women who seek judicial support through informal mechanisms (p. 6).

This is a serious limitation in the evidence base, especially considering that it is well established that Indigenous women and children experience higher levels of gendered violence as well as additional barriers to access to justice in South America (Spinardi et al., 2020; United Nations, 2018). Statistics indicate that women – as a percentage of the prison population – have also been growing in Latin America (Washington Office on Latin America, 2020).

A review of the academic and policy literature in India suggests that evaluations of women's police stations in that jurisdiction have had mixed results. One recent study found that "all-women police stations did not improve services for gender violence victims" (Jo, 2020, n.p.), another that "Although women's police stations have been successful in increasing reporting rates, India's criminal justice system has failed in substantially improving conditions for women" (Sikri et al., 2021, p. 10).

In addition to the shortcomings of the academic and policy literature on the effectiveness of women's police stations, there is evidence to suggest women's police stations are far from a panacea to gender-based violence. For example, in February 2021, news reports in Argentina confirm the death of Úrsula Bahillo – a victim of gender-based violence at the hands of her partner, a policeman (e.g., Centenera, 2021, "Femicidio de Úrsula", 2021;

“Femicidio en Rojas”, 2021; “Una amiga de Úrsula”, 2021). According to the reports, Bahillo reported her case to the police, including women’s police stations, on at least 18 separate occasions (“Femicidio de Úrsula”, 2021). According to the victim’s family, the women’s police station “did nothing” in spite of the fact the deceased had made reports to the women’s police stations (“Femicidio en Rojas”, 2021). Other news reporting in Argentina suggests women’s police stations show a reluctance to report on the effectiveness of women’s police stations in the absence of localised data on femicide (Umana, 2020).

The Australian research on women’s police stations has been undertaken by a team of researchers – who are located in both Australia and Argentina – which is led by Carrington. Their collective research outputs constitute the most recent of very few outputs reviewing the available research on women’s police stations in English. This research has failed to comprehensively address whether women’s police stations have assisted women to access justice, whether they had any discernible impact on rates of crime across any categories of offending (femicide, domestic violence, assault), and local views on their operation by victims/survivors and the lay public. When we turn to find research conducted by other Australian academics, there is even less work to draw upon. Broadening this search, we found that much of the work that is focused on women’s police stations located in the Pacific and South America has been conducted by the same group of researchers. The following section will examine the key research and will address some of the implications of this limited scholarship.

As previously stated, the primary study into the effectiveness of the women’s police stations is led by Carrington and consists of a team of Australian and Argentinian researchers. In the study, the team interviewed 100 employees of women’s police stations in the Buenos Aires province of Argentina. The qualitative component of this study consisted of interviews and fieldwork, which were conducted over a three-month period in October and November 2018 and March 2019. The two study sites and the research participants represented a sample selected by the province’s Ministry of Security, which granted permission for undertaking the study. This research is the basis upon which the scholarship – written and published by the same research team – on women’s police stations draws and which is informing the public and media interest. It is for this reason that it is imperative that we take a closer look into the study itself.



The findings of the study were based on a total of 100 interviews, all of whom were employees of the two women's police stations. Of this total, 81 were police officers and 19 were "lawyers, social workers or psychologists" (Carrington et al., 2020, p. 45) employed or otherwise engaged with the two police stations that constituted the site of study of the research project. There is no discussion in the paper of how the status of research participants – as paid employees of women's police stations – may impact the interviewees' views as to their effectiveness.

Indeed, one of the most troubling aspects of this study is the absence of perspectives of victims/survivors, which would seemingly be pertinent in any assessment regarding the effectiveness of women's police stations. Absent too are the perspectives of other professionals, who are a part of the station's network of referrals, to whom women are connected by the staff at the women's stations. The research team did not interview victims/survivors, their families or support networks, nor did they interview members of the local victim/survivor support networks in which the women's police stations operated. In the absence of qualitative data or testimonies from victims/survivors or community members in which women's police stations are located, it calls into question the veracity and rigour of the study's findings as to the effectiveness of women's police stations in responding to domestic violence.

A further issue relates to the absence of quantitative analysis. More specifically, the study does not examine the crime rates and statistics of domestic violence, apprehended violence orders, and femicide rates by location. Carrington and colleagues (2020a) acknowledge this, stating:

The main limitation of our study is that it could not access the necessary data—rates of intimate female partner homicide by locality—needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of women's police stations by comparing locations with stations with those that had none. Nor were we able to access the longitudinal data necessary to assess whether rates of intimate partner violence have been rising or reducing (p. 60).

In the absence of a quantitative or longitudinal examination or analysis of crime rates, it is simply impossible to draw conclusions as to the effectiveness of women's police stations by location.

There are other limitations we identified which make it ethically problematic for this study to be used as an example illustrating the

effectiveness of women's police stations. For example, in terms of fieldwork observations, the study does not state how many hours the research team spent stationed at each of the two women's police stations. We do not know if it was a single afternoon on a Wednesday, for example, or several different times and days. The methodology section is silent as to the conditions under which the research team were granted access. For example, was the research team granted access to be embedded within the police stations to observe the everyday operation of the women's station, and, if so, where and during which hours? Was the team granted access to the waiting area at the front of the police station taking notes on people entering and speaking to the person over a counter, or were they observing in-depth complaints regarding domestic violence disputes or incidents? These are standard methodological processes that are usually articulated in the methods section of a study protocol.

One way that the study could be strengthened is through the inclusion of case studies of domestic and gendered violence at each station. This would provide a further understanding of the types of violence that were being reported, in the absence of other data pertaining to who was reporting, people who return to the service, whether the broader community and family were using the stations, and so on. The study does not include an examination of de-identified case studies of either the complainants or the alleged offenders at the sites of the women's police stations. The study also did not include interviews with the broader community in which the women's police stations were located – a standard feature of police ethnographic research (Manning, 2014).

A final shortcoming we wish to highlight here is the study's ahistorical and apolitical analysis of domestic partner violence and policing. Perhaps due to the absence of interviews with victims/survivors and members of the lay public, the findings of the study are bereft of discussion or analysis in terms of age, class, race, gender identity, sexuality, disability, Indigeneity, and cultural and linguistic diversity. The authors give no account of the history of policing in Argentina, the context of settler colonialism, or the ongoing effects of the rise and relatively recent demise of military dictatorship in this nation. Again, attention to such issues as race, Indigeneity, and class would seemingly be pertinent to a study into the effectiveness of women's police stations in responding to gender-based violence. This is true given Argentina's history of the disappearance of women and children in Argentina's Dirty War (Brennan, 2018) and the issue



of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (Booth, 2021). This is especially true when considering the relationship between police history and settler colonialism in Argentina, in particular the ongoing issues of Indigenous genocide in Argentina (Delrio, 2010).

In spite of these limitations, Carrington and colleagues (2020b) claim that Australia has “much to learn about how to improve the policing of gender violence from women’s police stations that first emerged in Brazil and Argentina” (p. 4) and conclude that:

adapted to an Australian context where Indigenous women are many times more likely to experience domestic family violence, these specialist police stations will need to be appropriately staffed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous officers trained to work from both gender and culturally sensitive perspectives. As a by-product they could also address the significant gender equity discrepancies in policing in Australia, attracting more women into the profession and providing a more rewarding career for those who choose to work in the field of violence prevention (p. 8).

Importing Carceral Solutions from afar: Interrogating ‘Southern Criminology’

The push in the media led by carceral feminists and southern criminologists, including Hill and Carrington, regarding the effectiveness of women’s police stations and their suitability as a response to domestic violence in Australia are most surprising, given there is such a dire lack of evidence for such claims. Indeed, their assertions regarding the effectiveness of women’s police stations are based on the original study by Carrington and colleagues (2020a) of the workforce and activities of women’s police station/s in the Buenos Aires province, Argentina and the small international body of literature on women-only police which is particularly dominated by studies in Brazil and Argentina (see Carrington et al., 2020a, 2020b).

One of the central claims regarding the effectiveness of women’s police stations in reducing domestic violence is that women feel more comfortable reporting violence to other women; relatedly that this is because they offer a completely different model to traditional ‘masculine’ policing. This is in spite of the well-established global scholarly baseline policing research showing that the experience of police contact and the possibility of justice differs

radically for women who are not white, middle-to-upper-class, heterosexual, abled, Christian, and cis-gendered (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Nancarrow, 2019).

Indeed, there is also notable evidence that existing women's police stations are not free from discrimination and violence towards people outside colonial binaries of gender and sexuality (see Sullivan, 2021). Lascano (2020) refers to a 2017 event in which female officers associated with a women's police station in La Plata (Buenos Aires province, Argentina) apprehended and publicly searched 10 transgender women. The women said they were threatened with being shot if they moved and stated that four of them were detained for no reason other than their visibility as transwomen. The event led to widespread condemnation of the La Plata women's police station by transgender advocacy groups, particularly as station staff at that time included a transwoman.

Across many spaces and forums and debates, it is claimed by women police station proponents, including Hill and Carrington, that women-only police stations would/could also reduce violence in First Nations communities, despite there being no evidence that women's police stations will improve outcomes for Aboriginal women, children, and families. Yet, there is a body of evidence produced with Indigenous communities by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars in Australia, that points to concrete alternatives for resourcing first responses for Indigenous women experiencing violence (Cullen et al., 2020, 2021; Longbottom, 2018). Indigenous women experience discrimination by police services across various intersectional domains of race, gender, class, disability, and sexuality (Cullen et al., 2021; Longbottom, 2018). Womanhood across races and ethnicities does not improve access as can be seen by the complicit nature of violence inflicted by white women historically, along with current-day experiences (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Research led by Cullen and colleagues (2020) proposes that Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are one of the preferred sites of disclosure where they are trauma and culturally informed and safe for First Nations women. This research neither features in Carrington's work nor Hill's advocacy. It is dangerous and problematic to advocate for an imported solution instead of supporting sovereign Indigenous communities in their advocacy and efforts to exercise self-determination in responding to domestic and family violence.

There are reasons to suggest that foreign and imposed 'solutions' from elsewhere might overlook significant contextual differences here in Australia.



Chief among these are the significance of ongoing genocide, frontier wars, and land theft (Porter & Cunneen, 2020). For sovereign Indigenous peoples, policing remains inextricably linked to the continuing violence of systemic racism and settler colonialism – including forced child removal, administrative controls under the guise of welfare, and the policing of family violence.

Safety for Whom? Interrogating Blind Spots, Assumptions, and Biases in White Women’s Standpoint

In addition to the lack of empirical evidence on women’s police stations as described above, a final concern relates to the failure of many of the academics and journalists, including leaders such as Hill and Carrington, to examine how their ‘standpoint’ or ‘speaking position’ as middle-class white feminists might impact their reporting and research on the subject of ‘the police’ (Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Smallacombe, 2004; Watego et al., 2021). Distinguished Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) explains the concept of ‘standpoint’ in her seminal book, *Talkin’ up to the white woman*:

The priorities of Indigenous women are often in opposition to and are different from those of the white feminist movement and the nation state. [...] As knowing subjects, middle-class white feminists and Indigenous women speak from different cultural standpoints, histories and material conditions. These differences separate our politics and our analyses. Indigenous women do not want to be white women; we want to be Indigenous women who exercise and maintain our cultural integrity in our struggle for self-determination as Indigenous people (p. 151).

Former United Nations Social Affairs Officer and member of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Sonia Smallacombe (2004) comments on this paradox in what she terms ‘speaking positions’ on violence:

Within debates on violence, some voices are heard which the majority, which happen to be those of Indigenous women – who in the most cases are the victims of violence – are habitually silenced. Who speaks for whom has always been an area of contention in the academic, as well as a broader

issue in the Australian community. In the current climate in Australia, the voices of Indigenous voices of Indigenous women against violence have either been silenced or not supported (p. 47).

One of the most striking features of Hill's three-part, *See what you made me do*, ABC television series is the centring of the journalist – also the narrator – against the backdrop of Sydney's affluent eastern suburbs. Reflecting on one's 'standpoint' or 'speaking position' and how it impacts what they see (or do not see) as well as their claims to 'truth' is especially important with respect to the police. The three-part documentary does not consider how both 'the police' and 'policing' are experienced differently – whether one is located in a white, affluent suburb compared with racialised, working-class suburbs or Indigenous communities. Nor does it consider the police itself as a source of significant racist violence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For the most part, sovereign Indigenous women are represented as victims, and indeed, misidentified as perpetrators – but never as frontline responders to domestic violence.

For many Indigenous women and girls, the police represent a site of lethal violence. To demonstrate this we need only turn to the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (RCIADIC). Nine of the 11 female deaths in custody examined in the RCIADIC were in police custody at the time of their death (Johnston, 1991b, 1991c; O'Dea, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1991d; Wyvill, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c, 1991d, 1991f). Most were being held for minor, victimless offences, for example, for the offence of public drunkenness, fine default, or offensive language. The only sentenced female prisoner at the time of death was incarcerated for motor-vehicle-related offences. The young Aboriginal girl who died in juvenile detention in Queensland was in custody for trying to escape the welfare authorities. More than half of the women who died in custody had been removed from their families as children. Many women were themselves victims of gender-based violence. All of the women who died in custody are most certainly victims of state-sanctioned violence.

Thirty-one years on from the RCIADIC, Indigenous women and girls continue to bear the brunt of the violence of policing today. Nearly all of the recent deaths in detention involving Indigenous women, for example, the recent deaths in detention of Ms Dhu (Fogliani, 2016a), Ms Mandijarra (Fogliani, 2016b), Ms Day (English, 2020), and Ms Maher (O'Sullivan, 2019)



bear a resemblance to the circumstances of those women whose deaths were investigated as part of the Royal Commission. It is disappointing that the stories of these women were not centred or platformed during these debates regarding women's police stations, as much of those discussions were taking place in 2021 – the year of the thirtieth anniversary since the publication of the RCIADIC.

In addition to the violence of policing, Indigenous advocates have repeatedly drawn attention to the more insidious violence of under-surveillance or failure to protect. A clear example of this involves the case of Tiffany Paterson, an Aboriginal woman from the Northern Territory who was violently assaulted after the Northern Territory Police failed to protect her from an attack. Paterson, who survived the attack, later sued the Northern Territory Police on the grounds of negligence and settled on confidential terms (Carrick, 2014).

The failure to protect can be seen equally through the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (Behrendt, 2014; Clarke, 2018; McQuire, 2018; Porter & Whittaker, 2019). In Turtle Island/Canada, a report into the Thunder Bay police service found that the police consistently “devalued Indigenous lives, reflected differential treatment and were based on racist attitudes and stereotypical preconceptions about Indigenous people” (McNeilly, 2018, p. 5). More recently, a national inquiry found persistent and deliberate patterns of human rights abuses and characterised the issue of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and children in terms of genocide (NIMMIWG, 2019).

While there has been no equivalent national or regional inquiry in Australia, the names and stories of missing and murdered Indigenous women and children have been brought to the attention of the Australian public thanks to the labour of Indigenous journalists and academics – in particular Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt (2014), Allan Clarke (2018, 2021), Amy McQuire (2018), and Martin Hodgson (2022). This is also thanks to the tireless work of Dr Hannah McGlade who has been at the forefront of human rights at the international, national, and state levels along with working closely with families, such as the family of Stacey Thorne, who was murdered being 22 weeks pregnant (McGlade et al., 2021). Regrettably, these scholars and experts do not yet appear to have been included or afforded a platform in discussions and debates on domestic and family violence and their solutions.

Finally, Indigenous advocates have repeatedly brought attention to the major role that the policing of domestic violence plays in the ongoing removal of Indigenous children from their families (Davis, 2019; McGlade, 2019; NISATSIC, 1997). While space precludes a thorough summary of this literature, the proposal for women's police stations does not feature among any of the hundreds of recommendations within this significant body of literature. Rather, successive inquiries and empirical research repeatedly confirm the limited impact of programmes or solutions involving the police (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2000, 2015, 2016; VALS, 2022). For example, original research conducted by Distinguished Professor Marcia Langton and colleagues (2020a) emphasised the need for greater legal and support services for Indigenous women. A report released the same year demonstrates that responses or programmes involving the police may have limited impact on reducing violence due to high levels of distrust in both the police and the legal system, resentment and anger resulting from a history of injustices against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and disproportionate criminalisation (Langton et al., 2020b).

Conclusion

A significant amount of media attention has been afforded to the idea of women's police stations in Australia. Yet, a review of the extant evidence of women's police stations reveals there is minimal, if any, evidence of their effectiveness according to victims/survivors, their families, their supporters and their local communities.

In the absence of this evidence, we write out of concern for the significant public platform their proponents have attracted. The media platform given to the idea of women's police stations, even in the absence of any evidence of their efficacy, demonstrates the position of power that white women, especially those peddling punitive and carceral responses to social harms, retain in feminist movements.

We are equally concerned by the fact that advocates for women's police stations are apparently willing to deliberately ignore and belittle Indigenous women and scholars in order to have their idea made into policy, and mainstream media and service/policy bodies are seemingly willing to go along with this. This is especially true when there is considerable evidence to suggest that simply 'adding women and stirring' will never be sufficient, as demonstrated both in the policing literature (Chan, 1997; Loftus, 2009; Porter, 2018) and by recent events highlighting the limitations of female



leadership within carceral industries – for example, Queensland Police Commissioner Katarina Carroll’s underwhelming response to sexist, racist, and homophobic Facebook pages (Smee, 2021e) and the female prison guard being charged with assault and suffocation (Hunter, 2021). We note that these issues are not new and have a history dating back long before the ‘Bell-Huggins debate’ (Behrendt, 1991; Curthoys, 2002; Goodall, 2008; Huggins et al., 1991; Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

Finally, we leave the reader with some reflections on the contradictions of southern criminology and criminological knowledge production more generally. Several well-known critiques of southern criminology have drawn attention to the tendency towards collapsing important distinctions in its analyses of experiences of ‘crime’ and the criminal legal system, especially with respect to class, race, and settler colonialism (Moosavi, 2019; Travers, 2017). To these criticisms we would add the contradictions of a southern criminological inquiry such as this one, which seeks to ‘data mine’ and extrapolate on carceral solutions from afar; in this case to import a carceral solution to Australia and impose yet another colonial institution to exert state violence upon Indigenous women and communities despite a large number of Indigenous women – from across a range of expertise and sectors – collectively saying no. Indeed, southern criminological inquiry on women’s police stations seems to ignore scholarship produced by Indigenous scholars (Davis, 2019; Langton, 1992, 2020a, 2020b; McGlade, 2019; Smallacombe, 2004; VALS, 2022) as well as the lived experiences of sovereign Indigenous victims/survivors, families, and organisation. In this respect, southern criminologists would do well to recall the warning of Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang (2012) that “decolonisation is not a metaphor” (p. 1).

Southern criminological inquiry has shown little, if any, interest or engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, scholarship, theorising, and social movements. Indeed, it is perhaps guilty of charges of ‘intellectual *terra nullius*’ – to use a term used by Professor Lester Rigney (1999) and others (Davis, 2006, p.136; McPhail-Bell et al., 2017). The absence of Indigenous knowledge is surprising, especially given the stated aims of southern criminology “to decolonise and democratise the toolbox of available criminological concepts and method” (Carrington et al., 2016, p. 1).

We urge criminologists and policymakers to consider the grave risk of repeating the racist harms of carceral feminist policy advocacy on domestic

violence (Behrendt, 2000; Bond, 2021; Douglas et al., 2020; Gruber, 2021; Nancarrow, 2019; VALS, 2022; Watego et al., 2021). At this critical juncture in time perhaps now more than ever – at the thirtieth anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Johnston, 1991) and as we face the twin global crises of ecocide and genocide – carceral feminists must demonstrate their engagement with the voices, perspectives, and intellect of sovereign Indigenous women.

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