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MOVING BEYOND CARCERAL SAFETY LOGICS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

Abstract:
Carceral safety logics, which place institutions within the criminal punishment system as a source of safety, continue to dominate globally. Despite their dominance, during the last 5 years in Aotearoa New Zealand, surveys have reported that more people feel less safe (Ministry of Justice, 2023). This article problematises the reliance on carceral safety logics in Aotearoa and explores alternative approaches that may generate more collective and sustainable safety. This article draws on 16 semi-structured interviews with people who advocate or work in the 'justice' system to inform this perspective. Narratives shared within these interviews present a desired relational element of safety that is at odds with carceral safety logics and punitive approaches to safety. The participants, from penal populists to penal abolitionists, ultimately saw safety through community-building, ensuring wellbeing needs are met, and collective care. This article unpacks what these shared ideas could mean for abolitionist conceptions of safety and justice in the community.

Keywords: carceral safety logics, care-based safety, collective care, community safety, prison abolition

Introduction

Before embarking on a discussion of carceral safety logics it is important to explain key terminology that is used throughout this article. The terms 'carceral state' and the 'criminal punishment system' are frequently used within abolitionist scholarship and are intentionally used here to explain the extensive reach and impact of punitive responses to harm. Marie Gottschalk (2015:31) poetically states, "a tenacious carceral state has sprouted in the shadows of mass imprisonment and has been extending its reach far beyond the prison gate". Many prison abolitionists, and those critical of how systems of 'justice' operate, are reluctant to use the term 'criminal justice system', instead opting to use the phrase 'criminal punishment system' (McDowell, 2015; Bell, 2021; Kaba, 2021; Kilroy and Lean, 2022). The carceral state and criminal punishment system encapsulate the web of institutions, policies, and practices that by design exclude and isolate people from society, and simultaneously traps them into marginalised positions and cycles of harm.

Carceral logics are the ideologies, mindsets, and belief systems that uphold and further entrench the carceral state and criminal punishment system. These logics provide the foundation for how we punish and have become entrenched in Aotearoa New Zealand (hereupon Aotearoa) and many countries globally. The term carceral logics is not restricted to just considering the institutions and structures that are carceral-like. Indeed, it extends the focus from the problem of mass incarceration to interweaving issues of racial injustice, neoliberal ideology, policing, surveillance, and Othering (Brown and Schept, 2017). Carceral logics demonstrate the insidious nature of the carceral state and how its shadow clouds our ability to move outside of a carceral framework.

The idyllic view of Aotearoa, which is often held by international communities, quickly fades when the desire for punishment and consistent investment in the criminal punishment system is exposed (Pratt, 2006). Recent political change in Aotearoa has seen government commitments to the introduction of anti-gang legislation, ineffective youth justice policies such as bootcamps, hefty investment into building more prison beds, and amendments to sentencing legislation that would result in a burgeoning prison population, all in the name of public safety. This is not a novel political agenda in Aotearoa. Since the 1987 election, tough-on-crime rhetoric has been central to election campaigns across the political spectrum. Successive governments continue to uphold carceral logics and rely on the criminal punishment system, while blatantly ignoring the evidence that this response to social problems is not only flawed, but harmful (Lambie and Gluckman, 2018).

In Aotearoa, the government has recently shared its commitment to prison expansion through a $1.9 billion investment into Ara Poutama (Department of Corrections) for 810 prison beds. The rationale for their investment into the criminal punishment system is to 'keep NZ safe from crime' (Mitchell, 2024). Concerningly, this investment is funnelling taxpayer funding into a flawed and harmful criminal punishment system, while depleting resources that could be spent on addressing the root causes of social problems and inequalities. Through bolstering and investing more into police and prisons, more people are pushed into precarious and marginalised conditions, where they are disconnected from their communities. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2022) concept 'organized abandonment' is useful to reflect how the state's disinvestment in social welfare has pushed marginalised communities into precarious and oppressive conditions. The state then weaponises this against racially, socially, and economically marginalised communities to legitimise the criminalisation and control of such communities.

Incarceration rates within Aotearoa are considerably higher compared to similar jurisdictions. In 2018, Aotearoa had the 8th highest incarceration rates in the OECD, dropping to 16th in 2022 (Justice Sector, 2022). 2018 marked the highest prison population in Aotearoa, reaching 10,645 people in prison (Department of Corrections, 2018). The prison population steadily declined to 7,581 in 2022, the lowest it has been in almost two decades, however, it is rapidly increasing and is expected to soon surpass the 2018 peak (Department of Corrections, 2022; 2024a). There are currently 9,638 people in prison, as of June 2024, with 44% of them on remand (Department of Corrections, 2024b). During these changes to incarceration rates within Aotearoa, the percentage of Māori[1] within the prison population (53% of total prison population) has incrementally increased, especially for Māori women (63% of women's prison population) (McIntosh, 2022; Office of the Inspectorate, 2023b). While Māori remain an ethnic minority at 17% of the wider population, they experience the majority of crime control practices and are heavily represented across all parts of the criminal punishment system. The continued investment into the criminal punishment system reflects how pervasive and confining carceral logics are in Aotearoa.

The expansion of the criminal punishment system is frequently justified by governments under the guise of 'safety'. However, the illusion that safety can be achieved in this way is not equally experienced. Communities with extensive histories of state violence, police brutality, and excessive punishment may not subscribe to this approach to safety, instead viewing the criminal punishment system as a place of 'unsafety'. Not only is it a place of unsafety, but it is inherently harmful for racially, socially, and economically marginalised communities. Extensive scholarship has recorded and condemned the harm, violence, and pain caused by the criminal punishment system globally (Scott, 2020; Kaba, 2021; Davis et al., 2022). In Aotearoa, several recent reports that capture people's experiences with the criminal punishment system have highlighted injustices and harm caused *by* the system, particularly for marginalised communities (Ashton-Martyn, 2019; Burrows et al., 2019; Lamusse, 2024). Collectively, these reports provide a compelling argument for the need for transformative change.

Carceral institutions and logics are "so deeply wedded to safety in our collective imaginations that it is difficult to disentangle them" (Kaba and Ritchie, 2022:2). Carceral safety logics restrict the collective ability to imagine alternatives to modern economic, social, and political conditions (Davis, 2005). It is imperative to dismantle the mindset that carceral state is the most legitimate solution to achieving collective safety. Beyond freeing the collective imagination from the bounds of carceral logics, it is necessary to address inequalities that are intentionally sustained by white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, and neoliberal ideologies (Davis et al., 2022). Transformative change must uphold anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, and anti-patriarchal values to ensure sustainable and collective change.

Safety logics

Safety is often positioned as being paramount for government agencies and statutory bodies that oversee the criminal punishment system. In Aotearoa, the New Zealand Police have the slogan 'Safer Communities Together'; the Ministry of Justice works "to help make sure New Zealand is a safe and just society"; public safety is a core purpose of the Corrections Act 2004; and 'community safety' is the most important consideration for the Parole Board. Discourses of safety are at the forefront of these institutions and are often accompanied by terms such as 'community', 'public' or 'neighbourhood' safety. In theory, these terms are used to promote unity, togetherness, and collectivity. However, this ideal can often diverge far from reality, and instead rear the 'dark

[1] Indigenous people of Aotearoa

side' of community, where community can "be both oppressive and exclusive" (Taylor, 2011:66). Indeed, these values-based concepts can simultaneously communicate a sense of belonging and exclusion. The process of demarcating a 'community' inherently creates an in-group and an out-group.

When 'community' safety coincides with punitive responses to harm, such as through the criminal punishment system, there are many people who become banished and excluded from the community. Van Swaaningen (2005:303) argues that exclusion and the notion of removing people from a community is driven by the "fears of the law-abiding citizen" and is embedded in the politics of safety. Through the politicisation of safety, certain communities that become swept into the criminal punishment system are pitted against those who are imagined not to engage in crime. Williams (2017:38) contends that the concept of 'public safety' centres on imagined white societies, suggesting that safety is a "right that inheres in white bodies". This perspective, in turn, constructs a "violent threat that inheres timelessly in bodies that are black, brown, and poor" (Williams, 2017:38). The exclusionary nature of dominating safety logics has resulted in communities becoming increasingly polarised and divided. Gated communities are an example of this, whereby they function as a form of "exclusion and residential segregation" (Low, 2001:45). Further, neoliberal policy has shifted responsibility of safety onto individuals, through the commodification of surveillance and security (Button, 2006).

Carceral safety logics

Carceral safety logics place criminal justice institutions as a primary mechanism to achieve 'safety'. Therefore, efforts to increase safety rely on bolstering the carceral state which are synthesised with punitive and exclusionary approaches. Importantly, while framed as a means to safety, not all groups and communities feel that the carceral state offers safety. Instead, the carceral state makes certain communities less safe, through the harm and violence that it perpetuates. Three conceptual frameworks can be drawn on to demonstrate the dominating reliance on the carceral state as a means of safety: 'fear-based safety' (Norris, 2021), 'safety as absence' (Jackson and Meiners, 2011), and 'carceral safety' (McDowell, 2019).

Zach Norris (2021) argues that fear-based safety has dominated in the United States and is demonstrated by high incarceration rates and the investment and pervasiveness of the 'punishment dragnet' (Norris, 2021:4). Fear-based safety is upheld by four components: deprivation, suspicion, punishment, and isolation. Deprivation includes a reluctance by the government to meaningfully invest in communities. Instead, funding is funnelled into the criminal punishment system through the expansion of police and prisons. The second component, suspicion, highlights the climate of mistrust that is generated through the increasing use of surveillance cameras and metal detectors. Punishment is enacted upon any person who is viewed as a threat to public safety. The final component of fear-based safety is isolation, which is evidenced by the popularity of excluding people from society through gated communities and barbed wire (Norris, 2021). Importantly, it is not just physical barriers that isolate people, but also the stigma that comes with the label of 'criminal' which can socially and economically isolate people.

Jackson and Meiners (2011) recognise that safety can often be defined through the absence of unwanted feelings, such as fear, anger, or disgust. Their theorising of 'safety as absence' articulates that safety is achieved when negative stimuli, for example violence, threats, and discomfort, are absent. A 'safety as absence' mindset initiates a "control approach to safety", whereby potential danger is identified and then managed through the creation of physical or virtual barriers (Jackson and Meiners, 2011:278). Through such an approach, there is a reliance on removing any negative stimuli, irrespective of whether the stimuli are perceived or real. Mass incarceration, surveillance technologies, and increased policing are justified in the name of a 'safety as absence' approach (Jackson and Meiners, 2011).

McDowell (2019) builds on the work of Jackson and Meiners (2011) and names dominating approaches to safety as 'carceral safety', whereby state-run institutions, such as police and prisons, are relied upon as a source of safety. A 'carceral safety' approach to safety is driven by the belief that policing, criminalisation, and banishment are "the only legitimate forms of protection from, and solutions to, harm and violence" (McDowell, 2019:45). More often than not, communities living at the margins of society are subjected to, and bear the brunt of, the 'carceral safety' as an approach to safety. Through flawed, neoliberal economic and social policies, the state funnels people into precarious conditions of insecurity, while simultaneously seeking to address social problems with harmful carceral safety approaches (Kaba and Ritchie, 2022).

Collectively, 'fear-based safety' (Norris, 2021), 'safety as absence' (Jackson and Meiners, 2011), and 'carceral

safety' (McDowell, 2019) reflect the dominating approaches to safety. All three approaches to safety rely on upholding and expanding the reliance on the criminal punishment system. Thus, mass targeted criminalisation and punishment are used in the name of public safety. The incongruence in conceptualising safety in these ways is that it obscures the fact that the carceral state includes multiple sites of pain and violence, therefore contributing to a lack of safety for the people who are trapped within the criminal punishment system (Law, 2014; Gordon, 2022).

Hierarchies of safety: Safe from the 'dangerous Other'

Carceral safety logics are designed to keep certain communities in a marginalised position and, therefore, does not manage to keep all people in society safe. The politicisation of safety has been framed in such a way, that it "means getting all those people off the street that threaten the general public's feeling of safety" (Van Swaaningen, 2005:291). Indeed, there is a hierarchy embedded in carceral safety logics, which is underpinned by 'Othering', that prioritises the needs of certain communities over others (Norris, 2021). 'Othering' includes a perceived superiority, in which a person or group are identified as different to another individual or group, in an exclusionary way (Rohleder, 2014; Ajil and Blount-Hill, 2020). There are many levels in which Othering can be enacted – interpersonal, institutional, or structural – however, all levels are founded upon a power imbalance.

Norris (2021) argues that fear-based safety has been driven by 'architects of anxiety' who engage in fearmongering by drawing attention to certain anxieties and then swiftly promote a contingency plan to maintain safety. More often than not, the contingency plan centres the carceral state. Othering is infused into carceral safety logics, which serves to explain what, and more importantly *who*, is framed as something that should be feared. Harm perpetuated by racialised communities, and crimes of poverty, are disproportionately represented in the media as something the public should be fearful of. Indeed, in drawing attention to these harms, other forms of harm such as white-collar crime and environmental harm – that are committed by profit-driven corporations and the ruling class – go unscrutinised (Norris, 2021). An Us vs Them framing is used to enable the demonisation and oppression of certain communities. Consequently, carceral safety logics are used to justify criminalising and caging populations that pose a threat to the status quo.

Despite carceral safety logics not generating collective and sustainable safety, they are tolerated and encouraged by wider society because they are "performed on *them*, and not on *us*" (Davis, 2005:12 emphasis in original). Othering enables people labelled as 'criminal' to be dispensable and disposable. Therefore, any punishment, exclusion, or harmful conditions they experience are accepted in the name of public safety (Davis, 2005). Society has become so deeply "indoctrinated with the idea that we solve problems by policing and caging people" (Kaba, 2021:17); however, there is, and must be, another way to achieve real collective, and sustainable safety

Non-punitive approaches to safety

In contrast to their theorising of dominant carceral-based safety approaches, Norris (2021), Jackson and Meiners (2011), and McDowell (2019) all reconceptualise safety through 'care-based safety', 'safety as presence' and 'insurgent safety' respectively. Care-based safety is founded on four components: resources, relationships, accountability, and participation (Norris, 2021). First, investment in universal access to a living wage, accessible healthcare, education, and warm housing will provide communities with the resources to be able to thrive. Fostering and strengthening relationships between people is an important feature of care-based safety, as it generates communal care for people around us. Accountability is the third component, which functions in opposition to the punishment component of fear-based safety. Unlike punishment, which is done to someone, accountability is done alongside and with a person. Real accountability encourages people to take responsibility and to learn from their wrongdoing, whilst strengthening collectivity and partnership. The final component of care-based safety is participation, where people's right to participate is upheld through opportunities to meaningfully engage, feel included, and have agency in their lives (Norris, 2021).

'Safety as presence', as conceptualised by Jackson and Meiners (2011), recognises that the existence and abundance of positive stimuli and experiences in a person's life can contribute to more sustainable safety. 'Presence' can include living in healthy environments, strong relationships and connections, access to resources, conflict-resolution processes, and a sense of belonging. Feelings of safety are achieved through proactively embedding positive stimuli into people's lives so that they have the relationships and resources they need to

thrive (Jackson and Meiners, 2011). Through this approach, human flourishing, and supporting people to reach their potential, is the central focus of working towards creating collective safety.

McDowell's (2015; 2019) theorising of 'insurgent safety' also resonates with this, which reimagines safety through the perspective of the community. In her (Re)imagining Public Safety Project, participant-generated photography, alongside interviews, were used to capture alternative visions of safety that did not rely on carceral safety approaches. Insurgent safety includes the combination of a 'public ethic of care', 'counter-carceral communication' and play (McDowell, 2015; 2019). A public ethic of care centres mutual care, mutual aid, and interdependency. Counter-carceral communication recognises the importance of language in shaping our lived realities, and therefore provides an invitation to move beyond carceral logic when considering approaches to safety. The final component, play, incorporates sensory experiences into feelings of safety, where laughter, communion, and joy are brought to the forefront. An important characteristic of insurgent safety is that it is not a generalised and prescribed approach that is thrust upon a community. Instead, it needs to be tailored to the needs of a specific community, where the members of a community have the opportunity to collectively identify appropriate solutions.

Our collective imagination is currently confined to carceral safety logics that rely on the criminal punishment system as a safety mechanism. It is possible, and indeed necessary, to untangle the mindset that the carceral state is the only legitimate option to achieve safety (Kaba, 2021). 'Care-based safety' (Norris, 2021a) and 'safety from presence' (Jackson & Meiners, 2011), and 'insurgent safety' allow us to think beyond being dependent on the criminal punishment system to achieve safety. These three frameworks of safety collectively demonstrate the importance of reimagining what it means to feel safe.

Methodology

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted for this research with 16 people who advocate or work in the criminal justice sector in Aotearoa NZ. Those who were purposely selected to be interviewed held a range of positions: parole board members, ex-police officers, victims' advocates, justice advocates, a judge, a politician, a member of local government, the Secretary of Justice, and the Department of Corrections National Commissioner. The people who were invited to be interviewed regularly make decisions and comment on public safety. All participants were given the option to be named in any outputs related to this research or to have their contributions anonymised. Ethical considerations from a Eurocentric lens often prioritise confidentiality and anonymity in the research process, however, by doing so it can render their personal contributions invisible. To challenge and move beyond Eurocentric approaches to ethics, Tracey McIntosh (2011) notes that it is important to allow people to actively choose to be named so that their meaningful contribution is recognised. All participants selected to be named in outputs related to this research, which demonstrates their own perceived authority in this area, and their familiarity with being named due to working in a public or semi-public role. To recognise their contributions to this research small biographies of each person are included in Appendix 1. In March 2020 I was granted ethical approval by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (UAHPEC) to complete this research. Interviews were conducted between July 2020 and August 2021, with most interviews being completed in just over an hour.

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was used to analyse the interviews, to determine how engrained carceral safety logic is in Aotearoa, and to explore opportunities for alternative approaches to safety. Braun and Clarke's (2021) six recursive phases of RTA were followed to analyse the data. First, to familiarise myself with the data I thoroughly read each transcript and reviewed my reflective notes from each interview. This first phase prioritises gaining "intimate knowledge" of the dataset, to ensure that the researcher is critically engaging in subsequent phases (Braun and Clarke, 2021:42). After fully immersing myself in the data, I initiated the coding process through NVivo which involves identifying "segments of data that appear potentially interesting, relevant or meaningful for your research question, and apply pithy, analytically-meaningful descriptions (code labels) to them" (Braun and Clarke, 2021:35). The next three phases of RTA were intertwined and involved generating, reviewing, and refining overarching themes. Phase three included clustering codes into overarching shared ideas to generate initial themes, which were then developed and reviewed in phase four. Next, phase five refined, defined, and named the themes in preparation for the final phase, writing up the analysis and findings.

Reflexivity is a fundamental feature of RTA, which encourages those engaging in research to consider how their social position, personal experiences, disciplinary knowledge, and ideological commitments shape their perspective. In centring reflexivity, research is viewed as an active process that involves "a subjective, situated,

aware and questioning researcher" (Braun and Clarke, 2021:5). Throughout this research, my role was as an active and "subjective storyteller" (Braun and Clarke, 2021:6), in which my own perspectives shape how themes are generated and findings are presented. As part of the reflexive process, I regularly situated myself within the research to recognise where my biases and subjectivities influenced the research. The intent here is not to remove subjectivity, but instead to ensure that my positionality is acknowledged from the outset. As Kim England highlights, it is important for researchers to "locate ourselves in our work and to reflect on how our location influences the questions we ask, how we conduct our research, and how we write our research" (England, 1994:87). To that end, I must recognise my privileged position of being a Pākehā[2], abled body, cis-gendered, well-educated, middle-class, heterosexual, female. I situate myself within critical criminological scholarship and prison abolitionist politics. This contributes to my position as an activist-scholar, where my activism engagement with People Against Prisons Aotearoa (PAPA) informs my perspective.

Conceptualising safety

In the interviews, participants were asked what comes to their mind when they hear the word 'safety', and what the word looks and feels like to them. Participants recognised that safety evokes emotions and can differ significantly for different people. This is articulated by the following comment by Rachel Leota:

I think safety is a little bit in the eyes of the beholder. I think different people have different perspectives of what safety means, which can be a little bit difficult I think in our organisation [The Department of Corrections], about what that means. One person's safety could be another person's threat (Rachel Leota)

Despite this statement, which presents a view that safety is subjective, there were three core elements evident across participants' narratives that contributed to feelings of safety. The three elements – relationality, predictability, and familiarity – are first discussed respectively and then collectively to demonstrate how interwoven they are.

Relationality was the strongest feature of safety that participants identified, which involves feelings such as being included, equally valued, supported, and having a sense of belonging. Tania Sawicki Mead acknowledged that feelings of safety are "grounded in relations between people" and "feeling connected to other people". Efeso Collins and Golriz Ghahraman both highlighted the importance of knowing the people around you in your community and being able to see and interact with similar people. Having strong relationships with people around you can increase trust, which was related to a stronger sense of safety. Khylee Quince acknowledged that Māori are "fundamentally externally oriented" and therefore an outward gaze is emphasised. However, it is not only Māori who centre relationality in approaches to safety. Helen Algar, who provides community support for a predominantly Pākeha community, argues that "safety is not being isolated". Therefore, being connected with other people and strengthening relationships can lead to increased feelings of safety.

Predictability was the second element participants identified as contributing to increased feelings of safety. This was a sense that a behaviour or action was expected or planned, which contributed towards a more peaceful state. The ability for a person to control their environment was also viewed as important as this could be used to improve predictability. Explaining the importance of predictability from another perspective, Chester Borrows stated that he feels less safe when in an unpredictable and uncontrollable situation. This raises the issue of disparities in the ability of different communities to control their environment. Structural inequalities resulting in racism, poverty, and sexism intersect to produce social conditions that make certain communities more susceptible to uncontrollable environments (Wood et al., 2008). Indeed, the ability to control a person's own environment is restricted by the impacts of structural inequalities. Thus, access to predictable, and therefore safe, situations and environments is not equally experienced by people.

The third element that was associated with increased feelings of safety was familiarity. Several participants spoke of familiar environments – such as their neighbourhood, workplace, or house – that made them feel safe. Familiarity of an environment or people is borne out of positive previous experiences, where feelings of comfort and peace are present. There is also a cultural safety aspect of familiarity, where participants reflected that spaces aligning with their cultural values feel familiar and safe. Participants also recognised the opposite of this, where unfamiliar environments, where they had not previously been before, affected their feelings of safety.

[2] Non-Indigenous New Zealander of European descent

When a person feels disconnected to the people around them, this can lead to heightened feelings of unpredictability and unfamiliarity. Compounding experiences of lack of relationships, unpredictability, and unfamiliarity, Golriz Ghahraman shared how as an Iranian woman, she would feel "less safe walking into like a sports bar late at night, where people are drunk and they're all male".

Dominating carceral safety logic

Despite relationality being a core feature of increased feelings of safety, it was evident that 'fear-based safety' (Norris, 2021) and 'safety as absence' (Jackson and Meiners, 2011) were dominating participants' discourse. Thus, the desire for strong relationships, inclusion, and belonging was overridden by the removal of people who were identified as being a threat. This, therefore, undermines relationality and instead replaces it with isolation, exclusion, and Othering. Andrew Kibblewhite explained that safety is "about exposure", and therefore attempts at increasing feelings of safety can be done through "protection from harm or risk". Efforts of protection, no matter how well intended, can evoke a 'fear-based safety' and 'safety as absence' mindset. The damaging removal of children from their family by Oranga Tamariki (Ministry of Children)[3] under the guise of care and protection has been widely criticised (Alexander, 2021; Keddell et al., 2022). The systemic failure to adequately protect people who live at the margins of society is not unique to Aotearoa, with state abuse being justified in the name of 'protecting' Indigenous populations globally.

Speaking of her responsibility for the safety of people in prison, Rachel Leota recognised that a priority is ensuring the absence of any form of abuse. Isolation and segregation are often used within prisons and justified for the purposes of safety. In 2023, the Office of the Inspectorate released a report on isolation and seclusion within prisons in Aotearoa. The report found that between October 2020 and September 2021, 29% of the people in prison had experienced a period of separation from the mainstream prison population (Office of the Inspectorate, 2023a). Over half of those placed in separation were done so for the safety of others in the prison. People in prison are also placed in directed protective custody, and are separated for their own safety, however those subjected to these segregation regimes describe them as punitive (Office of the Inspectorate, 2023a). There have also been concerns raised about the lack of documentation on the decisions behind placing a person in segregation by the Office of the Ombudsman (2023)). Two recent damning reviews into women's experiences within prison have also expressed concern about the number of women who are subjected to segregation and solitary confinement (Office of the Inspectorate, 2021; Shalev, 2021). Despite concerns about the harms related to segregation, it is evident that seclusion is frequently used within prison in the name of safety. This demonstrates the reliance on a 'safety as absence' mindset, whereby safety within prison is supposedly managed by isolating and segregating people deemed as a threat.

Tim McKinnel recognised that there are "competing tension" regarding safety, and that "solutions too often have favoured the powerful... [and] powerful institutions". These competing tensions are explained further through Kim Workman's reflection on his engagement with the Department of Corrections regarding their safety policies. Workman acknowledged that when working towards achieving safety within prison, the Department of Corrections tend to prioritise concern for their staff, rather than focusing on improving relationships. In 2011, Workman was invited to provide feedback on a major review of prison safety that was conducted by the Department of Corrections. His commentary below echoes Norris' (2021) perspective on hierarchies of safety, whereby concern of one person or group's safety is prioritised, which overrides the desired relational aspect of safety:

> The terms of reference when I got them shocked me, because it was totally focused on the safety of prison staff and had nothing, no reference at all, to the safety of prisoners. And we submitted a report pointing out that everywhere in the world, that the main ingredient of safety within prisons was the relationship between prisoners and staff, and to simply look at it from the view of one of those groups was counterproductive (Kim Workman).

From the perspective of the victims and survivors they advocate for, Ruth Money and Jess McVicar shared that being distanced from their perpetrator and having them removed from the community increased their feelings of safety:

[3] Oranga Tamariki is a governmental department in Aotearoa responsible for the well-being of children.

> For most of my people, safety is that the person has either been in prison and isn't being released from parole or hasn't been given bail. And I don't need to worry until the trial, and then they'll be sentenced so I've got some time to be safe. They're not in my community. (Ruth Money)

> For me, safety is knowing that our system is doing everything they can to keep us safe by keeping the baddies away from the public, from society, from our own little bubble. (Jess McVicar)

The phrase "keeping the baddies away" demonstrates judgment that is afforded to those who are identified as needing to be removed. Within this framing is also the expectation that the carceral state and the criminal punishment system are the preferred mechanisms to achieve safety. Carceral safety logics dominate our psyche and ensures a continued reliance on punitive and exclusionary solutions that do not foster collective and sustainable safety (Jackson and Meiners, 2011; McDowell, 2019; Norris, 2021). This is directly at odds with the desired relationality that participants previously recognised as being imperative to increasing safety.

Non-punitive approaches to safety

Although carceral safety logics frame and dominate many approaches to safety, there were some participants who expressed concern over its prevalence. Paula Rose explained that the public are fixated on the argument that "protection for themselves or being safe is being distanced from others by a physical barrier or barriers". Similarly, Efeso Collins expressed his critique of the overarching discourse of safety as placing someone perceived as dangerous as "over there and don't come near me". Instead, he argued that "loving, nurturing, caring relationships" should be at the centre of safety, which is antithetical to carceral safety logic. Therefore, there are opportunities for achieving safety that are non-punitive and do not rely on the criminal punishment system.

Participants' narratives from this research provide some useful ways to envision non-punitive and care-based approaches to safety. Participants collectively recognised that the social conditions leading people to engage in crime need to be addressed. Of the many root causes of crime identified, the most common ones acknowledged by participants were alcohol and substance abuse, mental health issues, lack of access to education, poverty (and associated issues of unemployment and housing), and unresolved trauma. Much of this is a symptom of the ongoing impacts of colonisation, capitalism, and neo-liberalism. Two themes evident in participants' interviews were the importance of "wellbeing as a prerequisite for safety", and the concept of "social bridging". These themes demonstrate that there is potential to dream of other ways of achieving safety, but there needs to be a commitment to making these dreams a reality. Providing resources to communities and investing in more care-based approaches to safety is necessary for the benefits to be experienced collectively and sustainably.

Wellbeing as a prerequisite to safety

Helen Algar remained steadfast in her belief that "wellbeing is a prerequisite to safety". Social, economic, environmental, and cultural needs should be met to foster wellness and wellbeing. Tania Sawicki Mead recognised that meaningful safety requires the "complex interweaving of needs being met, lives being lived, and beliefs and rights being respected". Andrew Kibblewhite similarly noted the importance of a sense of wellbeing on feelings of safety:

> I'm sure people who have had a good week, a good day, who have succeeded in their job, they'll inevitably just walk a little taller and you feel a bit more confident. And so, I'm sure that kind of general sense of wellbeing actually influences how safe you feel too (Andrew Kibblewhite)

Approaches to safety that centre individual and collective wellbeing will look different across communities. Therefore, localised approaches are necessary and should be embedded in the specific needs of a community. Helen Algar's long-term involvement with the Stronger (Safer) Waitaki organisation demonstrates her commitment to community-specific approaches. Stronger (Safer) Waitaki regularly communicates and collaborates with the community to ensure that the collective groups are channelling their energy into addressing the concerns of the community. A localised approach to safety that centres wellbeing can equip communities with the resources to manage their own needs.

In addition to centring wellbeing, people need to feel supported and have opportunities to support others. Participants expressed the importance of communal love, care, and mutual support. When speaking of young

people who are trapped in intergenerational cycles of poverty and violence, Efeso Collins explained that many of them just need someone to "walk beside them" and give them a feeling of 'home'. Similarly, Judge Phil Recordon acknowledged the importance of working alongside those who come through the court system. He shared his preference for using judicial monitoring for home detention cases, as a way of "keeping involved in people's lives and having a cup of tea with them now and then, and then just making them realise that they are a valued". Reflecting a similar sentiment to Jackson and Meiners (2011) concept of 'safety as presence', Tania Sawicki Mead and Emilie Rākete shared the importance of supporting communities in a way that structurally prevents harm from occurring:

> I think a positive definition or conception of safety would be one in which you know communities have what they need, that they are supported, and that the foundations upon which the community is based and grow from are solid, and different across different communities. And that the foundations are not rigid. That they have flexibility to be able to adapt, whether difficult times and difficult behaviours and differences between people, so it is safe in the sense that it is sustainable (Tania Sawicki Mead)

> Real, actual safety only exists where we are structurally provided for, where the structural causes of interpersonal harm don't exist, where the drivers of all of the stuff that we are worried about are dealt with socially, collectively, and through an organised plan for the management of society that doesn't rely on just letting the market figure stuff out (Emilie Rākete).

Drawing on the DuBoisian view of abolitionist democracy, Angela Davis (2005:69), recognises abolition not as the "negative process of tearing down, but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions". Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2018: online, emphasis in original) similarly states that "abolition is not *absence*, it is *presence*". Therefore, to achieve safety, the building of new social structures and conditions that ensure the presence of support, caring relationships, and wellbeing is required.

Social bridging

'Social bridging' was discussed explicitly by Khylee Quince and Efeso Collins, but was implicitly referred to in interviews with other participants. Social bridging centers relationships and encourages the process of building connections – or bridges - between people who may have different social conditions or life experiences. Fostering relationships and encouraging interdependence between people are integral to social bridging. Social bridging can be reinforced through Putnam's (2000) theorising of 'bridging social capital', whereby emphasis is placed on increasing trust, tolerance, and collective responsibility within a diverse community (Claridge, 2018; Hughes, 2020).

Khylee Quince spoke of how people have become exponentially socially distanced, which she defined as the "gap between people in terms of their experiences and knowledge". As social divisions widen and people become increasingly siloed, the social distance within communities widens. Heightened social distance, and therefore a lack of social bridging, makes it harder for people to care about social issues that do not directly affect them. The following quote demonstrates the current lack of social bridging within Aotearoa:

> People pretend that they know and have relationships with diverse groups of people, and they really don't. We've become more and more sort of siloed, whether it's by where you live, in terms of your income, [...] where you go to school. But even the social things like 30 years ago people could say that they played rugby or cricket, or their social lives were intertwined with people they didn't necessarily have professional relationships with. But a lot of those things have gone by the wayside. So we need to change that in terms of the social distance that people have from one another (Khylee Quince).

Efeso Collins reflected on his position as a "community connector" and the importance of building networks with and between people in his community. Efeso provided multiple examples that demonstrated his commitment to facilitating social bridging. At a bus stop near his house there have been occasions where drunk people, people struggling with mental illness, or street-based sex workers have created noise at early hours of the morning. Efeso shared how he would often make an effort to connect with them and build rapport, to ensure that they feel included and that there are people in the community who care. Doing this action of social bridging, is dedicated to creating an "inclusive society, so that we all know each other". Social bridging, through building

relationships with people, is an important aspect of enhancing wellbeing, and therefore feelings of safety. Acknowledging the importance of prioritising wellbeing and social bridging, Shila Nair provides the following long, but detailed, commentary:

> If we are to reduce offending, we need a holistic, integrated wrap-around approach that would examine family dynamics and address issues that keep family members caught up in the vicious circle of poverty and abuse. Poor housing and or homelessness, racial bias, impact of colonisation, mental health, addiction issues, family violence, poor schooling, poor budgeting, lack of food, emotional nourishment, warmth and care are deficits that get internalised in potential offenders over the long term. People living in such circumstances, where even basic needs are not met on a day to day basis, develop worldviews born out of their lived experiences. Such worldviews that are founded on deficit thinking and poor social connectedness can lead members towards pathways that make a life of crime look encouraging. Therefore, improving living conditions and social inclusion is important if we are to seek changes in behaviour and outlook of those who perpetrate violence or who could potentially commit crime (Shila Nair).

These participant's narratives regarding 'wellbeing as a prerequisite to safety' and the importance of 'social bridging' mirror recent scholarship that has created space to reimagine alternative approaches to safety. 'Care-based safety' (Norris, 2021), 'safety as presence' (Jackson and Meiners, 2011), and 'insurgent safety' (McDowell, 2019) have progressed the discourse to promote more collective and sustainable approaches to safety.

Conclusion

Despite the dominance of carceral safety logics, just as they have been socially constructed and made, they can be unmade. Abolitionists perspectives are continually labelled as utopian, however, many social movements of the past were viewed as utopian right up until their vision became a reality. As Page and Woodland (2023:xix) importantly note, there needs to be commitment to "change what we think is possible". It is imperative to be bold in our visions for the future, whereby harm and violence is reduced, and the collective flourishing and care is centred. As Solnit (2004:2) asserts in her book *Hope in the Dark*, we must have "hope for the realization of our own dreams, [and] also to recognize a world that will remain wilder than our imaginations".

Unhealed trauma and abuse impacts the relationships that can be developed between people (Page and Woodland, 2023). To support people to have their wellbeing needs met, and to encourage social bridging, collective care needs to be centred and sustained. Saidiya Hartman (2017:online) importantly states that "care is the antidote to violence". To expand on this, collective care can provide an antidote to violence, harm, and carceral logics. Collective care has the potential to unshackle society from carceral safety logics, which will move societies closer towards collective liberation and freedom.

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