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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation tells the story of modern anti-war prisoners of conscience in the United States—people who are incarcerated for six months or more as a result of nonviolent resistance. It explores how they intentionally use and learn about their own privilege in solidarity actions that land them in the belly of the imperial beast; the prison. It traces the lives of forty three such prisoners of conscience, from discernment of action through release, to show how “who they are” (in terms of their visible identities and private senses of self) impacts their experiences, the ways they are understood, and their own interpretations of their actions. The story that emerges is about what it feels like to resist the state with your body, how “whose body” matters in the shaping, interpretation, and efficacy of resistance, and what white, financially stable, well educated, Christian U.S. citizens learn about their own positionality through living for months and years in America’s jails and prisons. What they learn and how they are changed by their experiences is significantly impacted by their racialized gender identities, and the focused story of these individuals works to tell a larger story about patriarchy, neoliberalism, foreign policy, and the contemporary prison industrial complex. The study also provides a model of solidarity activism that takes account of political location, privilege, and “speaking for.” It challenges nonviolence theory and practice to better understand and articulate its strategy of prison witness, and is also an important intervention into the politics and actual “doings” of border crossing solidarity activism that is attentive to personal and global relations of power.

**PRIVILEGED RESISTANCE:  
PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE IN THE UNITED STATES,  
1980-2013**

by

Anya Stanger

B.A., Peace and Conflict Studies, UC Berkeley, 2002

M.Sc., Gender, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004

Dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Social Science

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Project

The subject of this dissertation was gifted to me in 2009—at choir practice, of all places. Every Wednesday, the Syracuse Community Choir sings songs for peace and justice in the tradition of Pete Seeger. One evening after practice, soprano Nancy Gwin announced that she was planning to “cross the line” (illegally trespass) onto the base at Fort Benning during that year’s annual School of the Americas Watch vigil, enacting an important nonviolent technique known as prison witness—a strategy in which an activist undergoes relatively lengthy incarceration as a consequence of protest action. My reaction was immediate and incredulous, despite my long interest in nonviolent activism. “Who would do that?” I wondered. Happily, this question has kept me going ever since. Indeed, it has proven an insightful way to understand contemporary American imperial power through the lived experience of a single person. The forty-three lives highlighted in this research provide a snapshot picture of what committed nonviolent resistance looks like in this current moment: From nuclear weapons to torture, drones to prison, the issues that “justice action prisoners” care about *as well as* what happens to their minds and bodies as a result of action are revealing of the interconnected, complex, smooth-running and varied processes of militarized global empire.

Listening to people’s stories during interviews, the significance of one’s public/visible/ascriptive identities, including race, class, and gender, emerged as crucial defining influences over what happens to justice action prisoners, how the strategy of prison witness works, and as a key shaper of how activists interpret and value the events

of their lives. Further, such axes of identity proved to matter not only as private experiences or sensations of self, but also as a political force that was remarkable for its ability to differently produce experiences and interpretations of moments of action, imprisonment, and release. Indeed, justice action prisoners often specifically *used* their privileged identities; and particularly their whiteness, citizenship, education, and professional/moral status to make more visible the violences they so fiercely protest. Within this, one's gender identity (as male or female) was not often noted by participants as significant, but proved to be a fundamental and reliable dividing line between them. Women and men relayed stories of action and incarceration that were remarkably different from one another (even when other circumstances were similar) in strikingly patterned ways. Hence, this dissertation's driving questions crystalized as 1) How do justice action prisoners' conceptions and enactments of identity form and transform during their journeys through prison witness? and 2) how does gender matter in shaping their experiences?

Studying prison witness from the starting point of a complex and intersectional identity makes clear ways in which “who we are” matters in what we can do and how we experience what happens to us, as it makes more and differently visible the systems under which we live. An emphasis on identity is also a way to highlight the politics, repercussions, and dangers of relying upon unequal and/or hegemonic social roles in one's solidarity-inspired efforts towards profound systemic change.

\*

The activists who I call “justice action prisoners” utilize a tactic called “prison witness,” a nonviolent technique of “going to jail for justice” to put particular issues (war,

nuclear weapons, drones, particular laws) on trial (Kinane 2013). It is a high-risk tactic, identified among activists as a “strategy among strategies” that is “not a card we play lightly” (Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan interview). Indeed, the technique is one of the most extreme in the nonviolent toolkit. It entails intentionally breaking the law—most often through crimes of trespass onto federal property or the destruction of property—acts that result in lengthy jail time (months or years).<sup>1</sup>

From a Gandhian/principled perspective of nonviolence (which views nonviolence as a way of life), the strategy “works” through the voluntary assumption of personal “suffering.” By engaging in an act that dramatizes-as-personal the violence of the policy/opponent, the violence may be better understood and confronted (Nagler 2001). From the pragmatic/strategic nonviolent perspective (which is concerned with strategy), prison witness “works” via the disproportionate distance between the crime and the punishment (trespass and lengthy prison terms, most commonly). Pragmatically, the public moments created by prison witness (action, arrest, trial, imprisonment) are ways to generate critical thinking, raise awareness, and enable the learning required to propel the transformation of policies, laws, and practices. Further, through providing the courts with valid cases to “test” particular laws and policies (for example, challenging the legality of nuclear weapons in the context of international law, by which they are illegal), activists give the juridical branch the opportunity to strike down illegal practices and more

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<sup>1</sup> In the United States, nonviolent resistance has a revered history: from the Boston Tea Party to Civil Rights, the Underground Railroad to Occupy, Americans with a sense of history understand that power is exercised only with their consent, and that in its withdrawal, social, political, and legal lines may be re-drawn (Ackerman and Duvall 2000; Lynd and Lynd 1966; Zinn 2002; Zunes et al 1999). Indeed, much of what we consider today to be “good” policy (women’s suffrage, fair pay, civil rights) has been won through the organized efforts of dedicated activists, and very often through strategies of nonviolent resistance.

accurately and democratically define proper scopes of government/defense practice. In practice, the motivations of principled versus pragmatic nonviolence often overlap, and jointly they comprise the primary rationales for engaging in prison witness, a nonviolent technique that has always been rare but that is very important in the history of progressive change in America.<sup>2</sup>

Though they do not necessarily court imprisonment (a majority seek not-guilty verdicts),<sup>3</sup> justice action prisoners use and rely upon the punishments acquired, either for exposing suffering (principled) or as platforms from which to speak legitimately against militarism both broadly and specifically (pragmatic). In the latter, their unlawful actions give them entrée into particular public forums (classrooms, media, courtrooms), as they also provide validity to speak as political, moral actors. In the words of participant Brian DeRouen, being an ex-con is “a sexy position” from which to speak, one’s status as a former prisoner makes other’s take one’s actions “seriously.” Hence, one occupies a “unique position from which to be more helpful” to the causes and people one cares so much about (Brian DeRouen).

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<sup>2</sup> Nonviolent “war resistance” in the U.S. is an important part of U.S. history, and was specifically developed during the First World War by American activists who opposed the war “and the underlying economic injustices that... gave rise to war” (Riegle 2012a, p. 3) War resisters’ critiques are most often systemic: they are about specific wars and policies, but also about the structures that support and propel war. “By the early 1960s,” Dan McKanan explains, “war resistance was a vital tradition with a heroic history, a rich repertoire of practices, a mix of underlying spiritualities, and an interconnected network of practitioners. The tradition was available to Americans in general and to Roman Catholics in particular” (McKanan, 5). It is from this tradition that this study’s participants are drawn; they are the contemporary actors of a legacy of resistance that has shaped this country’s laws, practices, and policies.

<sup>3</sup> This is complicated. The aim of resistance is not specifically incarceration, but it is jail time that makes the strategy “work”—whether via “suffering” (principled) or the production of cognitive dissonance (pragmatic).

In scholarly and activist literatures, such activists are called “prisoners of conscience” (POCs), as they are incarcerated for reasons of conscience—for their values and beliefs (Berger 2008; Esquivel 2008; Mollin 2006; Tracy 1996; Wittner 1984). A goodly number of my respondents, however, do not like this label. They find it patronizing to themselves and disrespectful to other prisoners (as will be discussed shortly). To honor their thinking, I refer to them by the term suggested by participant Karl Meyer, as “justice action prisoners--” people who are incarcerated as a result of their intentional actions towards justice. Unlike political prisoners (such as Nelson Mandela and Leonard Peltier), justice action prisoners are imprisoned by choice: they willingly engage in acts that they know can result in prison time.

To be included in this research, I employed straightforward criteria: a person must have completed a prison/jail sentence of six months or more in the United States, as a result of nonviolent resistance. The focus on “nonviolent” rather than “violent” action precludes investigation of significant resistance against the state (such as the struggle for Puerto Rican independence), but for reasons that are both personal (I am interested in nonviolence) and practical (I can’t do everything), I focus on nonviolence. Importantly, nonviolent action does not comprise any action that is not “violent” (harmful to people) but centers on actions that are specifically guided by nonviolent theory and strategy—as outlined in the forthcoming section. The “six month” mark measuring incarceration length is an effort to delimit inclusion to those who have endured incarceration as a result of effort and planning (“discernment”), and as a way to exclude those who are unintentionally “picked up” for being on the wrong side of a police line, for example. Insisting upon nonviolence conducted in the United States and adding “time” to my



criteria brought my research group into ready view: those who go to prison for nonviolent resistance and are alive today are almost always peace activists, and specifically, belong to either the School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) or Plowshares movements (though some belong to neither/no movement).<sup>4</sup> With these criteria established, the “who” of my dissertation became contemporary (living) peace activists in the United States who have served time in prison for protesting imperialism, militarism, war, and nuclear weapons. On some level, this community of people is highly constructed: what constitutes nonviolence is contested, the geographic reach is limited, and the six-month mark is essentially convenient (at the root, a measure enabling most SOAW line crossers to be participants). However, it is also real in how it demarcates a group of people who share similar concerns about the world, as well as beliefs about appropriate ways to seriously challenge them.

Importantly, getting locked up for six months or more for nonviolent resistance does not usually happen easily or accidentally. It is most often a result of what activists call “discernment”—long processes of planning, intention, and praying with like-minded others. There are exceptions to this, such as Peter DeMott’s 1980 Plowshares action at General Dynamics Electric Boat shipyard in Groton, CT. In this action, he drove a shipyard van into a Trident submarine because he noticed that the keys were in the ignition (<http://www.commondreams.org/headline/2009/02/21-5>). (Similarly, participant Tim DeChristopher’s 2008 environmental action of “buying” public lands at auction to

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<sup>4</sup> There are a handful of environmental and anti-abortion activists who have served substantial periods of time in prison, but environmentalists are newer to the practice of lengthy incarceration and most of the people who go to jail for conservative issues do so as a result of violent protest. Focusing on anti-war activists (with the exception of Tim DeChristopher) was not only logical, then, but brought coherence to the research group.

keep them safe from energy development was not planned beforehand, but happened because circumstances allowed (<http://www.peacefuluprising.org/tim-dechristopher/tims-story>). However, even in these cases which appear spontaneous, both men were “looking for a way to get arrested,” in Tim’s words. They had been psychologically, spiritually, and politically preparing for such action for months and years before the particular opportunity to do so arose. Occasionally, one does get arrested and serve a lengthy sentence without intending to do so; participant Ken Crawley’s second six month SOAW sentence was the result of an “aiding and abetting” charge that was not planned; he was arrested while helping others to cross. However, most commonly the action is intentional and planned, and results in known personal hardship. This makes justice action prisoners stand apart from other activists: they are a unique group.

This unique group is very small. In her 2008 book on the movement, sociologist Sharon Erickson Nepstad counted 160 living Plowshares activists globally (Nepstad 2008a), 117 of whom lived in the United States. SOAW justice action prisoners numbered 245 in 2014—though many of these have served sentences shorter than six months ([www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)). There are also a number of people who are not affiliated with either/any movement, but who act on behalf of disarmament (resisting drones, war tax resisters, etc.). This includes people who have acted with the campaign to close the bombing range of Vieques, Puerto Rico, the Missouri Peace Planters, and the SAC/STRATCOM line crossers ([www.nuclearresister.org](http://www.nuclearresister.org)). Most resisters wish to make a public stand through their actions, but a handful want their witness to remain “private” and un-published even within activist circles (Cohen-Joppa interview). Hence, obtaining a precise number of living justice action prisoners is simply not possible, given the

complexity of purposes, movements, personalities, and ways in which people act. My educated guess is that there are fewer than 1000 living nonviolent justice action prisoners who could have been included in this study as nonviolent anti-war/disarmament peace activists, if only I had the time to find and interview them.

These people share a lot in common besides their obvious commitments to peace and justice. Almost all war resisting justice action prisoners in the U.S. today are white, well educated, financially stable, Christian (mostly Roman Catholic), and over the age of 60. This is not new information to those familiar with these movements; the mainstream American peace movement has always been largely white and Christian (Coy 2000; Mollin 2006; Tracy 1996; Wittner 1984). This demographic has been problematic historically: through careless attention to the politics of race, for example, radical pacifists of the 1940s-1970s reified many of the oppressive patterns they sought to transform (Mollin 2006; 2009). As such, the particular and privileged demographic of its participants is not tangential to work towards peace and justice, but fundamental to it. Centering the identity of those who engage in prison witness is key to understanding it as a strategy of resistance against an imperial state; it helps explain how it works and fails, and sheds light on what, more precisely, it does.

Hence, I make the privileged identity of nonviolent peace activists my starting place for study, rather than bracketing it as a troublesome corollary to the history of justice organizing in the United States. This focus on social privilege is significant in the stories of how justice action prisoners come to activism, what their resistance is “for,” and how and why they—given their social location—are able (or not) to bring attention, pressure, and movement to an issue. High-risk nonviolent resistance is a useful medium

through which to see how social inequalities are reified, as privileges (of whiteness, class, citizenship, etc.) can strengthen or weaken the effectiveness of the actions performed.

There are six major contributions of this research. First, it provides evidence about how who we are, in terms of our ascriptive and subjective identities, plays out in what we can do and how we experience the world (Alcoff 2006; 2010; S. Mohanty 1993; Moya 2006; Moya & Hames-Garcia 2000). Cementing the work of realist identity scholars, this research affirms that who we are and what we do are inextricably linked: we are shaped by our political locations, but remain capable of agential action towards social transformation. Agency is enacted through what I theorize in chapter 4 as “identity-work,” the labor of bringing one’s actions into alignment with one’s beliefs. Identity-work can be the result of religious beliefs or secular values, but in all cases, “doing the work that I was put here to do” (participant Randy Serraglio) underlies motivation for action, so political action and identity are linked. Second, the research illuminates what I theorize in chapter 5 as “privilege power,” a tool that is not fundamental to nonviolence generally, but is absolutely central to prison witness. In the main, justice action prisoners are privileged folk who rely upon the power of their privilege to motivate and enact resistance. As part of being in alignment with their values, an acknowledgement of their status as U.S. citizens, as white, formally educated, etc. is often a strategic tool of resistant action. Infrequently, it is under/misunderstood and may be dangerously regressive. Focusing on privilege shows how activists navigate the fraught terrain of “using privilege for good” for reasons of solidarity (Coy 2000; Koopman 2008; 2012). This effort is not straightforward, and the dangers of attempting relations of solidarity without awareness of power differentials are real: violences can be

strengthened, differences entrenched, unequal colonial relations hardened. So “how” justice action prisoners act matters, and their awarenesses and enactments of the politics of identity, privilege, and solidarity are significant for reasons beyond theory. Third and relatedly, the research complicates and makes available important conceptions of solidarity, as it highlights the significance of practices of egalitarianism. During interviews, participants shared stories and insights about what it means to act, as a privileged person, “on behalf of” those less fortunate. How justice action prisoners think about and animate solidarity shows what they know and understand about the world and their place within it, as these understandings and actions also provide data for scholars and activists interested in doing solidarity “well.” Fourth, the life-stories of justice action prisoners inherently include periods of incarceration, and the unique standpoint (feminist articulation of the idea that “where we stand determines what we see”) that is gained through activists living in these institutions tells us more about the development and significance of a political/politicized standpoint more generally (Cole 2000; Haraway 1988; Harding 2004). The standpoint of justice action prisoners theorized in this research is explicitly tied to the concept of identity-work explored in chapter 4; it is the result of specific kinds of learning and alternative positionalities for people of privilege. Fifth, the personally “empowered” justice action prisoner (proud of her/his reasons for incarceration and connected to communities of support) is uniquely positioned to educate a broader public about the role of the prison in the imperial state—via yet another use of their privilege power. Their unique standpoint, experiential knowledge, embodied experience of incarceration, as well as their mainstream privileged identities, combine to make them powerful voices directing ideas towards institutional change. Last, the life

stories of justice action prisoners prove the omnipresent import of gender: the differences in men's and women's experiences, in terms of how they recall their lives, what they learn from their experiences, what they do as activists, and how they change as a result of participation were striking from the beginning of fieldwork. Grounding this research in an intersectional notion of gender offers evidence of the ongoing, multiple, and complex work of patriarchy. To best get at these six diverse contributions, my research is interdisciplinary theoretically, but is fundamentally guided by a transnational feminist analytical framework that makes more visible the critical playings of identity, privilege, solidarity, standpoint, and gender in the life and work of contemporary activists.

Methodologically, I focus on justice action prisoners' personal journeys, as expressed to me in interviews that all started with (and rarely moved on from) the question "tell me a little about yourself and your activism." The interviews were very unstructured, and in almost all cases the participants led the conversations. From this generalized beginning, the themes that became this dissertation's chapters emerged relatively quickly: Knowing, identity and solidarity (4); privilege and empowerment (5); the gendered experience of prison (6); and the development of a new (post-prison) standpoint (7). The frequency with which these themes occurred confirmed their importance, as my interview approach was not specifically or intentionally "leading." Rather, the kinds of stories people told bore resemblances across particular lines of identity—specifically gender and religious identity (as vowed religious vs. lay)—in ways that superseded movement allegiance, time of action, age, and other variables. Participant observation and significant historical review built upon interview findings.

The rest of this chapter provides context for the work of contemporary justice action prisoners striving towards disarmament/peace. First, I define and review nonviolent resistance as a fundamental political strategy in a democratic context, with an important legacy for propelling political change. Second, I discuss questions around naming, and specifically, my use of the terms “justice action prisoner” and “nonviolent resistance.” Third, I review of the “issues” that get people locked up, namely, U.S. imperialism as maintained through militarization and nuclear weapons. Fourth, I describe the Plowshares and SOAW movements, their histories and politics. Fifth, I review the most common legal arguments made by justice action prisoners and explain how they think (in general) about this aspect of their action and its relation to the imperial state.

### **Nonviolent Resistance**

Essential to understanding what justice action prisoners do is a cursory knowledge of nonviolent action; its practices, tenets, and legacies. Around the world, nonviolent civil disobedience is one of the most effective, prevalent, and misunderstood forces of social and political change (Bond 1994; Holmes and Gan 2012; Shock 2005; Zinn 2001). There is a strong ethical tradition supporting such resistance that can be traced to Antigone, of ancient Greece (Sophocles 441BCE).<sup>5</sup> However, it was not until the last century when, wrestling free of British colonialism, Mohandes Gandhi codified nonviolence as a method of struggle, clearly distinguishable from (though often concurrent with) moralistic beliefs about pacifism (principled opposition to war/violence).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Antigone disobeyed King Creon’s demand that her brother not be properly buried. She buried him anyways, rightly knowing that doing so would lead to her own death.

<sup>6</sup> Mohandes Gandhi articulated nonviolence as a philosophy and practice that is “greater” than that of violence, and outlined it as an effective practice against oppression. It is a method of courage, and “where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I

Nonviolence is subject to a number of misconceptions.<sup>7</sup> Most fundamentally, nonviolence is not anything that is not violent: it is not passive resistance or inaction. Nor is it submissiveness, avoidance of conflict, negotiation, or ideological-- you don't have to believe in anything particular to participate (Schock 2003). Pragmatic/strategic nonviolence (the most common variety) does not rely upon the assumption of personal suffering, nor does it rely on inducing a "change of heart" in one's opponent (Schock 2003). It is not a method reserved for the privileged, an always "civil" set of techniques such as petitions and letter writing campaigns, a tactic to be used only for the achievement of small gains, or reliant upon a charismatic leader (Nepstad forthcoming).

Instead, nonviolence is a "way to wage and win conflict"-- more akin to a military campaign than a religious/moral belief-- that is marked by its methods: it does not permit harm towards human beings (Ackerman and Duvall 2000, p. 44). As a method of generating conflict, nonviolence aims to increase tension so that an issue cannot be ignored (King 1963).<sup>8</sup> Nonviolence is defined as action that is "not violent" and that "takes place outside the context of normal political, economic, or social behavior" (Merriman 2009, p. 17). Hence, it is inherently non-institutional (the state or corporation can never be its initiator), and is often used to "directly challenge elite interests" such as

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would advise violence" (quoted in Naess 1974, p. 110). This fundamentally differentiates nonviolence from "passive resistance" or absolute pacifism, which never condones the use of force as a matter of *principle*. Gandhi prescribed nonviolence as both a refusal to cooperate with oppressive structures (civil disobedience) and "constructive programme"—the building of alternative, parallel institutions that are more responsive to people's needs. (Schock 2007, p. 4459).

<sup>7</sup> See Ackerman and Duvall (2005), Brian Martin (2008), Sharon Nepstad (forthcoming), and Kurt Schock (2003) for excellent descriptions of nonviolence.

<sup>8</sup> In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Martin Luther King Jr. writes, "Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored" (1963).



militarism and economic exploitation. Most often, its target is the state (Schock 2007, p. 4458). Nonviolent methods respond to socio-structural contexts, and hence are capable of confronting instances of both direct and structural violence (Dudouet 2008, p. 4). Participation in nonviolent action does not guarantee one's safety or the efficacy of one's struggle, however both are more likely to be achieved via nonviolent rather than violent action—keeping in mind that “nonviolent methods” are specific and intentional, not haphazard or passive (Stephen and Chenoweth, 2008).<sup>9</sup>

Nonviolent methods are creative and multiple, they can be coercive and risky, but they are never physically violent towards oneself or others. In 1973, political scientist Gene Sharp articulated 198 “methods” of nonviolence, divided into areas of protest and persuasion, non-cooperation, and nonviolent intervention. The most familiar methods include boycotts, sit-ins, marches, and civil disobedience—acts of breaking the law. Those who break the law and go to jail as a result do so in a variety of ways; they may break an unjust law in protest of the law itself (Jim Crow) or they may break a law when it is used to protect an injustice, such as a trespass law protecting a military base housing nuclear weapons. Such direct action can be integrated as part of a large-scale movement,

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<sup>9</sup> There are two important quantitative studies illuminating the efficacy of nonviolent versus violent change. In 2005, *Freedom House* investigated the 67 countries that made the transition from some form of dictatorship to some form of democracy between 1970 and 2004 (Karatnycky & Ackerman 2005). It found that nonviolent resistance proved the most effective method of change, as well as instituted the most stable new democracies. In 2008, Chenoweth and Stephan analyzed 323 major insurrections around the world and found that violence worked in 26% of the cases while nonviolent strategies worked 53% of the time (2008; 2011). In tracing why nonviolent campaigns are so much more successful than violent ones, Chenoweth and Stephan identify two primary reasons: first, commitment to nonviolence enhances its legitimacy and encourages participation—hence undermining the regimes main sources of power, and second, “regime violence is more likely to backfire against the regime” when opposition is nonviolent (2008, p. 9)—and “backfire leads to power shifts” (2008, p. 11).

and it can (arguably) be a clandestine activity involving secrecy and nonviolent sabotage. Crossing the line at the School of the Americas is an example of the former, while Plowshares actions are examples of the latter. Civil disobedience leading to lengthy imprisonment (“prison witness”) is a specific strategy, high-risk and intentional, of breaking the law in order to bring attention to an issue (either by enduring suffering or provoking attention), by which it may be transformed.

### **Principled versus Pragmatic Nonviolence**

*“From a religious point of view, nonviolence is not primarily a tactic. It is a way of living and being and expressing the truth of your soul in the world.” (Daniel Berrigan, quoted in Wink 1999, p. 96)*

*“We’re not nonviolent because we want to save our souls. We’re nonviolent because we want to get some social justice for the workers... you’ve got to **win** with nonviolence!” (Cesar Chavez, quoted in Wink 1999, p. 228)*

There are two branches of nonviolence, principled and pragmatic. In the case of prison witness, the differences between the two are important.<sup>10</sup> Very generally, Plowshares participants follow a more principled path, while SOAW participants are more likely to be pragmatic. As a strategy, prison witness is considered a technique of principled nonviolence, however this thesis shows how it is also pragmatic.

Principled (Gandhian) nonviolence assumes nonviolence as a way of life, and is most often chosen as a result of moral, religious, or philosophical conviction (Berrigan 1968; Bondurant 1975; Nagler 2001; del Vasto 1974).<sup>11</sup> Thus, for participant Jerry

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<sup>10</sup> For a good discussion of principled versus pragmatic nonviolence, see Cynthia Boaz’s 2012 article—including the illuminating comments from several scholars in the field—posted on the website *Waging Nonviolence*, <http://wagingnonviolence.org/feature/must-we-change-our-hearts-before-throwing-off-our-chains/>

<sup>11</sup> In a letter written to the Weathermen in 1968 (a resistance group active in the 1960s that did not condemn the use of violence), Philip Berrigan wrote, “no principle is worth

Berrigan, “nonviolence is simply a word, a phrase, an expression, for summing up God’s message” that he can emulate through enacting principled deeds. The principled nonviolence approach is not “with a view of trying to prevail at any cost” but with seeing “the truth prevail—trying to see that the best solution emerge” (Holmes 1989, p. 291). The solution sought is win-win, and seeks to achieve a change of heart in one’s opponent as well as a “higher degree of understanding” in oneself (Nepstad forthcoming). Transforming violence through principled nonviolence is effective because “there is enough innate rejection of violence inside a person that (nonviolent struggle) can often work just by making the violence in a situation unmistakably visible” (Nagler 2001, p. 232). In bringing *suffering* to the surface (i.e, going to jail), the nonviolent actor gives his/her opponent the opportunity to see the suffering, at which point it can be more easily rejected. For those who choose nonviolence for principled reasons, violence is always wrong and the choice of nonviolence is both obvious and singular (Schock 2007, p. 4461). One’s emphasis is on means, the idea is that unjust means can never produce just results (Martin 1989). For those committed to principled nonviolence, its methods are the only route towards change possible, because only nonviolent means can bring about the world one wants to create.<sup>12</sup>

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the sacrifice of a single human being. That’s a very hard statement.... A revolution is interesting only insofar as it avoids like the plague the plague it hopes to heal... and will be no better and no more truthful than those who brought it into being” (quoted in Varon 2004, p.188).

<sup>12</sup> For example, the methods of nonviolence, which require organization, communication, group decision making, alternative institution building, and individual commitment, give practice to future leaders in these skills (Schock 2003). A violent revolution, on the other hand, gives practice to authoritarianism, coercion, and violence, and is often simply a transition of elite male power.

Pragmatic (strategic) nonviolence is more common globally and in practice. Where principled nonviolence is a way of life, pragmatic nonviolence is pursued because it is believed to be the most effective form of resistance available (Ackerman and Duvall 2000; Ackerman and Kruegler 1994; Stephan & Chenoweth 2008; 2011; Dudouet 2008; Martin 2008; Merriman 2009; Schock 2003; 2007; Sharp 1973; 1980; 2012; Sharp and Paulson 2005; Zunes 1999). Planning for a pragmatic nonviolent intervention is similar to planning for a military one; for example in identifying one's opponent's "pillars of support" which may be worn down through targeted and specific actions (Dudouet, p. 15). Theorists and practitioners of pragmatic nonviolence seek to understand and enact it as good *strategy* (rather than morality), knowing that the qualities of one's strategic choices can and do affect the outcomes of struggle (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994, p. 2).

An important distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence relevant to prison witness are the differing views around "suffering" espoused by each. For principled nonviolent folk, voluntarily taking on suffering makes visible the more general suffering their protest is meant to highlight (Nepstad, forthcoming). Michael Nagler explains, "The nonviolent actor is deliberately seeking to manifest the pain that others are trying not to see. So in his or her case, the pain is not just something to put up with along the way, it's part of the point" (2001, p. 81). On the other hand, for pragmatists who engage in prison witness, the prison sentence (suffering) is a (sometimes unhappy) consequence of good strategy rather than a goal in itself. Indeed, personal suffering is "not an essential part" of nonviolent action (Schock 2003, p. 706) but is something to be

avoided as it can diminish movement participation (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994). Further, there is not an emphasis on the personal redemptive or biblical qualities of prison (as there is for principled activists), but rather a focus on what the experience makes uniquely possible in their lives as activists—i.e., what it changes and facilitates. For example, disarmament activist Lisa Hughes recalled that “I used to have to really work hard to find places to talk about my times in El Salvador, once I was going to prison, all kinds of groups wanted me. And the media pays more attention to you if you’ve gone to jail; in fact, that one of the main reasons for doing it” (quoted in Riegle, 2012b, 213).

Highlighting these notions of suffering are important not just for understanding principled versus pragmatic nonviolence, but because they get to the heart of the tricky issue of efficacy (i.e., does prison witness “work?”) For the principled nonviolent actor, dramatizing suffering is intrinsically linked to efficacy—to the extent that efficacy is a concern among participants. For Plowshares activists, efficacy (in terms of changing policy) is very often superseded by “faithfulness”—by their commitments to right action and living in a Christ-like manner. “Working” is thus defined not as changing policy, but as being “faithful” to what one knows to be right and true. Participant Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit explained that you “offer the seed, and God will take care of the rest.” Similarly, Plowshares activist Jerry Ebner explained that time in prison is a way to “continue the witness... we don’t do it to be arrested but because it’s the right thing to do” (quoted in Riegle 2013b, p. 118). Conversely, for the pragmatist the goal of prison witness is precisely to change policy via the production of awareness around the issues of concern that resistance actions make possible. It is a way to “gain credibility” (Sr. Dorothy Pagosa) and increase power (Ed Kinane).

## **We Are Not Prisoners of Conscience and We Are Not Disobedient: Naming**

What we call things is important. My first challenge in terminology came early in my fieldwork, when I identified the people I study as “prisoners of conscience” (POC).<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International coined the term, and defines anyone imprisoned because of their “political, religious or other conscientiously-held beliefs, ethnic origin, sex, color...or other status, provided that they have neither used nor advocated violence” a prisoner of conscience (<http://www.amnestyusa.org/our-work/issues/prisoners-and-people-at-risk/prisoners-of-conscience>). Because those who are incarcerated for nonviolent political resistance in the U.S. have broken laws—albeit nonviolently and in political resistance—Amnesty International does not recognize any POCs in this country. Most of the scholarly literature on the subject of POCs is concerned with people living elsewhere—political dissidents in Burma and China, for example. Many U.S. activists and movements, however, proudly claim the term and its legacies. For example, the web page for SOA Watch that describes prison witness is entitled “prisoners of conscience.” It explains that

Prison witness has been a core element of the SOA Watch movement since its beginning. In the tradition of Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr., Aung San Suu Kyi and countless others, SOA Watch activists have used peaceful, nonviolent resistance to expose the horrors of the SOA/WHINSEC and to express solidarity with our sisters and brothers in Latin America.... Their sacrifice and steadfastness in the struggle for peace and justice provide an extraordinary example of love in action and have given tremendous momentum to the effort to change oppressive US foreign policy and to close the SOA/WHINSEC (<http://soaw.org/about-us/pocs>).

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<sup>13</sup> Activist Stephen Kobasa and oral historian Rosalie Riegle prefer “Peace people”--- people who are united by “sympathies of purpose” (Riegle 2013a).

For SOA Watch, a POC is “steadfast,” an example of “love in action” who has traditionally been the effective fuel of the movement.

Participant Kathy Kelly was the first person to tell me that she does not like being called a POC. For her, it is “not even honest” to describe herself as a prisoner of conscience, because “all prisoners” are prisoners with consciences. In prison, “people’s consciences (are) very, very strong (and) many do feel a deep, deep regret and remorse, and the courage that it takes to keep going is, it’s just a very special kind of courage” (Kathy).<sup>14</sup> Participant Martha Hennessey also rejected the term POC. She explained that she does not like the way that such language separates herself from others, as if she is the one who has been uniquely “radicalized.” In an email explaining his thoughts to me and in reference to Kathy Kelly, participant Karl Meyer said

I detest the designation "prisoner of conscience". I am not a prisoner of my conscience. My conscience and I get along very well and have a completely voluntary relationship, and as Kathy suggests, all prisoners we have met and spent time with have consciences, though not all are reconciled with them. When we are in prison we have been classified legally as convicts and as criminals, and those are good, honest terms, with no attempts at euphemism, and we are prisoners of the federal or local governments, not prisoners of conscience. I also would not favor "prisoners on purpose", because I generally regard myself as innocent of the crimes charged, and believe that I should be acquitted and released....Like Kathy, I also do not like to be separated out from other prisoners by designation as a "political prisoner", because all prosecutions and imprisonments are based on political and social values and judgments.

Karl suggested the terms “justice action prisoner” and “peace action prisoner” as alternatives to “prisoner of conscience.”

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<sup>14</sup> This issue is so important to Kathy that in a book she co-wrote with Nuke Watch founder Sam Day, she named herself a “prisoner on purpose” to distinguish her action as political in a way that did not dishonor the very real consciences of those she lived with in prison. See *Prisoners on Purpose: a Peacemakers Guide to Jails and Prison*.

In April 2013, I held a focus group with participants I had already interviewed in Syracuse, in part to ask for feedback on Karl's suggestions towards an alternative name. The response was enthusiastic. For Dan Sage, "POC" has always sounded "a little grand." He told me that "if you find something better, and I think you have," I should use it. Ann Tiffany was clear that she preferred "justice action prisoner" to "peace action prisoner" because "I don't think 'peace' works for me at all." Ed Kinane agreed, "I don't like the peace word, (to) invoke peace without justice, it's the peace of the dead, of the oppressed."

There is still power in the term prisoner of conscience, however, as "I'm familiar" with it, participant Doris Sage explained. She continued, "I use it a lot, hoping (people) know" the term. For Doris, a professional storyteller whose stories became very political after her work with SOAW solidified, the term POC fulfills an important educative purpose. Julianne Oldfield added that it is also accurate, as "it was my conscience that got me there."

My decision to use the term "justice action prisoner" instead of "prisoner of conscience," "peace people," or otherwise, is grounded in these multiple exchanges. Ultimately, my choice is a way to make evident and honor the nuances in my participants' thinking and efforts towards living and representing themselves as honestly as they can. Among many things, but most importantly to this research, they are former prisoners: people who served time for their heartfelt, personal, and political actions towards a greater and deeper justice.

Another term quickly recognized as problematic was my initially flexible utterance of "civil disobedience" to describe the arrestable actions I was interested in. It



was participant Sr. Carol Gilbert who first alerted me to how seriously Plowshares activists consider what they do to be acts of “resistance” rather than “disobedience.”<sup>15</sup> Sr. Carol provided me with a copy of Ellen Barfield’s article “Defending Resistance” before she signed her consent document. Barfield explains,

Disobedience means breaking a specific law that is or embodies the problem.... While challenging oppressive laws is possible and valid, the complex web of laws and policies governments use to prepare for and perpetrate war do not lend themselves to direct breaking. Peace and antiwar activists contend that what governments and corporations do to prepare for and perpetrate war is illegal, and they consider their own actions of civil resistance to the governments or corporations as obeying higher laws.... Those who do civil resistance uphold the Nuremberg principles that citizens have responsibilities to resist illegal government crimes of aggression.... Resistance is understood to include legally challenging the government’s behavior, and urging juries and judges to uphold the citizens right and responsibility to protest government wrongdoing by acquitting accused resisters (2011).

In a 2013 conference presentation on drone warfare, participant Ed Kinane explained the difference simply. He said, “Civil disobedience entails (justifiably) *breaking* the law, whereas our direct actions seek to *enforce* the law – international law” (2013).

Hence, in resisting nuclear weapons/the SOA/militarism, and in upholding international law (rather than disobeying particular laws), justice action prisoners are confronting the “system” of violence. Former nun and Plowshares founder Liz McAllister explained during her interview that her resistance is “not against a particular law, it’s a whole culture.... it is a whole network of things.” From this perspective, and in *resistance*, justice action prisoners are not acting illegally, but are actually upholding

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<sup>15</sup> Resistance is also contrasted with “protest.” As Jim Wallis explained in the magazine *Sojourners*, “Protest is speaking, resistance is acting. To protest is to say that something is wrong, resistance means trying to stop it” (Riegle 2012b, p. xx). So resistance is more constructive than obstructive, ala Karl Meyer.

laws that trump domestic law.<sup>16</sup> In her chapter “Divine Obedience,” Sr. Ann Montgomery argues that “both divine and international law tell us that weapons of mass destruction are a crime against humanity and it the duty of the ordinary citizen to actively oppose them” (1987, p. 25). As such, in resistance “we practice divine obedience” (p.26).<sup>17</sup> Such terminology is common among faith based activists, and oral historian Rosalie Riegle notes that disarmament activists often claim to practice moral obedience, Gospel obedience, divine obedience, and civil resistance, terms that encompass their feeling that “it is their government that disobeys the law, especially international law, not they” (2012a, p. xiv).<sup>18</sup>

Karl Meyer also rejected the term civil disobedience, though for different reasons. For him, “civil disobedience” does not accurately describe what he does. He explained, “I don’t like to sit in the middle of an expressway and stop traffic over these issues.” Instead of obstructive action, he participates in what he calls “defensive” actions. “I’m doing defense of civil liberties,” he explained, “particularly as they try to take them away.” For example, when police designate protest zones—something commonplace today—it is the police who are breaking the law, not they who should pass through them. “The whole public area of the USA is a free speech zone,” Karl explained. “The first amendment says

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<sup>16</sup> Scholar Elaine Scarry argues that the presence of nuclear weapons is not only illegal by international law, but by domestic law—the very fabric of democracy makes nuclear weapons impossible, and she argues that we must choose between “democracy and doom” (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Jerry Ebner explains, “we may be violating the laws of this empire but we’re upholding God’s law, and that’s the primary law... we have a responsibility to violate these US laws because they’re keeping the whole system of empire in place, a system which is causing so much suffering and needless death” (quoted in Riegle 2012b, 119)

<sup>18</sup> Activist-historian Howard Zinn further legitimized such thinking around resistance, writing “our problem is civil obedience.” 1997, *The Zinn Reader: Writings on Disobedience and Democracy*. New York: Seven Stories. 436).

congress shall make NO law” infringing on the public’s right to free speech and assembly, “so my view is that it’s the government, it’s the establishment, who are breaking the law... and thus disobeying the Constitution and laws. So I usually describe protests for which arrest is likely as nonviolent resistance actions.”<sup>19</sup>

For clarity, a few other notes on naming are worth bringing up here. First, because so many of the people involved in resistance are vowed religious (and specifically Roman Catholic, which I abbreviate to “Catholic” in my writing), it is helpful to review the terminology of the Catholic Church. A “father” (Fr.) is a priest, and most priests are considered clergy. A sister (Sr.) is an apostolic (in the world) vowed woman, while a nun is a contemplative vowed woman (lives a spiritual life withdrawn from the world, cloistered). However, it is at times acceptable to use the term “nun” for sister, for example in the phrase “nuns on the bus.” In all likelihood and certainly among my participants, an activist is a “sister,” however I take advantage of the leeway allowed in the terminology, and sometimes refer to them as “nuns.” I do so for two reasons: for clarity (to distinguish between vowed religious women and biological sisters—a well as the vernacular of the labor and black movements) and for style. As is practiced in media coverage of activist events, sometimes there is just more “oomph” in naming participants “nuns” than “sisters” (“84 year old nun arrested!” sounds interesting, right?) I follow this tradition. Also importantly, several of the participants involved in this research are former priests or sisters, but think of themselves as Phil Berrigan did: as a “priest who happens

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<sup>19</sup> Such actions are effective, Karl reminded me, citing as example the fact that for his first action (disobeying an air raid drill in 1955), he was incarcerated for 35 days. Now, U.S. Constitution in hand, he finds it “hard to get arrested.” And “we’ve won these,” he says of the rights and liberties gained and maintained—they are a result of actions such as his, which push against and uphold the limits of democratic citizenship.

to be married.” In honor of these important self-identities, I refer to such participants as religious—though upon first introduction, note their “former” status.

### **Imperialism and the Nuclear State: The Issues**

Participants in this study share an analysis that names U.S. imperialism—basically economic, political, and social domination maintained through force—as the root enabler to diverse violences around the globe (Laffin and Montgomery 1987; jonahhouse.org; Kinane 2013; Riegle 2012a, 2012b; www.soaw.org; Terrell 2011; <http://transformnowplowshares.wordpress.com/legal-arguments>). Plowshares activists believe that U.S. imperial power is critically maintained through the existence of nuclear weapons, while SOAW activists focus more specifically on the impact of U.S. military training on the lives of Central and South American people.

In her analysis of the anti-nuclear movement in the United States, Diane Swords explains that “U.S. nuclear dominance has from its inception been used to back up U.S. imperial aspirations” which seek to expand U.S. power, particularly in the third world (Swords 2008, p. 37). The reciprocal relationship of nuclear weapons with imperial domination and violence is key for activists; “In our time,” Plowshares scholar and justice action prisoner Art Laffin writes,

the building of nuclear weapons and the intention to use them have become the central acts of violence to which all other forms of violence are linked. The violence of oppression, poverty, and starvation, the violence of racism, the violence against children and the unborn, the violence of state torture and imprisonment, the violence of superpower intervention around the world, and the subtle violence of our consumeristic life-styles are all drawn together and reenacted in the intention to use nuclear weapons ...excessive military spending serves to perpetuate a permanent war economy at the expense of great economic deprivation and abject poverty for millions” (Laffin 1987, p. 3 and p. 11)

Hence, Plowshares dismantle and disarm nuclear weapons themselves, but the intent is

broader in scope—the goal is to transform U.S. empire. Similarly, the SOAW campaign “is not just an isolated skirmish, a single issue. The campaign has the larger purpose of raising consciousness and mobilizing US taxpayers and citizens to oppose US militarism and hegemony in Latin America and throughout the globe” (Kinane 2013). Describing how he determines where to focus his resistance efforts, participant Fr. Louis Vitale said “I just keep bouncing from one thing to another. It’s all connected, though. I see them all as connected. It’s all about injustice.”

This broader concern is evident by the fact that a goodly number of my participants (17 who I know of— but probably more) are now also active in work against weaponized drones. This shift in focus indicates not movement disloyalty, but issue allegiance: Nuclear weapons, military training schools, and drones are understood to be *instances* of violent and aggressive U.S. imperialism, around which people organize. Of course, the specific effect of each is terrible—and what is protested is at once the violent instance and the system which supports, legitimizes, and furthers it.

From this “big picture” assessment of violent imperialism, justice action prisoners recognize that American economic, political, and social power is maintained through militarization. The U.S. has the world’s largest military budget, indeed, U.S. expenses constitute 43% of the world’s military expenditures (“Invest in People”, AFSC). According to the National Defense Authorization Act for FY 2013, the U.S. military was allotted \$554.2 billion that year to fund its military forces, approximately \$88.5 billion of which was assigned to fund Overseas Contingency Operations ([www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us)). In their analysis of the overall Pentagon budget, the American Friends Service Committee finds that over half of the U.S. discretionary budget goes to fund the military (“Invest in

People”, AFSC). In addition to far out-spending other countries for military purposes, the U.S. has the second largest number of military personnel, after China. As of December 2013, 1,369,532 people were on active duty in the armed forces, with an additional 850,880 people in reserve (govtrack). The Armed Forces also control large quantities of advanced and powerful equipment—weaponry, infrastructure, ships and submarines, manned and unmanned aircraft, etc.

The international reach of the U.S. military is impressive: In 2012, U.S. military personnel were stationed in 150 of 192 countries, with nearly 300,000 individuals posted overseas (<http://www.vetfriends.com/us-deployments-overseas/>). The U.S. occupies over 1,000 bases internationally (Gusterso 2014, see also Davis et al 2012). These military bases on foreign soil make up 95% of *all* foreign military bases operated by any country worldwide (Gusterso 2014).<sup>20</sup> The impact of these bases is gaining increasing scholarly and activist attention. Hugh Gusterso, a columnist for the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, argues that the “Empire of bases” constitutes a new form of imperialism. He writes

The old way of doing colonialism, practiced by the Europeans, was to take over entire countries and administer them. But this was clumsy. The United States has pioneered a leaner approach to global empire. As historian Chalmers Johnson says, "America's version of the colony is the military base." The United States, says Johnson, has an "empire of bases" (quoted in Gusterso, 2014).

Foreign bases are critical to the project of U.S. hegemony globally, and it is from these various and multiple sites that even the most remote corners of the globe can be

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<sup>20</sup> In these places, the Department of Defense owns "More than 600,000 individual buildings and structures at more than 6,000 locations on more than 30 million acres of land" (<http://www.vetfriends.com/us-deployments-overseas/>). Since 1950, 56 countries have “hosted” over 1000 troops at a given time, and the U.S. currently employs over 81,000 local people through such installations (ibid).

monitored and controlled.<sup>21</sup>

From this context, Plowshares activists emphasize nuclear weapons as the “lynchpin”, the essential enabler, to the smooth running of perpetual U.S. dominance worldwide. Though precise numbers are difficult to obtain (the nine countries who have nuclear weapons tend to treat anything related to them as top secret), in their 2013 article “Global Nuclear Weapons Inventories: 1945-2013” Kristensen and Norris estimate that there are about 17,000 nuclear warheads globally, over 90% of which belong to either the U.S. or Russia (2013, p. 75). While the number of weapons globally has decreased since the height of the Cold War (when warheads numbered about 70,000), countries continue to modernize their nuclear stockpiles, as well as maintain the weapons as part of their national security policies (Kristensen and Norris, p. 77). Approximately 1,8000 of today’s Russian and American warheads are on “high alert” status, meaning that they are ready to launch within five to fifteen minutes (ibid). The U.S. stockpile currently numbers 4,650 warheads—2,150 of which are deployed (on missiles or bases with operational launchers), plus an additional 3,000 “retired” (slated to be dismantled) warheads. The total U.S. inventory, then, is 7,700. The vast majority of these are 10-50 times more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Reif 2013).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In their 2012 study of the “strategic choices” the U.S. could make regarding foreign bases, scholars at the RAND corporation took up the challenge of whether, in response to changing geopolitical contexts and financial constraints, the U.S. should close some foreign bases. Assessing these choices against U.S. interests, the authors concluded that reducing U.S. military presence overseas does not make sense if it is “perceived” that such presence plays a role in deterring and responding to threats posed by China, North Korea or Iran, specifically, but that relying more on allies could lead to reductions in U.S. military presence overseas. In all cases, the report makes clear, the project of maintaining U.S. strategic interests—i.e., hegemony, is paramount.

<sup>22</sup> Traditionally, arms treaties do not require the destruction of warheads, nor do they attend to “non-strategic and deployed” nuclear weapons (Krisensen and Norris 77).

Even among the most conservative security circles, it is understood that no country needs so many nuclear weapons. The official rationale for the continual manufacture, maintenance, and development of nuclear weapons is that they act as a deterrent, for their actual use is practically inconceivable (though still possible. We know that president's Truman, Kennedy and Nixon considered using them, see Scarry 2014). In an article questioning when, exactly, the U.S. might actually use nuclear weapons, *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* columnist Kingston Reif explains that even if a U.S. president decided to use them, he or she would need “only a handful, not the thousands the United States currently possesses” (2013). Indeed, today nuclear weapons are a “niche weapon, not the bedrock of US security that some still claim they are” (ibid). This niche weapon comes at a heavy price, and the Ploughshares Fund (not connected with the Plowshares movement) estimates that the U.S. will spend “between \$620 billion and \$661 billion on nuclear weapons and related programs over the next decade” (<http://www.ploughshares.org/what-nuclear-weapons-cost-us>). This spending includes the construction of new weapons. For example, in 2013 the defense department

wants to spend \$11.6 billion to rebuild the B61 nuclear bombs deployed in Europe—bombs that will never be used, designed for a threat that no longer exists. There are about 400 of these outmoded bombs still in the arsenal, with about half stationed at bases in Europe. At this price, the bombs will cost *more than* their weight in gold, nearly two times more in fact, an estimated \$28.9 million each (Rogers 2014).

In terms of defense against threats, such spending is clearly not useful. However, the reality is that nuclear weapons serve purposes that are political as well as military. They play a central role in maintaining U.S. power abroad. In other words, Plowshares activists are right; and nuclear weapons play a key role in perpetuating U.S. empire.



## **The Movements: Plowshares and the School of the Americas Watch**

Almost all of the participants in this study come from one of two movements, Plowshares and the School of the Americas Watch (SOAW). Plowshares is an anti-nuclear disarmament movement named from a biblical verse from the Book of Isaiah, advising Christians to “beat swords into plowshares”-- to transform weapons into something useful and productive. Since 1980, there have been over 80 Plowshares actions carried out by over 200 activists in the U.S., Germany, Sweden, Great Britain, Australia, and Holland (Nepstad 2008a). 117 individuals have participated in Plowshares actions in the United States, 29% of whom have participated in two or more actions (Tobey 2010, p. 45). As of 2010, just under 19% of participants were vowed religious, and 37% lived in an intentional community (most often, Jonah House or Catholic Worker houses) at the time of their action. 36% of Plowshares activists are female (ibid).<sup>23</sup> In the last decade, American Plowshares activists have grown older and more religious: since 2000, only two (of nineteen) U.S. Plowshares activists have been younger than 40, and the majority are older than 60 (ibid). Of these nineteen, nine have been members of vowed religious communities (ibid, revised to include the 2012 Oak Ridge action). Internationally, the average Plowshares participant serves one or two years in prison, though in Europe the average is just over one month, while in the U.S. time served has been as long as 18 years (Nepstad 2008a).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Tobey used data from Nepstad (2008) the Jonah House website, and Laffin and Montgomery (1987) to derive these numbers.

<sup>24</sup> Nepstad explains that in the mid-1980's, U.S. judges purposefully began imposing longer sentences on Plowshares activists, to “raise the stakes of participation” (216). In Sweden, on the other hand, the state is receptive to Plowshares activists, and some even believe that this has “undermined” the movement (178). Further, in the US today,

The Plowshares movement has its genesis in the Vietnam War, when nine activists (among them priest-brothers Daniel and Philip Berrigan) raided a U.S. customs office in Catonsville, Maryland and burned over 300 draft files with homemade napalm ([www.hitandstay.com](http://www.hitandstay.com)). This nonviolent but controversial act led to a long jury trial and prison sentences for all participants, as it consolidated a new form of activism in the American anti-war movement: dramatic nonviolent civil disobedience that included the destruction of property, illegal trespass, and intentional interference with national security (Mollin 2006). The first actual “Plowshares” action occurred in 1980, to protest the manufacture of nuclear weapons at the GE plant in King of Prussia, PA. In the 12 years between Catonsville and King of Prussia, those involved served prison time, learned and taught about the U.S. war industry, protested militarism and nuclear weapons, formed Jonah House in Baltimore (an intentional community that prioritizes war resistance), and clarified dramatic acts of nonviolent resistance as the most legitimate and forceful means of resistance available to them (Tobey 2010). From its inception, the movement has benefited from powerful leadership, in the team of (former) Fr. Philip Berrigan, Fr. Daniel Berrigan, and (former) Sr. Elizabeth McAllister. All are venerated within the movement, admired for their long periods of incarceration, political commitments, and for their deep Catholic commitment and knowledge.

Those involved with Plowshares are traditionally (but not exclusively) leftist-Catholics who identify nuclear weapons as instruments of death that rely upon and support U.S. empire, destructive capitalism and military expansion. They see investment in the manufacture of weapons as responsible for domestic poverty. The rationale is that

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Plowshares actions “count” as acts of terror—hugely increasing the risk (i.e. sentence length, prison security level) that activists must be willing to endure (O’Brien 2013).

the billions of dollars spent annually on “national defense” is money not spent on healthcare, education, social services, etc., hence comprising a “theft from the poor” (participant Kathleen Rumpf).

Many in the Plowshares movement are inspired to action by their belief in the “prophetic tradition” of Catholicism, as well as through involvement with the Catholic Worker (CW).<sup>25</sup> About 80% of U.S. Plowshares activists ascribe to the prophetic tradition, which interprets the life of Jesus as committed to nonviolent struggle (Nepstad 2008a, Tobey 2010). In this thinking, Jesus died for resisting the imperial state. He did what he believed to be right without concern for popularity or efficacy (Aslan 2013; Biegelson 2010; Wink 1999). As Fr. Louis Vitale explained, “You do what you can do, but then you don’t impose your conclusions on it.... You do right action, and then you’re righteous, and then what happens happens.” Thus, the prophetic tradition justifies resistant action even if it is not “effective” in terms of changing policy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The Catholic Worker (CW) is a network of “houses of hospitality” founded in 1933 by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin in New York City. It provides “the works of mercy” for this nation’s neediest populations. Workers are thoughtful about the proper role of Catholics in a context of violence, and publish a newspaper giving Christian responses to contemporary problems. In this, they advocate for a “quasi-anarchism called ‘personalism’.... suggesting that one should address economic and political ills personally instead of through institutions” (Riegle 2012a, 14, see also McKanan 2008, Riegle 2003). A commitment to personalism means that Workers try to “live radically the Sermon on the Mount, practicing the voluntary poverty, prayer, hospitality, resistance to war and injustice, and intellectual and spiritual formation espoused by the founders” (Riegle 2012b, p. xix). In this, many consider “the works of mercy to be only one component of a more radical social vision” (Tobey 2010, 35). As former Worker and participant Kathleen Rumpf explained, the CW is about “performing...the corporeal acts of mercy... it is also to confront the system, it is about systemic change, too.” Thus, Workers are committed to nonviolent resistance in the aim of social transformation, as instructed by their interpretation of the Bible.

<sup>26</sup> Participant Brian Terrell complicated the view that those most motivated by faith are not concerned with efficacy. He cited Derrick Jensen’s *Endgame*, in which Jensen quotes Phil Berrigan saying that it is “faithfulness” that God demands. Brian claims that “Jensen

To bring attention and hoped-for change to the issues they care about, Plowshares activists engage in actions that are both public and illegal, and as Catholics, their tactics are “legitimate” in how they are biblically appropriate to those who use them. Hence, the use of blood, insistence on nonviolence, and commitment to on-going struggle are typical (Nepstad 2008a). The elements of a Plowshares action are symbolic/actual destruction of property, spilling of blood, illegal trespass, and the use of household hammers (Tobey 2010). Daniel Berrigan described the rationale behind such tactics, as well as how the symbolism of Plowshares actions are meant as communicative messages that are authentic for use by Christians. He explained,

At the Pentagon we are dealing with the insane... so we are not only relying on rational means of communication.... The symbols are an effort to make death concrete. The generals never see the other end of their decisions.... For us, for we are mostly Christians, this is also an extension of our normal worship. Our tradition is sacramental. It is full of symbols: human blood, ashes, water, oil.... You shed your own blood rather than the blood of others; your own body is broken rather than the body of others. This is the heart of the Gospel. He said *do this! Do this!*... which we understand to mean not only *do this* with symbols at the table... but *do this* with our lives (quoted in Wink 1999, p. 94).

For the ways in which they dramatize violence and include elements of nonviolent sabotage, Plowshares actions are more risky and controversial than any other form of contemporary nonviolent anti-military action. Participants do things like sneak onto restricted military property and “symbolically disarm” nuclear weapons and related machinery, such as B-52 airplanes, Trident submarines, and nuclear nosecones. They jack

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misinterprets this as Phil saying that pacifism is not intended to change things in the “physical world,” but depends on a Christian God to come and “fix” things. Jensen does not want to wait on God while the earth is trashed... (Jensen) shows how there can be confusion. Of course Phil was not waiting on God to fix things and he faithfully strove to make real progress for peace in the physical world but knowing that it all did not depend on him.”

hammer on missile siloes and swim to nuclear submarines. In often highly securitized sites, they bang on military equipment with household hammers, pour their own blood to represent the ultimate purpose of the weapons, and post incriminating evidence against the war machine (Tobey 2010). They do this because they believe that the threat of war, nuclear weapons, and imperialism are dangerous, imminent, and urgent, and because they are willing to endure incarceration. Their choice of tactics is symbolic, authentic, and principled—and is arguably based more on their moral commitments and values than on concerns with efficacy (see Nepstad 2004c for a discussion of Plowshares tactics). Plowshares actions are highly secretive in their preparation (they must be, as U.S. law is unforgiving in matters of conspiracy) and daring in execution. Such acts are notable as—for example—priests and nuns in their 80’s, carrying wire cutters and sneaking into aircraft hangers and splattering blood, make for good press *and* force moral reckonings.

Plowshares tactics are meant to actually disarm material that activists believe have “no right to exist” (Elizabeth McAllister interview). The actions are symbolic, but they are also real. The destruction of property is intentional, and positively “works” in the effort of disarmament. However, because they intend to be destructive as well as symbolic, Plowshares actions have inspired lively debates within peace communities as to whether or not the acts of destroying property constitute true “nonviolence.” Liz McAlister explained that Plowshares actions are nonviolent, because they always have a “human dimension”—the only property they destroy is that which should not exist.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Of the Catonsville 9 action, Ben Varon writes, “To the charge that they were sowing disorder, the defendants answered that they had violated only that ‘public order which is in effect a massive institutionalized disorder’....These raids, which meant taking on extraordinary levels of risk, were motivated very much by the desire to match deeds to words....Their actions also underscore how difficult it became to strictly separate violent

Daniel Berrigan was swift to proclaim that it is better to “burn paper than men” (1968). What *kind* of property is destroyed is specifically important for those who condone its destruction as a legitimate form of nonviolence. Usually, sabotage is constrained to property that is not essential to an individual’s life (shelter, food, means to a legitimate livelihood, toothbrushes). Such property is differentiated from “the tools for an illegitimate job that a person does, such as make nuclear weapons” (Cohen-Joppa personal email). For those engaged in such actions, the difference is clear.

However, opponents to this form of action claim that such acts constitute sabotage and are not nonviolent. Participant Karl Meyer described his adherence to the “golden rule” as a guideline for action—he would not want someone burning his files for reasons of political difference, so he does not feel the right to do the same to others. Further, such acts not only damage property, but also rely upon secrecy—which is antithetical to nonviolence for how it perpetuates rather than liberates people from fear, reduces the number of potential participants who can be part of an action or movement, and precludes the possibility that conflicts be resolved “in terms of human needs” (Okamoto 1999). Gene Sharp argues that sabotage— ‘acts of demolition and destruction of property’—is *not* compatible with nonviolent struggle because it

risks unintentional physical injury or death... requires a willingness to use physical violence... requires secrecy... requires only a few persons to implement plans (reducing the number of effective resisters)... demonstrates a lack of confidence in the potential of nonviolent struggle... is a physical-material action, not a human-social action.... Attempts to undermine the opponents by destroying their property.... Commonly results in a loss of sympathy and support... (and) often results in highly disproportionate repression (2005, pp. 390-391).

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and nonviolent protest. The Berrigan circle took as its mandate the premise that ‘certain property has no right to exist: concentration camps, slums, and I-A files.’ To destroy these was therefore not violent at all” (Varon 2004, p. 122).

Further, such acts inspire fear in the opponent, keep the struggle small and elite, and may provoke higher levels of state repression for all (Schock 2007). Fundamentally, arguments against sabotage are based on the increased potential for harm that it poses to human life—whether that of the self, opponent, or innocent bystanders.

On the other hand, in their analyses of nonviolent strategy, Ackerman and Krueger (1999) find that “nonviolent sabotage” (demolition) can be an important and effective tactic in nonviolent campaigns, defined as acts which “render inoperative the material resources of an opponent” and essentially work as economic sanctions (p. 39). This research includes Plowshares-like sabotage as nonviolent action, and does not engage further in questions of what constitutes true “nonviolent action.”<sup>28</sup>

The Plowshares movement occupies a special space in the peace movement, as the most radical type of nonviolent activism currently practiced. At the same time, it is controversial—for its destruction of property, religious symbolism and focus, for the techniques employed, and for questions around efficacy and appropriateness. What it unquestionably provides, however, is a model of what a very small group of committed activists can produce, as well as information, language, and principled backing for other ongoing peace activism/anti-war work, strong leadership, recognition, and a model of the community support necessary to commit to lives of serious resistance. It is also a persistent attempt to keep a difficult issue alive (nuclear threat as an ongoing challenge). Importantly, Plowshares actions also provide narratives for other peace groups, as well as issues around which to organize. In this, it is a sort of lightning rod for the peace movement more broadly—it is the radical fringe from which other movements by

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<sup>28</sup> For a fuller discussion of this issue, see Okamoto, 1999.

association appear less radical, and for this reason alone, its role in the peace movement is significant.

Participants are also drawn from the campaign to close the School of the Americas (renamed the “Western Hemispheric Institute for Security Cooperation” or WHINSEC), a military training school for Latin American military personal in Columbus, Georgia. Founded by Jesuit Fr. Roy Bourgeois in 1990, the School of the Americas Watch (SOAW) is the longest ongoing movement of civil disobedience in the U.S. (Koopman 2008b). SOAW is

an independent organization that seeks to close the U.S. Army School of the Americas, under whatever name it is called, through vigils and fasts, demonstrations and nonviolent protest, as well as media and legislative work....the SOA Watch movement is a large, diverse, grassroots movement rooted in solidarity with the people of Latin America (<http://soaw.org/about-us>).

The first large SOAW protest gathering was in 1997 (when over 2,000 people attended). By 1999, over 10,000 people attended, of whom 4,408 “crossed the line” (Koopman 2008, p. 831) in an act described by the movement as civil disobedience.

Since its founding in Panama in 1946, the School of the Americas/WHINSEC has trained over 64,000 Latin American military personal, including “some of the most notorious dictators and human rights abusers” in the region (Nepstad 2000, p. 67). Consistently, the countries with the “worst human rights records” have been the ones “sending high numbers of students to the school during peaks of repression” (Koopman 2008b, p. 828). In 1996, due to intense pressure from grassroots organizations such as the SOAW, the Pentagon released seven training manuals from the school. The manuals gave instructions for “targeting union organizers and those who say the government is not meeting the basic needs of the people. The manuals detailed forms of torture, advocated



‘neutralization’ (i.e. execution), and tactics such as arresting the relatives of those being questioned” (Koopman 2008b, p. 829). In 2001, Congress closed the SOA, but re-opened it a few weeks later as the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation (WHINSEC). The campaign to close it down “resists this new world order doublespeak” and continues to refer to the school as the SOA, nicknamed the “school of the assassins” by the movement (Koopman 2008b, p. 830).

Since its inception, SOAW has organized an annual vigil at Fort Benning during the weekend nearest the anniversary of the 1989 massacre of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper, and her daughter in El Salvador (usually the third weekend in November). The event includes two full days of conferencing; trainings, lectures, film screenings, and music educating people about Latin American issues. Similarly to Plowshares, SOAW connects the militarism of the school to policies of U.S. Empire more broadly.

I attended the vigil in 2011, and that year conference workshops included speakers from Honduras testifying about the 2009 coup in that country (the government was toppled by SOA graduates, with U.S. support), workshops about drones, Guantanamo Bay, Gaza, agriculture and sustainable farming, “killer Coke,” the drug wars in Mexico and Colombia, immigration and detention in the U.S., and the ongoing war in Afghanistan. In addition, there were workshops on direct action, nonviolence, and peace keeping; the essential nuts and bolts of how to engage in civil resistance.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> While my shorthand description of the school is a “dark spot on the planet,” the work of SOAW has also made the place a site of tremendous learning potential. Patrick O’Leary—an activist and writer for the Catholic Reporter who I spoke with in Columbus—told me that he hopes the school doesn’t close because it is such a useful symbol of America’s imperialism. “Nothing else,” he said, “can so clearly show people what we’re doing.” It is a place, on U.S. soil, where people can come to protest one thing and then learn about a whole host of others—and the “system that keeps them all

Certainly, organizers take advantage of the learning opportunities for topics beyond the specifics of the school that the annual event affords. For example, at the session I attended on direct action, participants were reminded that the state of Georgia has a “show me your papers” law, hence citizens without troublesome legal records or immigration concerns needed to be especially careful around how their resistance could negatively impact those with more precarious legal status. The major focus of this meeting was to be sure that immigrants and the un-documented were not unintentionally caught up in any illegal actions. Organizers explained that it is “a privilege to act” in resistance, and those doing so must “do so with cognizance of the consequences for others. Immigrants need protection. Assume infiltration. In your actions, you can’t risk others, only yourself.” At this particular meeting, there were several undercover police agents from the Muscogee County police force in attendance, and no specific actions could be planned. The emphasis of the meeting was entirely on being mindful of the wider/actual results of one’s personal actions, paired with a request to be vigilant on behalf of others. Hence, within a context focused upon learning about “elsewhere,” participants learned something about themselves and their own positionality.

Another way in which learning occurs during the weekend is through seeing the state more clearly for what it is: a police state. The security at Fort Benning during that weekend in November is remarkable for a space that is—on any other weekend of the

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supported.” In this, he explained, it is uniquely useful. While no one in attendance that weekend *really* wants the school to stay open, I believe O’Leary’s comment should be understood as a compliment to what the movement has been able to do: the sentiment is not a wish is not for movement failure, but an astute observation of what the movement has accomplished—though the school doors remain wide open.

year—can be accessed as public space.<sup>30</sup> Since 2005, there have been three layers of fencing outlining the perimeter of the protest area, topped with barbed wire and covered with tarp so as to be opaque.<sup>31</sup> The entrance sign is also tarped. The fences separate the protest zone from the entrance to the base. A helicopter flies continuously overhead for the two days of the outdoor gathering, several hundred uniformed police agents and undercover police guard the perimeter and stroll through the crowds, and police trailers, cars, and quads are parked around the area at all times. The vigilers are regularly reminded via loudspeaker that it is illegal to trespass onto the base, a courtesy used as an abuse.

In this space of control, the annual event culminates on Sunday morning in a solemn funeral procession. The names of the victims of SOA graduates are read as a litany, and in response to each name, vigilers call “*presente*” in chorus (a customary way in Latin America of conjuring up and respecting the dead). The slow procession fills the morning, the continual calling of names creating an ache that grows colder by the hour. There is also, however, an emphasis on what participant Clare Grady described as essential to resistance work: “fun.” There are puppets and music, food stalls and political booths, much laughter and many happy greetings among old friends.

With the exception of 2013, every year between 1996 and 2014, the capstone of the Sunday morning ritual has been the moment(s) in which an activist/group of activists

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<sup>30</sup> In 2014, the city of Columbus denied the SOAW’s routine request for a permit—a decision that was eventually overturned in court, but shows the level of interference the authorities are willing to engage in to dampen and dissolve the movement.

<sup>31</sup> Sara Koopman’s article, “Cutting Through Topologies” thoroughly describes the protest area, as she beautifully contrasts the physical lines demarcating the protest space (fencing) with the lines of connection formed between those who protest there and those affected by the school (2008b).

“cross the line”—illegally trespassing onto the base and into the arms of the ready arresting military personnel. When my family attended in 2011, Theresa Cusimano crossed—and though I was racing towards the gate in response to the roar of the crowd, I arrived too late to see her cross. Later, I was able to see video footage of her action. In my fieldnotes, I wrote of that moment, and of watching the footage.

The crowd was cheering: hoorays and shouts and clapping, and then a chant of “shame, shame, shame.” I saw Nancy (Gwin), in her peacekeeper hat, and asked her what had happened. She said, “we can be heard here,” but then proceeded to tell us that a woman (we only guessed that it was Theresa, at this point) had crossed, wearing high heels. Nancy’s been saying “for years” that they should hide a ladder in a puppet, and this year, they finally did. There had been a die-in near the fence, and the peacekeepers were keeping the area clear. In this space, Theresa’s supporters (Fr. Louis Vitale) quickly put up the ladder. We later saw the video (posted on the SOAW website) showing how Theresa went right to the ladder, climbed it carefully, gently laid a piece of carpet over the barbed wire, kicked off her high heeled shoes one at a time, and slowly lowered herself down. Immediately, she went limp, and was picked up by the military personnel. They dragged her away by the elbows, belly towards the ground, her naked toes dragging on the road behind her. The crowd was shouting words like “we love you, Theresa!” as she did her action. She was very thoughtful and slow in her movements. It was a beautiful witness.... When I arrived at the fence, the crowd was chanting in support of Theresa, and the ladder just stayed there—like “Jacob’s Ladder,” said Nancy. Begging someone to climb it. After several minutes, a woman holding a photo of a victim of the SOA climbed up a few steps, and the crowd went wild. She climbed to the top of the ladder, crying, earnest. She shook her fist, but not in a militant way. She cried. She showed the mps (military personnel) below her the photo. I thought for sure that she was going to cross, and my heart felt in my throat. It raced. I was VERY emotional, very scared—the adrenaline was pumping. In the end, she kissed the photo and handed it down to the mps below her, cried more, and climbed down. The ladder remained. Several minutes later, a young man climbed a few steps, the crowd cheered, he shook his fists, and then climbed down. After that—a show—the peacekeepers took down the tempting ladder, and the crowd calmed and dispersed. I felt spent. Surprised by how I reacted so strongly to that woman’s few steps. I think, knowing so much about the consequences of direct action at SOA, I was terrified on her behalf. And amazed at the courage it takes to make that step.

As of February 2015, 247 people have spent more than 100 years in prison for resisting the school ([www.soaw.org](http://www.soaw.org)). Since 2001, they almost always serve the maximum penalty for this offense of trespass, which is six months in federal prison.

For those involved in the SOAW movement, the action, trial, and resulting imprisonment are somewhat stylized (trespassing onto the base on the third Sunday morning of November) and the narratives and supports are largely provided by proximity to the movement. Discernment groups are sponsored during the weekend, legal expertise is on hand for those considering action, and a legacy of line crossers (and resulting six month sentences) precedes each activist today. Trials are held in the Muscogee County, GA courtroom, where until 2000 they were presided over by “Maximum Bob” Elliot (the judge responsible for forbidding Martin Luther King Jr. to march through Columbus), by Judge Mallon Faircloth until 2010, and now by Judge Stephen Hyles. Participant Brian DeRouen explained that in his trial statement, he “thanked” Judge Faircloth, because “without him, our movement doesn’t work. Nobody pays attention to people on probation. So I was like, ‘thank you for being our Bull Conner. Thank you for being the great injustice that makes this whole thing work.’”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In meting out such harsh sentences, Judges Elliot and Faircloth certainly helped consolidate prison witness as the strategy of the SOAW. By penalizing resisters with the maximum sentence of six months for the crime of federal trespass, they simultaneously furthered publicity of the movement. However, their sentencing has also succeeded in slowing the number of willing line crossers to a trickle. In 2013, for the first time since the movement was founded, there were no line crossers at the vigil. This is surely the result of a few things. I am not on the SOAW POC listservs so I am guessing, here-- but I think that the shifting geopolitical landscape (focus is on drones, wars in the middle east), a religious backlash against founder Fr. Roy Bourgeois (in response to his commitment to help women become Catholic priests, the Jesuits have withdrawn their financial support for the movement and no longer send students to attend the vigil), the nearly certain six month sentence allotted to trespassers, a sense that the strategy may be over-worn in this case, as well as the increasing difficulty of the prison experience itself have influenced

However, the work of SOAW is not limited to the vigil in Columbus or solely propelled by its POCs. Rather, the movement today is “a hub and spokes network” (Koopman 2008b, p. 832). During the third weekend of November, solidarity events are held across the U.S., as well as internationally. In addition, the organization sponsors the “April Days of Action” each spring in Washington D.C, which focuses on lobbying efforts to close the school. There are also international efforts, including delegations and political lobbying. Importantly, SOAW has been a critical player in six Latin American countries’ decisions to withdraw their troops from attending SOA/WHINSEC, including Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela. Explaining his 2012 decision to stop sending military personnel to the school (and after meeting with SOAW delegates), Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega explained that “The SOA is an ethical and moral anathema...All of the countries of Latin America have been victims of its graduates. The SOA is a symbol of death, a symbol of terror” (Evans 2012). While there may always be dictators willing to engage with such a symbol, the efforts of SOAW are successfully reducing the number of potential students the school can attract, a tactic that shows the strategic efforts of the movement overall.

### **The Legal Defense: On Trial for “Governmental Insanity”<sup>33</sup>**

Nonviolence requires that one accept the consequences of one’s actions. Hence, after engaging in illegal activities, justice action prisoners await arrest, pursue trial, and endure incarceration. For both principled and pragmatic nonviolent activists, the goal of

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movement organizers. Also important must be Theresa Cusimano’s prison experience (reviewed in chapter 7), which was particularly and unpredictably horrifying. Interestingly, in 2014 two activists crossed the line at Fort Benning, and were sentenced only to probation and monetary fines. (As participant Ann Tiffany explained, “the only thing you can count on is inconsistency...”)

<sup>33</sup> Participant Kathleen Rumpf

the trial is not acquittal, but rather to “put the system on trial” (participant Ed Kinane). Hence, defenses are crafted to give courts the opportunity to stop violations of international law regarding nuclear weapons, drones, torture, etc. Such recognition would simultaneously entail acquittal for participants, in a manner that is consistent with their principles. Instead of striving towards acquittal, then, providing compelling cases for the courts and juries to review is the primary motivation for going to court. The idea is to give the juridical branch the opportunity to uphold and improve the law, both domestic and international. The action, trial, and specific defense, then, is constructed to provide a venue through which both the issues and the system are rendered scrutable. Engaging in a criminal trial, on such terms, is a way to confront the state, in a tradition that dates to at least the Civil War (Howlett 2013).<sup>34</sup>

The trial “works” from this framework as a pedagogical tool: through the public venue afforded them through resistance, activists persuade and coerce followers and opponents, show discrepancies and inconsistencies in policies and laws, and force authorities into uncomfortable defensive positions from which they must either enforce unjust/wrong laws or make decisions on things that they would prefer remain obscure. Through their actions, justice action prisoners show the law to be an instrument of repression rather than justice, and by their own identities as moral felons of conscience, they facilitate consciousness raising in the broader population (Laffin and Montgomery 1987). The trial also generates local, regional, and sometimes national media attention, increases awareness of relevant issues, inspires activists, and develops organization

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<sup>34</sup> For abolitionists, the goal may be to “vindicate the state through its justice system vindicating abolitionists,” rather than to confront or oppose the state per-se, as an anarchist would (Cohen-Joppa).

within the movements. Hence, trials effectively work on behalf of activist causes. Significantly, the trial itself, and prison witness more generally, does not often result in either acquittal or changed political policy. Instead, the actions and trials—usually at best—raise awareness and tension, and thus may make the policies of war harder to normalize and enforce.

This, however, is an important form of success—and one that is deliberately sought by participants. In a 2011 article written for the organization *Voices for Creative Nonviolence*, participant Brian Terrell highlights the pedagogic purpose of the trial as key to his (pragmatic) intent. He explains

I am very aware that a protestor being found not guilty does not bring an end to war a whit closer. More important than achieving any desired decision from the court, I hope that our courtroom strategies and arguments have been consistent with and have added to the message of our actions on the street, bringing the issues raised to a wider venue.

From this perspective, the efficacy of the trial is not measured by “winning,” i.e. securing acquittal or changing policy, but by widening the circle of those concerned about the issues. Time in prison is the ticket cost for participating in this project, and justice action prisoners are simply those who are willing to pay this price of putting their “action” where their “belief is” (Participant Ken Crawley).

Most justice action prisoners believe that the modern U.S. criminal trial enforces injustice, rather than furthering justice. Describing the trial as the “second action” in what is for him a tri-partite act of resistance (discernment and illegal act, trial, and prison), participant Fr. Steve Kelly described the courtroom as “one of the most dangerous rooms in the Pentagon.” In his article on the (common practice among justice action prisoners)



use of the Pro Se defense (defending oneself),<sup>35</sup> activist Brian Terrell recalled that as a young man he was “not interested in justifying myself before a system whose definition of justice I am unable to relate to and which is more dependent upon the bargaining of attorneys than upon and real moral values” (2011).

In general, the justice action prisoners I spoke with do not expect what is legal, just, or holy to prevail in what is to them clearly an enforcing arm of imperial power, and they are not willing to demean themselves and their values by playing by the rules of the institution (i.e., they would rather go to jail than plead guilty to a crime of sabotage, for example, when they view what they have done as an inspired, moral, and necessary act of enforcing justice). Often, this commitment comes from a principled nonviolent stance of means: justice action prisoners are not willing to participate in a game they see as inherently unfair. For others, the trial is primarily an attempt to put an issue on trial and hence galvanize a community around it—it is a strategic choice.

To support their contention that the legal process is rigged, justice action prisoners’ shared many examples. For example, participant Tim DeChristopher’s trial was rescheduled nine times, a clear (though ultimately unsuccessful) attempt to wear out the tremendous movement organizing that his “Bidder 70” action inspired. There is widespread use of the *in limine* motion during Plowshares trials, what Fr. Steve Kelly

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<sup>35</sup> Terrell explains, “The best trial scenes happen when defendants go to trial with a community of support. Lawyers can be a great help as advisors or representing some defendants, effectively making them “co-counsel” with those who go *pro se*. The best movement lawyers do not presume to make decisions for their “clients” but act as collaborators, acting in a sense as tour guides and interpreters to travelers to a strange, exotic and confusing landscape. One advantage to this approach is that judges often will order the parameters of testimony so narrow...as to make the proceedings meaningless. While an attorney risks losing her livelihood by speaking the truth in such circumstances, a *pro se* defendant can speak up risking only a reprimand or at worse a day or two in lock up for contempt (2011).

described as a “gag-order.” This rule limits what people can say in the courtroom: on trial for trespass or sabotage, they are forbidden from uttering such words as God, nuclear weapons, Nuremburg, war, and international law. Such constraints fundamentally challenge what justice action prisoners can accomplish in court, as the subject of the trial shifts from their intent— from “nuclear weapons” to “cutting fence and trespass” (participant Susan Crane). Hence, the frequent use of this rule “has precluded the accused from putting on a defense”—a defense that is won not by “truth telling” but by “saying super words at the time of argument” according to Fr. Steve (personal email). In other words, the way that trials are commonly won is not by exposing what is most just (or even what is legal), but by hiring the right people to say the right things in the right kind of way. Justice action prisoners sometimes refuse to participate in the trial on these terms, though they themselves bear the cost of such refusals (see Tobey, 2010, for an excellent review of the Sacred Earth and Space trial, during which the Plowshares defendants turned their backs on what they viewed to be a kangaroo court).

In their criminal defense, SOAW trespassers most often plead not guilty to charges of trespass, and aim to demonstrate the urgent need for their action (necessity). Plowshares activists rely upon the necessity defense and international law. The necessity defense is the tool for individuals who argue that their actions are needed to stop a greater, demonstrable, and urgent threat. “The rationale behind the necessity defense is that sometimes.... a technical breach of the law is more advantageous... than the consequence of strict adherence to the law” (Phelps et al 2005). Plowshares also rely heavily upon international law, and specifically the Nuremberg principles and Geneva Conventions (treaties which prohibit the proliferation of nuclear weapons, to which the

U.S. is a signatory). In practice, neither defense proves particularly successful, and acquittal is extremely rare for any act of civil disobedience that uses either international law or necessity in one's defense (Cohan, quoted in Tobin 2010, p. 165).

However, justice action prisoners' commitment to these defenses is not about obtaining their best chance for acquittal, but is instead a way to keep the trials focused on the topics of nuclear weapons and war, rather than specific charges as they are levied (trespass, sabotage, and the destruction of property). Further, activists are often deeply guided by their religious faith—which essentially acts as a higher code of law. Susan Crane explained that she participates in Plowshares actions because she considers nuclear weapons “an ongoing felony,” and her faith instructs her to not “sit by while your brother's blood is being shed.”

Religious scholar Kristin Tobey interprets the Plowshares “theory of the trial” as deliberately crafted to maintain participants “marginal” identity status as befits their interpretation of the Gospel. For her, this explains their commitment to the necessity defense and international law, despite the fact that these tools almost never succeed (Tobey 2010, p. 140). Her arguments are based on a theological reading of the identity of the activists (as outsiders), paired with archival research on the written works of the Berrigan brothers (Philip and Daniel) and Liz McAllister. With my more empirical data, sociological perspective, and broader net from which to fish for participants, I respectfully disagree with Tobey.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, I absolutely do not think that Plowshares

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<sup>36</sup> Practically, this is why they put so much energy into things like jury studies (“my dad learned from Angela Davis,” participant Clare Grady explained, and jury studies are an “important part” of engaging in trial). Similarly, finding the right mix of expert witnesses is emphasized. For example, former U.S. attorney general Ramsey Clark is a frequent expert, called to inform jurors of international law and the illegality of these weapons.

activists are deliberately using defenses that are not successful in court for purposes of identity (though what they do in court reflects and solidifies their sense of identity, which includes their commitments to principled nonviolence). I also believe that acquittal is the preference of disarmament activists—but only on their terms. They are simply not willing to waste the opportunity to “put the system” on trial through the use of a less compelling or relevant (to them) defense—i.e., they will never defend themselves in terms of the charges levied, because these charges are not the point. Certainly, justice action prisoners do not want to go to jail (especially in today’s overcrowded and unhealthy prisons) they are simply *willing* to do so. This willingness, paired with their emphasis on right means and ethical commitments, mandates that the trials proceed in very particular ways. Such means include keeping the focus on the issues, wherein “winning” is never as important as keeping the resistance going.

### **Dissertation Map**

This introduction has provided a foundation for understanding the context in which justice action prisoners live and work. It has reviewed the issues that motivate them, the movements of which they are a part, and the principles and practices they enliven through their nonviolent actions. The next chapter outlines the interdisciplinary theory that frames the research, highlighting that towards which it most contributes. As a study that begins in the individual experience of activism, this research is grounded in transnational feminist theory, including conceptions of post-positivist realist identity theory and feminist scholarship on solidarity. It is also informed by nonviolence theory.

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Historian Howard Zinn testified regularly on behalf of activists before his death. Procuring such experts is quite obviously an attempt to bring legitimacy to the trials—in order to win—as it also serves to educate the jury.

These twin frames best illuminate what it is that justice action prisoners “do”—both in terms of the strategy of prison witness and in terms of how they use their identities to animate and propel action on the issues they care most about. This framework brings into relief issues of identity construction, solidarity, privilege, and activism from an analytical perspective that is ever attentive to *how* identity and gender matter. Chapter three provides the methods and procedures undertaken to complete this study, including both a description of what was done and how, as well as a brief discussion of the mandates and protocols I have most taken to heart in this production of qualitative, feminist research.

The thesis includes four empirical chapters. These are organized chronologically, following the arc of the activists’ life stories. Chapter 4 (Like a Chiropractic Adjustment) traces the work of becoming an activist who participates in prison witness—a project that is rarely simple. Fundamentally, deciding to engage in prison witness is a project of identity, and comprises what I term “identity-work” as a process of bringing one’s values and beliefs into alliance with one’s actions. The work of identity involves several key parts, including learning, the nonviolent lifestyle, and experiencing solidarity. As part of their progression as activists, justice action prisoners achieve what I call a “counter-hegemonic knowledge,” which is a critical way of knowing as well as body of knowledge that privileges connections between people, places, and events and refuses to see injustices as inevitable or separate. It is most often gained through direct experience, such as through international travel to places where political violence is happening, through domestic work with the domestic poor and homeless, or through the experience of nonviolent activism itself. It is compounded by intellectual pursuits (reading, attending lectures), as well as through religious beliefs. The critical analysis gained is often

confirmed through the experience of prison witness, and particularly through the experience of incarceration. Justice action prisoners also discuss a “nonviolent lifestyle” as central to their way of knowing and being in alignment with their sense of values, a way of living that is often communal but is always intentional about one’s choices and impacts on the greater community. The chapter concludes with a review and discussion of justice action prisoners’ conceptions and animations of “solidarity,” the border-crossing work conducted “on behalf of” the others whom their activism is, at least partly, meant to benefit. Some of the ways justice action prisoners think about and engage in solidarity are unusual, and provide important information for those wondering about how to work with others and across borders responsibly and well.

Chapter 5 (Privilege Power and the Experience of Action) is about the intentional and strategic ways justice action prisoners understand and utilize their own privilege as a specific method of nonviolent power. Such action can be politically dangerous, and has the potential to reify unequal relations rather than encourage transformative or systemic change. At the same time, not using privilege—or worse, not knowing or acknowledging its existence and power—can be even more dangerous. What emerges as most significant are the *ways in which* privilege is understood and deployed by justice action prisoners. Chapter 5 also discusses the “moment of action” as a gendered experience, which men and women experience and recall very differently. Interestingly, most men, as well as the nuns, did not discuss the “moment of action” at all, or if they did it was to relay a series of logistics or sense of satisfaction for having used a strategy that both resisted the state and aligned with their values. For the lay women, on the other hand, the moment of action was often experienced and remembered as a hugely important, self-defining

moment in which they “finally” stood up to a power that was not only imperial and violent, but also patriarchal and personal (Ann Tiffany). The differences in lay women’s and men’s stories highlight the contemporary shape of patriarchy as an influence that defines even the most privileged and empowered American women’s lives.

Chapter 6 (Prison Communities) traces the different kinds of experiences men and women have during their tenures in prison. In prison, more than at any other time, women and men told vastly different stories of their experiences. For most of the men, prison was remembered as a solitary, spiritual, sad, and even restful time, their exposure to “the system” and its cruelties working to confirm their commitment to resist the imperial state. With the exception of the four priests and two of the lay men (and in contrast to justice action prisoners historically), the men mostly kept to themselves while in prison and did not develop friendships with other inmates. The women, on the other hand, almost unanimously recalled living in a strange and sad “community,” in which they very much lived *with* other women. Their identities as activists were generally un-muted by their changed surroundings, and women regularly got into trouble for pushing against the administration (for example, spending a few days in solitary confinement to resist a teacher’s sexual harassment of students). In part as a result of this greater engagement with others while in prison, the result of incarceration was most often to transform women’s activism to include a prison reform/abolition agenda, or to feel guilty for not doing so. On the other hand, men most often went back to lives as foreign policy/disarmament activists. None of the justice action prisoners returned home “unchanged” by the experience of prison, but the women embodied these changes much more dramatically and permanently than did the men.

The seventh and last empirical chapter (A Visitor in Someone Else's House) is about the political standpoint that is gained as a result of incarceration. This new way of seeing develops as a result of one's experience in prison, as a person of privilege who is not ashamed of their reasons for incarceration. As participant Sr. Dorothy Pagosa explained, for socially privileged justice action prisoners who are incarcerated for reasons of conscience, firm in their convictions and buoyed by communities of support, "even when you are strip-searched, you don't have nothing." As such, one is always a bit of a "visitor" in the prison; one is in the place but not of it. The standpoint of justice action prisoners is a continuation of "identity-work" and builds upon the "counter-hegemonic knowledge" discussed in chapter 4. However, it is crucially awakened through the experience of prison; the bodily experience of living under someone else's control, in a space of oppression that primarily affects vulnerable populations, but always as a person of relative empowerment and privilege. An important result of this confluence is this gaining of a new way of seeing; one that makes visible both structural problems (the prison industrial complex as a manifestation of white supremacy and capitalist control, whose violences are connected to transnational imperial power) and personal revelations (differently understanding ideas of "oppression," new understandings privilege, alternative readings of the Gospel). Though always still protected by their own privilege from having an experience of "the oppressed," through incarceration justice action prisoners gain a closer approximation to such ways of knowing. The eighth and final chapter reviews the major findings and arguments of the dissertation, as they fit within, speak to, and further the literatures on transnational feminism and nonviolence. It also identifies shortcomings in the project, and articulates areas for future research.



## Chapter Two

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

An hour or so into my first interview, I asked Ann Tiffany what had changed as a result of her 1997 action at Fort Benning. Brightly and without hesitation, she replied, “me!” In that moment, I knew that the story of nonviolent resistance would not be adequately explained as an analysis of social movements and political changes, nor was it necessarily about nonviolent action. Instead, Ann’s story would be best illuminated by transnational feminist theory, for its insistence on beginning with the personal while connecting to the global, and for its work on the subjects of identity, privilege, and solidarity. Not only did such theory help me to understand Ann’s experience, her story also speaks valuably to transnational feminism.

Through beginning with the individual experiences of justice action prisoners, this research shows how “who we are”—in terms of both our public identities (what we look like, where we were born) and our personal senses of self affect the ways we act, what we can do, and how we interpret and value our experiences.<sup>37</sup> More, our identities influence the structural and political powers that we actually wield. Through grounding analysis in identity, and particularly the difference that gender makes in shaping justice action prisoners’ experiences, this research still makes evident their fundamental concerns: imperialism, militarism, violence, and social justice organizing. However, by centering attention on people rather than such issues, it most centrally provides a view into the

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<sup>37</sup> “Who we are” or “identity” is here understood as the combination of our public/visible identities, and our personal sense of self. Our “ascriptive” and “subjective” identities, in the words of Paula Moya (2006)—as will be discussed in this chapter.

essential functionings and impacts of identity—showing how “who we are” matters, both politically and personally.

This research makes this evident through highlighting the intentional use of privilege in the aim of solidarity activism towards justice, in a nation state that is imperial and violent. Identity matters in what we believe to be real and important, it matters in what we can do, and it is never simple or neutral. This chapter brings interdisciplinary insights together to frame this reality, and specifically relies on transnational feminist theory, social movement and post-positivist realist theories of identity, and critical race theory (jointly explicating “how” identity matters) as frameworks for understanding. Such ideas are brought firmly into the field of nonviolence theory—which functions as the primary analytic for understanding *what it is* that justice action prisoners *do*.

Itself, the strategy of prison witness makes the focus on the individual in relation to the political logical. Unlike other and more popular nonviolent tactics, prison witness is inherently already personalized: it “works” by creating a moment of cognitive dissonance around what is “just.” As “good people” (people of conscience) going to jail, prison witness is meant to jar the public into more critical thinking about the issues of activist concern (nuclear weapons, militarism, schools of torture). As a method of action, then, prison witness is uniquely well suited to tell this blended story of the personal impacting the political and vice versa, despite my participants’ oft-voiced complaints that their witness is “not about me, it’s about the issues” (Julienne Oldfield). In fact, their actions are about both things: it is their identities that provide the platform and the power for their protest, and it is on their bodies that their political messages are most effectively

conveyed. So no matter how they might wish otherwise, their witness is already and always also about *them*, as well as the contexts in which they live and work.

In addition to shaping experiences and impacts, identity is the driving force behind justice action prisoners' decisions to act. Whether to be "true" to one's sense of self, to be responsive to what one knows, to be a good Christian, to be responsible towards one's place in the world as a "beneficiary of empire," or some combination therein, all participants in this research explained that they felt compelled to resist as a result of "who" they are; structurally and personally. Further, justice action prisoners act "in solidarity" with others, and most often, with others who occupy positions of less power than themselves. For example, SOAW activists protest the SOA because as U.S. citizens they feel responsible as the taxpayers who fund the school, but also because those most affected by the school are unable to safely lodge their own resistance. As participant Randy Serraglio explained to Judge Faircloth during his 2004 trial in Columbus GA, he was there because he *could* be. On the other hand, "if I were a campesino, I would be dead in a ditch somewhere." Hence, it was his identity (as a U.S. citizen) that motivated Randy to resist, and it was his privilege (as a white American man) that made his protest possible.

This research highlights the tension that "using privilege for good" brings into vivid relief. It is a common practice in solidarity activism, but it is also a potentially dangerous re-animation of colonial relations of power in which "white men" continue to rescue "brown women," ad nauseum (Spivak 1994, see also Haggis 1998; McClintock 1995; Narayan 1997; Said 1980; Ware 1992). Hence, this research contributes to the

vibrant theoretical conversations exploring the formulation and mobilization of privileged identities in solidarity activism, with “others,” towards the goal of *systemic* change.

Transnational feminism is the major voice in this discussion, as a discipline developed around questions of *how* to continue speaking, struggling for liberation, and working “on behalf of” others in reflective relationships of equality and without entrenching unequal legacies of colonial power (Alcoff 1997; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Narayan and Harding 2000; Grewal and Kaplan 1997; Mohanty 1991). Transnational feminist theorizing on the project of solidarity is particularly relevant (Alexander 2005; Alvarez 2000; Basu 2000; Cole 2008; Cole and Luna 2010; Dean 1996; Fowlkes 1997; Kaplan 1994; Lyshaug 2006; Mohanty 1991; 2003; Nelson 1999; Reagan 1983; Sampaio 2004; Weir 2008). Also important are critical theories of oppression and power, and specifically those within critical whiteness studies, whose offerings work as both cautions and guides for how to continue working among unequal compatriots (Alcoff 2000; Frye 1992; Garvey & Ignatiev 2006; Boler 2007; Sullivan 2006; Thompson 2008; May 2006; Mills 2007). These discussions are then related to nonviolence theory (Ackerman and Duvall 2005; Bond 1994; Duduoet 2008; Martin 2008; Naess 1993; Nagler 1999, 2001; Schock 2003, 2007; Sharp 1973; Stephen & Chenoweth 2008; 2011).

The social privileges possessed by justice action prisoners are hugely important to understanding what it is that they do. At the same time, nonviolence as a global practice is rightly recognized for being a force of “people power,” in which particular identities are not relevant to the outcomes overall (Ackerman and Duvall 2005; Bond 1994; Zunes 1999). However, nonviolent action is not necessarily so egalitarian as this, and is distinctly *not* so in high-risk, small-numbered techniques such as prison witness. As a

result, nonviolence has been criticized for being “exclusive” and the domain of the privileged (Chamberlain 1998; Gelderloos 2007; Myers 1994). Hence, understandings of nonviolence would benefit from a more robust analysis of how identity matters in resistance actions, and part of the contribution of this research is to address this shortcoming through making “privilege power” a central axis of analysis for nonviolent campaigns.

Identity work, solidarity, and “using” privilege are not simple projects. Identities are never enough ground from which to act on behalf of others, for identities can be exclusionary and restrictive—further entrenching differences rather than enabling alliances (Brah 1996; Mohanty 1991; Reagan 1983). Nor is the answer is to “do nothing,” or try to elide the reality that identity matters (hooks 1990; Okin 2000; Thompson 2008). Instead, one’s identity is a fundamental aspect of organizing (Beuchler 1995; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994; Larana et al 1994; Robnett 2002; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Snow and McAdam 2002; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Hence, it would be useful to know more about how best pursue the deployment of a privileged identity in progressive activism, in the most productive and least dangerous ways possible.

### **Transnational Feminism**

*Feminism offers the only politics which can transform our world into a more human place and deal with global issues like equality, development, and peace, because it asks the right questions: about power, about the links between the personal and the political; and because it cuts through race and class. Feminism implies consciousness of all the sources of oppression: race, class, gender, homophobia, and it resists them all.*

*Feminism is a call for action.*

*-- Peggy Antrobus, quoted in Moghadam 2005, p. 88*

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Feminism is an emancipatory discipline that aims to liberate people from oppression. Transnational feminism takes this goal “across borders”—national, ethnic,

religious, economic, and otherwise (Alexander 2005; Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Grewel and Kaplan 1997; Mama 2007; Mohanty 1991; 2003; Nagar 1997; Narayan 1997; Narayan and Harding 2000; Roy 2004; Stone-Mediatore 2003). It is interested in global movements and local realities, and is characterized by learning from “elsewhere” to better understand “here” and “here” to better understand “elsewhere” (Narayan and Harding, 2000, p. 1). Stone-Mediatore (2003) defines transnational feminism as

A theoretical and political project that confronts, with a view toward resisting, far reaching political, economic, and cultural relations of dominations and the specific dangers that these relations present to women. Such a project is *transnational* because the relations of domination that it confronts cross over national boundaries and produce historically specific cooperative as well as hierarchical relations among women of different nations, races, and classes....(It) is defined more by its goals than by its tie to any specific identity. In effect, transnational feminism includes people of diverse cultures, nations, classes and genders who share a common aim: to resist structural relations of domination in all of the varied and unsuspecting forms that they may appear (p. 128).

Hence, transnational feminism is interested in the oppression of women as a part of a *network* of other oppressions, violences, and systems that predictably and systematically penalize some ways of being over others, while elevating and furthering the interests of the few. In this, it is inherently intersectional (Crenshaw 1991). It is fueled and made coherent by its commitments to resist domination and promote liberation, and not by a specific or exclusionary focus on “women” or “women’s issues.”

Transnational feminist praxis evolved after and alongside critiques of white, Western First and Second Wave feminism in which dreams of a “global sisterhood” relied upon essentialized notions of women, a minimization of difference, and “speaking for” that replicated hegemonic hierarchical patterns of center and margin (Mohanty 1988; 1991, Harding and Narayan 2000). As such, the praxis is centrally concerned with

questions of *how* to continue speaking, struggling for liberation, and working “on behalf of” others without furthering inequalities (Alcoff 1997; Hegde 1998; Narayan 1997). This work contributes towards the ongoing challenge of how to represent and work in coalitions with others, without relying upon essentialized or flattened notions of “women” that ultimately reinforce the relations of domination that feminists are so committed to transforming (Kaplan 1997; Mohanty 1988; 2003). Hence, issues of representation, essentialism, and what constitutes good or valid knowledge are central concerns of the field. They are also the necessary starting points from which to engage in practices of solidarity activism.

I will explain this through an example. Feminists have long argued that political work begins in “how” we know (Alarcon 1990; Crenshaw 1991; Foucault 1980; Hill-Collins 2000; Sandoval 1991; D. Smith 1987)—so in our efforts towards equality and justice, we must begin at the level of epistemology. For example, Uma Narayan is specifically concerned about “cultural essentialism” as a way of knowing (1997; 2000). She explains her concerns through an analysis of feminist scholar Mary Daly’s work about the Indian practice of sati,<sup>38</sup> which Daly interprets as a uniquely Indian expression of violence against women and the product of “Indian culture” (quoted in Narayan, 1997). Narayan argues that the perspective achieved through such ethnocentrically derived notions maintain and strengthen colonial relations of inequality (see also Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Anzaldúa 1999; Barker 2000; Kaplan and Grewel 1994). Such one-dimensional and ahistorical representation renders culture “homogenous and coherent” (Hegde 1998)—i.e., easily knowable, as it also creates a false sense of

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<sup>38</sup> Rare, regionally and caste specific, and nearly defunct, Sati is the practice in which the wife of the deceased burns herself to death on her husband’s funeral pyre.

hierarchical difference between groups (see also Said 1980). Such forms of knowledge cast Western white women in a superior position, poised as rescuers to their brown sisters (Spivak 1994). At the same time, it makes more difficult the possibilities for effective resistance because such representations obscure both differences and similarities between women, men, and groups. Essentialism is problematic for how it creates a singular and knowable subject, and for how it accepts knowledges and other cultures as simply “different” without attempting to understand, implicate, take responsibility for, or historicize such difference (Narayan 2000).

Hence, an important response to such essentialist ways of knowing in feminist work is for feminist researchers to employ alternative methodological interventions in their research processes. Narayan argues for the cultivation of a “critical stance” from which to distinguish historical and political information from cultural stereotypes, to be aware of changes over time, and to guard against “selective labeling”—the naming of particular practices as paradigmatic or typical (1997, pp. 92-96). Chandra Talpade Mohanty recommends that analysis and theorizing be grounded in historical, specific, and located knowledge, with a critical eye to power dynamics and accepted knowledges (1988; 2003). This means learning about others in their specificity, unique and located, while simultaneously understanding that people’s lives are shaped by macro/global structures, institutions, and patterns. Such analysis recognizes that personal and group experiences are “not all the same, but relations of ruling effect women in similar ways” (Mohanty 2003, p. 55). Thus, while there is not “sameness” between people, there are similarities that may be furthered by struggling-against on a transnational, rather than purely local, scale. Kaplan and Grewal (1997) argue that in linking struggles across lines



of difference, transnational feminism must be simultaneously interested and attentive to local struggles, border crossings, cultural flows, material realities, and relations of power (p. 17). The idea is not simply to “connect” oppressions, but to construct a theory of gender oppression that operates via “scattered hegemonies” around the world (pp. 17-18).

The lens that is needed to produce such ways of knowing must be focused on issues both far and near; global and local. For example, identifying and resisting aggressive, neo-imperial capitalism (“far”) is a major project for transnational feminists. As Zillah Eisenstein explains, “feminism without a radical economic critique inevitably creates a system of privilege”—in other words, reifies the very world feminism hopes to eradicate (Eisenstein 2006, p. 60).<sup>39</sup> Hence, including anti-capitalist struggles is central to the work of transnational feminist scholars who define “women’s issues” to include its

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<sup>39</sup> Jacqui Alexander describes the United States as “neo-imperial” because the state reproduces colonial relations, and because its economic policies result in “unequal gendered and class consequences” both domestically and internationally (2005). Alexander defines “imperial relations” as practices that “derive from the organization of a global capitalist class that also functions as the dominant partner in a now uneasy alliance between... the G8 countries and the multinational corporations that govern through a series of population displacements, the uneven dispersal of resources, and gendered and racialized hierarchies” (p. 182). She foregrounds the complexity of the international system as she demonstrates how problems such as the feminization of poverty, corporate hegemony, declining labor standards, and the widening gap between the rich and the poor integrally rely upon and reinforce each other. Pointedly, her theorizations identify “the constitution of new empire, accelerated militarization, and war on the part of the United States (2005, p. 234) as mutually constitutive and violently consequential.

Nancy Naples explains that a focus on transnational capitalism is appropriate feminist work as “poor women, who are disproportionately women of color, bear an unequal burden of the economic and social dislocation resulting from these gendered, racialized, and internationalized processes” (2002, p. 11). Maria Mies agrees that capitalism is carried out on women’s bodies and requires the collusion of unequal relations of class, race, gender, nation, and sexuality to remain dominant (1997). Ann Ferguson describes an instance of this in her description of northern-based economic development policy, in which narratives of “progress” justify paternalist neoliberal programs that rely upon women’s invisible, undervalued, and underpaid labor. (2000). Hennessy and Ingraham highlight that including capitalism in feminist analysis offers a “systematic way to make sense of social life...that simultaneously serves as an agent for changing it” (1997, p. 4).

effects (Alexander 2005; Carty and Mohanty forthcoming; Ferguson 2000; A. Davis 1998; 2011; Hennessey & Ingraham 1997; Mama 2005; Mies 1997; Mohanty 1991; Molyneux 1989; Naples 2002; Sudbury 2005).<sup>40</sup> What these scholars find is that centering capitalism is a way to remain focused on relations of power and the effects they have on people's lives, and is necessary for feminist work if it is to remain radical, relevant, and transformative to these lives. As a praxis bent on liberation, it is inherently feminist to expose the effects of transnational capitalism, neocolonialism, the prison industrial complex, and other processes which rely upon keeping brown women's bodies at "the bottom" as they justify and perpetuate white supremacy and male dominance (Joseph 1997, see also A. Davis 2005; 2011; Ferguson 2000; Sudbury 2008).

Secondly, feminists must focus "near"—close up—and begin analysis in specific, located, and marginalized women's lives. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) explains, "Beginning from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women, I am able to access and make the workings of power visible—to read up the ladder of privilege" (p. 231). In this way, the work remains attentive to the global practices and power relations at play, without losing sight of the individuals affected. Hyndman and Mountz explore what this starting place allows. They write, "the working woman's body holds intimate knowledge of the global powers of transnational corporations. While she may not have crossed international borders to work, she finds herself simultaneously

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<sup>40</sup> Maxine Molyneux's conception of "strategic" and "practical gender interests" offers helpful clarity here. Molyneux explains that strategic gender interests are those that we typically think of as feminist (legal protections and rights for women), while practical gender interests develop as a result of women's social positioning (economic welfare, childcare, and healthcare). Work that furthers traditional "feminist aims" and work that practically benefits women's daily lives (even if not specifically furthering feminist goals) may be considered beneficial to "women's interests" (Molyneux 1989). This distinction broadens what may be considered relevant as feminist analysis.

displaced by poverty and held in place by global capitalism” (2006, p. 457, see also Sanchez 2004; Wright 1998).<sup>41</sup> Arguing for beginning from the level of the individual does not mean that we can know the world from this single scale, rather that transnational trends and local realities may be made visible through it, as women’s daily lives are shaped and constrained by global forces.

Helpful in keeping simultaneously focused on the “near” and the “far” is a conception of the “intersectional” nature of identity, which is a key part of feminist analysis more generally (Crenshaw 1991, see also Alexander-Floyd 2012; Brah & Phoenix 2004; Cho et al 2013; K. Davis 2008; McCall 2005; Sandoval 1998; Yuval-Davis 2006). Building on a legacy of radical work by feminists of color, legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw used the metaphor of the traffic intersection to describe how multiple axes of identity (race, class, gender) meet in one body, a body shaped by a collection of forces that cannot be reduced to one another (1991, see also Alarcon 1994; Anzaldúa 2001; King 1988). As Alcoff and Potter explain, “feminism... must be more inclusive than a focus on gender alone permits. If feminism is to liberate women, it must address virtually all forms of domination because women fill the ranks of every category of oppressed people” (1993, p. 4).

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<sup>41</sup> Lisa Sanchez’s work on women prostitutes in Portland Oregon demonstrates this. Through legislation permanently forbidding certain women’s presence in particular areas of the city, state control may be read on both individual bodies and linked to other bodies (2004). From the perspective of the women in Portland, Sanchez illuminates exclusions, similarities, and differences among sex workers globally, analysis which strengthens and furthers her understandings of the women in Portland. Melissa Wright’s work on women workers in Mexico’s maquilas does the same thing. In the stories of Cynthia and Rosalia, Wright not only makes visible the gendered politics that inform the women’s personal and professional lives, she also shows how post-NAFTA neoliberal policies and borderland cultures are inscribed on their bodies through training, dress, workplace assumptions, citizenship status etc. (Wright 1998).

From this frame, “who we are” (in terms of our visible identities and how we experience the world) emerges from the complex interactions of our various identity markers within existing structures of power. As a perspective that can see multiple marginalizations, intersectionality is not an additive approach (race + class + gender) but is multiplicative (Yuval-Davis 2006). The goal of an intersectional approach is not to reify or transcend categories, but to understand the *relationships* between them, and to see the relations as explanatory of social and personal conditions (McCall 2008). Catherine MacKinnon explains that an intersectional methodology is not meant to highlight categories themselves, but rather to reveal the dynamics that produce them in the first place (2010). As such, intersectionality is fundamentally a complex and multi-scalar study of power, and its effects on people’s lives (Crenshaw 1991).

A commitment to intersectionality mandates that understandings be neither reduced to one aspect of identity nor made so specific that predictable lines of power are obscured (i.e. that women are systematically oppressed in relation to men). In practice, intersectionality translates into a privileging of experience: to see each woman as inhabiting a unique location shaped by intersecting matrixes of power, including gender, race, religion, geographic location, class, caste, and ethnicity. Intersectional research requires attending to the multiple axes of identity and oppression people face simultaneously, to locate this in context, structure, and history (the work must be concrete and situated), and to account for the relations among and between identity categories and power (Choo and Ferree 2010; Phoenix and Pattynama 2006).

Holding the micro-level individual experience and macro level political/economic processes in simultaneous focus is the intention of intersectional analysis. The

transnational feminist work cited here is implicitly committed to intersectionality (or any methodological orientation that enables the production of knowledge that is complex and receptive to information from multiple scales), and then to taking this multiply-constituted lens across borders—to sites of contestation, struggle, and change.

Grounding transnational work in global systems and individual lives makes possible cross-cultural activism and organizing that does not assume a common experience of oppression (patriarchy) or rely upon the image of an “average” (essentialized, flattened) woman to make sense. Instead, such movements see that macro-processes function in similar ways the world over, shaping and influencing people’s lives in familiar and predictable ways. From this frame, resistance can be lodged towards the “far” and the “near” of people’s lives simultaneously, making it more accurate, effective, and egalitarian.

This form of transnational theorizing and organizing neither falls into the pitfalls of simplistic essentialism *nor* advocates for a neutral relativism that is unable to struggle against oppression. Grounded in the local, transnational feminist struggles speak authentically and with clarity to and against the global/violent. Linking this to relations of power brings efficacy and force to the work. It is also distinctly *feminist* work. As feminist intellectuals, Jacqui Alexander explains, part of our job is to “connect what has been disconnected”—to draw lines across historical, cultural, and geographical spaces, to open up and make visible global processes and dynamics that are otherwise mystified or invisible (2009). Angela Davis agrees, and tells us to “think together” disparate ideas and problems as a way to imagine new solutions and possibilities to complicated and seemingly intractable problems (2010). In “thinking together” the local and the global,

the feminist intellectual remains rooted as she engages with macro-structures. From this perspective, the trends, connections, and patterns through which women may appropriately, honestly, and effectively organize and resist become differently visible—and hence, differently and more effectively resisted.

## **Identity**

### **Social Movement Theories of Identity**

Activist identity is a focus of social movement scholarship; “Indeed, one could easily get the impression that identity is the key concept in social movement research today” (Snow and McAdam 2000, p. 41). As a research project oriented around the identities of peace activists in the United States today, it is important to include a brief review of this relevant explanatory theory.

Most often in this literature, identity is analyzed as “collective” and as a resource for mobilization (Hunt and Benford 2004). Collective identity is the sense of “we-ness” that enables a person to recognize oneself as belonging to a group, and social movement analysis focuses on the qualities that bring and keep people in and to movements (Beuchler 1995; Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta 2001; Jasper 2004; Larana, Johnston, & Gusfield 2002; Pichardo 1997; Robnett 2002; Taylor and Whittier 1992). Collective identity is socially constructed, intentional, multiple, active, negotiated, expandable, real, changeable, and valuable to social movements (Meyer and Whittier 1994, Larana et al 1994). It is a major resource for mobilization, and essential for long-term participant commitment (Nepstad 2004).

In his seminal study, *Freedom Summer*, Doug McAdam found that “intense ideological identification with the values of the movement” was essential for

participation, though it was not sufficient to become involved (1986, p. 64). Studying Plowshares, Sharon Erickson Nepstad (2004) found that activist identities were strengthened by the high-risk and sacrificial nature of their activism: activists dedicate so much (years of their lives, relationships, careers, material comforts, health) to the movement that staying connected with it becomes very important to their sense of self. In any case, the significance of a shared identity connects activists to movements, and long encourages them to stay allied as advocates.

Within social movement analysis, collective identity is understood as socially constructed (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994; Klandermans 1994; Larana et al 1994; Pichardo 1997; Snow & McAdam 2000; Robnett 2002; Whittier 2002). Melucci (1992) asserts that “collective identity is a product of conscious action and an outcome of self-reflection more than a set of given or structural characteristics” (p. 10)—it is the product of effort rather than birthright. Collective identity is based on one’s location and experiences, Nancy Whittier argues, and entails a (re)definition of a group’s characteristics that resonate with one’s sense of self but are always also shaped by external forces (2002). The construction of a collective identity, then, is never stable, and can be externally shaped and changed.

Snow and McAdam (2002) examine how identities are constructed in social movements, rejecting claims that they are simply structural or personal. Instead, the building of a collective identity is intentional, and happens through “work.” Processes of identity work (different than the identity-work, with hyphen, described in this thesis)

defined as how identities may be formed and refashioned, are key to social movements.<sup>42</sup> Snow and McAdam (2002) explain that people embrace a collective identity through several processes: convergence (already identify), seeking (people looking for like-minded groups), appropriation (adopt movement identity as one's own), amplification (enlargement of existing identity), and extension (extension of existing identity) (pp. 47-54). Such processes are enabled by movement participation and framing. Participation enables the adoption of a collective identity through experiences in protests, meetings, etc. William Gamson describes this as an "enlargement of personal identity," which is something movements may work towards (quoted in Snow and McAdam, 2002, 43). The development of collective identity is also linked to framing, which gives people the ideological power to support their life-style and beliefs, as it also provides rationale for participation (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994).

Another piece of the development of collective identity that is important to social movement scholars is the development of an "oppositional" or "critical" consciousness, which functions as a fundamental basis for collective action (Burdick 2013; Gramsci 1971; Mansbridge 2001; Morris & Braine 2001; Taylor & Whittier 1992). The idea of oppositional consciousness is that it is the consciousness developed by oppressed groups, who are empowered to "act against a system of human domination" (Morris & Braine 1989, p. 25). It involves seeing actions of the dominant as structural and changeable, through the creation of "free spaces" where resistance can be contemplated (ibid p. 27). Sharon Groch (2001) argues that oppositional consciousness is at play when members of

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<sup>42</sup> Snow and McAdam define identity work as "the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept" (46).



an oppressed group join and “regard their life situations as unjust, find a common interest with other members of the group.... Consider the injustice due to structural inequalities, and believe the injustice can be ended or diminished through collective actions” (p. 65). For oppressed groups, the development of an oppositional consciousness is key for the development of an identity needed for social movements to thrive.

For those belonging to movements that do not directly connect to their public identities to movement goals (such as participants in the environmental and anti-nuclear movements), identity construction must occur from the “ground up”—it is not inherent in a person’s make-up or assigned from an external force (Morris and Braine 1989). For example, Morris and Braine explain, “An identity as an ‘environmentalist’ is fully chosen rather than externally imposed by a dominant group.... And creating this identity often requires considerable education and persuasion” (p. 21). For those involved in the anti-nuclear or environmental movements, earning and maintaining such an identity involves learning to understand such things as “what a nuclear holocaust would look like or what could happen to Earth and its inhabitants in the event of total environmental breakdown” (Morris & Braine, p. 37). For more privileged groups, then (such as those examined in this research) the construction of a collective identity seems to have more to do with learning and identity-alliance/convergence than it does with the development of a consciousness of empowerment. Specifically, the identity that is activated through the process of prison witness is formed in the interplay between one’s subjective identity, public/visible identity, and what one “knows.” It is a construction, but it is also personal. Such a multi-part analysis of identity is examined in chapter 4. To carry such analysis

through, the insights of social movement theorists provide helpful foundation, but the key analytic is found in post-positivist realist theories of identity.

### **Post Positivist Realist Theory of Identity**

Identity is a central theme within transnational feminism. Post-positivist realist (“realist”) theories of identity fit well with the methodological and theoretical commitments of transnational feminism as reviewed, as they also provide the most traction for this research—which wonders about how “who we are” matters in what we (can) do. Realist identity theorist Satya Mohanty (1993) describes identities as “ways of making sense of our experiences” that are also a response to our social locations, personal histories, and personalities (p. 55). This conception of identity differs from that deployed within social movement analysis (a resource that is “constructed” and flexible). Linda Alcoff (2006) describes Satya Mohanty’s ideas, explaining that

Identity constructions provide narratives that explain the links between group historical memory and individual contemporary experience... they create unifying frames for rendering experience intelligible, and... they... help to map the social world. To the extent that identities involve *meaning*-making, there will always be alternative interpretations of the meanings associated with identity, Mohanty... insists that identities refer to real experiences....Of course, identities can be imposed on people from the outside. But that is more of a brand than the true identity.... Identities must resonate with and unify lived experience, and they must provide a meaning that has some purchase, however partial, on the subject’s own daily reality (p. 42).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Hence, identities function as “explanatory theories” that must accurately describe people’s experiences. In this, “experience” is the “raw material” for theorizations (Alcoff 2010, p. 162). One task towards which this thesis specifically contributes is the fleshing out of “experience.” This is important, as in validating the epistemic role of experience, realists need “a more sophisticated account of what experience consists in and how it works in the production of knowledge” (Alcoff 2010, p. 152).

Like feminist standpoint theory, realists argue that what we experience is influenced by where we stand. Alcoff explains that our identities are essentially *sites* from which “one must engage in the process of meaning-making”—and from which certain information may be gained (2006, p. 46). Where we stand provides information about the world, but it is always a limited vista. Satya Mohanty explains that “social locations facilitate or inhibit knowledge by predisposing us to register and interpret information in certain ways. Our relation to social power produces forms of blindness just as it enables degrees of lucidity” (1997, p. 234). Hence, what we see (know, believe to be real, experience) is a joint product of our social location and our subjectivity, where we stand combined with our personal senses of self.

As such, for realists, identities are formed in the interplays between structure and agency; structurally determined and influenced by knowledge and experience, they are both constructed and real (Alcoff 2006; 2010; Brah 2001; Hames-Garcia 2006; S. Mohanty 1993, C. Mohanty 2010; Moya 2006; 2001; Stone-Mediatore 2003).<sup>44</sup> Paula Moya describes that within a “realist” conception of identity, the self is constructed as a relationship between *ascribed* identities, broad social categories that are imposed upon us (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity) and *subjective* identities, or subjectivity. Subjectivity refers to a person’s internal self-identification, their personal sense of self (Moya 2006, p. 46). In line with postmodern thought, realists recognize that we are born into locations that determine much of how we will experience life, and that will critically affect who we are. We are particularly shaped by our “visible identities” (race and gender), which are

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<sup>44</sup> Alcoff explains; “If we combine the concept of identity politics with the conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as non-essentialized and emergent from historical experience and yet objectively located in descriptably social structures and relations” (147).

powerful and accurate predictors of how we will experience our lives (Alcoff 2006). One of the advantages of a realist theory of identity is that it “allows for an acknowledgement of how the social facts of race, class, gender, and sexuality function in individual lives without *reducing* individuals to those determinants” (Moya 2006, p. 136). Hence, we are shaped by the society in which we live, its categories and spheres of belonging, but we always also retain some power over who we are and can change and transform some aspects of our being.

Justice action prisoners occupy an interesting niche in the study of identity, in the ways in which they negotiate the relationship between ascribed and subjective identities. Their ascribed identities are solidly those of privilege. However, they engage in what I theorize as “identity-work” (chapter 4) on the level of subjectivity—they “do things” to align their values with their actions, to best be who they feel they most “are.” In their politicization process, there is commonly a realization that as democratic citizens of the United States, their privileges are part of the package that upholds U.S. empire. For justice action prisoners, this realization leads to a personal determination to say “no, not in my name,” and to act against it. Thus, as part of becoming an activist, there is often an acknowledgement and deployment of an intentional identity—as activist, U.S. citizen, privileged, Christian, mother, martyr. This rejection and re-articulation of identity is not rational, from the level of ascribed identities—there is no necessary reason for those with privilege to reject it on behalf of those who suffer by it.

Hence, the (privileged) subject who assumes personal risk on behalf of others motions towards a distinctive notion of self—a self who is empowered as a change agent, and at the same time, feels (and acts as if) one is irrevocably connected, accountable, and

responsible *to* others. Justice action prisoners' choice to engage in civil disobedience as *witness* is testament to their belief in the capacity of the individual agent to make change, to be an actor of power. (If this were not so, prison witness would be a futile strategy). At the same time, they activate an interdependent notion of self— their actions are intended to benefit others (See Markus and Snibbe, 2005).<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it is often *as* members of community and *for* members of a broader community that justice action prisoners engage in their actions, actions that are made relevant and powerful because of the credence westerners give (and justice action prisoners feel) to independent people, acting (at personal risk) on behalf of “personal” beliefs.

Centering identity is the chief organizing principle of this thesis, and some of the work's most important contributions lie in its illumination of the ways in which “who we are” come to be, and matter—personally and politically. Identity politics assume that similar identities generate similar types of experiences, but it fails to account for differentiated individual experiences within these broad groups. Social movement scholars look at identity as constructed, but not closely at how one's particular identity may shape one's experience from movement recruitment through consequences of participation. Realist theories attempt to bridge the gap between subjective and ascriptive

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<sup>45</sup> The work of psychologists Hazel Markus and Alana Conner Snibbe (2005) illuminates this duality. They describe culturally differentiated notions of the self; “independent”—the western, autonomous, enlightenment self, and “interdependent”—a notion of self that exists in community, and is more common in non-western contexts (p. 703). In an American context, the independent self is marked by *choice*—the hallmark of personal agency. Agency, Markus and Snibbe write, “has usually been equated with ‘controlling the world’” (p. 704). The rational agent who is able to make decisions and determine her/his own path (such as a justice action prisoner) is the pinnacle of an *independent* self. An *interdependent* notion of agency differs, for example it might be equated with “controlling the self” (p. 704)<sup>45</sup>—and such a (non-western) concept of agency is also visible in justice action prisoners' actions.

identities, and to provide an adequate framework from which to incorporate both group belongings and personal experiences. It is towards this framework that this research most specifically builds.

### **Solidarity**

In the name of “solidarity,” justice action prisoners work on behalf of, in the name of, and for others. Solidarity activism has an important legacy in the United States (see Cunningham 1999; McAdam 1986; Nepstad 2004; Power and Chirlip 2005). SOA Watch activists, specifically, go to jail to bring attention to the suffering of others, and consider themselves to be a part of a solidarity movement. However appropriate and noble, such action is also always power laden and involves multiple “border crossings” in the sense of traversing lines of power and access, as well as geography. Hence, acts of solidarity are important opportunities for personal learning and political change, but they are also opportunities for perpetuating oppression and reinforcing the status quo, for example through reifying unequal relations between “activists” and “victims.” How best to engage in solidarity is hence a fundamental strain of transnational feminist theorizing.

To pursue liberation, feminism needs to build coalitions, cross borders, and work in solidarity with other women. The question feminists pose is, when (we) cannot depend upon our racial, gender, ethnic, religious identities to generate solidarity (which anti-racist, anti-colonial, transnational feminists assure us that we cannot), how can we work for liberatory goals? Feminists think carefully about how to conduct emancipatory work on behalf of others, in a way that does not replicate essentialist histories (Carastathis 2013; Cole & Luna 2010; Mohanty 1988; Sangtin & Nagar 2006). Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains that there is great potential in alliances, and “‘common differences’

can form the basis of deep solidarity” (Mohanty 2003, p. 225). However, in a context of neoliberalism, solidarity can be dangerous; with activists reifying and reinvigorating colonial relations and rescue narratives (Koopman 2008; Spivak 1994), re-centering Western norms and practices (Narayan 1997; Roy 2004), and obscuring the global forces that shape women’s lives (Mohanty 2003; Tuhawai-Smith 2008).

To engage in solidarity action, feminist scholars assure us that attention to our own relationships with power (and implicitly, colonial histories, transnational capitalism, neoliberalism) is key. Sara Ahmed explains, “I think one of the main challenges is to dispel the myth of the West as liberator... I think our task in creating solidarity is to open our ears rather than our mouths” (quoted in Carty & Mohanty, forthcoming). Solidarity is threatened, Teresa Cordova writes, “if we fail to understand the logic and dynamics of domination and how they get played out,” for without recognition of the neoliberal/colonial context in which we act, “we are more likely to perpetrate it, even among ourselves (quoted in Carty & Mohanty). Avtar Brah explains that a “politics of solidarity would need to emerge from (an) appreciation of ‘difference’ and analysis of global modes of exploitation and patriarchal inequalities... It is not easy to win solidarity without taking account of our differential locations and positionalities vis a vis one another” (quoted in Carty & Mohanty). Hence, the fundamental political challenge of solidarity is how to work together, across difference, towards common goals, without reifying the oppressive patterns that such border-crossing work can often produce. In other words, it requires attending to both the “near” and “far” (see Anzaldúa 1990; Cole

2008; Fowlkes 1997; Lyshaug 2006; Mohanty 2003; Reagan 1983).<sup>46</sup>

Thinking about these mandates against the foil of transnational feminism, as articulated in this chapter, shows much resonance between feminist methodological commitments and less-harmful ways of pursuing solidarity. It begins in locating “the self.” For individuals, the work of solidarity requires the construction of a “flexible,” “located” and “political” identity (Carty & Mohanty forthcoming; Cole and Luna 2010; Lugones 1987; Sampaoi 2007; Weir 2008). Identity work is a thus crucial part of solidarity work, but the identities constructed must be “political”—i.e. changeable and strategic, and be crafted to be “equally accountable” to those near and far (Cole & Luna 2010). Further, solidarity always requires “more” than identity as a grounding for connection. “Sisterhood,” Chandra Talpade Mohanty explains, “cannot be assumed on the basis of gender; it must be forged in concrete historical and political practice” (1988, p. 67). In other words, it must be accomplished through what we *do*, as informed by what we *know*—about ourselves and the world.

In an unusual study of feminist activists who work on solidarity projects, Elizabeth Cole and Zakiya Luna asked about how to mitigate the risks involved in working in coalitions with others, across lines of power. They found that the twelve

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<sup>46</sup> Being attentive to historical legacies is essential, Himani Bannerjee writes, and “to create solidarity among feminists requires an understanding of and agreement among feminists of both North and South regarding capitalism and neoliberalism”—there has to be an awareness and grounding in local contexts and systemic realities (quoted in Carty & Mohanty). Leila Farah explains that “unlearning privilege” is a key part of solidarity work; she envisions a movement in which participants “continue the work of undoing privilege, unlearning the confines of formal knowledges, shattering completely the differentials and valuation of in/formal knowledge, and a willingness to share resources more completely.... Exchanging and or/utilizing privilege for solidarity on the ground might stand a better chance of taking root and having more long term alliance building leading to a more realistic socially just movement” (quoted in Carty & Mohanty).



participants interviewed advocated for feelings of “connection” with the oppressed combined with feelings of “accountability” as privileged individuals (2010). Part of what is needed, participants explained, is a broader recognition of “who” is part of “our” community. Andrea Smith, one of Cole and Luna’s respondents, recommended feeling in “solidarity” with people in the third world “paired with a feeling of being culpable” as appropriate for U.S. activists (2010, p. 84). Along with feelings of connection, respondents insisted, must come knowledge of responsibility and a willingness to be accountable towards one’s role in a context of empire. To achieve such understandings, work along the level of identity (for example, mobilizing a minority identity, or acting “as a Christian”) is simply not sufficient (Stone Mediatore 1998).

Identities are also dangerous ground on which to form coalitions. Many feminists reject identity as a basis for activism as doing so risks essentialism, reifying static categories, constraining expression, and enabling exclusions (Butler 1990; Crenshaw 1991; Cole & Luna 2010, Mohanty 2003; Reagon 1983). Margo-Okazawa-Rey challenges “identity politics” as the key frame of progressive movements, wondering if instead “generative principles and values” could further feminist work (quoted in Carty & Mohanty). The problems exemplified in Narayan’s discussion of essentialism point to the troubling nature within claims about how “women,” as united by biology or “sisterhood,” come up in discussions about solidarity-- through which women are hypothetically united via what Chandra Mohanty calls the “feminist osmosis” theory (1987, see also Mohanty 1988; Reagon 1983). Relying upon one’s simplistic identity as “a woman” as grounds for coalition is not only inaccurate, Mohanty and others argue, but is harmful for the ways in which it erases difference, ignores relations of power, and discounts experience as an

essential part of the process of identification (reviewed in Weir 2008).

The problems with relying upon identity as a basis for solidarity (identity politics) challenge thinking and practice around utilizing identity as a foundation for action. For example, it conflicts with the scholarship reviewed on “collective identity” which recognizes identity an important (and relatively un-problematic) resource for movement mobilization that may be effectively generated, mobilized, and transformed via participation (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994; Hunt & Benford 2004; Larana et al 1994; Meyer & Whittier 1994; Snow & McAdam 2002). For these scholars, identity categories (eg. “black”) have the potential to define, empower, constrain, and control groups, and much powerful organization happens along the lines of identity politics (Hunt, Benford & Snow 1994). Realists similarly argue that shared experiences can form the basis of strong ties. For example, “communities of meaning” may strengthen our allegiances within particular groups and they can also be important resources for personal development and empowerment (Moya 2008; Hames-Garcia & S. Mohanty 2000). Realists also recognize identities as “resources,” which make them tempting (and fertile) ground on which to organize and pursue change. Further, many feminists recognize that political identities can be mobilized to resist particular forms of group repression or to propel certain aims. Consciousness can be raised and activism generated via the animation of political identities (Hill-Collins 2000; D. Smith 1987; Sandoval 2001).

Despite its potential usefulness, “identity politics” have been outed as *sufficient* for solidarity (as essentialist constructions) within feminist thinking, and yet it remains true that women *do* share a lot “in common” (Okin 2000). Hence, feminists struggle with how to maintain identity as a sticking point for coalition, as demonstrated by the

abundance of work on the subject, including Ann Ferguson's conception of "bridge identities," (2000), Alison Jaggar's global feminist discourse community (2000), Linda Alcoff's "positional identity politics" (1988), Gayatri Spivak's "strategic essentialism" (1994), Maria Lugones's "world-traveling" (1987) as well as work by Denise Riley (1987), bell hooks (1990) and Teresa De Lauretis's (1987).

Making headway into this complex terrain, Anna Carastathis argues that identities remain a useful category for organizing "as long as identity categories are conceptualized as coalitions"—a formulation that resists the division of identity-based groups as spaces of sameness vs. coalitions as spaces of alliance built across difference (2013, p. 941). Carastathis bases her arguments on Crenshaw's claim that "an intersectional analysis of identity-based groups reveals them to be 'in fact, coalitions' (1991, p. 1299, quoted in Carastathis), a conception that enables the formation of "effective political alliances that cross existing identity categories" to pursue "a liberatory politics of interconnection" (p. 942). Beginning from a place that sees identities as "already" coalitions shifts the project of working *across* difference to recognizing that all groups are already different. Doing so increases the potential ground to be utilized in efforts of solidarity.

The product of this important theoretical work sifting through the uses of identity in movements for solidarity generally agrees that the path to feminist coalition is not paved by belonging in particular identity categories but by the recognition of shared "interests" and "issues"—such as violence against women, reproduction, access to healthcare, or poverty. Complicating "what unites" from a framework of biology/identity to a framework of interests and issues involves a transformation of identity that makes it linkable with solidarity: we can work together and we can identify-with when we work

together not “as women” (or whatever group) but as interested individuals, affected by the same meta-problems and structures as others (Brah 1996; Hames-Garcia 2008; Mohanty 2003). The trouble of acquiring childcare may look very different for a poor woman of color working in a Paris suburb than for a middle class white woman in the urban U.S., but both have an experience that is shaped by such divergent pulls as those of the marketplace, health and safety, and love. What unites us is working together against the forces that shape us, rather than through our anatomical make-up or some-such gross similarity. From this place, we may cautiously begin to work together.

Solidarity, when understood from the perspective of transnational feminists, looks like a lot of work.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, as Andrea Smith explained to Cole and Luna, “you can’t assume an alliance” on the basis of identity, but “you have to go through the trouble of actually creating them” (2010, p. 88). The creation of a flexible, political, located identity is an essential “first step” towards the enactment of solidarity—but it is not sufficient. Instead, efforts towards solidarity should also be pursued with strong commitments: it requires self-reflexive identity work paired with “other” work. It requires a keen, transnational feminist analysis and deep learning that begins from people’s experiences and is contextualized within larger frameworks—the structures that influence people’s lives.

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<sup>47</sup> And as if attending to all of this is not enough, feminists remind us that border-crossing feminist work must also concretely alter larger global structures and institutions. The urgency of feminism is addressed through activism-- activism that is formed, informed, and reformed by the critical feminist knowledges. A significant way that transnational feminists remain mobile to act against violence is through “communities of resistance,” which operate as political definitions encompassing resistance-to, rather than essentialist notions of belonging (Mohanty 2003, p. 46). Valentine Moghadam analyzes “transnational feminist networks” (TNFs) which are networks “organized above the national level that unite women from three or more countries around a common agenda” such as women’s rights or the environment (2005, p. 4).

## People Power

*Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.*  
--Frederick Douglass

As individuals engaging in nonviolent solidarity action, nonviolence theory is helpful in understanding precisely what it is that justice action prisoners “do.” Most basically, nonviolence is an embodied form of political and social power. What this power is and how it works is a key aspect of nonviolent theorizing (Ackerman & Duvall 2005; Atack 2006; Bond 1994; Boulding 1989; Sharp 1980; Summy 1974; Dudouet 2008; Martin 2008). In this literature, there are two important understandings of nonviolent power: nonviolence as a lack of consent (a form of political power) and nonviolence as personally empowering (diffusing power, imbuing “people” with “power,” providing experiences of personal empowerment). Critically reviewing theorizations of both show conceptions of the “power of nonviolence” to be largely inattentive to questions of identity and privilege, and a contribution of this research is to clarify “privilege power” as an axis of power worth centering.

French philosopher Etienne La Boetie (1530-1565) was the first to articulate nonviolent power as a withdrawal of consent. He argued that the authority of any leader rests on the consent of those governed (reviewed by Dudouet 2008). The basis of nonviolent action, Gene Sharp agrees, “has always been the same: the belief that the exercise of power depends on the consent of the ruled who, by withdrawing that consent, can control and even destroy the power of their opponent” (quoted in Atack 2006, p. 88). If people, in sufficient numbers, withhold their cooperation to a system for long enough,

the system will “no longer have power. This is the basic political assumption of nonviolent action” (Sharp 1973, p. 64). Resistance to government may be effective because even the most robust political systems are fragile in that they are not generators of power, but rather rely upon the exchange-power of those governed. Economist Kenneth Boulding explained, “The recognition that a system depends for its survival on it being accepted by those affected as ‘legitimate’ is very important” (1989). Power is given, not controlled, through relationships, and it may be taken away. The political power that Sharp et al describe is relational, diffuse, and heterogenous, and may be destabilized and dismantled by mass non-cooperation.<sup>48</sup>

Secondly, nonviolence theory explicitly understands personal empowerment to be a result of nonviolent activism (Bond 1994; Dudouet 2008; Nagler 2001). Stone conceptualized this as a “power to” rather than a “power over” (1989, quoted in Naess). Franz Fanon is famous for highlighting the “cleansing” power of violence under circumstances of colonial rule (1963), and nonviolent activists have described the accomplishment of similar feelings through nonviolence (Deming 1996; Schock 2007; Naess 1974; Nagler 2001). Indeed, not only empowerment, but a sense of personal freedom may result from engagement with nonviolent activism—and this itself is an important tool with which to combat oppression. Martin Luther King Jr. explained, “psychological freedom, a firm sense of self-esteem, is the most powerful weapon against the long night of physical slavery” (Naess, p. 114). Hence, nonviolent action is an

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<sup>48</sup> Sharp identifies several sources of power on which a ruler/authority relies, and which nonviolent actors may weaken: authority (acceptance of a ruler’s right to rule), human resources (number of people who align with ruler), skills and knowledge (of those who align), material resources (ruler’s degree of control, including over methods of communication and transportation), intangible factors (psychological, cultural, ideological) and sanctions (ruler’s use of “stick” to control) (1973).

individualized, embodied form of resistance that works precisely by its refusal to be disciplined, as it is also a generative form of creative power that has the capacity to resist injustice systematically, not just specifically.

In her essay on liberation, Angela Davis reviews “active resistance” (she was not concerned with nonviolence, specifically) as the “exit gate” towards freedom for the American slave (1998). She quotes Frederick Douglass recalling of his childhood, “That slave who had the courage to stand up for himself against the overseer, although he might have many hard stripes at first, became while legally a slave virtually a free man. ‘You can shoot me’, said a slave to Rigby Hopkins, ‘but you can’t whip me,’ and the result was that he was neither whipped nor shot” (1998, p. 55). Davis claims that in this refusal there was a rejection not just to the flogging but to the

entire institution of slavery, its standards, its morality. It was a microcosmic effort toward liberation. The slave could thus become conscious of the fact that freedom is not a static quality, a given, but rather is the goal of an active process, something to be fought for, something to be gained in and through the process of struggle (p. 55).

Hence, freedom, resistance, struggle-- is an ongoing practice that requires a physical/visible “no” and a mental/intellectual rejection of the status quo, as well as the imagination and courage (cognitive liberation) to think that things could be otherwise. This alternative thinking, in itself, is empowering—and paves the way for broader structural change.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Davis reminds us that resistance includes knowledge: there is often an alternative way of knowing, a cognitive break with the normalizing powers of the state, that enables resistant action. Research participants concurred, and consistently explained their motivations for action along the lines of, “once I knew, I had to act.” See chapter 4.

Reviewing historical struggles, it is evident that participation in nonviolent action is an effective method for people with less political power than their opponents (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994; Bartkowski 2013; E. Boulding 2000; Lynd and Lynd 1966; Martin 2008; Schock 2005; Stephen & Chenoweth 2011; Zunes et al 1999). Indeed, the most common pictures of nonviolent resistance in the popular imagination are of poor, relatively powerless people of color struggling against more powerful white folk. It is easy for most of us to recall images of lanky young African American girls being fire-hosed by Bull Connor's cronies or of skinny Indian men being bloodied by Englishmen on horseback. These images come from what are called "dilemma actions," actions that force authorities to choose between two bad options: either enforcing an unpopular law, or appearing weak through not enforcing it (Sorensen and Martin, 2013). Gene Sharp called this "political jiu-jitsu"—noting that brutalities against a clearly nonviolent opponent "disturb(s) many people... thus, wider public opinion may turn against the opponent" (1973, p. 658).

The images that such actions produce—of voluntary suffering, risked in pursuit of change—shake our foundations because they illuminate the violence of the systems on which they rely (Dudoet 2008; Nagler 2001; Schock 2007). In theory, what is "right" is so clear in these situations that what is "legal" may become obsolete. This is how principled nonviolence works: through making suffering visible by personalizing it, it makes possible a shift in what is "legal" can better match what is right (Nagler 1999; Schock 2005; Zinn 2002). The specific actors, in these cases of mass unrest, do not matter. Theoretically, we (the public) do not need to know the names of the young girls being fire-hosed, or even what they look like. We just need to know that they, and their



suffering, exist. In this sense, nonviolence truly is a form of power for the powerless—or more accurately, for the anonymous. It does not matter who you are, what you have access to, or what you look like. In situations of grave injustice and with mass participation, anybody's body works.

This has been described as the enactment “people power” (Ackerman & Duvall 2005; Bond 1994; Zunes et al 1999). In people power movements, the authority of grandmothers, children, professionals, and students combine to meet/override that of oppressive leaders and policies. As such, nonviolent power is by its very nature a way to de-centralize power; away from a model of militarized masculinity and towards a model with room for everyone (Schock 2003; 2005).

Understanding nonviolence as “people power” and power for the powerless is exhilarating as well as true, but it is not a complete understanding. Nonviolence is effective, it does transform power relationships, it can be personally empowering, and it does leave the new status quo with a better chance at democracy than violence often can (Stephen & Chenoweth 2008; 2011). However, understanding nonviolence only in these ways—as something that anybody with sufficient commitment can do equally well—is an imperfect understanding in contemporary America, and particularly as it regards high-risk strategies such as prison witness. To the extent that we do not understand nonviolent power better, we constrain our understandings of what makes change happen, what effects our actions may have, what our powers rely upon, as well as what can be.

Without the mass participation of nonviolent movements we may be more familiar with (civil rights, the Colored Revolutions, the Arab Spring), the public story of prison witness often concentrates on the individual, rather than the issues or the

movement. This focus on individuals makes the identities of participants extremely important—a reality that often irks justice action prisoners (“it’s not about me!!”) but that must be accounted for in its consequences. In other words, prison witness is not a form of “people power,” but a form of *person* power, and this research further clarifies that *who* the person is critically matters. Indeed, *privilege power*—the force of one’s mainstream status—is often the power most in operation during prison witness (see chapter 5). While the significance of privilege power is likely important to any nonviolent movement, here it is analyzed as a foundational part of small-numbered, high-risk nonviolent tactics—and specifically, prison witness.

### **Privilege Power and the Body**

As participant Ken Crawley explained, bodies are serious. The state and media can ignore, lie about, and manipulate other forms of civic involvement, but they “can’t ignore bodies.” Bodies occupying public space force visibility and unmistakably show numbers and support. What activists call “somatic politics” is a method of action that concentrates the violence of the system onto the space of the body, making it personal, visible, and potentially transformable. As such, somatic politics is a form of power: through everyday people engaging in forums of resistance, power is generated, shifted, transformed, and confronted. The body and power are thus already always connected: the body is the instrument of nonviolent power, the medium that makes violence visible, and the force that persuades change. For the strategy of prison witness, in which the body publicly performs illegal actions and invites hardship in order to be a witness against gross acts of violence, the centrality of the body is essential.

Somatic politics is deepened by activists' use of the body symbolically, and popular nonviolent direct actions include "die ins" (symbolically dying together), fasting, pouring blood, and dressing as those they represent (for instance, Witness Against Torture activists dress in orange jumpsuits, standing in for the prisoners at Guantanamo Bay). In addition to singing and marching, puppets and bull-horns, bodies often do things in public spaces that are symbolically appropriate to the specific person doing the action: activists concerned about war dig graves, women knit, priests pray, mothers cry. This authentic and strategic use of self can enable and strengthen political action. For example, in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship, women sewed "arpilleras"—small quilts made from the clothing of their missing family members—simultaneously affirming the life of those lost and creating a tangible product of dissent. Arpilleras were outlawed, but they were difficult to control because they were a distinctively *feminine* form of protest imbued with the power of sorrowful mothers, sisters, aunts, and wives of disappeared relatives *sewing*—a "womanly" activity that the conservative government needed to support (Agosin 1987, see also Cook and Kirk 1983). In other words, acting as *mothers* made political action possible in a highly repressive environment. Hence, the reality of "whose body" matters is not restricted to those of social privilege, but usage of identity generally is an important tool of dissent that needs further analysis.

In the case of prison witness, how identity and the body matter most often draws on the privileges of race, class, nationality, and professional/moral status (as a professor or a nun, for example). The participants I spoke with often described a savvy and political understanding of themselves as conscientious people of privilege, purposefully using their white, middle class, elderly, high-status bodies *as such* to protest U.S. imperialism.

In other words, they used their social positions as an intentional tool of protest, utilizing “privilege power” strategically. In this, the choice of justice action prisoners (as was the choice of white student volunteers during the Freedom Summer campaign) has been to “use” privilege for good (McAdam 1988). However, as transnational feminist theorizing reminds us, how to use privilege for good, without breathing life into entrenched inequalities or disempowering local groups, is not at all straightforward and may actually be dangerous (Alexander 2005; Narayan 1997; Koopman 2008a; Spivak 1994).

In Social Movement theory, the politics of using privilege in one’s activism is a growing topic of theorization (Boothe & Smithey 2007; Coy 2007; Koopman 2012; Kraemer 2007; McAdam 1988). Paulo Friere recognized the important historical legacy (though inadequacy) of more dominant people being part of struggles for liberation (2000), however such participants also bear the “marks of their origin” in the words of Doug McAdam (1988, p. 104). Privileged allies can use their access to power, resources, and skills to benefit the causes they care about—but without adequate knowledge of how their dominant status impacts their work and the organization, inequalities can be strengthened and local groups disempowered (Boothe & Smithey 2007, p. 50, see also Coy 2007). The lesson of Freedom Summer was that “using” privilege is inadequate: it must be paired with efforts to undermine unequal hierarchies at the same time (McAdam 1988). In other words, it is not enough to rely on privilege in pursuit of progressive causes, the structures that support the inequalities must also be confronted. Without this, no deep level (systemic) change is possible (Koopman 2012).

Writing of nonviolent interventionists,<sup>50</sup> Boothe and Smithey recommend a way for people of privilege to move forward as allies. They insist upon the development of a “reflexive awareness” of the context in which one acts, as well as knowledge of the economic, political, and symbolic meanings on which one’s involvement relies (2007, p. 41). Privileged actors should have “a solid understanding of their position within Empire” (p. 45). To gain this, such activists should “incorporate anti-oppression awareness through experiential training” (ibid, p. 50) in which they learn about their own “status, capacities, and weaknesses” (ibid, p. 52). Similarly, Kelly Rae Kraemer explains that “privileged allies” need to understand “not only their own privilege, but also the interrelationship between privilege and oppression and its impact on intramovement dynamics” (2007, p. 22). In other words, it is not just self-knowledge that is needed, but knowledge of the context from which that self arises, as well as the impacts of one’s identity on the work that one does. In particular, activists need to pay attention to how their efforts may serve to disempower local groups, and hence must ensure that indigenous “empowerment” be a key aspect of alliance.

In “using their privilege for good,” justice action prisoners engage in a risky strategy. Feminist philosopher Alison Bailey explores how to identify those who effectively resist privilege, and specifically “those who belong to dominant groups yet resist the usual assumptions and orientations of those groups” (1998, p. 28). Bailey employs Ruth Frankenberg’s distinction between “privilege-evasive” and “privilege-cognizant” white scripts to analyze white resistance to racism (1993). The former refers

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<sup>50</sup> Third party nonviolent interventionists observe rather than perform direct action, through protecting vulnerable populations or helping make “space” for nonviolent movements to engage (Booth and Smithey, p. 40).

to practices that do not challenge whites to think about their own privilege (though they may challenge racism), hence reproducing white superiority, and the latter is a refusal to animate the roles and worldviews whites are expected to perform (Bailey p. 36). To be privilege-cognizant is to be a race “traitor,” Bailey explains (see also Garvey & Ignatiev 2006). To be a race traitor is a daily practice that requires effort, and is visible in what one *does*.

In working in solidarity with less privileged others, not being attentive to the ways in which power and privilege operate can perpetuate inequalities, hence awareness is fundamental and basic. However, awareness—simply seeing the pervasiveness of racism—is a challenge for white people (Bailey 2007; Frankenberg 1992; Frye 2001; hooks 1999; Kimmel 2001; May 2006; Mills 2007; Scheurich & Young 2007; Sullivan 2006), a challenge that “awareness trainings” may be insufficient to remedy. Michael Kimmel writes that having social privilege is like walking with a wind at your back: pleasant, easy, effortless. To walk *against* the wind is difficult, but to walk with it is to not notice it. He explains, “being white, or male, or heterosexual in the United States is like running with the wind at your back” (2001, p. 1). For people with privilege to become aware of it is akin to trying to make the wind *visible*. It is a challenging task, made more so by the fact that what is invisible is political, and follows predictable patterns that people of privilege are well taught to ignore.

Awareness of privilege, translated as it is by many justice action prisoners into feelings of personal responsibility and action, constitutes a rejection of what critical race scholars have identified as “white epistemology” (Alcoff 2007; May 2006; Mills 2007). White epistemology is a way of knowing that preserves racial hierarchies that privilege

white skinned people, simultaneously disadvantaging people of color (Mills 2007). It has two parts; it is a way of knowing (white epistemology) and a way of not knowing (white ignorance). Together, such whitely “knowledge” functions to maintain racial boundaries that are hierarchical and oppressive to people of color, and thus constitute a form of direct, structural, and epistemic violence (Frye 1992). This violence is perpetuated systematically and without requiring the conscientious participation of white people, however its effects are real. As beneficiaries of a system of privilege, “whites have a *positive* interest in ‘seeing the world wrongly,’” to paraphrase Charles Mills (May 2006). Vivian May explains that “willful” ignorance is a set of “carefully crafted methods of not-knowing that are a means of perpetuating privilege and domination. Willful ignorance entails an agreement to know the world wrongly that is rewarded and encouraged because it serves to maintain the status quo” (May 2006). It is thus important to recognize this wrongness of representation and the violences therein as well as one’s own complicity and role in the system, and then to *do something* about it. Critical race scholars agree that white people “doing something” about race is essential (Alcoff 2007; Boler 1999; Frankenberg 1994; Thompson 2008; Warren 2001).

One of the distinctive markers of justice action prisoners is their willingness to act, at risk to themselves, specifically as agents of privilege. Such willingness satisfies scholar Megan Boler’s insistence that “empathy” does not lead to justice but instead works to absolve people of responsibility (Boler 1999).<sup>51</sup> Feeling badly, empathetic, and guilty are counter-productive and re-center whiteness, according to Boler (see also Thompson 2008). *Acting* is essential, even when people’s privilege insulates them in such a way that

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<sup>51</sup> Claiming that empathy is “unreliable,” Boler argues, “I am not convinced that empathy leads to anything close to justice, to any shift in existing power relations” (157).

even their most strident acts are relational privileged experiences.

There is much good to be gained from the development of “awareness” of privilege, but the activation of such awareness must always be enacted with great care and reflexivity. Boothe and Smithey insist upon local knowledge and local empowerment as the unswerving compass determining action. For them, the role of the privileged ally is to act “as a greenhouse”—not a leader or guide (p. 54). A greenhouse plays a passive role, it lets sunshine in and keeps the wind out. Its role is only “really important when the wind blows” (Hunter, quoted in Boothe & Smithey, p. 54).

Learning about one’s privilege and enacting it carefully, then—i.e., using privilege power—is not simply an exercise in naval-gazing, but it is critical and difficult personal work that must be done in constant reference to one’s position within Empire. The personal work must be done to ensure that the movements with which one allies can make the strides towards systemic equality and justice that one struggles for, and to insure that one’s role as a privileged ally is neither disempowering nor regressive to either those most effected or to the “big picture” of systemic injustices. To move towards such work, insights from critical theory are needed.

### **Critiques of Nonviolence and the Potentials of a Feminist Lens**

Critiques of nonviolent theory and practice touch upon its inadequate understandings of the role of the individual and “privilege power,” as they also prove the ongoing need for critical theorizing. For example, Ched Meyers, a Catholic theologian whose writing influenced the Berrigan brothers, argues that “somatic politics” (and specifically prison witness) is “unconsciously elitist.” The technique is a tool of the few (exclusive) and is non-threatening to the state (ineffective) when the purity of the



actor/action trumps efforts towards efficacy and inclusion (Myers 1994, p. 261). At times, he writes, “our attempts at somatic politics... degenerate(s) into an aberrant form of piety” (p. 263). In other words, activism becomes a (usually Christian, principled nonviolent) exercise that is personalized rather than an effort that is political, and this results in a form of action that remains largely inaccessible, symbolic, and elitist.

Myers cites two ways in which nonviolent witness is elitist, and manifests as both racist and classist. First, “nonviolence is still too much of a theoretical creed among First World practitioners--” the aim towards personal perfection (being a good pacifist, Christian...) clouds vision, creates hierarchies and enables heroism among activists, as it also blocks potential alliances with others who may be different (use violence, look different, were born somewhere else, focus on different issues). Secondly, “white peace activists have simply remained racist in some very basic but unexamined levels” (265). This is visible through white peace activists’ belief that “peace” is simply not an issue of interest to people of color (which explains to white people why people of color do not join their movements), as well as white activists’ ongoing concern with “what might happen if a bomb exploded” rather than the present reality of the nuclear cycle already making a “disproportionate impact on the Fourth World” (p. 266).

For Myers, it is only the particular Christian-pacifist conception of “peace” (as pacifist, international) that makes it a “white” issue, and the concern with “what might happen” shows privileged activists’ obliviousness to the current realities of those living more marginalized lives. This exclusivity and blindness keeps “peace” firmly in the purview of white privileged folk, and indicates a problem of vision (what ‘counts’ as peace, as peace activism, as peace activist) rather than mission. In other words, the peace

movement is not plagued by a “diversity problem,” but by a problem of adequate *seeing* (what constitutes violence? What are the issues of greatest concern? For who?). For Myers, the elitism of somatic politics must be uprooted through education (of self, privilege, context) and requires a flexibility of inclusion. His litmus test for determining nonviolent activism is not personal or religious perfection, but political efficacy. He wants nonviolence to “work,” in the sense of changing policy and improving affected people’s lives.

A second relevant critique of nonviolence comes from activist-scholar Peter Gelderloos (a man who has served time for protesting the SOA). He problematizes nonviolence for being ineffective, racist, statist, patriarchal, strategically inferior, and deluded (Gelderloos 2007, see also Churchill 1998). For him, such shortcomings mandate an abandonment of nonviolence, towards what he calls a “diversity of tactics” that include violence.<sup>52</sup> Gelderloos is concerned that—as a racist, statist, patriarchal technique—nonviolence is a strategy of the privileged enacted on behalf of the oppressed, that works only for the privileged, and that fails to bring about systemic change because its actors are also the beneficiaries of the status quo. Gelderloos observes that pacifism/nonviolence (he conflates the two) “can only work for privileged people,

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<sup>52</sup> At the heart of Gelderloos’ concern is that nonviolence does not “work.” However, to arrive at this conclusion he relies upon a double standard (privileging violence) that is untenable, and has been well responded to by Brian Martin (2008). For example, he argues that nonviolence is ineffective, even when celebrated as working. He writes, “The British were not forced to quit India. Rather, they chose to transfer the territory from direct colonial rule to neocolonial rule” (16). Further, nonviolent organization did not compel British withdrawal, rather, the Empire was already over-extended and was simply unwilling/unable to put up a stronger fight in India at that time. Given this expanded historical/global/temporal scale, it is clear that the “independence movement proves to have failed” (p. 16). His points are fair and arguably true, however when such a wide scope is applied to *any* instance of resistance, violence as a means of change proves no more effective and Gelderloos offers no examples that meet his standards of efficacy.

who have a status protected by violence, as the perpetrators and beneficiaries of a violent hierarchy” (p. 34). He chides the idea that “hunger strikes and petitions” could have slowed the genocide of the American Indians, or stopped the African slave trade in its tracks (p. 34). So in its reliance on privilege, it is not only a racist technique, it is also one that reinforces and protects the state.

To this concern, nonviolence scholar ably Brian Martin counters with examples of more marginalized people engaging in nonviolent actions (2008). However, such examples do not address Gelderloos’s deeper concern—which is fundamentally about access to power. Indeed, though he does not identify it as such, Gelderloos’s primary critique is with the way that privilege works in acts of resistance, and not with the specific techniques of nonviolence. A central issue he finds troubling is how the unequal advantages granted to people who look a particular way or are born in a particular place are relied upon, but unconsciously and without care. To the extent that the people who engage in nonviolent resistance do not understand their privilege and its power as a tool that is real and dangerous, they may replicate and reinforce the inequalities on which their positions are based—and this makes nonviolence “statist.” In replicating hegemony, such nonviolence affirms rather than undermines the status quo.

However, to cite this as a problem of nonviolent techniques, specifically, is misplaced criticism. It is not that “nonviolence doesn’t work”—or that violence does—but that structural inequalities and self-reflexivity must be part of *any* activists’ understandings and analysis. What this calls for is not an abandonment of nonviolence or violence, but the need for a different lens through which to conduct and analyze *any* action that includes an animation of privilege. The problem cannot be solved via a tit-for-

tat argument about instances of (non)violence, but by a rich and deep query into the twin workings of privilege and oppression that is personalized and made relevant to people's individual lives.

This perspective is available via a transnational feminist framework. Though methodologically dissimilar, Gelderloos's critique is of a piece with the concerns of feminist geographer (and SOAW activist) Sara Koopman. Koopman analyzes white women SOA Watch activists who risk reinforcing the role of "good helper" in their well-meaning solidarity activism with people in Central America (2008a). The problem that both Gelderloos and Koopman notice is that who we are, how we act, in what contexts and with what understandings, is critically important in what we (can) do, what we make real, animate, and reinforce. As relatively privileged people, U.S. activists have to be very careful about what narratives they enliven when they protest "on behalf of" others. The possibilities for reinforcing historical and colonial patterns of violence are ever present—and for Gelderloos, this reality requires an abandonment of nonviolence. For Koopman, it is a rallying cry for *extreme* care and ongoing reflexivity about oneself and one's role, in a context of structural inequality.

These opposing interpretations are telling of the theoretical foundations supporting each scholar. From a framework of nonviolence/pacifism, Gelderloos sees no way out of reinforcing colonial relations through nonviolent action, and so—rather bizarrely—insists upon the use of violence as the way to achieve a more just and peaceful world. Backed by feminist theorizing, Koopman is able to work towards a nonviolent way forward. It is exactly into this discrepancy that this work fits: through keenly accurate diagnoses of the problems that we seek to resolve and enabled by frameworks

that complicate and clarify what we can see, we may better respond to the challenges we truly wish to face and transform. By problematizing *privilege* rather than nonviolent (or any) techniques, movements for progressive change may continue, and continually improve, learn from, and refine themselves. A clear perception of “the problem” is thus essential, and is fundamentally enabled by a critical feminist framework. This chapter has argued that such a framework should be employed in our analysis of social movements, as well as in our personal work as political actors.

In sum, what activists need is not to abandon nonviolence, solidarity, or identity politics, but instead to critically understand their own positionality as (privileged) actors for change, acting in a context that is both local and global, and that critically matters. Such understandings cannot guarantee that colonial hierarchies will not be animated or reified through solidarity/peace action peopled by privileged folks from the global North, but such critical awareness is an essential part of inclusive forward motion. Most basically, in making “privilege power” an explicit part of analysis for any nonviolent movement or act of resistance, the potential for further learning and continued refinement on the subject remains open rather than closed.

## Chapter Three

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

#### Feminist Methods and Power

Epistemology is the “philosophical study of knowledge” (Tanesini 1999, p. 3) that can be defined simply as the “ways in which we know.” As Patricia Hill Collins explains, it is also value and power laden. She writes, “far from being the apolitical study of truth, epistemology points to the ways in which power relations shape who is believed and why” (2000, p. 253, see also Shutte 2000).<sup>53</sup> Methodology is a set of guidelines for “how to conduct research” and how “interpretive paradigms are to be applied” (Hill Collins, p. 252). A feminist method is a technique for gathering evidence, but is “often used to refer to all three aspects of research” (Harding 1987, p. 161). For the sake of clarity, this chapter will use “method” in this latter sense: as the basis of *how* and the *ways in which* we know. The methods we use are very important.

Indeed, methods are the essential frameworks that allow certain knowledges to flourish and others to wither. “How we know” is a form of power that can legitimize and promote certain kinds of experiences as it curtails and silences others. Michel Foucault identified the power/knowledge nexus as mutually constructing and reinforcing, so that power produces knowledge, which in turn produces knowledge (1980, p. 98). Hence, careful attention to how knowledge is generated is fundamental to feminism as an emancipatory practice; it is an important way in which to identify, subvert, and resist dominant relations of power.

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<sup>53</sup> “Knowledge is determined by the methodologies and data legitimated by dominant cultures”(Shutte 2000, p. 49).

Crucially, our methods define the subject of knowledge, the “we” around whom lines are drawn, knowledge is produced, and reality becomes “known.” These categories determine what constitutes a legitimate voice, simultaneously foreclosing on those who do not fit.<sup>54</sup> As such, to be accountable and accurate across diverse women’s lives and experiences, feminist frameworks must clearly illuminate *who*, *what* and *how* knowledge is produced, reflected, and for (Alarcon 1994; Crenshaw 1991; Sandoval 1998; 2001). Our methods allow us to speak, but they are also always exclusionary and partial, hence knowing what we can say and see—and what we cannot—is essential for scholars seeking to produce knowledge that is liberating.

The understanding that the production of knowledge is consequential to people’s lives—indeed, it can stimulate emancipation or legitimize domination, has challenged the political, activist, and ethical responsibility of scholars. More and more qualitative research in the social sciences engages with this challenge, and scholars have worked to develop critical, reflective, anti-imperial, feminist, anti-racist methods with which to frame studies, generate theory, and develop analysis that does not silence marginalized voices or reinforce legacies of oppression (Choo and Ferree 2010; Crenshaw 1991; Delgado 2003; DeVault 1996; Perez-Huber 2010; Sandoval 1998; Tuhiwai-Smith 2008).

Of course, there is no way to produce “perfect” or complete knowledge, and all research methods have strengths and shortcomings. Each methodological decision

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<sup>54</sup> For Chela Sandoval, what U.S. third world feminists demanded in the 1980’s was the creation of “a new subjectivity” (p. 58.9a). Indeed, the meta-problem with white liberal feminism, if I may be so bold, was that the “we” its methods propelled was “women.” There was no space for difference. The first task for U.S. third world and black feminists, then, was methodological: to make the invisible visible, to disrupt the grand “we,” to show the lines of power at work in the production of ‘truth’ (Alarcon, p. 355, Sandoval, p. 52.3a). Truly liberatory theory can only emerge from frameworks that are attentive to concerns of power, difference, and complexity.

involves trade-offs, and in our research designs a challenge we must think through is what types of questions we want to forefront, what to make visible, what is acceptable to lose/risk losing in our understandings and analysis, as well as how our subjectivity is present in the production and interpretations of what we find. In sum, the methods we choose, combined with our epistemological reflexivity, fundamentally determine what we are able to see, experience, and learn, and are important at every step of our research (Van Maanen 1998, DeVault 1996, 1999).

Broadly, qualitative research is especially capable of producing detailed, specific, contextualized and profound small-scale studies, yielding information that can speak to larger frameworks but that is not easily generalized across groups, time, or space (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995; Schensul et al 1999). A common strategy in qualitative research is “grounded theory,” a technique in which theory is derived from the data itself, rather than applying data to existing scholarship (Charmaz 2000, see also Cliffords 1986). Such research generates its own data, relying upon interviews and participant-observation to do so. It is time-consuming and relationship based, and it requires the building of trust and rapport among researchers and participants. It aims to relay the stories and experiences of others accurately, fully, and well (Bogdan and Biklen 1992; Schensul et al 1999). In terms of how I collected data to generate theory, I have basically utilized a “grounded theory” approach—but one that has been ever-filtered through a reflective and political lens, as is appropriate for work to be “feminist” in the ways this chapter describes.

Qualitative research generally accounts for the subjectivity of its researchers, who commonly struggle with issues of objectivity, personal location, bias, and insider/outsider



status. In part as a response to this, qualitative research increasingly includes a commitment to “reflexivity,” which is the locating of the researcher in the research (Code 2000; Luttrell 2000, Nagar and Geiger 2007; Oakley 1981; Tanesini 1999, Reinherz and Davidman 1992). A commitment to reflexivity responds to the recognition that one’s “account of reality does not simply mirror reality, but rather creates... as real” what it describes (Atkinson 1990, p. 70). Hence, there is an important political and ethical dimension to research methods in regarding the *self*, a fact that critical, and especially feminist, scholarship has taken up (Harding 2004; Haraway 1988; Hyndman 2001; Gilbert 1994; Jagger 2008; Kaplan 1994; Nagar 1997; Rich 1984; Sangtin 2006).

Here, it is important to clarify what constitutes specifically *feminist* research. Marj DeVault writes that feminist methods are “approaches” that aim to “subvert the established procedures of disciplinary practice tied to the agendas of the powerful,” so feminist methods are inherently about confronting power (1990, p. 96). Reinherz and Davidman argue that feminism is a “perspective” that shares a common emphasis on women’s lives but whose method is not “provided” by feminism, for there is no single or correct way to do feminist research (1992, p. 241). Importantly, Reinherz and Davidman continue, the purpose of feminist research is to create social change and “research should contribute to the welfare of women and contribute to knowledge” (p. 251). Further, feminist research is marked by the involvement of the researcher as a person in research. Personal experience is relevant to knowledge claims.

Feminist methodologies today almost invariably include some version of this third piece, a commitment towards accounting for a “politics of location” (Rich 1984). This translates as identifying—specifically and attentively—the researcher in research, a task

that does not “bias” the research but comprises a fundamental, significant, and inevitable part of the knowledge that is created (Code 2000; Harding 1987, 2004; Kaplan 1994). Indeed, accounting for the role of the researcher in the research may produce knowledge that is *more* “objective” than research that tries to elide this dynamic (Code 2000).

Feminist standpoint theory is essential grounding for understanding how the subjectivity of the researcher is inherently part of what is known (Code 2000; Harding 2004; Haraway 1988; Smith 1987). The intention to locate oneself in one’s research is not simply “better science” or “less biased knowledge,” but to simultaneously take apart stereotypes, dis-place white/middle-class/western privilege, and to tell a story that most accurately reflects people’s lives, multiplicities, and differences through the production of situated knowledge (Code 2000). It is also an attempt for better “accountability,” of both the researcher and the research (Rich 1984, p. 211).

This research springs from these multiple engagements. In my interviews, analysis, and writing, I have tried to be very clear about my values and assumptions. My subjecthood as a well educated, financially secure, heterosexual white woman with social justice values is ever-present, and my commitments to social change no mystery. I work to be “excruciatingly accurate,” in the words of my advisor John Burdick, but not to be “objective” or “neutral.” Critical, yes, but I do not hide my friendships-with or admiration-for my participants. Though my power as the teller of this story is ever-present in my ongoing interactions with participants, the actual interviews often felt to be a meeting of like-minded equals in which I was *learning from* participants (I was), with the goal of better understanding, differently articulating, and carefully thinking about

their stories, knowledges, and experiences through a particular analytical and critical framework.

This political and personal alliance facilitated great trust, and surely furthered the warm responses that my requests for time and expertise have always conveyed. In any case, it should be clear that in my life and in this work, I am motivated towards social justice—as in the production of more fairness and less oppression in people’s lives—and I am keenly interested in better ways for privileged folks such as myself to effectively work towards it. Indeed, my energy to tell this story, specifically, comes from my commitment to better uncover what is most useful and effective in the pursuit of nonviolent change, as well as what is dangerous and does not work. It is as a fledgling partner on this path, alongside my participants, that I write and work.

In part as a result of this interest in understanding “what works” in the pursuit of systemic, progressive, nonviolent change, the focus of this thesis is most often on the justice action prisoners doing the most novel, insightful, progressive, and sophisticated things. I make this choice not to conceal the imperfections of activists or movements (which I try to always note), but instead to make more available the most interesting and useful models of what people are doing. For example, ten of those interviewed expressed deep understandings of how their privilege impacts their activism and how they use it carefully and strategically as a tool (chapter 5). I spend a good deal of time examining the understandings and enactments of these ten individuals, at the expense of the thirty-three others who expressed less nuanced (and sometimes even regressive) views. I do so for a very simple reason; other than understanding the significance of their presence and the effects their partial understandings may propel, there is little to learn from activists (in

terms of replication/modeling) who are either unaware of or use their own privilege in ways that are regressive. On the other hand, for those interested in how to do progressive work across lines of power ethically and well, much can be gained from centering the model of the ten most “progressive” participants. Theirs is the “new story”—and the most important one for activist praxis. Most simply, it is important to understand that my choice to focus on what I find to be “most interesting” is intentional, and is not meant to heroize the movements or its actors, but is a way to provide good data for the most fruitful future analysis and action possible.

Doing this research “among equals”—or even among elites, as some interviews have felt to be—has been an unusual way in which to conduct feminist research. So many of the mandates in feminist methodology are about how best to ensure that the marginalized are able to “speak” for themselves, and that privileged academics do not “speak for” them (Alarcon 1994; Alcoff 1997; Jaggar 2008; Spivak 1994). Such lines of power never disappear, but in this project are less pronounced than is often true in feminist analysis. As a privileged group, justice action prisoners are very well able to “speak for” themselves, in terms of being articulate, used to being heard, and adept at creating platforms for themselves from which to speak. That said, I alone have crafted the framework and analysis for this thesis. Within this role as architect, I am committed to making space for its participants be its primary voices: their words fill its pages, and they collectively illuminate its stories and significance in ways that far exceed my own expressive abilities. Indeed, locating the beginning in justice action prisoners stories is the most basic methodological commitment of this project, the idea being that starting with micropolitics is a way to engage larger frameworks: through grounding the work in

the personal, much can be illuminated and understood about the structural, global, and political (Mohanty 2003). Grounded, individual stories are theorized against global structures (capitalism, patriarchy, colonialism...) as such forces shape, exacerbate, and transform the lives of individuals around the world.<sup>55</sup> Such is the gesture of my work.

### **Locating Myself**

My personal circumstances were important to the way this research occurred. The year that I conducted interviews (and travelled around the country, staying in participants' homes, sharing meals with them, offering my partner David's help towards a variety of home improvement projects) was the year that I became a mother. Hence, David and our then infant daughter, Isa, joined me for most of my trips. When people offered sleeping space in their homes, I warned them that I was a "package deal." Unfailingly, they welcomed (and fed) us anyway.

Especially as a traveling new mom during the research process, I was continually grateful to be part of tradition of feminist research that accepts the subjectivity of the researcher in research as fundamental to the process of knowledge production (Bhavnani 1988; Harding 1987; DeVault 1999; Minh-ha 1989; Oakley 1981). It is very clear to me that "who I am" made a significant impact on the end product of this research; its trajectory took shape as stories told to me, specifically—and this was important not simply for its impacts on methods, but for the creation of the very fabric of this research.

This is true for several reasons. First, a very specific kind of story was told to me

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<sup>55</sup> As Chandra Mohanty explains, "cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic systems and processes... (grounding analysis in women's lives reveals) how the particular is often universally significant—without using the universal to erase the particular (2003, p. 223)."

because of my role as an interested and knowledgeable *listener*. Listening is powerful, and an interview is a unique opportunity to be listened to carefully and at length (Atkinson 1990; DeVault 1990; Warren 1990). I did not actually have to say very much during my meetings with justice action prisoners for them to “know” that I “care” about them and their work. The simple act of listening can be extremely intimate, and it conveys affection even without the utterance of actual words (Bourdieu 1996). As the recipient of stories told by deeply thoughtful people, who though sometimes heroized within the movements to which they belong generally have much more to say than people have time to hear—my *interest* in listening, for a long time, often propelled them to open up in profoundly trusting and often very personal ways. This was not always true. For one participant, the unstructured nature of my interview was never comfortable and we tortured our way through a forty-five minute exchange before making a gracious farewell. A few people seemed to feel better after I established some “credibility” through asking more specific topical questions. In general, however, all I had to do was listen, and a particular kind of story emerged.

Second, my knowledge of the subject area in general demonstrated not just expertise, but caring. As people talked with me, I often knew/knew-of particular events or persons who made appearances in the stories shared. This knowledge (conveyed through such simple remarks such as “ah, yes”) seemed to mark me as trustworthy, and to make me more a “companera in struggle” than a researcher/outsider. This often made interviews feel collegial rather than inquisitive, though again—I was doing very little actual talking. I took as complimentary (rather than problematic) comments about how participants “could tell” that “you are one of us.” Never could I read such comments as a

pass to not be critical, but with feminist methods, I could allow my value-laden, maternal, and honest “self” a place in the research process.

Third, what I look like, my gender, whiteness, new motherhood, status as a graduate student, and outgoing personality are important in how I was perceived and in how stories took shape (Arendell 1997). I am a white woman with a heterosexual family, studying “peace:” in other words and as are the people I study, I am quickly identified as “good.” As non-threatening, as “similar” in all of the mainstream ways that makes my life so very comfortable and safe. And this affected the story that I was told. Women shared details of marriages and families (I was clearly sympathetic and definitely interested), men spoke of issues and policies (demonstrating their knowledge and expertise) in part because of they were speaking *to me* (Reinharz and Chase 1990).<sup>56</sup> A different methodology could have made my subjectivity less important overall: a survey, for example, or even an established interview protocol would have shaped the research more and lessened my presence within it. However, in the end I loved the richness of the stories that my “tell me about yourself and your activism” question produced, and I could not imagine constraining it. The cost of this richness, however, is that in small ways I am all over the place in this research and dissertation—and though I have made efforts to be aware of and responsible towards my presence, I also know that there is much that I do not see. This research is thus truly a joint production, iterative and reinforcing, a product of interaction and careful thinking among justice action prisoners and myself.

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<sup>56</sup> The way in which women talked with me corroborates Dale Spender (1985) and Marj DeVault’s idea of “women talk,” the idea women share enough of a common framework that they are better able to listen to and understand one another (DeVault 1999, p. 62).

## Who

This research is framed around two questions: 1) How do justice action prisoners' conceptions and enactments of identity form and transform during their journeys through prison witness? and 2) how does gender matter in shaping their experiences? To get at these questions, the research is primarily based on interviews with twenty men and twenty-three women, conducted between January 2010 and January 2014. After the initial twelve interviews, I completed preliminary analysis. After this, the heart of the research took shape. In the end, I interviewed thirteen Plowshares activists, twenty-nine SOAW activists, two anti-war activists not connected with either movement (Brian Terrell and Jerome Berrigan), and one environmental activist (Tim DeChristopher). All were released with time served when interviewed, for actions that took place between 1982 and 2009. Thirty-seven spent at least six months at one stretch in jail, while six served two, three, or four month sentences but were included in this research for other reasons.<sup>57</sup>

The (lack of) diversity within the group overall confirms the demographic limitations of the movements more generally: Only two of my forty-three participants (Fr. Luis Barrios and Derrlyn Tom) are people of color, the rest are white. They range in age from 30something to 80something, with the great majority being over 60. Most are formally well educated (ten are/have been vowed religious, at least five hold Ph.Ds, and at least fourteen have other graduate degrees), and all are financially stable. For some, this stability comes from actual monetary sufficiency, for others it comes from belonging to faith communities that eschew the material world but that still provide sustenance

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<sup>57</sup> For example, Father Barrios served only two months in prison, but as a person of color his experience was important to include.



(such as vowed religious and Catholic Workers—who often seem to live on air, but they are not living rough). Many of the people I talked with have heterosexual families and have/have had professional careers. Only eight do not identify as Catholic or Protestant, several of whom credit a religious upbringing with their development of “conscience.” In other words, justice action prisoners generally inhabit some sort of “ideal” of hegemonic American belonging; with the exception of their politics—which set them firmly apart.

As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, Nancy Gwin’s decision to act at Fort Benning in 2009 determined its subject. However, the ability to carry it through was crucially enabled by my living in Central New York at the start of the project, a region with a legacy of progressive activism that is home today to nearly two dozen justice action prisoners who fit my criteria for inclusion (have spent at least six months incarcerated for an act of nonviolent resistance). This made beginning the research easy: Before crossing the line herself, Nancy Gwin put me in touch with my first interviewee, Ann Tiffany, and during that interview I met her partner Ed Kinane. Ed introduced me to Rae Kraemer and Michael Pasquale, and in this way the track was established. The initial participants were all identified through “snowballing--” the process by which participants pass along the names of others with whom I could connect and interview (Le Compe and Schensul 1999). Further along the research process, I met others at various protests and events, where I solicited participation directly. In addition, I sent one email request via the SOA Watch POC listserv, which connected me with people in different geographic regions, diversifying my sample overall (though self-selecting for very willing participants). I also reached out to particular people intentionally (Karl Meyer, Fr. Luis Barrios, the members of Jonah House, Fr. Steve Kelly, Tim DeChristopher), specifically

searching for people with experiences that might be different from others (eg., people of color, people who do their jail time differently, or those with more difficult experiences). However, most participants were identified when others recommended that they speak to me—known within their circles as “the researcher with the baby.”<sup>58</sup> Everyone I asked directly said “yes” to an interview and in the end, I refused several interviews with the willing SOA Watch listserv folks because of limited time.

As with all parts of research design, there is no perfect way to attract participants and relying heavily on snowballing carries shortcomings. Most relevantly for this work, the framework of this dissertation was essentially developed around what I first learned from justice action prisoners living in Central New York. Most of them participated in either SOAW or Plowshares actions during the 1990’s. Friends, they are demographically and philosophically similar, and they belong to the same peace groups and churches. I tried to counter-balance the prevalence of this initial narrative (though it was diverse and lively) through the way that I found further participants; it is why I travelled to Ohio, Arizona, Illinois, Georgia, Maryland and California to interview others, and is partly why I was flexible on my “six months incarcerated” mark when the person carried some other needed/missing/unusual characteristic. Gifted with the problem of finding too many willing participants, I was able to select the most diverse group that I could (based on limited information), in terms of movement alliance, time of action, demographics, experiences, prisons lived in, geographic region, class and religious affiliation, etc. Nonetheless, the research group should not be called “comprehensive.” At the same time,

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<sup>58</sup> Though Isa is now three, identifying myself as such is still the most efficient way for me to introduce myself in virtual forums, where face recognition is not possible.

reading Rosalie Riegle's (2013a; 2013b) powerful oral history of disarmament activists (two volumes of interview transcripts with nearly 100 activists conducted over the last 30 years) proved heartening: adding her stories to mine increased my confidence that there were no major groups or core stories missing from my collection.<sup>59</sup> Hence, while this thesis would tell a different story if more of its participants were people of color, experienced harsher prison terms, etc., it would not necessarily be more "accurate." It would simply be a different story.

In general, people were eager to be interviewed and were proud of what they had done. All wished to be known by their real names. Despite this unanimous wish/agreement to be identified (which is itself telling of justice action prisoners' feelings towards themselves and their work) I struggled in deciding to honor it. Though transparent about my intentions (grounding analysis in the experience of individual justice action prisoners) and not intentionally soliciting or probing for deeply personal information during interviews, I knew that when people told me that they wanted to be identified by name, it was because they were proud of what they had done politically. Hence, even when they volunteered detailed information about their familial relationships and personal struggles, my assumption is that they did not expect *these* stories to be repeated. Hence, connecting the more personal stories with real names in my writing felt, at times, like a violation and an abuse of trust. Further, using real names can be a push towards writing a "celebratory history," in the words of my dear late advisor Sari Biklen, and must be engaged in with caution (personal email). Committed to accuracy and

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<sup>59</sup> Some of her participants have more dramatic experiences (of misogyny in the movement, abuse in prison, surprising moments of action etc.), and the increased temporal scope (WWII-present) certainly added additional layers of information.

wanting to write the most helpful (not celebratory) dissertation possible, I struggled with what to do.

For on the other side of the equation, the historical accuracy and power that comes from using people's real names is significant. In writing this snapshot history of prison witness, I am moved by sociologist Mitchell Dunier's argument that qualitative researchers should be held to the higher standards of accountability that using real names entails, as in journalism (1999, appendix). While by no means is Dunier's always an appropriate method for sociological work, among justice action prisoners—whose actions are inherently public—it felt correct. And certainly, using people's real names has served as a triple check for accuracy in my own writing: testing always for truthfulness and my own responsibility as a story-teller, combined with my role as a critical analyst whose job is not to celebrate, but to uncover, make available, and share the wisdom and shortcomings of this particular group of people.

Most importantly, choosing to use people's real names is a way to make them a part of the historical record; to name what they do as important and political, and as part of the essential—normal, important, appropriate—fabric of U.S. history. Part of my commitment as a scholar is to make nonviolence a more normalized and better understood part of our history—to see resistance as essential rather than exceptional, with actors who are intelligent and courageous and *real* rather than (just) crazy or naïve, heroic or ideal. I found this commitment echoed in participants' sentiments. As Liz Deligio explained, she “wishes” that civil disobedience was viewed as “not exotic or extreme, but as a fundamental tool in the kit.... This is part of being part of the human collective that's trying to share governance.” To honor this sentiment appropriately, real

names are required. Indeed, upon reflection, anything less ultimately felt like a cop-out.

Among such a small group of activists, it is also difficult to not use people's real names. It would be nearly impossible to maintain the anonymity of certain people, and attempting to do so could cloud the story so much as to make it incoherent. Rosalie Riegle uses people's real names in her oral history on war resisters (several of whom also appear in this research), and in her study of the Plowshares movement, Sharon Erickson Nepstad chose to use people's real names. She does so because it is

impossible to explain how this movement spread internationally unless I traced it through specific individuals. In addition, for those who observe or participate in Plowshares actions, key figures and leaders would be easily identifiable, even with pseudonyms, because the movement is small. Finally, naming those who have made significant sacrifices for the cause of peace is, I hope, a way of honoring them (2008, pp. xix-xx).

In the end, I chose to use people's real names to tell a lucid story, honor their wishes, concretize what they do as historical, legitimate, and political, and to give them the recognition they deserve as members of this group. Not to (further) heroize them, but simply to identify them. I hope that I have managed to share participants experiences in ways that are respectful, and make each person feel proud of themselves and what they have done, while balancing this with my own vigilance and responsibility as a researcher seeking clarity, wisdom, and understanding in the aim of progressive change.

## **How**

### **Interviews**

This research is fundamentally based on the stories collected during open-ended, exploratory, life-story style qualitative interviews (Atkinson 1990; Schensul et al 1999). All but one interview happened in person, most often in people's homes or workplaces,

but sometimes at protest sites or in public spaces such as coffee shops and convention centers.<sup>60</sup> No interviews happened in jails or prisons, although I was able to visit my friend Nancy Gwin during her 2010 stay at Danbury Federal Correctional Institution and at the halfway house in Syracuse where she completed her sentence. I did not interview her, however, until 2013. I conducted most interviews alone and in a way that felt quite “professional,” however baby Isa joined me a handful of times, her presence alone demonstrating the friendly kinds of relationships formed with participants. In the course of conducting research, I travelled from my home in Syracuse, New York to Columbus, GA, New York City, NY, Yellow Springs OH, Chicago, IL, Baltimore, MD, Tucson AZ and Oakland, CA.

Interviews were oriented towards life-histories (Atkinson 1990; Bogdan 1992). All interviews began with the same question: “tell me a little about yourself and your activism.” From this common starting point flowed memories of direct actions, processes of becoming an activist, uneasiness with movement politics, prison stories, conceptions of the U.S. government, war and poverty, relationships with nonviolence and activism, and personal joys and troubles—sufficient material for several dissertations in a variety of subjects. During interviews, I used active listening techniques (Whitman 2006; Bettez 2011), attentive to verbal and nonverbal language.

Most interviews lasted about 90 minutes, though some were substantially longer and a few were shorter. For most people, there were no “second questions” beyond the necessary probes—although my favorite additional question was “what do you wear when you know you will be arrested?” Almost all ended with some version of “is there

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<sup>60</sup> I interviewed Karl Meyer by phone, a conversation based on 5 questions I emailed him the day before we talked.

anything else you would like to tell me about?” This open-ended format strengthened the rigor of the research as it cemented its most prevalent themes; there were no directly “leading questions” about privilege or gender, for example, that could be similarly fulfilled by participants. Soon after most interviews were completed, I transcribed them in full (some took longer to get to, and a few I hired out)—the process of re-hearing and typing helping me to better distinguish themes, which I could direct my attention more carefully towards in further conversations.

In addition to interviews, several participants engaged in ongoing email communications with me, or letter writing when in prison. Participants have also sent articles they have written or been inspired by, usually in response to a direct question from me (for example, Brian Terrell sent me his article on the pro-se defense when I wrote to ask him about the process of the trial). These written communications have been a wonderful opportunity for me to learn more about particular topics, as well as to obtain a fuller sense of the experience of prison, specifically. In all cases, when such personal communications are cited in this text, I received additional consent from participants to do so, usually in the form of email communication.<sup>61</sup>

### **Participant Observation**

In addition to interviews, the research is importantly informed by participant observations (Emerson et al 1995; Schensul et al 1999), including observations of trials and attendance at multi-day protests, planning meetings for actions, and lectures/presentations given by former justice action prisoners. Most significantly, I attended the September 2010 weekend retreat for the Atlantic Life Community (ALC) in

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<sup>61</sup> In compliance with the IRB, all participants signed a consent form at the start of the interview.

Camden, N.J. The ALC is a radical Catholic group formed by Jonah House members to support Plowshares activists. Its bi-annual retreats are considered essential for nourishing and sustaining movement members. In 2011, I attended the annual vigil at Fort Benning, as well as the 2012 “April Days of Action” in Washington D.C. In each of these three sites, I attended multiple meetings, planning sessions, and trainings, as well as conducted interviews. In addition to these more lengthy observations, I attended over a dozen protests, trials, and meetings in the Central New York area.

My attendance and observation of such events provided prime recruiting ground for participants, as it also served to better ground me in the world of peace/anti-war/disarmament activism. Listening to the speeches from the stages of SOAW events, being present for Theresa Cusimono’s 2011 line crossing, visiting Nancy Gwin in prison, and observing the trials of Hancock drone protestors significantly improved my understandings of the risks people take, why they take them, and what their experiences may feel like. Much of this learning was physiological: My breath was hard in coming for minutes after Theresa crossed, I sobbed in my parked car outside of Danbury FCI, and my heart thrilled listening to Fr. Barrios speak in Washington D.C. However, the learning was also intellectual, and my understandings of movement goals and issues widened in ways that no participant fully explained to me. This was especially true when I attended trainings at the SOAW vigil and ALC retreat, in particular. It was in these sites that I “got” the systemic critique of the movements, enabling my understanding of the systemic critique that supports and is required to propel such fierce resistance. Engaging in participant observation was thus triply important: as a place to meet and interview participants, as a way to better understand—bodily and emotionally—the risks people



take, and as a way to learn about the contexts, rationales, histories, and goals of the movements and activists I most centrally study.

### **Data Analysis**

I conducted preliminary analysis after completing my first twelve interviews. Initially, I thought that the project would be about “nonviolent power,” but quickly realized that the most interesting story lay elsewhere—in the personal journeys of activists, rather than in the techniques they employed. At all times, what has been mined from the richness of the available material has of course been filtered through my own interests and training as a feminist peace scholar. However I am confident that the root themes present in the data; of imperialism, privilege, identity, and power—would stand out clearly within any personal or disciplinary framework.

While there are more and less efficient methods to code data and none are perfect (Becker 1970; Emerson et al 1995; LeCompte and Schensul 1999; Strauss 1987), I employed a method that worked well for me and that facilitated the creation of an accurate picture of a complex puzzle. All coding was done by hand, and I read each interview at least three times to identify themes and patterns. In various Microsoft Word documents titled by theme (privilege, the moment of action, learning in prison), I collected samples and quotes from all participants who said anything about that topic, creating a theme supported by a variety of participant perspectives and experiences. Documents ranged in length from three to thirty pages, their very weight conveying something about their importance overall. With much anguish, organizing, and re-organizing, I arranged these multiple and diverse documents into topics for coherent

chapters. Each coded document was then the foundation of a particular chapter section, and writing was based on the narratives such data enabled.

In addition to coding, “checking” my findings for accuracy has been ongoing. Partly, this is through historical analysis/review, and is also furthered by ongoing conversations with this study’s participants. First, writing about justice action prisoners, there are historical accounts (biographies, oral histories, published prison letters, media reports), as well as contemporary peace newsletters, blogs and websites. Such sources can be used as further data as they also provide a foil from which to check findings and look for major discrepancies. Most importantly here are Rosalie Riegle’s 2012 oral histories; *Crossing the Line* and *Doing Time for Peace*. I could have used several of her interviews (which are published at length and verbatim) as further “material” from which to analyze, however I restrained myself and used her data only to contextualize and clarify what I was finding in my own. The coherence in our joint findings makes me feel safer when speaking occasionally as I do of “the movement” or activist legacies and beliefs (as opposed to individual experience).

I have also been gifted with generous participants, several of whom have provided ongoing information and insight towards this work. In the spring of 2013, I held a focus group with six participants in Syracuse, to review findings and to ask clarifying questions (Morgan 1990). Several individual participants have also provided ongoing feedback, answered questions via email, and even read draft chapters on my behalf. Ed Kinane, and Brian Terrell have been particularly helpful in this task, and my work is certainly more accurate and useful for their thoughtful, incisive, and critical readings (though errors, of course, remain my own).

Also fundamental in finding my place as a contributor to what is known about war resistance and peace activism in the U.S. was my 2012 meeting with Felice and Jack Cohen-Joppa, and the ongoing relationship it has enabled. In addition to making absolutely perfect gluten-free pies, since 1980 the Cohen-Joppa's have been publishing a newsletter out of their home in Tucson Arizona, *The Nuclear Resister*. A "Chronicle of Hope," the *Resister* tracks those who go to jail as a consequence of war resistance around the world. Felice and Jack are beloved members of the resistance community, as well as its historical memory: they have been identifying and writing about its participants, publishing their articles and letters, and providing a network of support to various movements for over 30 years. Hence, talking with them was an important way to check my initial findings, as well as to learn more about the movements' histories, challenges, and actors. Had they strongly disagreed with any of my hunches, I would have been sure that it was my information and understandings that were flawed, and not theirs. Since that meeting, they have continued to be valuable resources, generously offering advice and reading a draft of this thesis to provide feedback and insight.

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

As a feminist researcher, my decisions about how to conduct research have always been intentional and sometimes fraught—I take very seriously my position as the storyteller empowered to determine this dissertation's content. In conducting a qualitative study that is connected to a variety of big themes (violence, imperialism, prison, activism), and which fundamentally relates to both histories of activism and religious teachings, the greatest challenge has been to filter such rich and diverse data into one coherent narrative. I do believe that the frameworks of racialized gender and identity are

best capable of holding this story together, but I am constantly aware that there are other ways to tell these stories. Ultimately, my goal has been to be truthful, responsible, and useful: to share the things that justice action prisoners know and do in a way that is accurate and realistic, and to do so in a way that best furthers critical knowledge about how to engage in nonviolent activism well, in the pursuit of truly systemic change.

## Chapter Four

### LIKE A CHIROPRACTIC ADJUSTMENT: ALIGNING ACTIONS AND BELIEFS THROUGH IDENTITY-WORK

*I feel this incredible one-ness....It's really important to pay attention to what's in our hearts... this is the struggle within ourselves. Not just within this system of racism and oppression and violence. I mean, we all have to look at what's in our own hearts, and it's a daily struggle.... This struggle is so personal, and is so moment-to-moment.*  
-- Martha Hennessy

This chapter is about what justice action prisoners do to bring their identities into alignment with their beliefs. As a form of confronting one's interior imperialism, for both men and women, identity-work is grounded in a particular set of knowledge and beliefs about the world and who one is within it—one's personal subjectivity. Most basically, it is the meeting of knowledge and self-concept that generates the particular "doings" of identity, hence the chapter begins with a generalized review of what justice action prisoners "know;" their views of faith, geopolitics, activism, and self-identifications that motivate them towards resistant action. Most often, these knowledges are driven by a concept of privilege and are gender neutral. However, gender impacted how "what is known" was relayed to me, with more men focused on exposing "the truth" and more women committed to sharing personal stories and experiences. Despite the different ways in which women and men told stories, they shared similar motivations for nonviolent action, based on similar understandings of the world and their place within it. The second part of the chapter examines three areas in which the work of identity happens: learning, the "nonviolent lifestyle," and solidarity. The last of these, solidarity, is an especially important product of thoughtful identity-work, and will be analyzed as a conversation with transnational feminist scholarship.

In each site—learning, the nonviolent lifestyle, and solidarity—justice action prisoners “do things” to bring their actions into line with what they know and who they want to be. In general, people defined themselves personally as active (including “living out my faith”), consistent, and capable. They did not usually define themselves as white, male or female, religious, or American. Instead, they defined themselves structurally as responsible and privileged. This is not to say that justice activism is “all about me,” but that personal work is a fundamental part of political work and in the case of high-risk activism, a profound reckoning with one’s subjectivity and place in the world are an essential part of the process.

### **Identity-Work**

Resistance begins with what I call “identity-work.” In social movement analysis, identity work (no hyphen) is “the range of activities individuals engage in to create, present, and sustain personal identities that are congruent with and supportive of the self-concept” (Snow and McAdam 2004, pp. 46-47). Identity-work (with hyphen) is clarified here more specifically, as the labor of bringing one’s actions and behaviors into alignment with one’s values and beliefs. Justice action prisoners want their actions to be in congruence with their ideals, as is appropriate within a principled nonviolent philosophy that sees means as determining of ends. As if in chorus, my respondents told me that as a Christian, a thinking person, a person of conscience, “once I knew, I had to act.”<sup>62</sup> So identity-work is fundamentally about self-concept (‘as a ...’), grounded in a political understanding of political location/responsibility, as this relates to specific forms

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<sup>62</sup> Meagan Doty, “the question was not “why would I” but “why wouldn’t I? How couldn’t I?... Once you know, you can’t go back.” Ken Kennon: “I would have destroyed myself if I would have turned back.” Jerry Berrigan: “As a deep believer in Christ’s message, I feel obligated to help anyone who is suffering.”

of knowledge (of geopolitics, weapons systems, nonviolence). In other words, deeply knowing “who I am” involves two sets of knowledge—one personal (what are my values? What kind of person am I?) and the other structural/political (what is my public place in this world? What gifts and responsibilities do my visible identities and political location make possible?). Being responsive towards one’s aligned identity involves attention to both levels: it means behaving as one’s truest and most authentic self, in an environment that is systemically rigged to favor particular folks over and above others.

Ultimately, for everyone included in this study, prison witness was the capstone experience of resistance resulting from identity-work. The road to incarceration, however, is riddled with differential tasks, epiphanies, and long thinking; it is also a process of labor. A realist framework of identity productively furthers analysis, with attention to both the constructed and real aspects of an individual’s identity (Alcoff 2010; Moya 2006; S. Mohanty 1993). Explicating the concept of identity-work does several things for realist theory. It increases what we know about subjective identity and agency, animates diverse meanings of “experience,” (Alcoff 2006), and provides new data about how people navigate their ascriptive and subjective selves. Simultaneously, it puts to rest the idea that high-risk actions of this type are unthinking, spontaneous, or natural. Clearly, they are the result of profound personal work; work that begins at the level of who we are.

### **What Justice Action Prisoners Know**

#### **Nonviolence is “Tough Love:” The Radical Gospel of Justice Action Prisoners**

Though it is impossible to accurately capture the beliefs of a varied group of people, there are strong commonalities among the faithful represented in this research

(the majority). Most importantly, faith-based justice action prisoners share a commitment to living their faith through what they do, not through what they say, and are inspired to action by either the Prophetic Tradition in Christianity (based on the New Testament, and usually adhered to by Plowshares) or Liberation Theology (more common among SOAW activists). Many cited the Bible as their primary rationale for action. Most commonly, this was to remind me that Jesus was a “trouble-maker,” his life and death evidence that radically resisting an imperial status quo is at the heart of what it means to be a Christian. It was also to link the social and political context with their understanding of the Gospel, from a perspective of liberation theology.

Many justice action prisoners, and almost all Plowshares activists, are part of the “prophetic tradition” in Christianity, with a grounding in the “radical Gospel” (Aslan 2013; Berrigan 1996, Bivens; Tobey 2010, Nepstad 2008). The basic idea is to

see the prophetic as, above all else, a call to justice, mercy, and peace within the Church and the World. This understanding of the prophetic is critical of a type and form of religion that reduces the life of faith to a highly charged circus of prayer, worship, Bible study, devotionals, and church attendance but ignores the marginalized, the poor, the unborn, refugees, single parents, militarism, multi-national corporations, environmental devastation, empires, and the structural causes of poverty in our new feudal world order. Voicing the concerns of this tradition, Bishop Dom Helder Camera once said, “When I feed the poor, I am called a saint. When I ask why the poor are poor, I am called a communist.” We can call this lineage the “political and liberationist prophetic tradition.” It is concerned with both personal and public holiness, integrity, and authenticity” (Dart 2006).

For Plowshares activists, Dart’s is a mild description. In their tradition, the aim is to imitate Christ—“imitatio Christi” through following in his footsteps as closely as possible (Roth, 1975, p. 19). And Christ, according to Philip Berrigan, was “never a reformer.... He preached that we should dismantle, not attempt to patch, the state” (1996,



p. 214). Living in such a way is a difficult mandate that can become all-encompassing for faith based activists, however as religious scholar Kristine Tobey explains, “as Christians responding to what they understand as scriptural mandates to enact God’s kingdom through political resistance, they believe they have no choice” (2010, p. 10). Many Plowshares activists describe themselves as “Catholics who happen to be Christians,” implying, Tobey explains, that while “Catholicism may be inherent” in their sense of self or family tradition, “Christianity must be labored towards” (2010, p. 107). To be a Christian, from this perspective, is to struggle for change—change that is resistant, transformative, and difficult to achieve. Christian activists should be persistent, however, for “it is a Biblical theme that change always begins in the desert, which is a metaphor for slums, the jails, the docks when one is in court, the margins of society where one is speaking truth to power” (Philip Berrigan 1996, p. 97). In this environment, “resistance is the cross,” Fr. Phil Berrigan is remembered as saying to his friends and colleagues (participant Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit)—in other words, resistance is the very core of what it means to be a Christian.

Plowshares activists are the Puritans of our century. Fiercely committed to the word of God, they are not constrained by the institutional Church and are willing to risk mainstream acceptability to more truly walk the path they are constrained to follow. Their Gospel is their guide, its teachings trumping what is “legal” at all times (Tobey 2010). In a newspaper article about Plowshares activists Susan and Bill Frankel-Streit, Bill describes himself as a “priest who happens to be married.” Reporter Amy Biegelsen quotes the (former) priest. “Presidents and pharaohs, they’re the anti-Christ. They’re what has to be resisted. The whole Bible is about resisting the principalities and powers, those

who make war on God's children, the poor” (Biegelsen 2010). Here, the Bible is “the radical tract” to systemic social and political change—“the handbook for nonviolence and anarchism” (interview with Fr. Bill). Overcoming the imperial state is the goal, for which all-out, bodily, bold, risky, and lifelong resistance is necessary.

Towards this goal, nonviolent resistance is “tough love”—it is not a passive approach, but is more like “living with an alcoholic” (Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit, quoted in Biegelsen 2010). It is drawing a line (‘thou shalt not kill’ being primary) and *doing something* when that line is crossed. For Fr. Bill, his faith entails a “responsibility to the world,” that is compounded for the vowed religious (interview). Sr. Ardeth Platte, a Dominican Sister and Plowshares activist who lives at Jonah House in Baltimore (and is the inspiration for the nun in Piper Kermin’s *Orange is the New Black*), is very clear about what it means to be a sister committed to following the teachings of Christ. She explained,

The documents of the Church spell it out. No more war. Abolish nuclear weapons. You know, economic justice. Counter racism, make sure you are opposed to the death penalty. They are all there. And you know if we Sisters don’t participate in the change, then I wonder who will? We really entered religious life in order to live the Gospel to the hilt. Luckily somewhere along the line a conversion took place in us, and we said we will give our life to this....do good and avoid evil. It is very clear. And when the government in our name defies the principles of our faith, then it seems to me essential to take the stand regarding it.

Sr. Ardeth’s commitment to political work comes from her vow to “live the Gospel to the hilt.” Given the realities of the war machine in the U.S., as a Christian person and a vowed religious member of the Church, she must act against it. It is “essential.”

Liberation Theology also directs resistance actions, particularly for those imprisoned for SOA violations. Fr. Roy Bourgeois (the founder of SOAW) recently

wrote that it was the people in the slums of La Paz Bolivia (where he first ministered) who “taught me about their ‘theology of liberation’ and a God who empowers and gives hope to the poor. This theology teaches about a loving God who does not want anyone to suffer from poverty, oppression, violence, or discrimination” (2013). Fr. Luis Barrios told me that his (liberation) theology works for a just society “here on Earth.” He explained,

I know enough about what is going on, on this planet. And it’s a lot of injustice. And I got to the conclusion that if there is heaven... no one is going there without going through Earth. So I think we need to fix what is going on. I don’t need to go there (to heaven) to feel the so-called justice of God, where there is equal distribution of resources and there are no abusive people... where you can be whatever it is that you want to be-- as a woman, as a black person, as a gay, lesbian, as a Muslim.... That we create something here, that we guarantee that you can stand, with respect, in this society. That’s why I put more attention into building the so-called ‘Kingdom of God’ on Earth.

Part of how he does this is to make “God” the center, rather than Jesus Christ. “And I call justice God,” he explained. In centering justice, Fr. Luis Barrios’s theology is inclusive; it makes space at the table for Christians, but also for people of other and no faiths. The basic core of liberation theology, as lived by such justice action prisoners, is to work for justice “here on Earth”—to not accept inequalities as inevitable or as “God’s will,” and to work to change them. Such is the core of liberation theology more generally, anthropologist John Burdick (1996) explains,

Liberation theologians argue that the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments promise a Kingdom in which humanity will live in peace, equality, and justice, and... that this Kingdom will be realized not in Heaven, but on earth. Moreover, just as God used Moses to free His people, so too will He establish His Kingdom with the assistance of human agency. This is why, liberationists declare, it is up to humanity to struggle for the coming of the Kingdom (p. 1).

Of course, even among the Catholic participants represented in this study, there are diverse values and beliefs around their faith. What is constant, however, is a

commitment to living the Gospel, through action, towards the betterment of people's lives here on Earth. For Plowshares participants, honoring the Gospel's tenets while living in a war-state requires resistance. For others, it serves primarily to support, justify, and rationalize their choices. "It was very easy to get support from the Bible," agnostic Ann Tiffany explained of her work with Sanctuary, support that strengthened that movement strategically (Coutin and Bibler 1993; Nepstad 2004; Cunningham 1999).

### **Counter-Hegemonic Knowledge**

"Counter-Hegemonic knowledge" is both a doing (as discussed in this chapter's section entitled "learning") and an intellectual foundation for resistant action. As an intellectual foundation, counter-hegemonic knowledge is a way of thinking that enables, justifies, and rationalizes resistance to militarism, imperialism, and nuclear weapons as it makes engaging in serious resistance both necessary and logical. Most basically, justice action prisoners share an analysis of the world that highlights its injustices, sees them as connected to one another, and as caused by changeable decisions. Counter-hegemonic knowledge is also about content, and justice action prisoners tend to act only after learning (at some depth) about U.S. domestic and foreign policy, weapon systems, national and international law, and nonviolent techniques. There are exceptions to this, but in general justice action prisoners are subject experts in the areas against which they struggle.

Counter-hegemonic knowledge is based in a critical or oppositional consciousness. *Critical consciousness* is the ability to interact with the world analytically, to see the greater context of one's life, realize it is constructed, and know that one is a subject capable of making decisions (Freire 2000; see also Mansbridge 2001). *Insurgent*

*consciousness* is the “cognitive liberation” obtained when one no longer sees “the system” as legitimate, and entails a loss of fatalism and a demanding of one’s rights, as well as a belief that change is possible (McAdam, 1999, Smith 1991). Social movement scholars recognize that a grounding in a “critical mindset”—some sort of attainment of a critical consciousness—is “essential” for movement actors, and emphasize identifying the instances that “change people’s minds” to be more critical/oppositional, as well as how such changes occur (Nepstad 2007, p. 661-662, see also Groch 2001; Hill 2014; Mansbridge and Morris 2001). Such scholarship emphasizes the development of consciousness among marginalized groups, whose critical way of seeing usually begins with life experiences and is gained by “first hand knowledge” (Nepstad 2007, p. 665).

Through engaging in resistant actions, justice action prisoners demonstrate the achievement of a critical/oppositional consciousness among a *privileged* group, in contrast to most social movements analysis. They view themselves as change agents in a context that has been constructed unjustly. Based in critical/oppositional consciousness, counter-hegemonic knowledge is a way of thinking as much as a body of knowledge, a perspective that sees systemic forces (war, racism, poverty) as human creations, if entrenched and solid. It focuses on the human and ecological impacts of laws, institutions, and customs, rather than their official rationales, and recognizes the self as a capable and important vessel for change.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Side note: Counter-hegemonic knowledge is in interesting relation with citizenship and notions of civic duty. For some justice action prisoners, disobedience is a form of “disloyalty” to the nation based on a broader interpretation of belonging (as a global citizen, for example). For others, resisting the state is the ultimate act of citizenship (as popularized currently by a viral video of Matt Damon urging citizen protest). An interesting further study would be to look at justice action prisoners as “hyper-citizens,” people who utilize their privileges as Americans through engaging in what are often

In terms of content, the knowledge that underlies Plowshares philosophy directly, consciously, and seriously connects poverty to militarism (www.jonahhouse.org; Berrigan 1996; <http://disarmnowplowshares.wordpress.com>; Laffin and Montgomery 1987; Nepstad 2008; Tobey 2010; <http://transformnowplowshares.wordpress.com>). Plowshares recognize nuclear weapons as the “trump card” or the “gun to the head” (participant Clare Grady) of U.S. imperialism, a greedy, long-fingered process that has no regard for human life in its pursuit of capital accumulation. “American superiority is maintained by these weapons,” former nun (and the late Philip Berrigan’s wife) Liz McAlister explained during her interview, a superiority that is harmful and “must” be resisted (Sr. Ardeth Platte). Sr. Ardeth explained that militarism “has an effect on every issue of violence that exists...whether it be climate change or whether it be poverty...it has drastic effect.” Fr. Steve Kelly furthered, “it is a sin to build a nuclear weapon” as even in its construction, it is a “theft from the poor.” Hence, in their own understandings, they are literally resisting the same thing (at different levels) when working in a soup kitchen or banging on a nuclear weapon—both are responses to the *same* system of violence.

This analysis of interconnections explains how participant Kathleen Rumpf could do her 1983 Griffiss Plowshares action “on behalf of the homeless.” A member of the New York City Catholic Worker (on the Bowery) throughout the 1980’s, Kathleen watched “the face of the homeless change” from “men from the road” and veterans who “couldn’t quite come all the way home” to addicts and families, while President Reagan’s

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profoundly un-patriotic acts, such as destroying property (and property is “an idol in this country,” according to Susan Crane), tax refusal, and breaking laws. For this dissertation’s purpose, it is sufficient to say that an intentional relationship with one’s citizenship and national belonging are a crucial part of counter-hegemonic knowledge.

StarWars program thrived. For her, the bloody and bodily costs of imperial governance are not theoretical. The violence of nuclear weapons was present in her daily life—visible in the advent of high chairs in soup kitchens. Kathleen explained how militarism and poverty are linked to a military “high up” during a solo protest at the Pentagon in the early 1980’s. She recalled,

I’m on the side of the poor.... I’m not afraid of the bomb dropping tomorrow.’ And at that time, there’s a lot of fear, a lot of fear. I said ‘people are dying now, without even dropping a bomb, they’re falling like flies.’

Heartbroken from what she was seeing on the streets of New York City, Kathleen hammered on a B-52 to bring attention to those most affected by the plane’s existence; the poor who are left poor while fleets of expensive airplanes rest on military tarmacs.

Present also in counter-hegemonic knowledge is an understanding of how systemic, structural, nonviolent change occurs. As Sr. Ardeth Platte explained, “the only way you can bring about systemic change is through political action... legal or judicial action, and... direct action.” All are important, and most justice action prisoners try each method at some point. However, “there are very few... causes that have been won without people going to jail. Without giving your life. There are many people’s lives that have been given to that totality” (Sr. Ardeth). Hence, civil disobedience/nonviolent resistance is considered an essential, historically crucial, and effective political tool. Their knowledge of nonviolence/organizing gives justice action prisoners ways to confront what they oppose, and prison witness is chosen as a method of great seriousness.

### **Analysis: Gender**

In the ways that participants told their stories to me, gender impacted the significance granted to counter-hegemonic knowledge. Men were more generally focused

on relaying content “facts” while women told stories about their relationships with such facts. Bluntly, men acted because they “know” something to be true, and women “felt” or “watched” or “responded” to the truth of something. The difference can be subtle—for example, Kathleen Rumpf did not spell out the particulars of U.S. policy when she told me why she participated in a Plowshares action, but she showed that she understood the relevant politics and their impacts through noting the presence of a high chair in a soup kitchen as a *consequence* of military spending.<sup>64</sup> In watching “the face of the homeless change,” she personalized what she knew to be true politically, and acted in response to that (enacting the feminist dictum that the personal is political). Hence, she acted “for” the homeless, but “because of” nuclear weapons. Similarly, participant Susan Crane was propelled to participate in a Plowshares action after watching Haitian children “eating dirt cookies.” On the other hand, among the men I interviewed, a series of facts U.S. spending priorities and nuclear policy were offered as rationales for participation. Ed Kinane explained that he is an activist against foreign policy because “the U.S. has been so aggressively imperialist over the decades” and knowing this is “key to understanding so much of the world’s problems.” Thus, empire itself must be the target of his resistance. For Jack Gilroy, part of what motivated him to cross the line at Fort Benning was his reaction to “being taken for a fool, being lied to” about U.S. foreign policy. Crossing was a way to prove that he knew what was “really” going on. For the men, then, motivation came from an understanding of the “issues.” Indeed, *knowing things*—being intelligent and well informed, was consistently important among the men.

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<sup>64</sup> She remembered, “I came into a soup kitchen in Washington DC, and there was a high chair in the kitchen. And I was like ‘What?’ Wait! Wait!’ Now it’s common place, but I said, ‘when did it become acceptable in America for children to be in soup kitchens and shelters and homeless?!’”



Participant Karl Meyer's narrative of "becoming" an activist is more colorful than most, but accurately shows how "what one knows" can reign supreme among male activists, as determinant of both one's sense of self and the types of actions one chooses to engage in. Karl explained,

(As a child), when I looked at myself and the question, what do I want to do with my life?... the big problem that needed to be solved in my lifetime was the abolition of war.... And so... my identity was formed very early, and has been very consistent ever since. Not much has changed, except that my ambition has constantly been scaled back....I want to be known in history, but I don't want to be known for being brutal, cruel, mendacious. I want to be known for qualities that I admire in others.

...And we're all driven by this idea of ourselves, and by some kind of ambition or idea of who we want to be, who we want to be seen as....So I had a lot of ambition, but I would never sacrifice the honesty and the sense of justice and the sense of not wanting to harm others, the vision of a society in which people don't harm one another, I'd never sacrifice that to the ambition....So it was the imitation, there was ambition, but there was imitation of those I respect; Gandhi, Thoreau, Joan of Arc, (Ammon) Hennacy....So there isn't a tension between self and issue. I don't deny, I'd like to see a place in history. But I want a place in history like... William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth. And I don't particularly want the place that Lincoln has.... And maybe not even Frederick Douglas because he was kind of wishy-washy... I admire Jesus, I admire Gandhi, but where they're wrong they're wrong, and when they're right they're right. I can tell the difference. I'm Karl Meyer.

Karl's clarity that he "knows the difference" propels him towards resistance. He is certainly not bogged down by doubt or fear. To imitate those he desires, to be in accord with his vision of a more just society, he is remarkably clear about what must be done. It is straightforward, and he has the confidence to "know" the difference between what is right and wrong. Similarly, Ken Hayes explained that he needed to cross the line at Fort Benning because "I didn't want to die without doing something more than I'd done." He wanted a legacy that was more active than checkbook activism; he wanted to do something concrete, remarkable, and important.

In contrast to such surety, women often described what they know in the language of feelings or personalization—perhaps mentioning the Geneva Conventions or a particular weapons system as support, but most often grounding their facts in a sense of themselves (as a Christian, a mother, someone who cares about the future of the world). Alternately, a few women did not talk about the reasons for activism at all-- perhaps assuming that as a graduate student interested in these things, I already knew the politics that would lead a person to cross a line or hammer on a piece of weaponry. For those who did speak of policy-oriented rationales, Alice Gerard archetypically explained, “the reason I decided to cross, it was very personal. It wasn’t just an issue to me, because I’m not really that kind of person. It has to have some meaning to me.” For Clare Grady, making her relationship known to the weapons was important, and disarming them is “one of the most clear ways” that she can express this. Similarly, for Martha Hennessy, “My Catholic faith... instructs me in not living a life that is centered around oneself, and what’s best for oneself, and that just changes the dynamics.” Hence, in contrast to the men, the specifics of particular policies, faith, or laws were less important overall. Instead, the women tended to focus on their own experiences and personal motivations.

The differences in the ways men and women spoke of their knowledges do not reflect a difference in what is known by each group; the men in general are by no means more educated about particular content than are the women in general. However, the valuation that the men gave “knowledge” was higher—they spoke to me as they would in a court of law: citing facts, systems, and patterns. Women, on the other hand, spoke to me

more often as a friend, a woman, a mother—reaching for emotional connection rather than factual superiority.<sup>65</sup>

In effect, the difference in such stories revealed how validity and the establishing of legitimacy can be processes that are themselves gendered. In how they told me their stories of coming to activism, the men portrayed themselves to be experts: knowledgeable political subjects who were motivated by truth-telling and revelation. The women came across more strongly as “carers.” The nuns were more issue oriented than the other women, a pattern of difference (between sisters and lay women) that holds throughout this research’s findings.

One way to understand the difference in types of stories men and women told has to do with the types of power that men and women most commonly wield. In 1959, psychologists French and Raven developed a typology of social power that has been usefully employed by those interested in understanding gender differences in social influence (Carli 1999; 2001; Foschi 1996; Johnson 1976). Their model delineates five types of power: *reward power* (can provide rewards), *coercive power* (can punish), *expert power* (possesses specific knowledge), *legitimate power* (perceived as having the right to influence others) and *referent power* (likeableness) (reviewed in Carli, 1999). In 1976, Paula Johnson applied French and Raven’s model to gender, and predicted that referent power is the only source of power readily available to women, as in comparison to men

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<sup>65</sup> Interestingly, I often told people (usually when asking them for the interview) that I was not interested in their reasons for participation, but rather in learning about their experiences--- and the women fulfilled this request, while the men did so less often. So there are methodological implications that could be further examined here.

women are perceived less favorably on all other levels.<sup>66</sup> In 1983, Guttentag and Secord argued that men's power most often comes from their structural advantages and access to resources, whereas women's power comes from their domestic roles and relationships with others (reviewed in Carli, 1999). This reality impacts the ways that men and women exhibit leadership/influence over others, as well as in how they are perceived. Most basically, women who display competence are less likely to be liked than are men, unless they combine such expertise with "warmth" (Carli 1999, p. 93). To influence others, women are much more likely to use "indirect strategies" (crying, dependency), while men are more likely to be "direct" (coercion, argument). For women, "displays of competence, directness, or authority reduce (their) influence" (Carli 1999, p. 92) while these same behaviors do not affect men's influence over others.

These patterns, in how men versus women are accustomed to demonstrating and conveying influence/power, are apparent in the different ways in which women and men talked to me about what they "know." From a French and Raven inspired framework, to tell a convincing story, be perceived as legitimate, count as an expert, etc., it is logical that men portrayed themselves as "experts" and women as "carers." According to psychological research on men and women's sources of power, women are most likely to be "influential" when utilizing referent power—i.e. friendliness and warmth—whereas men can rely most heavily upon the first four sources. Hence, accounting for the difference in men's and women's stories may in part be explained by their lived understanding of how they are most successfully perceived as competent and compelling.

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<sup>66</sup> Men are perceived to possess greater competency than women, and the standards for competence are lower for men than women (Foschi 1996). Further, women are less likely to be perceived as "legitimate" (occupying a higher status) than are men (Johnson 1976).

In response to this learned knowledge, their stories emphasize different content regardless of subject knowledge.

### **Public Identity: The Self in Structure**

Another important piece of *what* justice action prisoners know is how they know themselves, both structurally and subjectively. When they defined themselves structurally, they did not usually use words such as white, religious, or American. Significantly, gender was not an important part of how justice action prisoners described themselves, and sexuality was mentioned only once, by a bisexual participant. Other axes of identity (ability, ethnicity) were never discussed. A few men mentioned being a man in their lists of personal privilege (“as a white, now middle aged man...”) and a few women spoke of being distinctive as female activists, but in general, such specific identifications were not highlighted. Instead, participants most often defined themselves structurally as “privileged” and “responsible”—responsible as U.S. citizens and privileged by race, education, class, and experience. What was most highlighted was the effect of these identities rather than their existence—and very specifically, the privileges and responsibilities that spring from them.

### **Privileged Citizens**

Participation in prison witness is frequently linked with a concept of privilege: it is as U.S. citizens/white/well educated people that justice action prisoners feel responsible to act. This is reviewed at length in chapter 5, but participant Meagan Doty usefully summarized the general sentiment. She said,

I feel uncomfortable...that I have this privilege and I didn't earn it... and sometimes, I don't feel like I use it very well...and I need to use that, not to my benefit, but for the benefit of all those who didn't have that great chance, of being born in the place that I was born in...(In college, I realized that) You have power,

and not everybody has that power... You are part of the 1% who has a college education...I can't just take that for granted. I need to use my 1% power to speak for the people that will never have the opportunity.... these things just keep reaffirming the fact that this is good work, it's hard work, it's frustrating... but if I didn't come here (to the SOAW vigil) and do this, I would feel a little bit empty.

Acting in response to privilege is a crucial part of justice action prisoners' understandings of themselves and what they do. A significant part of this comes from their status as U.S. citizens. Their citizenship gives them ability to act (without higher risks than temporary incarceration), but more than this, national belonging is what makes it mandatory for them to act. It is *their* government, acting on their behalf, with their consent unless they demonstrate otherwise, whose policies result in struggle and death for others across the globe (Ann Tiffany). As Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit explained during the 2010 ALC retreat, "These are actions for U.S. citizens to take, because as citizens of empire, this is what's required of me." Hence, while they may not identify as "American," they feel compelled to engage because they are citizens of the United States.

### **Responsible**

Whether for reasons of faith, knowledge, privilege, citizenship, or some combination, justice action prisoners expressed a sense of responsibility for challenging the suffering that takes place globally "in their names." With tears in her eyes, Susan Crane expressed, "when I see the pictures of people in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when I see the woman who's body is burned and she's trying to nurse her child, what do you do with that picture?" For her, the answer is clear: resist. Resist those who are responsible for the violence, the policies that enforce it, the thinking that enables it, the institutions that support it—resist totally, not worrying about results (although of course, as Liz McAlister said, "we all want to be effective") but with the certainty that "we are just

doing what needs to be done” (Clare Grady). This certainty is supported by a critical consciousness, the documents of the church, and a “counter-hegemonic knowledge,” but is also crucially enabled by a sense of personal responsibility.<sup>67</sup> Susan continued;

when I sit with those images and with that knowledge, in prayer, and I sit with my faith tradition that says we’re supposed to love our enemies, what am I called to do? I can’t be silent.<sup>68</sup>... I look at the pictures of babies whose mothers were exposed to depleted uranium, and I think “is it right to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it? What’s right?”... So I begin to disarm the weapons. By international law they should be disarmed. It’s our duty and our responsibility to begin to disarm them, by my faith we need to... and someone needs to start.

Indeed, despite their wealth of reasons for engagement, being a person willing to “start” is remarkable among justice action prisoners, and all ultimately participate in prison witness because they feel responsible to do so. Indeed, more often than not, participants told me that despite the technique’s many challenges, “not acting” would be more difficult than doing something (Meagan Doty). At the root, what would make it so difficult to “not act” is that it would be inauthentic to their conceptions of who they are.

### **Who I Am: The Self Identifications of Justice Action Prisoners**

#### **Active**

Overwhelmingly and most basically, justice action prisoners identify in activist terms—i.e., as active people. They are busy. This is equally true for men and women: it is

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<sup>67</sup> As Ellen Grady explained, the first Plowshares action “spoke to me” because “it was we the people taking responsibility for our weapons.... It is our work to make disarmament happen... and it’s not just the transformation of the weapons, it’s the transformation of your own heart when you chose to do that.”

<sup>68</sup> Susan supports herself through her faith: “there’s a story where... Jesus goes into the temple and there’s a man there with a withered hand, and Jesus calls him up and... asks the guy to put his hand out....the religious authorities are saying “it’s the Sabbath. You’re not supposed to cure anyone on the Sabbath.” And Jesus looks at them and says “is it right to do good or to do evil? Is it right to save life or destroy it?” Silent. The people around him are silent. And this is one of the few times in the Bible when Jesus is angry and grieved, he’s angered at their silence, and he cures the guy’s hand.”

the core self-definition of a justice action prisoner. Fr. Luis Barrios laughed as he told me, “Fighting for justice, there is no way you can say, I’ve already accomplished my goal.” There is “no vacation, no retirement” in this job. As nonviolent resisters, justice action prisoners don’t want to “just talk” (Julienne Oldfield), they want to *do* things.

**Preach the Gospel, and if you have to, use words** (*Jack Gilroy, quoting Saint Francis*)

Connected to being active, people are committed to “living out” their faith (Michael Pasquale). What I expected to be an important independent form of identification (as religious, Catholic, Christian), proved unfounded: very few self-defined as religious, despite the fact that of the 43 people I interviewed, I am only sure that eight are not or are no longer religious, while twelve are or have been ministers, priests, or nuns.<sup>69</sup> Rather than religious, people described themselves as committed to *living faithfully*: their identity as people of faith was important to the extent that it was evident in what they did.

For Fr. Luis Barrios, liberation theology is “an inclusive practice, you need to let people see God in what you do” and not just in “what you say.” Nancy Gwin described

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<sup>69</sup> I draw this number based on a bit of inference: without necessarily “telling” me that they were religious, for most it was apparent. Twelve are/were vowed religious. Nine more live or have lived in Catholic Worker houses (as practicing Catholics) or work for the 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center for Justice, a progressive Catholic activist organization in Chicago. Four described living faithfully centrally in their personal stories. Eight others did not centrally discuss faith, but mentioned their congregations or faith lives during our interview (for example, Kathy “always thought I’d be a nun”). Two did not discuss their faith or lack thereof, but attended graduate level theology programs at religious institutions. Eight told me that they are agnostic, atheist, not very spiritual/religious, or skeptical of theology—several of whom lived part of their lives as church-attending Christians. Lois is an atheist member of the Unitarian Church. In sum, the group I study is *hugely* Christian, and specifically Catholic—though the theology that they align with as a group is not mainstream.



her activism as “action prayers”—which she claimed would make her “sound more religious” than she is, but went on to explain that

If you really study the Bible and the New Testament, Jesus didn’t just sit around and pray. Many of our prophets are troublemakers, and they are still regarded as very prayerful people. So that is my challenge to myself and the people I interact with. Get out of your pews! Get up off of our prayer rugs!... it’s time to do something!

As faith-based activists, it is important to use “our own two feet” in the works of charity, peace, and justice (Sr. Carol Gilbert).

The impact of living faithfully is huge for justice action prisoners—as Clare Grady explained, “In the mass, we sum it up: to love and to serve. You know, social transformation here.” Loving and serving are traditional Catholic tenets, but in the hands of justice action prisoners, they are also powerful tools for social change. John Heid encapsulated this when he told me about working on the U.S.-Mexico border, a place where leaving water in the desert for traveling migrants is illegal. “On the border,” he said, “works of mercy are works of resistance.” In effect, and as Phil Berrigan described, the work of living faithfully is inherently resistant: they are one and the same.

In sum, identification as faithful is expressed as a way of behaving in the world, rather than a sense of belonging to a particular group or believing/engaging in the ritual of a particular theology. Even the most religious described themselves firstly as busy people who are fundamentally informed, directed, and buoyed by their Christian beliefs.

### **Consistent**

Justice action prisoners hope to be “consistent.” They strive to be “true to myself, true to some moral standard” (Ed Kinane). Living “consistently” was expressed as being

uncompromising—never bending on one’s values or principles (John Heid takes the dictum “thou shalt not kill” seriously and is opposed to war, the death penalty, and abortion). In explaining how he came to be an activist, Professor Bill Houston warmly recalled being inspired by his parents, who were the ‘most consistent’ people he knew—they tried hard to live their values, a quality he deeply admired. Consistency is also interpreted as interior work. Jerry Berrigan explained that, “I try ever daily to follow and deepen my own prayer life, and to abide by the insights and the graces that that produces for me.” Consistency is enacted in the effort to present the same levels of dignity and calm publicly and privately; with one’s sentencing judges and with one’s closest family, with the media and in one’s private thoughts.

The latter is a central principle in Plowshares philosophy. Martha Hennessy explained that “for me, it’s always been a question of ‘how does one take personal responsibility, how does one see oneself in the world and in relation to others, and what do we do with what we see?’” For Clare Grady, the challenge of living consistently is about how to respond personally to what is being done “in my name” politically. Describing how it felt to do a Plowshares action, she said,

The word ‘alignment’ comes to mind, like any relationship... the more you act in that humble way, it literally manifests in your body.... And when I hammered on that... B-52 that was carrying this first strike nuclear weapon for this empire that I live in, I was making that so clear. I describe it as like a Chiropractic adjustment, *psss-ch!* Like I disarmed the beast, the head of the beast.

The relief of adjustment is a wonderfully descriptive image that resonates with the ways women and men talk about their feelings of involvement. Michael Pasquale explained,

My ultimate motivation was to be true to myself, and to be true to what I believed in... (not getting arrested) part of the feeling was like I hadn’t followed through on something... for me there was an internal need to be able to live out my faith.... And when I finally went through the process I could finally say, ‘okay. I

learned something about myself and I did it... I made that choice, I took that stand, and no one can take that away from me.' So as a citizen and as a Catholic, for myself, I put my money where my mouth was... I put my body on the line.

Through direct action, the justice action prisoners I spoke with felt a powerful sense of relief and contentment for being where they were supposed to be, doing the work that they were "put here to do" (Randy Serraglio). This relief was rooted in acting consistently.

### **Rebellious**

In addition to describing themselves as active, faithful, and consistent, many participants seem to simply be born trouble-makers, in the sense that they have a history of bucking authority. "You tell me a rule," Rae Kramer said, "and my instinct is to break it." Ever since grade school (when a teacher beat a student with a ping-pong paddle), Ed Kinane has had a "chip on his shoulder" about authority. Randy Serraglio is a "hot-head" who cannot stand arbitrary rules (he recalled a high school teacher telling him that he "always thought" Randy would get arrested—but not for "something good!"), and Karl Meyer is—like his father and sister, "unusually fearless." Julienne Oldfield was a Labour party councilwoman in England who asked questions about the municipal budget that no one had previously dared voice. Some people just seem to be born rebellious—and brave, and for them prison witness is a part of a life-long pattern.

### **The Doings of Identity**

Motivated by a deep faith life, a commitment to political and historical analysis and action, a sense of responsibility and privilege, and/or a self-conception suited to principles and rebellion, it still takes a lot of effort to align one's actions with one's ideals. The product of the efforts to bridge what one knows with what one does is most

visible in three sites: learning, the nonviolent lifestyle, and solidarity. In each, justice action prisoners do things that demonstrate their commitment to identity-work; to living in alignment with their beliefs. This section explicates more fully what comprises such work, as well as how such identities may be gained.

Social movement scholars are interested in how activists gain their “insurgent mindsets” (Groch 2001; Mansbridge 2001; Morris and Braine 1989). Sharon Erickson Nepstad analyzes the development of oppositional consciousness among privileged activists who were part of the Central American Solidarity Movement in the 1980s, a project that stands out for its focus on activists of privilege (2007). In contrast to those who are involved in organizing because doing so directly impacts their lives, how privileged people (and specifically, those not directly affected by particular issues but who are still involved) come to activism differs, and is less well understood in social movement analysis. Nepstad finds that “moral shocks” (“an unexpected event or piece of information [that] raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action”—Jaspar 1997, p. 106, quoted in Nepstad 2007) and “free spaces”—the “cultural work of interpreting moral shocks, creating a culture of resistance, and framing” are what move privileged people to action (Nepstad 2007, pp. 666-667, see also Groch 2001). In the case of justice action prisoners, free spaces and moral shocks are complimented by ongoing learning, including a basis in an alternative epistemology, direct experience, and “ah-ha” moments, which propel people to action and secure them to movements in profound ways. To Nepstad’s analysis, then, I add “learning” as a critical complementary piece of what motivates privileged people towards activism.

## 1) Learning: How they know

Learning is essential for justice action prisoners, and for men and women alike is a constant “doing.” Their worldviews are certainly not mainstream, and the achievement of a counter hegemonic knowledge is evidence of an alternative way of learning, accepting, and utilizing information.

Most basically, among this group of people there is a serious commitment to ongoing learning. Such learning is complimentary to social movement conceptions of framing, but is different for the ways that it is intrinsically motivated (the actors do it themselves) and ongoing. For example, Plowshares actions are directed by a profound “social analysis” (Sr. Carol Gilbert). The women at Jonah House watch ABC News together every night (to be “connected to the public”), then listen to “Democracy Now” (to get the “real story”). They also read privately and do Bible study together daily. From this deep and varied informed place, they discern appropriate resistance actions (Sr. Carol). Similarly, the annual vigil at the SOA is preceded by two full days of conferencing, including seminars, trainings, and film screenings on subjects such as U.S. foreign policy, drones, the drug war, and nonviolence. Many justice action prisoners travel to sites of conflict, often on peace delegations (such as those offered by *Witness for Peace*) to learn about what is happening “from the ground up” (Ken Crawley, who works for *Witness for Peace* in Chicago). Learning is also personal, and justice action prisoners learn much about themselves—their values, capacities, and privileges, through involvement in resistance. *Learning* is a key do-ing of resistance, and most justice action prisoners take their obligation to “know”—as resistant agents who speak for change—very seriously.

The development of the counter-hegemonic knowledges required for high-risk activism come in two ways: through traditional modes of learning (reading, attending lectures, college courses) and through experience (travel, work, communities of belonging, personal contact). Together, these can constitute a particular epistemology, or way of knowing. Indeed, the development of a “counter-hegemonic knowledge” is the result of intention, rather than social positioning: very few of those I spoke with gained their social analysis through experience based on their own location or traditional schooling, but rather learned it through deliberate placement of themselves in alternative positions; geographic, social, and academic. The learning that occurs happens as both a life-long process and as “ah-ha” moments, and is reinforced through experience. Current events, ongoing wars, prosecution of whistle-blowers, and political repression reinforce their analysis and strengthen their commitments, while prison provides the ultimate validation that their motivating social, political, and economic analysis is correct. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 7, prison solidifies an alternative and radical “standpoint” that begins as identity-work in the form of counter-hegemonic knowledge.

In addition to what they know, there is a particular epistemology present in the justice action prisoner’s intellect; a way of knowing that highlights personal responsibility, justifies disobedient action, and valorizes “right action” as righteous and important, regardless of the action’s (tangible) consequences. Indeed, it is this way of thinking (more than a particular body of knowledge) that motivates action. Counter-hegemonic knowledge is like wearing a pair of glasses, and once they are on, a lot of what you see looks like imperial violence requiring resistance. The epistemology also legitimates direct action and jail, so that imprisonment is thought of as an essential part of

the activist experience rather than as simply a consequence that should be avoided. “It was something missing,” Nancy Gwin told me, “that I’d been wanting to do.” For committed nonviolent activists, not going to jail is like a mountaineer not climbing an important peak. If you want to be a “46er,” you’ve got to climb all 46 peaks. And a lengthy stay in prison is the Mount Everest of such activism: if you can possibly do it, you don’t want to miss it.

This epistemology is primarily made available through how people gain their knowledge, which is largely experience-based. For a few participants, reading political, economic, historical, and philosophical texts primarily grounds and justifies their activism.<sup>70</sup> Many more “know” through the lens of their faith—for Liz McAlister, becoming a sister (nun) was “the thing” that made a difference in her life. It made her take the time for prayer, scripture, study, and “getting a radically different view of the world from that perspective.” However, for the majority of those I spoke with (even the avid readers), their crucial knowledge was built upon experience. Of the 43 people interviewed, 24 discussed international travel (to such places as Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, Colombia, El Salvador, Haiti, Iraq, the Occupied territories, Afghanistan, Lebanon) as essential to their understandings of how U.S. policies affect people across the globe. Many recalled being told, like Sr. Dorothy Pagosa was in El Salvador, “go home, and tell your president, no more bombs.” Uniquely, Fr. Luis Barrios was born in Puerto Rico, so for him colonialism “is not theoretical...I am one who has lived the consequences.” Eleven other participants spoke of their work among the poor in the

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<sup>70</sup> Karl Meyer found his commitment in the works of Socrates, Gandhi, and Ammon Hennacy. Ed Kinane reads historical and political texts through the lens of his education in Critical Anthropology at the New School in New York City.

United States, humanizing those they worked with as they became aware of the systemic injustices—racism, capitalism, prejudice—that assured the perpetuation of their poverty. For example, Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan, a Franciscan sister, took a sabbatical from the church to work in daily pay. For two years, she labored in a series of factories and offices in uptown Chicago with the city’s poor, an experience that made her recognize the “problems” of the Old Testament as present today. Many others work in Catholic Worker houses, doing the “acts of mercy” with America’s poor.

Of everyone I talked with, Kathy Kelly described the mandate to “know” through personal experience the most clearly. She needs to “stand alongside” those affected by U.S. policies to understand how they experience it, and as a result has visited Iraq at least 26 times, as well as Afghanistan (9+ times), Bosnia, Lebanon, Nicaragua, and Gaza. In these places, she lives in the refugee camps and villages of working class and poor people for months at a time, to learn the real effects of war and poverty. She contrasts her approach with the “intelligence” gained by drones, and works tirelessly to share what she learns through prolific writing and speaking when in the U.S. (see [www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org)).<sup>71</sup> As I write, Kathy Kelly is again in prison, where she hopes that “my short sojourn inside Lexington’s prison walls will help me better understand and perhaps help shed some small light on the systems that affect other people trapped there.” (<http://www.nukeresister.org/2015/01/23/a-future-in-prison-by-kathy-kelly/#more-5488>).

Such experience is strengthened when people have a personal connection with someone affected by violence. Alice Gerard was galvanized to action by the 1989

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<sup>71</sup> Kathy’s dedication to understanding and truth-telling has twice earned her a Nobel Peace Prize nomination, and the information and solidarity she produces is highly valued within the peace movement and beyond.



kidnapping and brutal torture of Urseline Sister Dianna Ortiz (a woman she met in language school in Guatemala), by SOA trained military personnel who were directed by a North American. She served 18 months at Danbury FCI for three separate SOA Watch actions, actions she carried out “for” Sister Dianna. Reverend Ken Kennon still gets angry when he thinks about the Nicaraguan woman he met in Tucson, whose husband’s body was returned to her street in hundreds of little pieces. Ken Crawley is amazed by the courage of an SOA torture victim who never sleeps in the same bed twice, but who continues speaking. Tom Mahedy remembered that he comfortably denied the linkages between the U.S. military in which he had served and what he was hearing through his church about the wars in Central America. Then, in 1982, he heard a few El Salvadorian Mothers of the Disappeared speak, and allowed himself to wonder, “what if they are telling the truth?” From that moment forward, his life was changed.

Such personal connections move people to action because they provide certainty in the underlining of what they know. After this sort of direct experience, people feel like they know the truth of what they protest “in their bones.” Those with personal connections make up a critical core of recidivist activists; only a few vowed religious did not discuss profound personal experiences in their rationales for how they stay active in the movements for the long-haul. (Seemingly, people can act once because it’s the right thing to do. But you don’t see recidivists who are neither clergy or deeply imbricated with the lives of those they work with/for). Close and intentional experience with a dramatically different way of living to the (privileged) life one has known is thus hugely correlated with the capacity to “know” like an activist ready to commit to prison. Indeed, only Jerry Berrigan, Clare Grady and Ellen Grady did not specifically mention such

experience as formative in their development as activists, three people who were “born into” the movement.<sup>72</sup>

Some participants also described an “ah-ha” moment as critical in their development/discernment process--a “moral shock” in the parlance of social movements. In such a moment, something “clicks” and a new life-path is made available (Jack Gilroy). Jack Gilroy spoke of his “epiphany” in Vienna in 1955, an experience that turned him away from what he had previously known. “I was a gung-ho soldier,” he explained, who had been chosen to participate in the ceremony granting Austria its post-war independence. For a month, “we were trained to march and we were to look directly into the eye” of the Russian soldiers whom they would be standing opposite,

and we were told, in expletives that I will not say on your tape, what we were to think of this individual. And I looked into the eyes of this kid, he had kind of blondish hair... and he was probably 17 or 18, he was a teenager as well” (Jack is crying, as he speaks). “And I thought, ‘what is this all about? I’m supposed to hate this kid?’ ... After that, I was no longer the good soldier.... I can still remember that young Russian, that Russian kid, and he was supposed to be the epitome of evil. And that is when I realized, this is what we are all being taught. These lies. This idea of hate the enemy, *whoever* the enemy is.

This experience propelled Jack towards mistrusting government intelligence, and he has been an activist against imperialistic policies ever since.

There are also reinforcing “ah-ha” moments; moments that effectively confirmed a path already suspected. Ken Crawley recalled hearing Dan Berrigan speak; “It was a big moment,” he said, “it was a pretty big moment”—one that left him changed, finding inspiration in Berrigan’s words that had “something to do with courage.” Shortly after her experience with daily pay, Sr. Mary Kay went to a film about U.S. involvement with

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<sup>72</sup> Jerry is Dan and Phil Berrigan’s brother, Clare and Ellen Grady’s parents were close friend of the Berrigans. Their father John Grady was a major player in developing the form of resistance that his daughter’s carry through to this day.

Panama, and left thinking “what would you rather do than dedicate your life to working for justice?” More commonly, people experience a “moment of truth” while witnessing or supporting other activists, particularly during their trials. Randy Serraglio was moved by the sentencing of Sister Claire O’Mara for her action at Fort Benning, a woman he described as a “65 pound, 87 year old nun” sentenced for illegal trespass at the SOA (interview). For Kathleen Rumpf, who attended the early Plowshares trials of Daniel and Philip Berrigan, the words spoken resonated with her experiences working with the homeless on the Bowery. She explained, “the actual trials would be so prophetic, and life changing to almost anybody going. I mean it’s something that changes you forever” because of how resonant “the words that were spoken” were with “some of what I heard and some of what I saw.”

Whether through faith, reading, a personal connection, travel, or a life-altering moment, at some point justice action prisoners begin to see differently: as Kathleen Rumpf explained, “I see the people who don’t matter, I see through their eyes.” Seeing this way shifts their understanding of the world and how they are able to learn, as it mandates their resistance and fortifies them to carry it through over the long-haul.

## **2) The Nonviolent Lifestyle**

For many justice action prisoners, particular the religious, the primary labor of living in alignment is structural—it is in how they organize their lives. However it is achieved, a “nonviolent lifestyle” is a key part of being able to engage in prison witness; the risk of lengthy incarceration mandates that such things as rent, childcare, and work obligations are at least negotiable. As Ed Kinane explained, “for years I’ve organized my life in such a way that if I were engaged in an issue and available to do so, I would...risk

arrest if others were doing so as well... most of my discernment has come in shaping my life-style so as to be available for my style of activism” (personal email). The work Ed describes is about his way of life, which involves not owning a car, keeping the heat down during the central New York winter, and earning so little money that he does not have to pay federal taxes. For Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit, the commitment to resistance required leaving the priesthood in 1988, to “put my body where my mouth is, and join the Catholic Worker.” For Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, it meant becoming a sister, and adding a vow of nonviolence to her promises of chastity, obedience, and poverty. Living in community, as a Catholic Worker, priest, or sister is an intentional choice that facilitates more extreme methods of resistance and partly explains why there are so many vowed religious in these movements: they are there precisely, to do resistance work better. It is not accidental or coincidental.

For those most committed to living “nonviolently,” incarceration is an easier continuation (rather than disruption) of their life-work than it is for those living more “normal” lives. Here, there is a significant gender component around parenting. Both movements strive to make it possible for men and women to engage in prison witness, but the reality is that the experience is vastly different for women with families than it is for men (with or without families) or the vowed religious.<sup>73</sup> At least nine of the twenty men I spoke with are fathers, but only Tom Mahedy, Ken Kennon, and Dan Sage spoke of how this role impacted their experience.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, ten women included in

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<sup>73</sup> This was reiterated through stories people told of other activists—several participants shared stories of mothers who had experienced difficulties with their families as a result of incarceration, while none shared such stories of fathers.

<sup>74</sup> Tom’s children were four and six years old when he was incarcerated for an SOA violation, Ken’s son died in an accident at age 23, while Dan and his wife Doris were

this research are mothers, and all ten were forthcoming about the role their children played in their lives as activists. Sometimes this was half-jokingly, as examples of difficult “practice” for nonviolent behavior, but children were also described as painful to separate from or as challenged by or the purpose/impacts of their activism. Plowshares activists were quick to say that “there is no going back” to a “normal life” if you want to be “serious about resistance” (Fr. Steve Kelly). For fathers and mothers, the impact of this truth are crucially different—and partly explains why there are so many vowed religious, as well as elderly, justice action prisoners in this country.<sup>75</sup>

For anyone who has done the organizing life-work for being an activist, the space between “regular life,” radical activism, and incarceration is narrowed. For example, several of the priests I spoke with described their prison cells as like a “monk’s cell,” and they viewed incarceration as a seamless (if stressful) continuation of their life of service (Fr. Louis Vitale). In effect, then, a nonviolent lifestyle facilitates resistance because it makes it a little less jarring. To be blunt, for younger professionals with families, six months away is experienced as a real sacrifice. For vowed religious living in community, these same six months are typically a smoother (though still often challenging) transition with fewer heartaches.

Further, for the priests, sisters, “professional” activists, and Catholic Workers who have made the lifestyle choices that are helpful to being a repeat offender felon, it may be easier to “step back into the same stream” upon release from prison than for those for whom the time represented a total “break” (Ed Kinane). Living in voluntary poverty,

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imprisoned together and spoke of how they did not adequately think through the effect of their joint absence on their son.

<sup>75</sup> Knowing the impacts of prison on one’s life, Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan told me that “those with children... shouldn’t do it.” Others disagree, but her observation is important.

being a missionary in Africa, and wearing sweaters indoors are ways of living that ease the restrictions and challenges of prison—but they are not inevitable. A nonviolent lifestyle is a choice, and at the core represents a labor of identity alignment.

One important way to do align one’s identities with one’s values is to live in community, as in sharing living space with people other than family. According to my participants—and particularly among Plowshares—living in community provides the supports necessary to engage in resistance, as it facilitates the “social analysis” needed for direct action (Sr. Carol Gilbert). Community is the “key to all of it,” according to Ellen Grady, and is also where one “gets the vision” for the action (Liz McAlister). It provides both personal nurturing and logistical support during incarceration. Clare Grady explained that one’s community is the group with whom one is “conspiring.” She continued, “It’s a dirty word, in the legal system, but it’s actually quite beautiful. Conspiring. Breathing together.” For members of Jonah House, community is a “mandate” as resistance is simply too hard to keep up on one’s own (Sr. Carol Gilbert). This insistence on community is supported by scholarship. In her study of Plowshares, Sharon Erickson-Nepstad shows that community is the crucial element that enables activists to participate over the “long-haul” (Nepstad 2008).

Living in community does more than clarify thinking and provide childcare during incarceration, however. It also tests individuals to continue the work of “disarming” their “own hearts” as its members strive to model alternative ways of living to the violent status quo. John Heid explained:

Community. The image that comes to mind is, it’s like the grist-mill. And it’s a constant reminder, and I did get this from Phil (Berrigan), of all the things that we struggle with in a privileged first world culture. It’s not exclusive to us... it’s *dramatized* for us....So the attachment that we have to ego and to power, to

control my things, my laptop, my bicycle... that gets a regular workout and requires, if one is going to stay, a letting go.... Community is absolutely essential for the work that I want to do... Intentional community is... an ongoing workout. (It is) a lot of work, and it forces you to work within yourself.

In other words, community enables a lifestyle that is more consistent with one's (anti-capitalist, nonviolent, Christian) values, and living this way is both a form of resistance and personal practice. Indeed, for Fr. Steve Kelly, the formation of community by those conspiring together is a greater instance of resistance to the status quo than is the moment of action itself. He explained that

99% of (the) witness is in the months preceding the action, when the folks are together (usually weekend retreats or five or six multi-day sessions). This involves forming community which is conditioned on wearing down the ego, the rough edges of the will. One has to have a disarmed heart to proceed, and we cannot act without being in community. If lack of community is the diagnosis, then the cure is to form community in the face of fears and consequences. (personal email).

One of the ways in which community is the "cure" is as a site of personal work, where one gets to practice living consistently in thought and deed. John Heid described his practice of letting go of attachment to things. Community pushes us, Clare Grady said, "it takes community to bring out our gifts and to challenge us" towards humility, balance, and being "down to Earth." Sharing communal values, items, and spaces, is not easy. Martha Hennessy explained that she lives in community intentionally, in order to "bump up against each other, remind each other of what we're doing..." John laughed as he remembered Phil Berrigan saying "Almost anyone of us can be angelic in front of the Pentagon," continuing "it is easy to be an exemplary model of nonviolent disarmament... on the picket line... and then go home and find something out of order and be

apoplectic.” So community helps with consistency; it shows weak spots and provides opportunities to practice. Living in community does not get easier with experience, but is

sort of like getting arrested a lot. People say, it must be easier for you... and there is something about a familiarity... but any of these commitments that we make are significant. We learn something about ourselves by going through them.... So we’re always changing (John Heid).

Being open to “always changing” is evidence of justice action prisoners’ commitment to living as their best selves. The allegiance to (principled) nonviolence involves every aspect of their lives, and requires constant effort.

Community is also “fun” Lois Puitzer insisted. Martha Hennessy explained that “it’s very important to have fun along the way, because you cannot sustain it in the long haul if you’re not living in community and having some kind of fun.” Much of this “fun” comes from the people with whom one interacts in this work—as Lois Puitzer explained, “you meet nicer people than you’d meet elsewhere, that’s all there is to it.” You “have a good time,” Sr. Kathleen Desautels agreed, and meet “the kindest people along the way.” Clare said that her sister Ellen Grady always makes sure that things are fun—disarmament protests are combined with Celtic fiddling and jam sessions on the busses that transport activists to and from the actions. The second time I visited Kathleen Rumpf’s house (to interview Martha, who was visiting from New Hampshire as a participant in an anti-drone trial) Kathleen was keen to show me her newest acquisition, a sign that had cost a dollar at the thrift store. It read, “A good friend will come and bail you out of jail, but a true friend will be sitting next to you saying, damn. That was fun.” In work that is so serious, so personally challenging, and so intimately concerned with issues of gross violence, the element of fun is not to be underestimated. As Martha



Hennessy said, “we have an obligation to laugh, as we’re thrown into the furnace.” Keeping spirits up is essential, as opportunities for burn-out are high.

For the devoutly committed (and particularly for those inspired by a path of principled nonviolence), communal living is an invaluable help for the personal work that it facilitates and forces, as well as for the political stand that it makes. As Clare explained, social transformation happens “in all these little ways, like how you are with your neighbors and friends.” So work that seems small is important: in living intentionally, justice action prisoners are trying to create the world that they want. This “creation” begins with who they are.

### **3) Solidarity**

Solidarity is here analyzed as an ongoing and significant product of identity-work, a necessary result of the labor of aligning a counter-hegemonic knowledge with a particular conception of “who I am.” Gender did not prove a significant determinant of either activist articulations or experiences of solidarity, with men and women instead presenting similar sentiments along movement lines. However, a conception of oneself as privileged and responsible was key. Justice action prisoners expressed thoughtful notions and enactments of solidarity, which are useful for scholars interested in this topic. The first part of this section complicates, from a transnational feminist framework, the practice of solidarity generally, and then analyzes each movement in turn. The second part looks at questions of representation as both essential and troublesome, and evaluates activist notions of “speaking-for” through a transnational feminist lens, in an effort towards identifying best practices in this realm.

Solidarity is a central rationale for action, description of method, motivating reason, goal, and enjoyable perk of involvement in nonviolent resistance. Referencing Saul Alinsky, participant Nancy Gwin explained that “solidarity is critical and impossible.” Most basically, the movements for disarmament and to close the SOA are “solidarity” movements in that they are performed “on behalf of” others. Plowshares activists often ground their actions in phrases such as, “I do this for the world’s children,” while SOAW members protest on behalf of those most affected by U.S. policies (such as campesinos in Latin America) who are unable to protest themselves. For the movements studied here, the intended “recipient” of actions are generally “others.” SOAW specifically considers itself to be a “solidarity” movement, while Plowshares does not.

The concept of solidarity activated within both movements mirrors what SOAW founder Fr. Roy Bourgeois learned in La Paz, Bolivia, from his time there in the 1970s as a missionary priest. In Bolivia, solidarity “meant ‘to accompany’ and ‘to walk with.’” To be in solidarity means to make another’s struggle for justice, peace, and equality *your* struggle” (2013). Hence, solidarity is fundamentally about empathy—about imagining oneself in another’s position, and in this way is inherently and simultaneously a project of identity (see Lyshaug 2006). However, solidarity is also about power. It activates and relies upon differential access to social, political, economic, cultural, and personal power, and must be engaged in carefully (Mohanty 2003). Among justice action prisoners, engaging in solidarity is a necessary resulting “doing” of aligning counter-hegemonic knowledge with identity.

Solidarity is a buzzword in academic and activist circles, with many partnerships being celebrated as instances of solidarity. Solidarity is defined as the “union or

fellowship arising from common responsibilities and interests, as between members of a group or between classes, peoples” (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/solidarity>). Solidarity is about working towards a common purpose, with other people who are like you. Interestingly, the meaning of the word specifies that it forged between members of a “group,” as in members of the same class. From its very etymology, then, lies the central difficulty of border-crossing solidarity work, which is around equality; of decision making ability, access, and of building coalitions that are responsive to longstanding inequalities and the blindnesses they produce. As discussed in chapter 2, the fundamental challenge of solidarity is how to work together, across difference, towards common goals, without reifying the oppressive patterns that such border-crossing work can often generate (Anzaldúa 1990; Carty and Mohanty forthcoming; Cole 2008; Cole and Luna 2010; Fowlkes 1997; Lyshaug 2006; Mohanty 2003; Reagan 1983).

Sara Koopman shares concerns about the “imperialism within” SOA Watch activists (2006; 2008a). A participant in the movement for over 20 years and a feminist geographer, Koopman’s work has been work-shopped, read, and commented upon by her fellow activists, and her insights have seemingly informed movement rhetorics. Specifically, Koopman is interested in white women prisoners of conscience (the term used by the movement), women who are idealized as “good” but in their solidarity actions may reinforce a colonial role of “helper” that strengthens global patterns of domination. She is unsettled, as is geographer Diane Nelson (1999, p. 70) about the “complicity of solidarity in the on-going production of relations of oppression” (quoted in Koopman 2008a, p. 290). Such complicity is facilitated by a liberal notion of self, Koopman argues, as fuller subjecthood for white women has historically been better

accomplished through proximity to those who are in even less-ideal relation to masculine white liberal selfhood; children, native peoples, etc. (p. 289).<sup>76</sup> Hence, Koopman argues, to change relations of imperialism, we must first change ourselves (p. 290). Her insights resonate with this research's findings, which show justice action prisoners to be consistently focused on aligning identity/"disarming one's own heart"/challenging their "imperialism within" as an essential part of peacemaking—as is evident through their particular ways of "doing" solidarity.

As the beneficiaries of empire, justice action prisoners told me that it is precisely U.S. citizens who should protest U.S. policies that harm people in other parts of the world—their location mandates resistance "on behalf of" others. I was repeatedly told that privileged white Americans are in the right position to do so, and their protest carries more legitimacy than would similar actions performed by those directly affected. At the same time, such solidarity activism relies upon unequal relations, and particularly colonial gestures of "rescue" in which the "good white" is necessary for the improvement of the brown persons/colonized lives (Narayan 1997; Said 1980; Spivak 1999; Ware).

Given the fraught context in which solidarity is carried through, how do justice action prisoners imagine and enact it? What are the elements considered important? With what attention to the power differentials that are inherent in all actions taken "on behalf of" others? To think through such questions, I will analyze Plowshares and SOAW separately, as the movements are very different in their orientations towards solidarity.

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<sup>76</sup> Liberal subjects are defined by what they are "not"—a project that is intrinsically raced, classed, and gendered. Militarism is particularly "intertwined with racism and heteropatriarchy"-- forces which effectively shape our lives, our resistance, and our senses of self "here," in the heart of empire (2008a, p. 284).

## **Plowshares**

For those involved in the disarmament movement, border-crossing solidarity is a less central organizing concept than it is for those in the School of the Americas Watch. In large part, this is because of differences in the missions of the movements: SOAW is committed to closing a U.S.-based military training school for Latin American military personnel, while Plowshares is struggling to clear the world of nuclear weapons. Plowshares actions are not done “on behalf of” an affected group, but as an all-out effort to save the planet and all of its inhabitants from total destruction. Importantly, differences are also shaped by the identities of movement participants: though often Christian, SOAW protestors are generally a more political, secular group, while Plowshares are most often deeply Catholic and are inspired to activism by their principles of faith. This is reflected in the differing notions of solidarity within each movement: in general, solidarity is enacted with attention to global relations of power by SOAW. The solidarity articulated by Plowshares participants is a more Christian notion of “one-ness” that embraces everyone as part of the same human “family.”

Sr. Ardeth Platte explained,

We really do believe deeply in a God that made a whole family of people across the world...a lot of people don't see it that way. They don't look at the Iraqi people as their brothers or sisters, or the Syrians as our brothers or sisters, or the Iranians. They are our brothers and sisters. They are the people we love. Why would you ever consider doing this, severance of this community within the family of God?

Susan Crane reinforced this idea when she relayed a remarkable exchange with one of her prison guards. A returned veteran from the second war in Iraq, he was very interested in Susan and often engaged her in conversation. One day, he came to her and said “I get it, now”—in reference to the difference in their thinking. He explained, “you think all life is

sacred, and I think American life is more sacred.” This idea of “all life is sacred,” of a shared humanity, underlies Plowshares philosophy.

Further, Plowshares philosophy recognizes that the very presence of nuclear weapons on the planet “lowers” the level of humanity possible (Fr. Steve Kelly). Indeed, “we can’t be fully human as long as there’s a nuclear weapon out there” because they represent a “pact” to “kill on a massive scale” (Fr. Steve). For Fr. Steve, “as soon as we deal with war, our humanity will take a quantum leap.” What Fr. Steve and Sr. Ardeth are struggling for, most basically, is a better humanity—a humanity that will improve, as a whole, in a world freed from nuclear weapons via the enactment of principled nonviolence. Within this frame, the specificity of differences between people is less important: the picture is bigger than the individual, or even of specific belonging to (racial, ethnic, national, religious...) groups. We are all equally threatened by nuclear weapons and technology, and “diversity” is not a goal of the Plowshares movement. Quite conversely, among those I interviewed there is a clear understanding that privilege underlies and makes possible the type of actions Plowshares members conduct, and the movement neither directly recruits nor expects more marginalized people to participate. As Fr. Steve explained, he is privileged and resourceful. “If I didn’t feel free, I would not consider doing the actions.” However, this understanding of privilege/marginalization is not extended to include analysis of the doings of solidarity, the actual effects of making another’s struggle “one’s own.”

In sum, Plowshares notions of solidarity are focused on a common humanity that participants are struggling to improve: it is as members of God’s family that individuals are recognized, beloved “brothers and sisters” whom it is our duty to protect. Solidarity

here is a Christian concept of “brotherhood” (sic) and is not politicized, problematized, or deeply analyzed among its participants or in its rhetorics.

### **SOA Watch**

Of his experience protesting the SOA, Brian DeRouen said,

How many actions in this country today can you take that will put you in solidarity with felons and their families, would engage your family, would engage you with any classroom you walk into, would engage you with prisoners and guards, it’s really a unique option.... And by crossing the line, folks are interested. They ask you, ‘what was prison like?’ And 45 minutes later, they’re still listening, but now you’re talking about Gandhi in South Africa, and they are still engaged. Whereas if you just walked up and said ‘you want to talk about nonviolence?’ They’d be like “hell no.”

Brian’s words immediately expand common thinking about solidarity activism. Yes, it is about the campesino in Nicaragua, but it is also about what happens *here*. It is a method of activism (working together), but it is also a goal in itself. For Brian DeRouen, solidarity is an ongoing project that is about forging relationships with students in U.S. classrooms as well as the prison guards who hold him captive. Solidarity humanizes both participants in a relationship, and prison witness is a pragmatic nonviolent strategy that provides reason to keep unlikely conversations going. Brian’s commitment to such work is exemplified in his tattoo: his right calf is green with the ink of the word “nonviolence” in 27 languages. It’s “another one of those tactics,” he explains. It is a “way to connect with people” and have them learn without intending to. “They just want to know about tattoos, and 40 minutes later, they’re learning about Cesar Chavez.... It’s a human connection. You have a tattoo and they have a tattoo and they want to know about it. So I can say ‘yeah you’re Irish? This is Gaelic.’” Each language represents a

nation the US has gone to war with, or pseudo-gone to war....so I have Russian, Sanskrit... and then I have other areas of conflict, Hebrew and Arabic or Gaelic

or Basque... Navajo, Hawaiian... I found that academia wasn't for me, but personal ways to connect and teach, without sounding superior or condescending... is amazing, and being a prisoner of conscience allows you to do that, and allows you to do that inside the prison.

Enabling unlikely connections is one of Brian's strengths, and he sees himself as particularly well positioned to formulate such connections between his suburban childhood home and what he knows about prison. Through his own incarceration, Brian said that he was able to see how "false" the "divisions" are between people, a schism he was able to make visible for his family and community of origin:

(My parents) got to...have their world turned upside down...By (my mom) being in that visitation room... and becoming friends with a 'real' criminal... she realized, but he's a father!... and he is still just like me.... I think that's one of the hardest connections for our culture to make. I mean, I'm good and they're bad. But when you're in that visitation room, it's impossible, it's impossible to maintain that. So, it was beautiful...It's still affecting my family.

In this way, Brian was using prison as a strategy of solidarity—a way to “connect my whole upper middle class, suburban world” to what happens in America’s prisons. People would have “never known” about it otherwise, but he was a messenger they could hear. Through his stories of “this is what I am eating, this is what I am thinking,” he humanized incarceration for a segment of the public usually otherwise guarded from knowing about it.<sup>77</sup>

Hence, for Brian DeRouen, solidarity—in the sense of forging human connections—is the goal of activism, rather than its “method,” and those he hopes to reach are not just those affected by the school whose existence he protests, but everyone

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<sup>77</sup> As a strategy, prison witness does this more widely. Not only are those who go to jail often privileged, so are those who are interested in their stories. Hence, it is not just the speakers who learn about prison, it is also their audiences. In these ways, incarceration can be activated as both an experience and a method of solidarity.



he meets. Going to jail is a tactic, talking about a tattoo is a way to educate others in the direction of social justice, being a justice action prisoner is a way to be “sexy” enough to be published in the newspaper or listened to in a classroom—he uses the tools available to him to connect with people as he challenges and changes what they know.

For others involved in the struggle to close the School of the Americas, solidarity is the motivation for action. It is working with others and being responsible towards these relationships that is most important, hence a sense of solidarity inspires engagement. In this, SOAW mirrors Plowshares—as well as the feminist activists interviewed by Cole and Luna in chapter 2. When I asked her why she crossed the line, Lois Putzier said bluntly, “I really love these people, so it makes it easier to help them. You would help your own children.” Michael Pasquale’s trial statement was framed around the idea that “if the most important commandment is to love my neighbors, these people are my neighbors. Therefore, we need to treat them as such.” The effect of putting forth such rationales is to narrow the genetic and geographic gap separating Lois and Michael from their family and neighbors, by *acting as if* blood-relation and proximity are not the crucial elements for what constitutes family and neighborliness. This move explodes the concept of who we are responsible to, as it makes active resistance to institutions that harm anyone blatantly necessary.

The liberation theology proselytized by Fr. Luis Barrios further reinforces solidarity as a motivating reason for action. He said,

Solidarity is the most important sacrament. It’s not going to church, it’s not taking the communion, it’s not baptizing, it’s not marriage. No. It’s how I deal with relationships with other people that can bring more people to the table instead of excluding them.

For those who protest the SOA, it is very important that solidarity be a “way of living” rather than just thinking, which is why prison witness is their chosen tactic: it is a way to *do* something. In his travels, Ed Kinane explained, “I had seen the terrorism” caused by imperial U.S. policy, and so it seemed “logical to go upstream and see the source of where all those bodies were coming from.” Going “upstream” led him to the SOA, and he ultimately served 18 months in prison, for three separate offenses, as a consequence of protesting it.

Often, the people I spoke with had some experience prior to activism in which they felt to be in solidarity with others. Somewhere along their life path, they had met people who were different than themselves, and were changed by the experience. This sounds like a simple thing, but when you are a white male Reverend from Arizona and the people who change you are poor migrating campesinos without formal education, it is actually quite telling of how you view the world and your place within it. This was most clearly revealed through the experience of Reverend Ken Kennon.

In 1980, Reverend Kennon’s 23 year old son died in an accident. The pain of this, he told me carefully, was “so wrenching, it shakes me today.” After losing his son, Reverend Kennon began to work with Central American refugees traveling through Tucson as they fled the bloody U.S.-funded civil wars in their home countries. The experience “completely changed my life,” he said.

It just boggled my mind that people could go on living, because my child had died by accident and theirs had been taken from them in such a horrible way. So there was a way in which I was opened to their pain.... They became my teachers, they helped me to understand what it means to be a human being and what’s truly important, and what isn’t.

The solidarity that Ken describes is based on a profound sense of connection with other people, forged in pain. He was “opened” to their pain—not “open” as in available, but opened-up, laid raw; his pain and theirs not confined to individual bodies, but overflowing, meeting and mingling, finding solace in the relationships forged, in recognizing the familiar in a new face. It was “solidarity in action”—fellowship arising from similar interests—and the road it paved led Ken through the gates of the SOA.

For SOA Watch participants, solidarity is a much more important topic than it is for Plowshares, and is one that has been problematized and discussed within the movement for over 20 years (Koopman 2006; 2008a; 2008b). This shows in the ways in which people talk about it—it is an organizing principle of their experience, and one that is as much about “them” and “here” as it is “other people” and “elsewhere.”

### **Experience of Solidarity**

Across both movements, I was repeatedly told, it is important to *experience* solidarity. As Fr. Luis Barrios explained, solidarity is “not a way of thinking, it’s a way of living.” Solidarity can be felt with like-minded others (for example, the supportive communal feelings justice action prisoners describe among movement participants), with similar but not necessarily like-minded others (what Brian DeRouen does), or with “other-others”—for example, across geographic borders or in prison. Such experiences can happen through international travel, be felt in the actions themselves, and be experienced during incarceration. Concretely, living “in solidarity” was expressed to me as being in connection with others—to think of and with them, to learn more about oneself and one’s relations, and to privilege connection-with over individuality and

personal gain. In any case, solidarity is a product of intention, and in this sense is a form of identity-work: a doing meant to align one's principles with one's actions.

Experiencing solidarity is valued, as Brian DeRouen explained, "solidarity matters, and without authentic experiences, it's theoretical." For Kathy Kelly, solidarity means standing alongside people. "Real security," she explained, "is Afghans knowing other Americans....It is important to be alongside ordinary people in times of war." Today, Kathy concentrates her energies in places overseas, but there is also a war "against the poor in the United States," and going to prison is a way to be in solidarity with them. "It's one thing," she explained, "to feel a solidarity type relationship to someone who's been packed off to jail, but it's another to sit on the same bunk with the person and share... correspondence and see the kids' pictures... this is a very, very different approach" and one that is highly valued by the justice action prisoners I talked with. "These women," Kathleen Rumpf said of the women in prison, connecting abuses across geographic lines to the same policies, "are the disappeared in this country."

Solidarity can also be experienced with one's activist community. When you are working in groups, you are able to "share the risk, and lose your fear" (Martha Hennessy). The power of activist solidarity was most warmly recalled in reference to the Sanctuary movement, of which many SOA and Plowshares members were a part (a movement that animated the illegal Old Testament idea of refuge as a public project). With the support of hundreds of church parishes across the country, Sanctuary activists said "arrest us, because this is what *we* have done" (Ann Tiffany, see Coutin 1999). There is a "contagion of solidarity" Ed Kinane explained, when you trust those you are working

with. The action and its members are empowered by the group—community “strengthens the efforts,” in Sr. Ardeth Platte’s words.

Solidarity can also be experienced in the direct actions themselves. For Derrlyn Tom, whose trespass at Fort Benning was inspired by her migrant students at the San Francisco public high school where she teaches, the base fence symbolically represents the border fence. Hence, her action gave her a deeper, more embodied understanding of what that fearful crossing meant for her students. “It was just too tempting,” she said of sneaking through the fence, a feeling that was followed by the sense that “this is nothing... I’m risking nothing” in comparison to those who daily cross the U.S.-Mexico border. Similarly, washing dishes at FCI Dublin, she understood her students’ families better, the parents who wash dishes everyday to “give their children a better life.” In comparison, six months was “nothing.”

Lastly, solidarity can be experienced during incarceration. Many respondents (especially women), spoke of being frightened about going to prison, but upon entry realized that “I am no different” than anyone else there (Kathleen Rumpf). “These people are me!!!” Kathleen exclaimed. Solidarity can be forged in many ways, but jail is a “route to quick learning,” in Kathy Kelly’s words. Jail provides a real, visceral *feeling* of solidarity. At best, this is not a sense that “now we’re all in the same uniform, so we’re all one” (John Heid) for most of the justice action prisoners I spoke with know that their privilege is still “all over the place” in prison, as John explained. Instead, prison is a bodily experience of, as Kathy learned, “wherever they keep the bad sisters, they’re not in maximum”—i.e., the lines separating us, that we have been taught to believe exist, are fabricated. Such experiences were described as permanently life changing, and justice

action prisoners cannot go back to their “regular lives” upon release and have the “false divisions” that society sets up make sense (Brian DeRouen).

The effect of experiencing solidarity—connecting with other people, acknowledging difference but with keen awareness of what connects—changes people. This can be simple. For Kathy Kelly, when she returned to teaching English after prison she “couldn’t be the jailor,” as she couldn’t be a person of authority after prison. Being under someone else’s control “radicalized her teaching.” Derrlyn Tom similarly realized that she has to treat her students with “such respect” if this is what she expects of them, as our environments and expectations of others are formative in directing behaviors.

Without exception, although along a spectrum of sophistication, no matter what social analysis a person had before entering prison, the experience of incarceration strengthened their conceptions of how societal divisions are constructed to demonize particular groups as they unfairly hold others up. Part of what justice action prisoners learned in prison was a way of seeing that made these divisions visible, un-liveable, and evident as changeable. Most justice action prisoners spoke of leaving jail and prison “more committed than ever” to their activism: their time in imperialism’s under-belly providing an experience of the inequalities ordering society that would be otherwise obscured for them, their analysis of the interconnections of violence solidified, and their desire to resist such violence reinforced.

### **Speaking-For as Solidarity Action**

*“The dead have no mouths to speak”—Japanese proverb, quoted by Derrlyn Tom*

As privileged North Americans striving to make violence visible, justice action prisoners occupy an unusual position: they are legitimized as valid speakers for social

and political issues, while the issues for which they speak are not necessarily about “them.” As Kathleen Rumpf explained, she banged on a B-52 “on behalf of the homeless,” and from the platform of the courtroom was able to speak “for” them, about the issues that most affect them. She was the medium of action (the force through which a substance acts), but not the message. Her act was not meant to highlight her person, but to convey the message of others.

Embodying resistance as a speaker *for* is an inherently a complex project riddled by the same dilemmas as are projects of border-crossing solidarity (Alcoff 1998; Kaplan 1994; Rich 1984). As such, *how* justice action prisoners speak—on whose behalf and with what understandings—is a window into their understandings of the operations of power more broadly. Further, “speaking”—authentically, as oneself, on behalf of others—is a crucial doing of identity-work. It is also one of the most complex as it brings together issues of privilege, solidarity, and identity in this most mundane “doing” of ordinary people protesting gross instances of violence.

For whom and what one speaks, from the self-constructed platform of valid speaker, differs among justice action prisoners. For some, “speaking” is personal, and is about making one’s position known. For this cohort, speaking through action is an intimate labor that simply must be done to be in alignment with one’s values. As Clare Grady explained, Plowshares activists are not “asking the government” to do anything, they are just “doing what needs to be done.” Those who took this position were primarily Plowshares activists motivated by principled nonviolent tenets, and who tended to be religious. They were insistent that what they did, they did *for themselves*—to be in alignment, to be faithful, to *do* what their knowledge and faith compelled them to do.

More commonly, and widely among SOAW activists/pragmatic nonviolent practitioners, “speaking” is interpreted in the sense intended by Archbishop Romero, who preached that “we who have a voice must be a voice for the voiceless” (attributed). As privileged Americans, justice action prisoners are taking responsibility for speaking on behalf of those most affected by U.S. policies, and this view tends to include at least a basic analysis of relations of social power and personal privilege. Sr. Megan Rice explained that she acts on behalf of those who have more “urgent” things to do: as a U.S. sister, she is supported and “able” to act. Karl Meyer furthered, “I don’t try to speak for others. I certainly try to work on behalf of others” and he is particularly compelled to do so because of his “education, and my knowledge of powerful nonviolent methods and... creative ideas.” He “uses” these powerful tools “on behalf of” affected others, but in doing so is not trying to speak “for” them, but rather, to make visible the injustices under which they suffer through the tools and privileges he has at his disposal.

Randy Serraglio explained that he works to close the SOA for “the same reason why I want some little snail to survive in the Santa Rita mountains”—a current campaign for the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, where he works.

It cannot speak for itself... And that snail is the campesino in Guatemala. No one is going to speak for the snail... and someone has to, or the snail will disappear, and that’s an injustice in my book. I don’t think we have to make species go extinct to live on this planet, and I don’t think we have to torture campesinos in Guatemala to live on this planet as United States citizens. It’s the same principle.

As Randy so directly expressed, some people are in such a precarious position that they cannot be heard, and someone “has to” speak for them or like the snail, they will “disappear.” But how to do this is complicated—and relations of power that legitimize and embolden white U.S. citizens to act on behalf of the brown, poor, third world folks



affected by U.S. policies are old, real, and dangerous. It is thus helpful to look to critical scholarship to assess the “speaking” work of SOAW and Plowshares actions.

One of the chief tasks of transnational feminism has been to illuminate problems around issues of representation. As Linda Martin Alcoff writes, feminism—like the SOAW—“has a liberatory agenda that... requires that women scholars speak on behalf of other women” (Alcoff 1998, p. 95). How to do so, without reifying historical patterns of inequality, is not straightforward. Chandra Mohanty’s article, “Under Western Eyes” was shattering (and transformative) to feminism because it showed how white feminism remained centered despite moves to “include” third world women’s texts in the canon (1991, p. 34). For Caren Kaplan, speaking “for” inevitably leads to universalizing claims, and doing so is an inherently colonial move that defines the center against the periphery (1994, p. 139). Sara Ahmed suggests that Western feminists “open our ears rather than our mouths” in pursuit of solidarity (quoted in Carty and Mohanty, forthcoming) and Linda Martin Alcoff promotes a “speaking to” as a way to represent without fetishizing, distancing, or silencing those we seek to speak for (1997). She suggests four steps for the (western/privileged) feminist to consider in (our) projects of speaking-for, steps which are equally applicable to those involved in movements of solidarity.

First, Alcoff writes, we must analyze our impetus to speak and represent others, understanding that sometimes the most helpful and liberatory thing to do is to listen. Second, we must analyze the significance of our location on what we believe and say. Third, we must be accountable for what we say and for the effects our words will have in the world. Finally, as the litmus test for all representation, we must ask ourselves, “will it

enable the empowerment of oppressed peoples?” (Alcoff, 1997, pp. 24-29). With these cautionary limits in mind, Alcoff suggests that we may venture to speak *for* others.

The first step of speaking-for comes in analyzing one’s intent, and in listening. Individual Plowshares activists conveyed a commitment to listening, though this is not a central component of the movement as a whole (nor did they speak of “speaking.” Rather, their emphasis is ethical/spiritual, and is about following Christ’s footsteps). Hence, I will focus here on responses from participants with SOAW, for the richer insights and practices they can provide.

SOAW participants generally conveyed a commitment to “listening.” This is reflected in the movement’s rhetoric more broadly. Randy Serraglio told an exemplary story, from his time as an organizer with the SOAW during its early years:

One of the gnarliest things we had to deal with was diversifying the movement and that meant youth as well as people of color, it meant women in positions of leadership, it meant people from Latin America and making their voices stronger, allowing more space on stage for people from Latin America. And even if it was a pain in the ass to translate what they were saying, we were going to do it because that’s what we’re all about. We can speak for these people as long as we want, but the real point is, they need to be able to speak for themselves, and they need people to fucking listen to them. That’s what we’re aiming for here, right?

Randy reminds us that activist work across lines of power requires closing our mouths as we open our ears, and to commit ourselves to *learning*. Sr. Kathleen Desautels explained that all of her organizing has helped her to learn about “what it means to be an ally, a white ally, a north American ally” and what she has learned is that she must “do lots of listening. Notice a pattern. Compare what you are hearing from what the U.S. was saying.” In other words, it is not enough to “listen” to others, one must also think about what one hears, critically and contextually. Privileged folks have to listen in such a way

that speakers can be heard; the process is not passive. Hence, SOAW not only needs to get the “most involved” people speaking (Sr. Dorothy), the power dynamics underlying the relations must be negotiated so that it’s not just a “pain in the ass” for them to speak, but comprises the crucial work of generating and defining appropriate action (Randy Serraglio). Translating these understandings of listening into actions of learning is the heart of this first mandate from Alcott, but as expressed in quotes such as those above, several participants seemed to really “get” it, and understand it as crucial.

Alcott’s second and third steps mandate locating ourselves and being accountable for the effects of our speech acts more broadly. These are precisely the questions that justice action prisoners struggle with when they take up issues of their privilege, and in answering them, find prison witness to be the required response to being “accountable” to their “location.” Through the experience of prison, as discussed in chapter 7, justice action prisoners learn more about the impact of their location, and come out “changed.”

Sara Koopman’s insights are instructive in regards to Alcott’s suggestions towards location and accountability, and Koopman offers several concrete ways to modify the use of the “master’s tools” of privilege to better confront empire. These include an emphasis on accountability rather than guilt, using language of “those most affected” rather than “victims,” striving towards being “true” rather than being “good,” and being better “compas”—companions, comrades, and colleagues—rather than “helpers” (2008). In no way does she claim that hers is a sufficient or finished recipe, instead what is essential is to begin one’s border-crossing solidarity activism in one’s own body: to confront the “imperialism within” as an ongoing challenge, rather than

jumping in and “saving” others without attention to historical precedent, context, and entrenched relations of power.

In answer to Alcott’s fourth question, “will it enable the liberation of oppressed peoples?,” the answer from SOAW—from a practical standpoint—must be “yes.” Millions of people *are* now aware of the school, and to date, seven Latin American countries have ceased sending military personnel to the SOA. While the school itself remains open (and others like it operate un-hindered in less overt locations all around the world), there is no doubt that the “heat and light” generated by the movement has been transformative for both the school and the activists (Randy Serraglio). Though at times reliant on the “master’s tool” of privilege to craft the platform from which to speak, justice action prisoners do speak powerfully on behalf of others towards the aim of liberation, and the movement provides novel ways for those most affected to speak and be heard. When those who have borne the brunt of the SOA’s violence do speak, as they do each year at the vigil in Columbus, they are almost always insistent that the movement is and has been important to their communities and their lives.

Activists listen to better be who they most want to be, in solidarity with those most harmed by the violences they protest—fighting their battles “as if they were our own” (Bourgeois 2013). And they do so as a practical stepping-stone, knowing that—as Sara Koopman writes,

The master’s house is taking up all of the land. If we are going to build a new house it has to be on this same plot, and most of our building materials will be recycled from his house. We cannot ignore his tools, or we will constantly trip over them; but we can dismantle and rework them” (2008, p. 299).

The goal is not to continue speaking-for, but to go about the work of constructing another

world as practically, effectively, and justly as possible—and justice action prisoners find that this work begins with “me.”

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

Justice action prisoners are active in a realm that is fraught and challenging: doing work that crosses lines of geography and power, using their positions of privilege to “help” and “speak for” those un/less able to do so, and through engaging in a strategy that is personally challenging and risky. To do so, and to keep it up—is an ongoing and substantial personal labor. Prison witness is the chosen tactic of only a select few: hundreds of people in the U.S., not thousands—and the “work” that they do in order to engage significantly begins at the level of identity. Indeed, this research finds that people participate in prison witness only after much learning, experience, and long thinking, about both who they are and what they know more broadly. Bringing their self-concepts into line with what they know about faith and politics for them ultimately mandates resistance. This resistance is practiced in three primary sites: in the development of a counter-hegemonic knowledge that prioritizes resistance and is usually based on personal experience with other ways of living; in structuring one’s life to live “nonviolently”—challenging oneself to be one’s best self (often by living community with others); and through solidarity, connecting with others, across difference, in a way that is ideally centrally concerned with avoiding the entrenchment of colonial relations of power as it seeks to liberate those most directly affected by such unequal relations. This chapter has presented all of this work-- political, religious, and personal, from the angle of identity, focusing on what justice action prisoners *do* to bring their self-concepts into alignment with what they know and believe. Such work is essential for effective and systemic

nonviolent change, and is critical to our understandings of the border-crossing, justice seeking, solidarity activism of justice action prisoners.

## Chapter Five

### PRIVILEGE POWER AND THE EXPERIENCE OF ACTION

*I could not resolve the fact that I was on one side of the door, and they were on the other. It hurt me... I did not come from a place of privilege except that I was white.... I was lying in bed one night, crying, and it got to the point where even that felt selfish to me. Because I still had a bed. And I didn't have much.... And I just realized, it's selfish to even cry in my bed. I have to start going out and crying in places where injustice stems from. And I started going to the White House.... So I started going to prison and I was fearless, because it was very freeing for me to go to prison... I felt strength... I was speaking up for the people I loved, and cared so deeply about.*

—Kathleen Rumpf

The body is the primary instrument for nonviolent direct action, and the experience and effect of protest (specifically high-risk protest such as prison witness) is always and already partially marked by *whose* body is doing the action. In a context of inequality, different bodies are differently positioned to lodge resistance, productively employ particular strategies, and generate various kinds of public attention. Activist awareness of this is apparent in how they discuss their privilege as both enabling and making necessary their activism: it is as the “beneficiaries of Empire,” participant Ed Kinane explained, that we “must act.” Further, many justice action prisoners use their status, especially around race, citizenship, and “the collar” strategically and intentionally—*for good*.<sup>78</sup> In other words, they use who they are; their subjective and public identities, as a tool of power.

The people who engage in prison witness tend to be highly socially privileged, mirroring Jarrett Lovell’s findings of Americans who engage in civil disobedience more generally (2009). He finds that “those who take to the streets often qualify as privileged protesters in that they tend to be white, well-educated and of middle-class (or upper-

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<sup>78</sup> Importantly, none of the Sisters I interviewed wear habits, so the benefits of vowed religious identity are not similarly bestowed upon them.

middle-class) economic status” (p. 127). Lovell continues to explain that civil disobedience is distinctively “something for the privileged” (p. 130) and that to engage in activism, one must have a vision of hope, a sense of empowerment, and access to resources (p. 128).

In response to their identities as privileged, for participants in this study there was a consistent and intentional deployment of what I call “privilege power:” a potent mix of white skin, middle/upper class position, high levels of education, Christian/Catholic faith, heterosexuality/chaste status, and professional achievement that combine to make a person largely un-objectionable within the mainstream United States. In their rationales for action and without significant variance among groups, 36 (of 43) participants articulated their own privilege as significantly inspiring and shaping their resistance.

In contrast to this finding, theories of both pragmatic and principled nonviolence tell us that “who it is” does not matter in nonviolent activism; the power of nonviolence springs from the involvement of “bodies” generally. Indeed, nonviolent action is specifically understood to be a form of struggle available to anyone on the power hierarchy, and is especially important as a form of power for the powerless.

A quick review of large-scale nonviolent campaigns affirms the widespread truth of this; it is often those with less power who achieve significant gains via nonviolent methods. Very importantly, nonviolence “works” through the enactment of “people power”—the force of regular people doing what is right/needed in the face of oppression (Ackerman, Kruegler, Sharp, & Schelling 1994; Atack 2006; Bond 1994; Dudouet 2008).

My research complicates this, as “people power” fails to account for a major source of the power deployed among justice action prisoners. This does not lessen the



explanatory truth of the idea, but adds the conception of what I call “privilege power” to the mix of what must be examined and understood, by both activists and scholars. In practice, privilege power—the utilization of one’s “mainstream” identity as a source of force—underlies and critically supports the work of most peace activists engaging in prison witness in the U.S. today.<sup>79</sup>

Unlike the most common forms of nonviolent action that rely upon big numbers to challenge positions and bring about change, prison witness relies upon individual action. As such, the sources of power on which prison witness draw require ways of understanding more focused on individuals than movements, the personal than the directly political. Most basically, people’s power in prison witness—in terms of drawing attention, shifting opinions, changing policies etc. is critically shaped by who they are, in terms of their visible identities (Alcoff 2006). For those interested in long-term, systemic progressive change, then, how “privilege power” is understood and deployed among justice action prisoners becomes crucial. This chapter uncovers the various enactments and understandings participants expressed in their utilization of this “master’s tool.”

Importantly, this study of prison witness makes the significance of privilege power clear and visible. However, better understanding the significance and potential effects of this force is applicable to *any* organizational or personal effort towards change. In other words, though larger-scale movements may still primarily rely upon people

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<sup>79</sup> To be precise, it is not necessarily “privilege” that fundamentally shapes the experience and impact of resistance, but rather one’s identity markers broadly; the color of one’s skin, citizenship, identity as parent or professional, etc. Hence, there are examples of movements in which one’s identity as a mother, minor, or blue collar worker were most significant. However, justice action prisoners primarily occupy positions of privilege across all axes of difference, and it is their proximity to privilege that is specifically used as resources to justify and propel action.

power than the specific privileges of its members, this chapter argues that understanding the significance of hierarchical inequalities and their effects are always relevant—and is a task made easier through an analysis inclusive of “privilege power.”

This research also finds that activist efficacy (in terms of drawing attention) and their personal experiences are inextricably tied to what one looks like and has accomplished “beyond” the political: white people, the vowed religious, and parents, for example, have a different (easier, more “effective”) public impact and personal experience than do those whose identities do not so closely match such a hegemonic “mainstream.”<sup>80</sup> This reality tells us something about what specific individual actors can do in a context of global inequality.

Secondly in this chapter, and as predicted by nonviolent theories of power (Ackerman and Duvall 2000; Ackerman, Kruegler, Sharp, Schelling, 1994; K. Boulding 1989; Dudouet 2008; Nagler 2001; Schock 2005), the experience of action generates a sense of personal “empowerment.” However, how this sense of power is experienced and described is different for women and men, with religious identity (as vowed religious vs. laity) and age also proving important in shaping how one feels about what one does. Exploring these differences usefully complicates nonviolence theory, contributes to understandings around gender and experience in social movement theory, and furthers feminist understandings of power and empowerment.

The first section of the chapter is framed around Judith Butler’s phrase, “my body is and is not mine” (2004, p. 26). The corporeal body is both a personal vessel, deeply one’s own, and a physical product that signifies certain realities and stereotypes.

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<sup>80</sup> Further studying efficacy, as connected with activist identity, would be a very useful future project related to this research.

Similarly, engaging in resistance incurs individualized bodily effects (feelings of fear, illness, and joy) as it relies upon broader interpretations of subjectivity (being a student, mother, professional, or religious). In Gandhian/principled nonviolence theory, prison witness is a tactic that works via the personal, anonymous, and voluntary “suffering” of those engaged in it, in which the individual body is a neutral site and mode of political power (Bondurant 1975; Naess 1974; Nagler 2001). Pragmatically, bodies represent strength. Their presence forces the tackling of issues that may be uncomfortable for those in power to confront and defend. What the intentional use of the body-- as a conduit of power meant to express political dissent-- actually looks and feels like, relies upon, reinforces, and challenges, is my intellectual starting place for a journey that propels me across terrain of power and privilege. Ultimately, grounding analysis in the body makes visible how prison witness is employed as an effort that is at once personal, spiritual, and political, but is never neutral.

The second section of the chapter is about the differential experiences of action recalled by justice action prisoners. In their descriptions of the “moment of action”—the spiritual, exhilarating, and occasionally terrifying moment in which a justice action prisoner crossed a line, hammered on a piece of weaponry, or poured their own blood—gender, as well as religious identity and age, crucially impacted how the experience was recalled. For lay women (and particularly those in their 50s, 60s, and 70s), the story told was most often personal, and contextualized within a culture experienced as patriarchal and unjust. Men and the vowed religious (both priests and sisters), on the other hand, remained focused on the issues that drive them: militarism, imperialism, and God. Religious identity was the key factor determining how a man or woman differently

interpreted one's experience, and it is lay women who stand apart for how their experiences differ from other groups. This clear difference points to the realities of unequal gender politics more generally, and specifically, the ways in which women are constrained within roles that cannot contain them, while men may engage in processes that may serve to consolidate their masculinity through participation in resistant action.

### **Embodiment**

*No matter which way you kind of dress it up, it comes out the same thing. You're putting your body, basically your political body, against the body politics. So you're just putting your body in the way, and that's what some nonviolent activists say is really your only weapon, the only weapon that you have.*  
--Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit

Nonviolent actors use their bodies to protest the state. In her study of women who protest the School of the Americas, feminist geographer Sara Koopman describes, “in this movement we use the intimate, our bodies, to stop the global patterns of domination that have such devastating intimate effects on other bodies” (2006, p. 93). In a movement of cross-hemispheric solidarity, it is the shared experience of inhabiting a fleshy, vulnerable and agential human body that unites U.S. activists with those most affected by their government's policies. In other words, cross-cultural connections are forged through notions of embodiment (Koopman 2008a; see also Fowlkes 1997; Grosz 1987; Lugones 2003; Lyshaug 2006). Nonviolent actions are often symbolic: funeral processions, die-ins, and digging graves are examples. Power accrues around those who use their status—as students, clergy, nuns, teachers, mothers—in authentic ways to speak against the state, as non-representative but fully participatory members of that state (Agosin 1987; Cook

and Kirk 1983; Cooke 1990).<sup>81</sup>

For many of the activists interviewed, the impacts of their specific bodies on the political/resistance messages conveyed seemed well understood, and was sometimes strategically deployed. For example, Kathleen Rumpf was clear about what she does with her body. Kathleen is a busy activist: she has been arrested over 100 times so far—for a 1983 Plowshares action, a 1997 SOA violation, and a variety of other disarmament actions. Liz McAlister once described Kathleen as “a one woman crime wave” (Riegle 2013a). She uses humor as a way to break down barriers between herself and others, and her raunchy jokes often catch officials off-guard. For example, as an over 400 pound woman for much of her life, Kathleen has been known to threaten arresting officers with the phrase “be nice, or I’ll go limp!” She plays the coquette (“I told you this is not my first time,” she once teased an especially handsome officer surprised with the length of her rap sheet), and she befriends FBI officials. In 1997, alongside Ed Kinane and others, she “transformed” state property by re-painting the entrance gate sign at Fort Benning to say “Home of SOA, School of Shame” with their own blood. Of the action, she explained, “we came behind the sign and faced the guys and held hands and said a prayer,

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<sup>81</sup> Further, the presence of the body in restricted sites (high security military areas, missile silos) works as a rupture in the secure, reliable workings of the state/military system. Particularly when the bodies present belong to the elderly, the infirm, to these “bumbling, bumbling” people in Ellen’s terms—it is perceived as humiliating or embarrassing (Zak 2012). Megan Rice’s action at Oak Ridge demonstrated clearly that by her very presence within a high security site, she was exposing infallibilities within US notions of security. At the same time, activists are proclaiming that they do not feel safe with this version of “security” offered by the state. What they are arguing for, fundamentally, is a security at the scale of the body—which means health care, education, jobs—not nuclear weapons and missile silos (interviews). This links to a long feminist insistence that real security be measured along the lines of the individual body rather than the state (Kirk, Hyndman and Mountz, Tickner, Enloe). A nuclear capable, masculinist and trigger-ready military does not comprise “security” for women’s (or anyone’s) bodies, and nonviolent resistance declares this publicly, by pushing strongly against militaristic notions of security.

and then I started singing, ‘cause I said to ‘um, ‘it ain’t over till the fat lady sings!’” She served one year at Carswell prison for this action, found guilty of destroying government property—a felony.

Her actions are often simple, and they are very clearly individualized to who she is. As such, they are inherently gendered. They are also creative responses to what she sees: she cries in public. She built a cage, put it directly outside of the Syracuse Justice Center (the city jail) and lived in it for a week to protest the conditions of the place. She sings. In such ways, she strategically plays with who she is—a large, white, Catholic woman—to challenge, upset, lighten, and humanize the dark spaces she has dedicated her life to illuminate and transform.

Not surprisingly, the public responses to her actions are also personalized and gendered. Most tellingly, she is often discounted as a “crazy lady.” For example, during her action at the Syracuse courthouse, mounted police taunted her one night and called in the code for a “crazy lady” as an intentional form of harassment. Kathleen also recalled an action in the early 1980s, during which she sat alone for a weeklong hunger strike on the steps of the Pentagon. Vulnerable and hungry, she held a sign that said “it is a sin to build a nuclear weapon.” After several days, the “meanest general” quipped to her, “it is a sin to be a glutton.” She wept, because “he had thought for a week about what to say, to hurt me. And he did.” These reactions—like the actions themselves—are not necessarily directly “political,” but personal. However, the fact that they “work”—as either political messages or as messages of harm, exemplifies the feminist dictum that “the personal is political.”

Participant Ellen Grady described another variant of the strategic use of (gendered) identity in resistance action. She recalled a 1980 action at the Pentagon, an action that used the symbol of women's hair to connect women in the U.S. with victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki:

Ellen: We watched the film Hiroshima Nagasaki. It was the first time my mother had ever seen that footage. And she was devastated... her biggest thing was that she said, 'we cheered. We cheered when we thought the war was over and when that bomb was dropped.' ... So because of that, she felt... that she needed to make amends. And seeing the women, and their hair falling out, in these clumps—my mom had really really long hair at the time... beautiful thick hair, and she said, I just want to cut my hair off. I just want to cut it off there at the Pentagon. And so we went. In those days you could go inside the Concourse... We thought, well let's show this film. And so we brought a generator in there, and we showed the film. And this is in the day when those projectors (went) "ah-ddndndndn." We started the generator "ah-dddndnddnn"--I mean you can only imagine. But once the film was over.

Anya: you showed the whole thing?

Ellen: I know! Nobody stopped us. Because it's supposed to be a public space. So we made a banner that said "how many Hiroshimas before we understand?" So we stood under the banner after the film was over and then this woman who was dressed as Death came to each person and brought us out and then cut our hair. And for some of us, vain people, only had our hair cut a little, but other people had it cut—and it was cut in such a way so that it looked like, like it had come out in clumps. And then they left the hair on the floor. And then, we had blood, so we put blood on our faces and then we just stood in silence. It was really, people were just—the crowd was just stunned and silent. And there was no...there was nothing, there was just silence, and then this Japanese tour group was there, and they just started CRYing. It was quite a moving action. And then all of a sudden, the police came, we were getting ready to leave, and the police said 'you can't just leave this hair here.' And we said, 'we are not taking it with us!' And they arrested Death. The Death Spectre. And then my mom dipped her hands in the blood and put them on the wall, and they took them both away.

Very specifically, this action used the women's bodies; their hair, their blood, and their presence in a site of state power to connect with other women across time and space (the Japanese tour group, the victims of the bombings). For the viewers, the emotional impact and apertures for new thinking were enabled by our easy resonance with the body as

messenger. The action “worked” because it was founded on women’s generalized identities “as women”—women who stand out for their willingness to cut their beautiful hair off in clumps and go to jail to make more visible the horror of nuclear weapons.

Such embodied protest has a long history. In her study of British suffragists, Wendy Parkins shows how the women *enacted* feminist agency through their (Butlerian) *performance* of the political citizenship that was denied to them (2009, p. 63). This was exemplified by the hunger strike in prison. The contemporary press roared that the suffragists were frail and incapable of citizenship, but their actions “overflowed” these categorizations (Parkins, p. 65). For example, Parkins describes an action in 1909, in which suffragist Mary Leigh positioned herself on a high rooftop to throw bricks into the windows of the hall where cabinet members were meeting with a “dexterity” that the *Liverpool Courier* described as “nothing short of marvelous” (quoted in Parkins p. 66). Parkins writes; “it is the corporeality of Leigh’s protest which is central to its efficacy: the precarious rooftop position which enables the breaking of windows represents both her capacity to dissent and her exclusion as a woman from the political” (p. 67). In her action, she is simultaneously “frail and vigorous”—at once enacting and defying models of appropriate femininity (p. 67).

As a critical form of body politics, it is logical to examine prison witness through the lens of feminist work about embodiment. The central idea of feminist body theory is that bodies—raced, classed, gendered, sexualized, (dis)abled—matter, and are variously and relatively positioned with distinctive knowledges, capacities, privileges, and challenges (Mountz & Hyndman 2004). “Feminist body theory,” or “corporeal feminism” is interested in the body as a site of power, and specifically as a place in which a binary



gender regime is constructed and reinforced (Braidotti 1989; 1993; Butler 1990; Gatens 1988; Grosz 1999). In this dualistic and constructed world, the body has been feminized (devalued), hence feminists argue that the body must be positively re-articulated to “provide feminism with an autonomous liberation from a primarily repressive” masculine reason (Bray and Colebrook 1988, p 37). Reading the world through different bodies is deeply feminist practice, as “bodies tell stories, very complex and challenging stories” (Isherwood 2004, p. 154). In this particular case, “body stories” reveal as much about patriarchal power and personal experience as they do about “how nonviolence works”—and are important to be attended to from a critical feminist frame.

Feminists theorize that through location and axes of difference across identities, the body is a standpoint that may reveal intimate and global relations of power (Hyndman and Mountz 2004). Transnational and intersectional feminism emphasize this as they articulate the oppression of women as part of a *network* of oppressions and systems that predictably and systematically penalize some ways of being over others, while elevating and furthering the interests of the few (Crenshaw 1991; Mohanty 2003). The body is private and intimate, but it is also public. Judith Butler explains that the body “has its invariably public dimension. Constituted as a social phenomenon in the public sphere, my body is and is not mine” (2004, p. 26). Our bodies are our own—we each feel the sensations, joys, and pains of our individual physical and emotional bodies—but each one also carries a significant political role as a raced, classed, and gendered member (or outlier) of a nation state (Connell 2005; Lazreg 1994; Enloe 2000; Mayer 2004; Turpin 2008). The body can be used for political ends, as Tamar Mayer’s work on the Bosnian war shows (2004). Through the use of rape as a weapon of war, she argues, the “nation

constructs its identity on women's bodies" (p. 157). For men, the attainment of a dominant, manly, "real" masculinity is tied to a militarized model, in which strong, masculine men "protect" the motherland (Enloe 2000). Feminist international relations scholars have analyzed women's bodies as a key site of nation-building, war-making, and political identity construction (Elshtain 1995; Enloe 2000; Tickner 2001; Yuval-Davis 1998). These scholars argue that the nation-state is enacted through militarized masculinity, wherein the woman's body stands as a "reminder of what cannot be fully controlled"—a field upon which statehood may be enacted, but through which the state can also draw and demonstrate power (Aretxaga 2003).

Drawing upon one's identity as a man, woman, father, or mother is thus one way to enact and consolidate legitimacy as a political subject. For example, in their explanations for action, Tom Mahedy, Brian DeRouen and Ken Kennon spoke of their roles as fathers. Fr. Kelly spoke of his responsibility as a priest to care for "children" generally, and several sisters explained that they act because they care about the "future of the world." Each woman I interviewed who is also a mother articulated her motherhood as central in her reasoning, learning about, and/or preparing for action. Julienne Oldfield was typical. She crossed the line at Fort Benning "for" her granddaughter. She explained, "how could I face her if I didn't try?... I want it to be a better world, I want her to know at least there are people trying." Hence, parenthood generally, and motherhood specifically, is an important identity from which justice action prisoners draw strength and find purpose.

Relying upon such "mainstream" roles to act in political ways has deep roots. To borrow scholar Sharon Hay's terminology, the appropriation of strong and separate

gender roles provides both *enabling* and *constraining* possibilities (1994). Gender stratification, she writes, “not only constrains men and women to act in certain ways, it also gives them both a sense of identity and a secure position in the world.” (1994, p. 43). Traditional roles are enabling in that gender can be a base of mobilization and resistance as well as a set of issues around which to press for change (Dandavati 1996, p. 4). Historical examples of political transformation show that occupying an “appropriate” gender role and speaking from that space makes it more difficult to discount or repress what is said (Cook and Kirk 1983; De Volo 1998; Enloe 2000; Turpin 1998; Peterson 1998; Rao 1999). For example, Miriam Cooke writes of women during the Algerian war for independence (not necessarily actual mothers) who used the role of motherhood to enter public space and demand justice (1996, p. 6). Claiming “motherhood,” Cooke argues, allowed for the representation of women in active political engagement as if they had *the right* to be there: it was a way to claim women’s power in speaking politically, in a way that was still “womanly” (and hence, acceptable). However, the constraining aspects of adopting this traditional role remained, and ultimately curtailed the possibilities for *systemic* change, in terms of changing women’s lives *as women*. Indeed, as powerful signifiers of “nation,” after the war Algerian women were deeply re-restricted to their role as biological reproducers (Cooke 1996). Hence, relying upon a traditional role can bring immediate benefits, but in the long run, acceptance of these roles seems to lead to deeper entrenchments in patriarchal and unequal structures (see also Lazreg 1994; Lorentzen and Turpin 1998). Surfacing this complex interaction between claiming aspects of one’s identity/body and facilitating systemic social change is necessary for understanding prison witness as it is currently employed, as it is a strategy

that relies upon and reinforces one's visible markers of identity—and specifically, one's citizenship status, race and gender.

### **Bodies of Privilege: How Privilege Shapes Resistance**

Rae Kramer, a retired health professional and former felon (six months in Danbury FCI for a 2001 trespass action against the School of the Americas) explained how privilege works in nonviolent resistance. She said,

The power of the prison witness more publicly was...the more that you are connected to mainstream life, the more effective and powerful is the witness.... I am a soccer coach. How do I tell these families that this woman who they have entrusted their children to... is going to jail? Wait a minute, bad people go to prison! The cognitive dissonance right there-- that was the magic moment.

Rae clearly explained that it was her *status* that made her line crossing at Fort Benning effective. For good or bad, the strategy *works*—in so far as it draws attention, inspires conversation, and encourages more critical thinking, because the people going to jail are not those who usually go to jail. Whiteness, wealth, and education are qualities that people do not commonly connect with incarceration. Hence, those who possess them and *do* go to jail are in a unique position to inspire “cognitive dissonance”—incongruent beliefs, which can be an important part of the efficacy of an action.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> By claiming that privilege effects efficacy, I am marking efficacy as measurable in the material world—something that goes against the religious foundations of many of my participants. As Liz McAlister explained, the witness of a “mainstream” individual

...certainly, clearly has more impact than somebody without ties. But that isn't to undercut the witness of someone without those ties. Phil (Berrigan) used to say that the (single) resister... that his witness was every bit as powerful. And I think that this is true. I don't think it gets the kind of mumbling over the dinner table as somebody who has deeper ties to the community...

But to call one form of witness more effective than another, she continued, “is undercutting the spiritual power, that really isn't at all attached to somebody having that kind of ... normalcy.” In other words, focusing on the public effect of an action is to look at only one arena of efficacy, and is not sufficient to explain what Liz does. I do not

For example, when a vowed religious person is arrested, the press and attention received is usually substantially broader and deeper than otherwise. For example, I was surprised to see Sr. Megan Rice on the front page of the *New York Times* on August 10th, 2012, for an action that without her participation would have likely been ignored by the mainstream press. Instead, a few weeks after the “Transform Now” action at Oakridge, TN, the then 82 year old sister was the subject of a life-story piece about her growing up years, her radical mother, and her life in Africa as a missionary. The article was not about the storage of highly enriched uranium at the base, nor was it about the other two men who participated, but it propelled national attention that included coverage in the alternative press, as well as the *Wall St. Journal*, National Public Radio, and other more mainstream sources (Johnson 2015, Quigley 2012, Zak 2012).

From inference based on much reading, stories told in interviews, discussion with The Cohen-Joppa’s (who write and publish *The Nuclear Resister*) as well as many conversations with justice action prisoners, those who generally “make the news” are people of compound privilege or distinctive status—elderly nuns and professors are common examples. (For example, after an action protesting torture training at Fort Huachuca, donations to the support fund for Fr. Jerry Zawadi, Fr. Louie Vitale, Fr. Steve Kelly, and Betsy Lamb “poured in.” Felice Cohen-Joppa recalled thinking ““Wow, fundraising is a lot easier when there are three priests are in prison!”). On the most surface level, then, it can be said that our most general and visible identities impact the breadth of what we can do as activists, who we can reach, and what we can change.

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wish to discount this, but my emphasis in this dissertation is on the world of the material. Here, my data shows that who performs the action deeply matters in terms of how the action is understood, publicized, legitimized, discounted, and mobilized—i.e., effective.

## **Privilege as Motivation for Action**

To a great extent, and unlike the scholarship about nonviolence more generally, justice action prisoners understand that part of their efficacy in nonviolent action is their privilege power. This is true across all axes of identity, and there are no great differences among men, women, lay people, and members of the church in this basic understanding. The enabling power of privilege was primarily articulated around white skin, but was also around such things as having an identity (middle class, professional, religious) that made people “think twice” (Rae Kramer), the inner strength to bear incarceration (Jerry Berrigan), the financial security to step away from day-to-day life (Ken Hayes), the ability to do something to “help people less free, less rich” (Lois Putzier), as well as assuring the “privilege to explain my legal record” after release (Liz Deligio). From officers telling other officers to “look out for them, they are good people” (John Heid), to the support of the movement (Tom Mahedy), many recognized that their privilege—and specifically their whiteness, significantly shaped their experiences.

Importantly, privilege not only enables, it also motivates direct action. Twenty-five participants made a direct connection between their structural location and their need to engage in resistance. For some, this was based on a simple ability to do the actions (economically able, the children were grown). More often, however, it was tied to the political: retired math Professor Bill Houston explained that being accountable as someone whose life “benefits from the oppression of other people” propelled him to cross the line at Fort Benning. Activist Liz Deligio concurred. She explained that not only did her U.S. citizenship protect her, it also made her liable. Her motivation came from the fact that

as an individual, I had a responsibility.... And because I had the privilege to protest without being disappeared, kidnapped, tortured, killed, I have a responsibility because of what my country is doing. And I have the freedom because I don't face... the same obstacles and risks that other people would who might want to do the same thing.

Thus, it was her particular position—as a then 28 year old, white, theology graduate student from Chicago—that made her both able and responsible to act.

In Plowshares analysis, nuclear weapons are the lynchpin that underlie and enable violent militarism and aggressive capitalism—i.e., the major sources of violence that negatively affect people's lives. Hence, as people not daily impacted by other violences (racism, poverty), several Plowshares participants explained that it was precisely their privilege that compelled them to work on issues of disarmament, specifically. Clare Grady said that her commitment “felt like a particular question for first world people of the United States ... it's sort of like ‘doing your own work’.” Sr. Ardeth Platte clarified; “I think we have to be very careful to choose the issues that are our issues, and I think that war and weapons very much pertain to us. As a classed society. As a privileged people.” Sister Megan Rice agreed, “You're doing it for other people, you're there for other people who have other, urgent things that they have to do.” Sr. Megan's responsibility comes from the fact that “I, we, are privileged, and you've got to be... consequent on that. I mean, this is my responsibility. I'm free to do it. Especially in this (sigh) empire that... is being created in this country.” From this perspective, nuclear weapons should be the focus of privileged people's activism—they are their/our responsibility. Importantly, then, part of the reason to concentrate on disarmament is because doing so is a way to *not* reproduce oppressive relations of power that a different

(less authentic to oneself) focus might lead to. Activists are focusing on the issues that they are genuinely responsible to speak for; they are doing their own “work.”

Significantly, this means that it is okay that these movements are largely privileged white people’s movements, because it’s “us who need to repent”—not “struggling inner city people of color” (Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit). This may be “too easy” a response, in Bill’s terms, but what is true for these justice action prisoners is that white folks have benefited for too long from the impoverishment of others, and prison witness feels like a way to take “responsibility” for this. It is also a way to “repent,” in the words of Fr. Steve Kelly, meaning to apologize and take responsibility for one’s actions, with a promise to behave differently in the future. While they can never fully understand the ways in which others’ experiences may be different from theirs, time spent in prison was expressed as a way to “wear down” one’s privilege, as it is also a way to take responsibility for it (Fr. Steve). In these ways, disarmament activism is an attempt to “speak as” rather than to “speak for” (Alcoff 1998).

This distinction between speaking *as* and *for* is crucial, as reviewed in chapter 4. In fact, it is precisely what makes the utilization of privilege power into something other than a crude colonial tool. Speaking “as”—as a privileged first world person who is responsible and able to act against a particular instance of violence, demonstrates at once an instance of acknowledging one’s social location, a political understanding of unequal relations, a powerful claiming of personal responsibility, and a remarkable demonstration of commitment to solidarity as a *standing-with* others—as your own person. In these ways, enacting privilege power may be more than a paternalist retrenchment or reification of a colonialist savior complex, and rather become an important method of



solidarity that deserves to be noted and studied further.<sup>83</sup> Most simply, justice action prisoners who demonstrate the consciousness to speak “as” provide an alternative model for how to better engage in border-crossing work.

### **“Use it Up:” Privilege and Political Action**

A core aspect of principled nonviolence is that “the means” must be consistent with “the ends”—we must actually live by the principles we wish to instill. Hence, relying upon whiteness, for example, to protest white supremacy is tricky business indeed. However, there is an important history of using privilege “for good” in U.S. justice struggles (for example, white student involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, U.S. citizens involved in the Central American Solidarity movement, white abolitionists working to end slavery). Justice action prisoners are a part of this legacy.

In the particular ways in which it relies on privilege, a close approximation to prison witness is the work of nonviolent accompaniers, such as volunteers with Peace Brigades International (PBI). Reviewing the scholarship on such volunteers is a useful way to broaden perspective and better evaluate the ideas and methods of justice action prisoners.

Volunteers for nonviolent accompaniment come from all over the world, to live and work in geopolitical hotspots (Colombia, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka). In these places, they accompany—live with—the people whose lives are most in danger: labor organizers, human rights campaigners, and people struggling for democracy. Accompaniment is a hugely effective nonviolent method for deterring violence and death in extremely dangerous situations (Coy 1997; 2007) The strategy works because people

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<sup>83</sup> In this effort, it would be specifically important to speak with “those most directly affected” by such enactments and ideas.

are less likely to commit violence when there are (visibly white) foreigners present, and particularly foreigners connected to movements whose members make an outcry if a particular person/group is harmed.

Sara Koopman's doctoral work describes that "accompaniers use the fact that their lives 'count' more (because of passport/economic/racial privilege), to build a world where everyone's lives 'count'" (2012). The aim, she writes, is to *use* privilege in order to *undo* it. Most volunteers feel that they use their privilege "strategically," as one PBI member explained to sociologist Patrick Coy. "What the escorting work is trying to do is to use existing power relationships in a kind of jiu-jitsu" in which the goal is to "turn it back on them in order to basically ally ourselves with those people who are trying to change the structures" (1997, p. 250). The ideal of accompaniment is to use privilege in such a way that one can "use it up," Koopman explains—to dismantle the systems of oppression that hold people unequally apart.

Those who work with organizations such as PBI are disproportionately from the West and North, despite sustained goals to "diversify" the pool to include participants from all parts of the globe (Coy 1997, p. 239).<sup>84</sup> PBI (and other accompaniment organizations, to varying degrees) have tried to mitigate their reliance on white skin in various ways: through instituting a uniform for volunteers (PBI volunteers wear bright yellow vests) and by engaging in trainings, workshops, and ongoing discussions for and

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<sup>84</sup> Actually "diversifying" volunteers however, has of course proven difficult, in part because when people of color have joined teams and run into trouble with local authorities, their treatment has generally been harsher than that of the white accompaniers—including beatings, torture, and longer periods of detention (ibid p. 240). In the 1990s, Patrick Coy learned that PBI leaves some leadership posts empty when unable to recruit people of color to fill them, rather than willingly be run by an all-white team (Coy 1997). The commitment to diversity is real and has come with effort and reflection; actually fulfilling it is much more difficult.

with volunteers about race and racial dynamics. Despite these efforts, accompaniment still fundamentally relies upon international status and white skin: people know not to “mess with” those being accompanied because “it could have blowback politically” (Ed Kinane interview; see also Coy 2007; Boothe and Smithey 2007; Koopman 2012). However, the strategy is extremely effective: it saves people’s lives in extremely dangerous conditions—and so the challenge is how to “use” privilege in the service of such protection, appropriately and well.

In her research on accompaniment in Colombia, Koopman finds that what is critically important is *how* accompaniment is done. She writes that accompaniers must not think of themselves as nonpartisan or neutral, but need to be aware of the impacts of their political location, be direct and knowledgeable about their race and privilege, and forge purposeful connections through acts of solidarity with those they live and work with (2012). In other words, using privilege well crucially begins in an understanding of oneself, one’s location, and one’s public/visible identity—and then builds from this place to responsibly work with others in challenging political ways.

What justice action prisoners do is a less overt form of relying upon privilege than what nonviolent accompaniers do. However, it is their whiteness/citizenship/privileged status as the ultimate “beneficiaries of empire” that provides some of their power, and that some intentionally use as a tool. Hence, accompaniers and justice prisoners are knowingly caught in a difficult catch 22: it is because they are white, specifically, that their protest carries certain meanings, but it is because their protest carries meanings that their whiteness maintains its power. The critical question thus becomes *how* to move forward, and with what knowledges and understandings, so that “using privilege”

becomes more a practice of “using it up” than it does of reliance and reinforcement. Koopman’s insistence on self-knowledge is essential, as are justice action prisoner’s conceptions of solidarity (discussed in chapter 4) and the sense of personal responsibility and commitment to “speaking-as” discussed in the following section.

### **What do you wear when you get arrested? Using Privileged Identity Strategically**

Many of the justice action prisoners I spoke with had specifically determined that the *use* of privilege power—a “master’s tool”—was a worthwhile trade-off in their justice struggles. The care with which they did so varied, and this section explores exactly what they consciously try to do when they know that privilege—and specifically whiteness—is a tool upon which they rely. In general, these conversations were circumspect: several participants said that they made mistakes in leveraging their whiteness, and that they are careful around it. A few relied upon their privilege with less consciousness and care than is safe for the facilitation of systemic changes worked for by the movements, as will be discussed. This analysis does not seek to categorize the various understandings and deployments of privilege power as a binary (good/bad, effective/ineffective, sufficient/insufficient), but instead to illuminate the spectrum of understandings expressed by participants, and to highlight what is so important about engaging in resistance with a sophisticated level of personal and political consciousness.

I spoke with ten people who spoke specifically of using their privilege intentionally, as an integral method of nonviolent protest: three sisters, three lay women, one priest, and three lay men. To get at notions of privilege without leading the way in my interviews, I asked many participants the question “what do you wear when you plan to be arrested?” For a good number, the response was logistical: dress warmly, wear

layers, a scarf works nicely as a pillow while you wait in a holding cell. For others, the question opened up their understandings of privilege and performance (in the Butlerian sense), their responses revealing what they know about and how they purposefully negotiate their own visible identities. In my first interview, I asked lay woman Ann Tiffany (a retired public health nurse) about clothing. She replied:

I like to present as a middle class white woman. That's generally who I am. I remember once going in...in a gray flannel suit and little heels, to be finger printed. The police thought I was there as a lawyer. And I said no, I'm here to be finger printed (laugh).

Ann's response shows how activists can employ their identity markers as performance to upset and challenge stereotypes. In her suit and heels, Ann is a protester. Nancy Gwin, a retired teacher, similarly told me that she always "dresses up" when she goes to a protest. "There's Nancy, in her flats!" others say—but she wants onlookers to see that there are people "like them" (white and middle class) who are interested in these issues, and who can do something about them.

Fr. Luis Barrios, a Puerto Rican Anglican priest and professor of Forensic Psychology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, deploys privilege very strategically to increase the efficacy of his activism; it is a tool that he takes advantage of. I asked him if he wears his collar when he knows he is going to be arrested. He replied,

Yes, I like to do that. It's a power struggle, and because it's a power struggle, I take advantage of that. So uniform to uniform. And then, most of the time, the police officer feels very uncomfortable, because they don't know how to do the arrest. They feel guilty, and I like to make them feel guilty....So ya, I like to wear my uniform in court when I do civil disobedience. We did Occupy Wall Street, Occupy Faith. So it was about 18 religious leaders, Muslims, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist. And the police have a lot of difficulty. 'Cause everyone says, let's do what we all know how to do. Let's pray. We all prayed. Every religion prayed.... They accused us of trespassing and disorderly conduct. We were not doing that! But then, I remember, the Lieutenant came to me and says (whispers) "excuse me Father?" I say 'yes?' "We need to do the arrest." I say, "I am praying to God!" He

said, “Oh I’m sorry. Let me know when you are finished.” (Laughs) So he just stood there, he doesn’t know. He said “are you finished talking to God?” I said ‘no not yet! I’m getting there.’ (laughter) I’m just waiting for the media to get there. Okay. Then I got a police officer, Italian, he’ll say, “oh my mother, my mother’s gonna kill me, when I tell her that I arrested a priest. She’s gonna kill me. She’s not gonna talk to me. I don’t know why I do this!” The police always... say “I’m sorry I have to do this. It’s my job.” I say, ‘I know this is your job. This is my job, this is why I’m here! So you do your thing. I’ll do mine.’ So yes. I take advantage of the collar.

Fr. Luis vividly illustrates how privilege is a form of power that can be directed intentionally, towards a variety of ends. As a Puerto Rican man, he uses his status as a priest/professor, over and above his citizenship/race. In the context of his home in New York City, this strategy is productive and efficacious.

The status attached to the collar also enables certain kinds of things to happen, whether or not the priest in question uses it intentionally. Fr. Steve Kelly told me about his experience as part of the 2009 “Disarm Now” Plowshares action in the state of Washington. Walking across the military base, the first guard who spotted the five Plowshares activists saw his collar and communicated the message to military personnel that “protesters” had trespassed onto the base. “So right away they knew we were protesters. They could see my collar... so in some cases it can diffuse it a little bit” though “it’s not guaranteed.” In this instance, however (where he was present in a “shoot to kill” zone), being a priest assured safety for himself and those around him.

There is a long history of such intentional use of status in nonviolent activism. Brian Terrell, an activist from Iowa, told me that Daniel Ellsberg demanded that the court address him as “Doctor Ellsberg” (PhD, Economics), even though he was always “Dan” in daily life. Martin Luther King Jr. asked those involved in the struggle for civil rights to wear suits and dresses when engaging in actions. Those I interviewed had plenty of

stories involving strategic use of status: Ed Kinane told of demanding a prisoner's release in Haiti with an elderly white nun in tow, to appear "gentle" and not provoke extra hostility. Sr. Dorothy Pagosa recalled calling a friend in the midst of a tense Chicago protest to say, "do you need a nun up there?" and then hurried over when he said "yes!" Quite simply, employing visible markers of one's privileged identity enables and facilitates certain kinds of actions and responses.

A common goal of those I spoke with is not only to speak "as," but to use their privilege to "make space" for those most directly affected by a particular violence to speak and be able to be heard: privilege power is, after all, a form of power. Sr. Ardeth Platte remembered her days on City Council and as mayor pro tem of Saginaw, Michigan, when she "shared everything that was going on" with the "disadvantaged community" so that they could be "the ones who came to city hall and put the pressure on us." She used her role as an elected official to create a platform for those most directly affected to talk, rather than to represent them on their behalf. She continued, as if to clarify, "I think we have to always be careful that we not speak 'for.'"

Sr. Dorothy Pagosa uses her privilege intentionally, though not with ease. She told me about her work with "Homeless on the Move," an Illinois-based organization that worked to get homeless people the right to vote. Standing with a crowd of the homeless vets who successfully organized this campaign, she said:

a security guard... came over to me and said 'you look like a reasonable person.' You look around at a sea of black faces, and I'm the only white one there. The only way I could use that privilege without wanting to throw up...was to keep him occupied while the others planned what they were going to do.

She explained that she uses her privilege

as a peacemaker when I'm down at the School of the Americas... I can talk to police if they start to hassle someone... to try to provide some protection... and that's... the only way I can see me using it.... (With Homeless on the Move), we were the leverage to get them in, but then they (the vets) went in... Sometimes our privilege gives us entrée. But sometimes maybe we shouldn't use it. Use the entrée, but not for you to speak. I have to remind myself to shut up sometimes and let the people that really know what they're talking about talk.... I'm still trying to figure out ways, and maybe I slip.... It's like, 'oh God, there I go again'... because I am a product of my environment, I'm a product of my class, I have to remind myself.

Sr. Dorothy's honesty about what she does is illuminating; she sees the effects of her whiteness and religious identity, and how they shape her legitimacy in the spaces of power in which she makes her protests. While it can sometimes make her "want to throw up," she also uses her whiteness to benefit the causes she struggles for. Sr. Dorothy's use of privilege power is recognized, and it is limited: it is to gain entrée, but it is not to speak. Still, despite years of organizing as an ally, she still "slips" and has to "remind myself." But she is committed to the process, and keeps at it.

Intentionally using privilege power is not universal among justice action prisoners, and Brian Terrell does not agree that it is always right or necessary for a man such as himself. I asked him what he wears when he's inviting arrest. He told me that he "doesn't dress up," because

I get enough preference as it is. Just being a white, now middle aged, man. I don't need to claim that, in fact, I need to do the opposite. I need to practice downward mobility. And I need to say, about those privileges that I don't deserve, that have been pressed upon me, I am reluctant to claim those. And I think in a system where it matters, in a system where someone wearing a suit and tie gets better treatment, I'll wear blue jeans and a T-shirt.

In contrast to Brian and Sr. Dorothy, I also interviewed people who did not recognize that privilege was a tool that they were using, or who used it in hegemonic ways. Six



respondents did not mention privilege at all during interviews, and a few others expressed understandings that were elementary. Jack Gilroy told me that he cannot understand why he was chastised as racist (by others in the movement) when he suggested that SOAW reach out to the African American community in Alabama to join the vigil in Columbus, as the “mixture of races” during the Civil Rights struggle was just “so powerful and beautiful.” Less overtly, Ken Hayes relied upon his privilege in prison, where he felt secure because the guards “knew better than to mess with somebody who probably had more money than they did.” In this, he used his class position and white masculinity as a way to feel safe in ways that reinforced inequalities, rather than unsettled them. The difference is important, and Derrlyn Tom, a Japanese-American public school teacher who crossed the line at Fort Benning in 2004, expressed “resentment” that the SOAW movement generally is not more attentive to how its core strategy of prison witness is reliant upon whiteness, a blindness that for her reflects wider and deeper “white ignorance” (Mills 2007).

These feelings gesture towards the complexity of relying upon the tools of race and nationality to address ongoing problems of colonialism. However, the consciousness expressed around “speaking as” among some of those I interviewed also provides a critical distinction that, I argue, enables the possibility for more responsible solidarity activism to continue; *speaking-as*, while *standing alongside*, is a complex act that does not simply reinforce deep historical patterns.

Clearly, justice action prisoners and the movements to which they belong cannot “in general” be called privilege/race cognizant, though they are relying upon their status as a form of power for their nonviolent actions (Bailey 1998; Garvey & Ignatiev 1997;

Sullivan 2006). Further, the strategy of prison witness is not raced or sufficiently understood as a method of privilege by the two movements covered in this research, and part of this chapter's work has been to show why such understandings are crucial—not just for Plowshares and SOAW, but for movements for change more generally. Some justice action prisoners revealed profoundly thoughtful understandings of what their privilege entails, and I have highlighted these voices so that these learnings can be recognized and replicated as useful steps away from the historical racism of mainstream peace and justice movements, and towards systemic change.

### **The Moment of Action: Gender, Power, and Faith**

Principled nonviolence scholar Michael Nagler writes that nonviolent action is a “peak experience” for its actors (2001). Social movement scholars recognize that protests can be arenas for “living moments of freedom, liberation, and joy” (Juris 2008, p. 66, see also Calhoun 2001; Gould 2001) and specifically recognize the significance of emotion in social action. As Brown and Pickerell explain, “It is important not to underestimate the pleasurable dimensions of collective action” (2009, p. 27, see also Flam and King 2005; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001). In the U.S. context (of relative physical safety, for white folks, from the police state), my respondents confirmed this idea. Ellen Grady claimed that body-politics are not a “big thing” reserved for “James Bond,” but something that can be truly pleasurable for ordinary people. Done in community, powerfully symbolic, surrounded by support, deeply righteous and spiritual, a way to ground one's beliefs with one's actions, resistant action is often remembered as a positive and transformative personal experience. Through participation in nonviolent protest,

participants described feelings of pleasure, surprise, courage, personal power, and heightened political awareness. Quite simply, engaging in direct action can be exciting.

Specifically, what I heard (from twenty of my forty three participants) was that the actual moment of action was “empowering,” ranging from feeling one’s most authentic self to feeling excitement about producing political changes, from confidence building to joy, that one was able to use one’s body to create/embody/demand the changes that one is most fiercely committed to. This finding mirrors those of social movement and nonviolence scholars.

This next section will explore the gendered experiences of “empowerment” described by the men and women I interviewed—complicating notions of nonviolence/protest as simply “empowering” for its actors, without reference to a larger context that takes gender, as well as other axes of difference, into account. Indeed, how empowerment was described varied crucially between men, women, laity, and the vowed religious, and was affected by age. These differences reveal how structure matters, and illuminate systemic inequalities as they also illustrate how identity matters in shaping both our actual experiences *and* our interpretations of them.

The findings are also relevant for social movement theorizations around gender and activism. Since the early 1990s, there has been growing insistence to undertake analysis of gender differentiation (see Barrett 1993; Burns 2007; McAdam 1992; J. Gamson 1997; Irons 1998; Staggenborg 1998). Verta Taylor writes, “even in movements that purport to be gender-inclusive, the mobilization, leadership patterns, strategies, ideologies, and even the outcomes of social movements are gendered” (1999, 9). As such, all aspects of a social movement may be analyzed from a gender perspective, and more

such analysis is needed. The touchstone in this literature is Doug McAdam's *Freedom Summer*, which shows how gender expectations and roles shaped the experiences of male and female volunteers during the civil rights movement (1988). This project broadens McAdams' scope, and shows that gender, specifically, shapes what activists concretely do *and* significantly informs the experience of movement involvement and its lasting biographical consequences. In this, it shows that the "what" of activism is also affected by its "who" and "how." In other words, gender may very well matter in the specifics of what one does, but it also crucially affects how what one does is experienced, recalled, and politically significant—during one's most dramatic moments of action, during incarceration, and afterwards.

**Lay Women: "It was the most empowering thing I've ever done"**

As Ann Tiffany told her life story, I heard a coming of age narrative. She married young, and soon realized that her marriage was a mistake. "Alcohol and other women" were a part of Bob's life, but divorce was discouraged in the 1950s and it was "me that was going to have to change." Ann had four children before she left the marriage, and with it, the constraints it imposed on her person. For her, crossing the line at Fort Benning in 1997 at the age of 63 was in some ways crossing the threshold into adulthood.

Telling me about that day, she said:

It was one of the most empowering things I've ever done.... I wasn't really very good at speaking up to authority.... But when I was arrested the first time at Fort Benning, I was with 60 other people, and... when the handcuffs were put on, I just felt so, I felt powerful. I felt, 'you've done it, Ann. You've stood up for what you believe in, and you've been confronted and you still stood. You didn't leave.' And that, that was good for me.

This was not simply because she was saying no to U.S. imperialism, or to the violence of the school, but because:

I think that probably (being a woman) was where my feeling of power came from. That as a woman I stood up. Because most of the authority that you stand up to is male. I stood up to my husband a couple of times but it was really, really difficult... I think there was definitely some relief and I just felt very good about myself. Each time it made me stronger.

For Ann, there was something deeply satisfying about resisting what she had struggled so long against—a power that was militaristic, but also a power that was male. This was reinforced with Ann’s experience in prison. She explained,

When you go to prison, the first thing that happens is you take all your clothes off, you’re strip searched, and you’re given a uniform. And suddenly you lose your professional role, your motherhood, your sisterhood, your parenthood, you are just are who you are. Nobody knows anything about you and you enter this world of women.... And you don’t have any roles that you’ve lived for all of your life. You’re kind of stripped of all of it. You know? You can almost create who you are. I remember thinking that, on this bunk bed in this room with 6 other 7 other women I didn’t know-- they don’t know who I am!... So suddenly I didn’t have to answer the phone. That was a biggie for some reason. I didn’t have to organize, make phone calls, write up minutes, make agendas... that six months was a real growing up time for me.

Ann’s story startles common expectations about what it feels like to do civil disobedience and be in prison. She was able to “create” herself anew at Danbury FCI, and left surer of herself and more committed than ever to her activism. She was extremely proud of her ability to do what she believed to be right.

Ann’s story is archetypal of the way that lay women told their stories of action, as a personal “peak experience.” Indeed, fourteen (of sixteen) lay women spoke in terms of empowerment. Nancy Gwin said that it was “pretty awesome” to cross the line. Like Julianne Oldfield, it was something she had been wanting and waiting to do for a long time. Kathy Kelly told me that it fundamentally “feels good to find a way to fit in with

resistance.” Kathleen Rumpf said that Plowshares “was totally not something I would do” but “I felt helpless on the Bowery” while in her actions, “I felt strength.” For these women, the moment of action was a purposefully confrontational and very important moment for them *as women*. It effectively positioned them as independent, capable, and liberated—often explicitly against the cultures, communities, and families from which they had come.

Most specifically, there was a way that lay women in their 50s, 60s, and 70s experienced the “empowerment” that comes through action. For feminist scholars, empowerment is not simply personal (though it is about building self-confidence and image) but is also aimed towards the “radical alteration of the processes and structures which reproduce women’s subordinate position as a gender” (Young 1997:372). In other words, empowerment has to do with facing one’s position within the gender regime and doing something proactive towards the accomplishment of a greater justice. Ann and her peers spoke consistently with this understanding; their moment of action was recalled as a pleasurable moment of personal power in a context they experienced as constraining. The women’s resistance worked against both the particular instance of militarism that they were directly confronting and against their position as women in a patriarchal culture—both broadly and within their nuclear families. Indeed, a goodly number of these women acted without the support of their spouses, families, or communities.

Julienne Oldfield’s experience is telling of the multiple levels of resistance that can come into play through women’s activism, and how this interplays with principled/Gandhian understandings of nonviolence as an instance of voluntary, political,

and valid “suffering.”<sup>85</sup> In contrast to the women, for the few men who discussed the notion of suffering, their time in prison was brushed off as “not as much of a sacrifice” as what soldiers do—a comparative choice that actually affirmed their action as sacrifice/suffering (Brian DeRouen). For the women, however, no notion of suffering was accepted. “I did not suffer,” Ann Tiffany explained, “I felt humble.” What is most interesting is that the women *did* sometimes suffer, and sometimes brutally so—but in general, the hardships came at home, rather than through the more public “political suffering”—i.e. incarceration—that results from the action.

A British woman, Julienne Oldfield moved to the U.S. in the early 1980s because she “cared about her marriage,” but not because she wanted to. She left a job that she “loved” as an elected labor party counselor in Swansea, to become an unemployed and initially impoverished faculty wife in Syracuse, New York. Her children were miserable. Her eldest daughter “became the picture of misery,” eating donuts by the bag-full during their first few years in New York. In other words, to support her husband’s career, the whole family “suffered” though no one—certainly not Julienne—named it as such to me. Years later, when she wanted to cross the line at Fort Benning and go to prison for a few months, her husband was adamantly opposed to the idea. In the end, Julienne crossed the line at Fort Benning without his support (becoming a U.S. citizen in order to do so), and in response he refused to talk to her for several months. She told me that she would have crossed “years before” if she “were selfish,” and she finally decided to do it only when emboldened by the SOAW community. This community supported her (in contradistinction to her husband) to be “who I already was.” Her (voluntary, political)

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<sup>85</sup> The voluntary assumption of “suffering” is the mechanism for change in principled nonviolence, though as discussed in chapter 4, is contested terrain among activists.

suffering on behalf of resistance, in other words, was not perceived as legitimate—it was simply unacceptable for Julienne to be away from her family, even after her children were grown. Her personal “suffering” (as a wife and mother) however, was assumed and remained unquestioned.<sup>86</sup>

Hence, for Julienne, crossing was an act that transgressed the school, but that also transgressed the limits of her identity within her marriage. Those few steps effectively *marked* her as an independent woman who finally did what she had for so long wanted to do. Like Ann Tiffany, Nancy Gwin, Alice Gerard, and Martha Hennessy, Julienne finally just “did it” (Ann)—regardless of familial support. For all of these women, the result was a tremendous feeling of empowerment: not just through making their positions about the school clear, but also through anchoring their identities as activists, and their positions within their marriages/families as independent and agential (Young 1997).

For the younger women, as well as the oldest (those in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 80s) an important part of the stories lay women told included an appreciation for doing something that was in alignment with their own self-concept—an empowerment that was more personal than structural. For Derrlyn Tom, “I needed something that I could say was *la causa de mi vida* (the cause of my life), the thing that would keep me. This is my life’s work.” Derrlyn’s engagement with direct action is *what allows her to be who she is*. Similarly, Lois Putzier was inspired to cross the line at Fort Benning with her husband

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<sup>86</sup> To be very clear, Julienne’s life as a mother and wife was not marked by “suffering”—she had a lovely husband and is very close with her three children. However, the contrast between “acceptable”/personal “suffering” and political/intentional “suffering” can be clearly seen through this story. It should be read more as a metaphorical instance, however, than as hard description of facts describing Julienne.



after participating in over a dozen delegation trips to Central America with *Witness for Peace*. She explained,

When we first got married, we were... going to the ballet and that was good, that was good. And then we found out about this trip... and that's what we did from then on. It was life-changing, and we like ourselves better now.... We think we are better people for having run into *Witness for Peace*.

Recalling herself when she crossed the line, she told me, “That part of my life is really very good. I was very good then.” Hence, for the youngest and eldest women, the “empowerment” that was experienced was self-affirming but less personally transgressive—it was about alignment and being one’s best self, but not necessarily about confronting one’s position in one’s family and culture. From this, it seems that the historical context in which the women’s actions and development of self occur matters, and age importantly shapes the lay women’s interpretations of empowerment. This confirms the importance of a temporal structure—of outside forces—in shaping who we are and how we experience the world.

In sum, there is a theme among lay women of a certain age that the moment of action is empowering for them as women. It is important to act politically, through the judicial system, in public—but what is equally important is the feeling that, “as a woman I stood up” (Ann). As will be discussed, the “feminist consciousness” (acting individually, powerfully, purposefully, and politically) that was awakened through activism was not similarly described by most men or by Roman Catholic sisters.

### **Sisters and Men: It’s Not About Me, It’s Just the Right Strategy**

In contrast to the theme of personal empowerment so prevalent in the lay women’s stories, for the men and Catholic sisters, the moment of action was discussed

impersonally—as a simpler instance of nonviolence or God “working.” These stories described actions as a sequence of political or moral imperatives rather than an event that was fundamentally about individuals and their own lives. For these participants, resistant action may have felt good (along the lines of enjoying the day), but this was practically irrelevant in how stories were recounted (with the exception of Fr. Louis Vitale, who feels a “thrill” that is “spiritual” when acting in resistance). For the vowed religious and lay men, the emphasis in story was generally about how nonviolence works and is effective, how resistance is the cross, or how one must not be too concerned with efficacy but rather with being “faithful” through one’s own commitments towards right action.

As is true across this dissertation, the nuances of storytelling are very important: how men and women remember, emphasize, and tell their own life stories to a young woman of assumed-similar politics differs and does not necessarily indicate such clear cut differences in actual experience. However, the consistency with which lay women spoke of “me” and men and sisters spoke of “tactics” and “God” is real and striking.

Reflecting the principled nonviolent position, a few of the lay men and most of the sisters mostly spoke in terms of faith, often referring to Dorothy Day’s attributed insistence that “what is important is to be faithful”.<sup>87</sup> As Sr. Carol Gilbert explained, “it is

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<sup>87</sup> Brian Terrell clarified for me that “No reference is provided for Dorothy saying this- I am pretty sure that she did not though it is often attributed to her. I do not think that this represents what she would have said.” He continued, “The confusion might come from *The Aims and Means of the Catholic Worker* (by Bob Lulow, he wrote: “*We must be prepared to accept seeming failure with these aims, for sacrifice and suffering are part of the Christian life. Success, as the world determines it, is not the final criterion for judgments. The most important thing is the love of Jesus Christ and how to live His truth*”). Brian continues, “This is the end of a detailed plan for changing the world! We might fail, but real success only comes from the efforts of people who are willing to risk failure. “Success at the world determines it” means things like getting Obama elected only to have more killing, less civil liberties, more deportations, more corporate

not a matter of how many times you are arrested, (or) is it successful. We talk about it as ‘being faithful’ and trying to speak the truth, wherever one finds oneself.” Sr. Megan Rice concurred, explaining, “You’re not doing something to achieve a direct result, you know, (in) those direct actions! But, you were just doing what you had to do, wanted to do, to be in solidarity with those people... efficacy has never been a concern, really.” In their consistent emphasis on the “external” rather than the personal, the sisters more closely mirror the men than they do the lay women, and are well fitted into this category.

Emphasizing living faithfully, the interpretation of personal events is absolutely different for this group than it is for the lay women—but at times, it can be personal. For example, Jerome Berrigan, the brother of Daniel and Philip and himself a life-long activist, told me that his brothers (as well as Martin Luther King Jr.), “believed in truth and goodness and love enough to die for it”—the ultimate proof of their devotion. For himself, he explained, “I have not yet come to the point of courage or devotion” for he finds “life... too much... to offer it up.” He is too attached to the comforts and joys of his living to follow the example of Christ and his brothers and go “all the way for him”—through following Christ’s “way of dying.”<sup>88</sup> In essence, Jerry admits to a lack of commitment in his faith that a more fervent resister would have overcome, their resistance so strong as to be willing to die for their beliefs.

Interestingly, four of the seven sisters I interviewed did not talk about their personal experiences of activism, bodies, or sensations *at all* during our interviews—

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subsidies, more people of color in prison than before. It means “winning” a war that plants the seeds for another worse one to come. “Success as the world determines it” is no success at all.” (Brian Terrell, personal correspondence).

<sup>88</sup> Phil spent over 13 years in prison during his life, and died of a cancer Jerry believes he developed as a result of those experiences. Similarly, Dan was in failing health when I interviewed Jerry, which Jerry credited to the stresses and poor nutrition of prison life.

despite the fact that—as other respondents make clear, the personal journeys of justice action prisoners’ can be grueling, exhilarating, and significant. Instead, when extraordinary things happened, they were credited to grace or described as miracles. For example, Sr. Ardeth Platte told a story of a heavy-duty lock on a gate “cracking open, it shouldn’t have done that.” Her explanation was that “there are miracles in these things.” She went on to dismiss the attention her actions gain as un-sought. “We don’t call the press or anything,” but people hear of what she has done and it “resonates.”<sup>89</sup> Here, Sr. Ardeth’s personal experience is absolutely not the point: she is simply a willing instrument, facilitating grace towards action. As vowed religious women in their 60s-80s, the lack of personalization is in sharp contrast to the way lay women discussed resistance and its aftermath.

Among the men, and with the exception of Plowshares activist John Heid, the “peak experience” of action recalled was not narrated along personal lines. Uniquely, John described his 1984 Plowshares action at Griffiss Airforce base in the words of Audre Lorde. He explained,

I was so nervous, so nervous... but I felt freer that day, more liberated, than the day I got married. I felt very free that day. I’m making a commitment, like a freeing up, not a tying down. There was this, finally! In a symbolic way... this (sense of) *‘when I use my strength in the service of my vision it makes no difference whether or not I am afraid.’*

For John, doing what he believed to be right made him feel free and released him from fear. He was making a commitment—a contract with his conscience— that liberated him

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<sup>89</sup> This is in direct contrast to the movement historically (the Catonsville 9 prepared press packets ahead of their action) and to the environmental movement as described by Tim DeChristopher, which is much more intentional about controlling “the message” than are contemporary Plowshares activists.

rather than made him feel locked up. In this way, his recollections of resistant action are personal and bodily.

Brian Terrell also complicated this basic story (of lay women vs. everyone else) in a letter to me from FPC Yankton, the South Dakota prison where he recently spent six months for an anti-drone action. He wrote,

When I was young I got a thrill, I must confess, being treated like a dangerous person. I felt like I was being taken seriously! Perhaps because I was a skinny little pip-squeak... I remember my first arrest in 1977 at the Pentagon when I was 21 years old, seeing the flashing lights of the squad cars and thinking, ‘that is for me?’

As a young “pip-squeak” it was exciting to be treated as a dangerous person, however now that he is older the “thrill” is gone and “now I am just tired of it.” Hence, as it is for the lay women, age seems important in determining how men experience the “thrill” of nonviolent action (or perhaps more specifically, having an identity that is in any way less dominant, such as female or pip squeak), though I lack sufficient data to follow this through here.

In contrast to John’s experience and Brian’s early memories, the other six men who spoke of empowerment spoke completely differently than either other men or lay women. Reflecting a pragmatic nonviolent perspective, they talked in terms of *generating new power towards political change*—i.e., efficacy. For Randy Serraglio, a self described “hot-head” who grew up “looking for trouble,” he was able to “channel a lot of rage” through civil resistance.

I’m not a religious person really at all, but I got no problem carrying a cross onto a U.S. military reservation – especially when it has a name of a person ’cause . . . that’s power....I never have felt that way in my life in anything else I ever did, than what I felt when we parked on the base holding that cross. It was exhilarating, it really was.... We made millions of people aware of the School of

Americas... And we forced the Pentagon to change the way they do things even if we didn't actually close the place, and we brought a lot of light and heat on them for this counter insurgency-stuff. And we did the right thing. We honored the lives of those people who were victimized by our policy, by our tax dollars. We did that 'cause it had to be done and somebody had to do it.

Here, Randy articulated how he used the power of the cross strategically, and was hugely moved by his action's significance as "the right thing to do." His action felt good, but it felt good because it was politically effective and because it honored the people victimized by U.S. policy—but not because it transformed Randy as a person.

Karl Meyer also spoke of the moment of action as empowering, but described yet another variant of what this meant. He was 19 years old in 1955, when with Dorothy Day and others he disobeyed an air raid drill in New York City. This was the "day I became a radical." He "crossed the Rubicon" that day, and in so doing, aligned himself with those he admired: "Joan of Arc, Socrates, and Gandhi." This felt wonderful, and brought him the respect of the great peacemakers of the time. Choosing to break the law "skyrocketed" Karl to fame within the peace movement in the 1950s, and confirmed him as a trustworthy fellow. Resistant action, in other words, was empowering and enjoyable—in the sense that it made Karl more powerful (effective).

Fitting in with the legacy of nonviolence, as an effective tactic, can be an important motivation for action among this group. As Sr. Ardeth Platte explained, very few causes are "won" without some people going to jail: prison witness is fundamental to the democratic toolkit. In contrast to some of the most religious participants, for many, prison witness is chosen because it is perceived as the most effective method available—i.e., not as a method of principle, but a method of strategy. Brian Terrell was the most

clear on this point. In a personal email, and in direct response to my emphasis on “faithfulness” among participants, he wrote:

I do nonviolent direct action not for the sake of my own purity or just to be faithful but because I seriously believe that it is the way that I can effect change. I believe that history proves that it works. I believe that it is the method that suits my capabilities and talents and temperament. It goes, too, to what you wrote about the body. I cannot afford face time with a senator. I cannot call a press conference and have the world media come. All that I have is my body to put on the line. Especially since the Supreme Court knocked down corporate political donation limits in ‘Citizens United’, direct action may be the only effective tool people who are not rich have left. What I can accomplish might be small but it is not nothing. Engaging in direct action is the single most effective thing I can do.

I do this knowing that I will fail more often than not and knowing that my own efforts will only be a drop in the bucket of the deluge of action required to save humanity and all life. But I am doing it to be effective. There is a danger in using faithful vs. successful in justifying ourselves while we pursue failed strategies. It can be a cover for laziness, for not doing the research and legwork direct action requires. Doing the same ineffective things over and over is not being faithful. Dr. Martin Luther King said- “Those who love peace must learn to organize as effectively as those who love war.” I agree that faithfulness is what matters but what we need to be faithful to is a vision of a real, better world. Not to a vision of our own abstract notions or to some kind of spiritual purity.

Prison witness, then, is conceived as both a principled stand and a pragmatic strategy, and the lay men were generally insistent that their actions were meant to be “effective.”

During interviews, lay men reinforced the idea of prison witness as an effective tactic. Ed Kinane was motivated to cross the line at Fort Benning because he saw the leverage that people were gaining (in terms of drawing attention to the movement to close the SOA) and he wanted to further the cause. Brian DeRouen experienced how “nonviolence works” through his 2004 protest at Fort Benning. He explained, “When you have truth and justice on your side, and you’re willing to take even the tiniest bit of suffering upon you.... by doing just the tiniest thing, amazing other tiny things can happen.” Most people are not willing to do so, he continued, but if one is willing to “put

some skin in the game,” then the tactic “works.” Jack Gilroy said that he would do prison witness again, for the right cause, “Because it’s a statement... and you never know where your influence ends.” (As I write, Jack is serving a three month sentence for an anti-drone action at Hancock Air Force Base). Randy Serraglio spoke about how nonviolence is “really a way to fight back and strike blows. It was supremely satisfying to blockade the Federal building and to get media and to get our point of view (out)... which is really the fundamental strategy (that) prison witness is all about.”

Hence, for the men and sisters who spoke of power/empowerment, nonviolent action was exciting because it shifted things structurally: it was a tool that worked and that resonated with their values. Their actions did not create or validate their worth as political subjects as it did for the lay women, but rather allowed them to be better men/Christians, and better positioned to work for the causes they care so much about. Uniquely, Sr. Megan Rice described “little arrests” as “enlivening”-- but not for herself, rather for the movement: “history records that there was constant opposition” she explained, to the issues that concern her.

Another way in which participants in this group spoke of their actions was to describe them as a series of logistics, as Susan Crane did (a lay woman, the only one in this category). Of the 2009 “Disarm Now” Plowshares action in Bangor, Washington, Susan recalled, we “walked across the dirt, nothing happened... went through the first fence, nothing happened... cut through second high security double fence... prayed on the grass and held banner up on the other side, and there were armed guards at that point, so we couldn’t go further.”



Alternately, stories of action were told as descriptions of nonviolent resistance as a tactic. Ken Crawley explained,

You do think about what you can do against this huge monster and it makes sense. Somatic politics makes sense to me....I mean that's basically the only thing you can control....If somebody gave us 100 billion dollars, I don't know if it would make a difference, because the military is still in control. It seems to me that if we have 100,000 people on the street, you could influence them some.

Prison witness is considered an extreme tactic that is only employed when other methods of nonviolent resistance have proven insufficient or ineffective (Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan). Hence, being taken seriously—evidenced by being arrested and imprisoned, is not only an expected, it is a required part of the tactic and the activist experience (see Tobey 2010 for an interesting discussion of this). Indeed, nonviolence only “works” because of the reaction that it produces. Remember, nonviolence is a method of generating conflict, focused to “raise tension” so as to make an issue unavoidable (King, 1963). Fr. Frankel-Streit explained that as a nonviolent resister, you “thrive on provoking a response” for the response to resistance is critical. The act of walking onto a military base is in itself not exhilarating or powerful, what makes prison witness unique is the dramatic reaction and severe consequence the action produces.<sup>90</sup> Explaining this, Michael Pasquale told me about his line crossing in 1996 (the year that 3,000 people trespassed onto Fort Benning) when, rather than arrest everyone, authorities bussed activists a mile away from the base and then let them go. This response made the action feel like a “crop walk,” Michael explained. He continued, “we weren’t trying to raise money for food

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<sup>90</sup> For example, in most instances, illegally trespassing onto a military base is punished with a fine of about \$75. It is only for those trespassing onto Fort Benning, during the third weekend in November, that six months of incarceration is standard (though it does occur elsewhere).

pantries or international aid, but we were trying to have an impact on U.S. policy in a concrete way, really trying to save lives and shift people's thinking." Hence, not being taken seriously felt "too soft, it was too easy," and it did not "sit well" with Michael. Quite simply, not punishing the nonviolent offense is a way to gut the strategy of its power, both in terms of the empowerment experienced by its participants and its political ability to shift thinking and draw attention (efficacy).

### **Analysis**

The differential and embodied stories of action told by the men and Catholic sisters (as faith-filled and effective) and lay women (as empowering and personally significant) gain insight and find resonance when contextualized historically. As carefully detailed in her book, *Radical Pacifism in Modern America*, justice action prisoner and professor of history Marion Mollin shows that being a woman in the U.S. peace movement between 1940-1970 meant navigation of a hugely patriarchal world (2006; 2009, see also Lempe-Santangelo 1989; Riegle 2013a; 2013b; Tracy 2004). Mollin argues that for these pacifists, the goal of equality—both between races and the sexes—was subsumed under the goal of "peace." Radical pacifists, "swam in a sea of sexism and racism, as well as militarism" that they were unable to overcome (Mollin 2006, p. 5). The experiences of present day activists confirm that this legacy is ongoing, although the context that lay-women refer to is by no means limited to the world of the movements. Indeed, it is very specifically framed as the world more generally.

That said, Plowshares is a particularly masculinist movement historically (interestingly, now principally enacted by women), that was inspired by two Catholic priest-brothers who were "used to calling the shots" (Sr. Kathleen Desautels). Phillip

Berrigan would pressure people to participate in resistance using phrases such as “having no balls” and “becoming a man” (Mollin 2006, p. 172). He chastised peace activists for being unwilling to sacrifice as much as military personnel, a theme that several men I interviewed iterated. Mollin details how pacifist men used radical action as a way to appropriate the guise of militarized (hegemonic) masculinity (see Connell 2005). For example, for the conscientious objectors (COs) of WWII, prison was a rite of passage that served as a way for men to “prove” their masculinity. Mollin writes,

Combining the tough physicality of mid-century working class manhood with the stoic ethos of Gandhian protest, resisting conscientious objectors overcame the charges of effeminacy and weakness.... By standing up to authority, the prisoners projected an image of strength and virility that even the most hardened felons could appreciate and respect. Their protests broke the back of Jim Crow in the federal prison system, a sure sign of their strength. Just as important was the power of these protests in shaping their understanding of who they were as men (p. 21).

As an alternative to military service, prison was a way to earn respect as a “dignified” man, a man of both principles and courage. The 1969 “Daddy Warbucks” draft-board action painfully shows the patriarchy of the movement: an all female action in the Plowshares tradition, the women were ostracized by other, male activists, and rejected by the movement (Riegle 2013a).<sup>91</sup>

Mollin’s findings are still visible in the men’s and women’s stories told here. Of course, even in the progressive peace movement, patriarchy does not simply “disappear,” and certainly not accidentally. Through participation, the women had an experience of empowerment that was often transformative, and deeply personal. On the other hand, in the men’s consistent emphasis on strategy and righteous Christianity, they told me that

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<sup>91</sup> They also never faced punishment, as the authorities were so busy looking for the action’s—non-existent—male masterminds that they ignored its all-female participants.

they did something that “worked,” something strong that had to be taken seriously, and/or something holy, as they simultaneously engaged with a gentle form of proving their status to me as “strong” men. The masculinity that these men were constructing fits well within RW Connell’s notions of masculinity as hierarchal and unstable. “Hegemonic masculinity” is the dominant mode of masculinity that is defined against femininity and subordinate masculinities (Connell 2005, p. 76). Such masculinity is never “achieved”—it must be constantly proved (Goldstein 2003, p. 264). Through their descriptions of action as impersonal and political, effective and powerful, righteous and moral, male justice action prisoners echoed such performance of a masculinity that is real and strong, through engaging in a strategy that they feel absolutely comfortable and legitimate enacting. This is *their* legacy; it does not need to change them personally.

In effect, what was revealed through the different ways in which men and women discussed power and empowerment was that men more commonly have a sense that they “use” power, while women did something that made them “feel” powerful. Through engaging in a dangerous, risky, political (i.e., male) strategy, the men were doing something that—though extreme and perhaps even thrilling—still somehow felt “natural” to them, and authentic to their conceptions of who they are. They had an unquestioned right to be there, as participants. For the lay women in their 50s-70s, on the other hand, the very act of participation felt to be a transgression: a transgression that was personal and exciting, courageous, rebellious, and political. How others felt about their actions were a central part of their stories, and even the process of deciding to act was an often communal, arduous, and exhilarating process. For much older and younger women, the sense of excitement and empowerment was somewhat muted, revealing that the specific

context in which one acts—how one grows up, what one’s experiences are, who one is married to, what one believes to be true—impact the ways we interpret what happens to us. And specifically for this type of action, how patriarchy is experienced (as controlling and ever present, as something one is theoretically aware of, as something one benefits from) crucially affects the scope of what is included in determining people’s experiences. In any case, the differences between the men’s and women’s stories confirm that patriarchy, specifically, plays an important role in shaping both resistance and its experience, while the different stories recalled by the nuns show that the extent to which this matters to the individuals affected remains negotiable.

Interestingly, religious identity trumped gender and age in the way that action was experienced; a fact that historical contextualization fails to illuminate. My best guess as to why Catholic sisters align with the men in their descriptions of action stems from the differing motivations they have for their actions, as well as the different communities they are responsible to. As vowed religious committed to lives of service, the sisters see themselves as more impersonal vessels for action than do the lay women (who contextualize their actions more intimately through the social and human constraints imposed on their person). The nuns, on the other hand, are simply doing work that they have vowed their lives to do, and they are working with an authority (God) who is conceptualized very differently than that negotiated by lay people (usually, one’s relationship with the state). Hence, what happens here—on Earth—literally has a less strong hold on the sisters than it does for lay women. This is not to say that they are somehow divinely immune from earthly abuses (on the contrary), but that their own personal experience of these abuses (as well as joys and other sensations) is filtered

through a religious/ethical/ impersonal lens. They “see” differently, so what they “know” is different. Committed to bringing the “kingdom of heaven” here to Earth, their own sense of self is less relevant to their stories: at the risk of sounding redundant, it is simply not about “them.”

In sum, the “empowerment” that comes from participation in extreme nonviolent activism is gendered, and is impacted by religious identity. For the men and the vowed religious, the moment of action is generally recalled as an instance of nonviolence or “God working,” and the personal story is less important. For lay women, on the other hand, what goes on is very personal—and is decidedly important in the realm of the human.

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

Through their participation in high-risk activism, activist self-concepts are revealing of how they understand and negotiate the contexts in which they act, as well as how these forces critically affect them. As a group of predominantly white, well educated, American citizens, justice action prisoners utilize their “privilege power” as a vital and sometimes savvy part of their activism; intentionally employing the status of the priestly collar, for example, to buy time and increase media attention for the actions. Most significantly for me, some justice action prisoners expressed how they used the power of their privilege as a method of “speaking as”—choosing disarmament and anti-military struggles as a uniquely appropriate area for their activism because they view themselves to be both responsible and capable to take on this “gun to the head” of American imperialism (Clare Grady). This authentic speaking, combined with a commitment to stand-with others in solidarity, is an important theoretical contribution

and a crucial lesson for social movements interested in crossing relations of power without replicating colonial patterns of inequality, as well as bettering our understandings of what happens in resistance more generally. Though the use of privilege power is fraught and not always as carefully used as would be ideal for the furtherance of truly systemic change, “speaking as” provides important guidelines and deserves further attention and analysis.

The more personal analysis of self, discussed here through differing stories of the “moment of action,” shows variance in the activist experience based on gender and religious identity, in ways that contribute to both the literatures on gender and social movements and to feminist theory. For lay women of a certain age, participation in resistance is most often experienced as personally transformative and as an important moment of specifically feminist action, while younger and older women describe it more as an instance of personal alignment. Men and the vowed religious, on the other hand, describe participation in more disembodied ways—having more to do with God and strategy than with self and intimate community. These fissures make visible how patriarchy still forms the activist experience, as well as how religious beliefs work to obscure and shift its significance.

## Chapter Six

### PRISON COMMUNITIES

*So much wouldn't have happened if I hadn't taken that tiny glimpse into that world. And it's so liberating. Like, the amount of time I was incarcerated and my liberty was taken away as opposed to the amount of liberation and joy and solidarity... that lefties talk about but don't get to experience in real, tearful experience, experiencing it themselves. So yes, if the school never closes, I would do it again.*

—Brian DeRouen

In their 2012 chapter, “Gender and Punishment,” Bosworth and Kaufman argue that punishment (and specifically, imprisonment) has been a productive way to show how identity interacts with disciplinary power (see also Bhattacharjee 2002; Foucault 1977; Wacquant 2009), but that such research would be enriched by a feminist grounding in intersectionality, as well as (Butlerian) notions of performativity and embodiment (2012, p. 192). This move would unite activist and scholarly goals around making *people* matter—in the words of Judith Butler, challenging “the symbolic hegemony” to “force a radical re-articulation” of what qualifies as a life “worth protecting” (1993, p. 16, quoted in Bosworth and Kaufman 2012, p. 195). Further, foregrounding the ways in which differences intersect and determine individual experience is a way to illuminate ideology and patterns of oppression—it’s a way to use the complex personal to study the complex political. For example, Bosworth and Kaufman suggest that an intersectional lens is necessary for understanding the “amplified marginalization women of color experience through the criminal justice system” (2012, p. 191). This chapter answers the call to study punishment from an intersectional lens, but with a twist: it interrogates the differential ways in which *privileged* people move through, experience, and learn from their involvement with the carceral state.



Theorizing the experiences of justice action prisoners in such a way brings into quick relief how they are especially marked by the privileges of their race, class, and professional/moral status. What most distinguishes the participants in this research from one another in terms of difference is gender, and to some degree religious identification as vowed religious or members of the laity. At first glance, an intersectional lens shows the relative demographic homogeneity of the group. However, it also reveals significant impacts of race and class, both generally and specifically. Justice action prisoners often spoke of their “access to resources” as a privilege that helped them through their stays in prison, most often in reference to the benefits of money and education, as well as to the supports of the movements and their deep faith lives. For the two people of color included in the study (Fr. Luis Barrios and Derrlyn Tom), race was crucial: for the first time offense of illegal trespass onto Fort Benning, both served a very unusual sentence of two months in maximum security prisons (Fr. Luis was then released, while Derrlyn was transferred to a prison camp for another four months). During interviews with several others, the differential treatment of justice action prisoners of color was mentioned as significant, as Liz Deligio explained, people of color are “taking on a lot more” than she is when they act.

The case of Derrlyn Tom is instructive, and shows how race matters as a key shaper of experience. A Japanese-American woman from San Francisco, Derrlyn spent six months at FCI Dublin for a 2004 SOA action. She was sent immediately to the SHU (solitary confinement), where she was held for one week before being transferred to maximum security. It took two months for her to be moved to the camp (where her four white co-defendants spent their sentences in full). During her tenure at Dublin, she was

interrogated twice by the INS about her citizenship (she was born in Hawaii), during which time her three-war Veteran father's patriotism was questioned by INS officials. When SOAW lawyers challenged the prison's decision to keep her in a maximum-security facility, officials explained that she was a "flight risk." Incarcerated as a gesture of witness, they claimed to be worried that she would try to escape. For Derrlyn, there is no reason other than race that explains why this was so, and as a result of such blatant discrimination, what she experienced in prison was "way beyond my capacity." Indeed, while several other participants endured difficult prison sentences, there were always also other explanatory rationales (Kathleen Rumpf and Clare Grady's status as alleged members of a terrorist organization, for example) that could—on some level—"justify" their treatment. For Derrlyn, a first time SOA offender, her treatment at Dublin FCI stands out as truly bizarre.<sup>92</sup>

Derrlyn told me that other justice action prisoners could not understand why she was having such a different and harsh experience of prison than is standard for SOAW protesters. "Because you are not of color," Derrlyn explained to them, "Why would they question you?... We scapegoat the easiest... and I was... the most vulnerable." By implication, she told me, she was saying that it would be harder for the administration to justify their treatment of her if she were "a nun, or an old white lady--" the kinds of people who *usually* engage in such actions (utilizing their privilege power to do so). She had a traumatic experience that correlates with not being white, and Derrlyn feels resentful towards the SOAW movement and members for not understanding the

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<sup>92</sup> Also potentially significant was the fact that Derrlyn, in resistance to a common rule that the only thing a prisoner can bring is a Bible, brought a Koran. It was immediately taken away from her.

importance and real effects of this dynamic better. This feeling and experience confirm the significance of the work that some justice action prisoners engage in, as discussed in this thesis, around understanding their own identities and privileges. It confirms such work as central to the struggles undertaken; it should never be considered tangential or optional.

Due to the similar demographic of justice action prisoners generally and within my study specifically, it is difficult to adequately assess the specific differential impacts of race/ethnicity on the experiences of justice action prisoners more broadly. However, Derrlyn's experience shows (and Fr. Luis Barrios's treatment confirms) that race is clearly significant, and to the extent possible, must be continually highlighted. What is undeniable is that whiteness hugely matters as a key shaper of experience. Class is also crucial, as will be shown. Other differences (sexuality, education levels) are also difficult to address specifically, given the relative homogeneity of those I interviewed. However, this very homogeneity is indicative of the dominant relations of power at play in resistance—it tells us who can resist, as it partly explains why this is so.

Most easily visible within my research is the significance of gender in shaping justice action prisoners' experiences of prison and its aftermath. Men and women described prison in consistently different ways from one another. Ann Tiffany told me that when you are arrested, the first thing that happens is that you are strip-searched and everything is taken away from you: your clothes and belongings, but also your identity as a mother, activist, and professional. You enter a "world of women" in which you "get to create who you are" in this new community. The women recalled their time in prison as an ongoing pursuit of their activism. They told stories about how they worked with and

felt committed to the women with whom they lived, became troublemakers against the institution, bore institutional violences, and carried scars. This proved true for both lay-women and nuns, though the nuns seemed less personally changed by the experience of incarceration than did most of the lay women. The men, on the other hand—though subjected to the same treatments—tended to approach prison as a period of solitude in which their identities were not significantly challenged or altered. Male participants told me that they kept to themselves in prison, their jail cell likened to a monk’s cell. Ann’s partner Ed Kinane described his sentence as a “sabbatical” from the pressures of an activist life. Some men—mostly the vowed religious—maintained an “activist self” during their sentences, but by and large, their experiences were “dull” by comparison to the women’s, and much more solitary (Dan Sage).

The different worlds created by the men’s and women’s prisons are institutionally distinct, certainly, but this does not suffice to explain the very different kinds of stories activists told about their time in prison and afterwards. Men, largely, returned to talking about foreign policy and faith, and women began talking about prisons, women’s bodies, motherhood, and drug laws. This chapter investigates what happens in these prison “communities of women” and “communities of men” for nonviolent resisters, and how the results are gendered.

### **The Federal Prison: Review of Institutions**

Before delving into this chapter, it is important to review the different types of institutions into which justice action prisoners are fitted. For most nonviolent crimes (trespass, destruction of property), federal prison is the bureaucratically appropriate institution for sentencing, but whether the crime is prosecuted under state/local or federal

laws ultimately determines where a person will spend their time. Some military bases are under joint jurisdiction, so prosecution can be either federal or state. Defendants rarely have any influence over where they are placed, and it is the policy of the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) to place inmates in the least restrictive facility for which he or she qualifies, preferably within 500 miles of one's home (though not necessarily their practice, according to participants) (<http://www.alanellis.com/CM/Publications/federal-prison-designation-update.asp>). Most of this study's participants served their time in federal prisons, though many also lived for short periods in state and local jails.

In 1980, the federal prison population numbered 24,252—and according to Fr. Steve Kelly, before Clinton's 1996 immigration reform policies took effect, federal prisons could be lonely places. However, with these reforms (federal prisons now serve as detention centers for those with immigration violations), the Sentencing Reform Act of 1984, as well as changes in drug laws and sentencing, federal prisoner numbers have ballooned (<http://www.bop.gov/about/history.jsp>). Federal prisons today are over-filled. As of May 27<sup>th</sup>, 2014, there are 217,181 people registered in the BOP's institutions, 29,193 of whom are in private, for-profit prisons ([http://www.bop.gov/locations/weekly\\_report.jsp](http://www.bop.gov/locations/weekly_report.jsp)).

The swelling of the prison populations has changed the feel of prison, long time activist Brian Terrell explained. He used to think of prison as

Like visiting a foreign country. There will be strange foods, situations you don't understand... new beds and new toilets and interesting people that you're going to have to take some trouble to understand.... I don't view jail and prison that way anymore.... Now it's more crowded, much more brutal... much more punitive... It's a scarier scene.

Not only is prison “scarier” than it used to be, it is also more penalizing. A common story justice action prisoners told was about their fellow prisoners’ overly long sentences. Women, especially, left feeling saddened by the women they had left behind. “Survivor’s guilt,” is how Nancy Gwin described it—the burden of knowing that you can return relatively quickly to a life that will be full upon return, while the incarcerated women you live with must spend longer months and years behind bars, eventually returning to lives that may barely resemble those they have left behind.

There are several security designations within the federal prison system. Minimum security (FPCs, known as “camps”) are where the majority of justice action prisoners serve their time. Camps have dormitory housing, limited or no perimeter fencing, and a low staff-to-inmate ratio. Camps, according to the BOP, “are work and program-oriented; and many are located adjacent to larger institutions or on military bases, where inmates help serve the labor needs of the larger institution or base” (<http://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/index.jsp>). Next are “low security” institutions (FCIs), which have more fencing, staffing, and work programs, and a mix of dormitory and cubicle housing. Medium Security FCIs have fencing with electronic detection systems, mostly cell block housing, higher guard-inmate ratios, and “even greater internal controls” (BOP). High security or United State Penitentiaries (USPs) have highly security perimeters, single and multiple occupant cell housing, the highest ratios of guards to inmates, and “close control of inmate movement.” (BOP). In addition, there are “administrative” institutions meant to house particular populations (pre-trial, escape prone, medical) (<http://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/index.jsp>).

Most of those I talked with spent the majority of their time behind bars in prison camps. Describing his life in 2013 at FPC Yankton (South Dakota) in a letter published by *The Nuclear Resister*, anti-drone activist Brian Terrell is worth quoting at length:

While I have been in prison camps like this on several occasions before, most of my experience of incarceration has been in county and city jails, crowded, dank, airless, filthy, windowless boxes of concrete and steel, with hideous acoustics and where weeks can go by without a breath of fresh air. Yankton is not like this.

This prison camp occupies the derelict shell of Yankton College founded in 1881. ...A federal prison since 1988, this place retains the appearance of the small, private, liberal arts college in a small Mid-American town that it once was. Most buildings are on the historical register and still bear the names of alumni and benefactors....In its present incarnation, the “campus” is demographically far more diverse and colorful than the student body of even the most progressive of small institutions of higher learning. On the other hand, there is no church college so puritanical and rigid as to impose a dress code austere as this prison’s, with its uniform and unrelieved khaki, olive drab and grey. I do not know if the old Yankton College was co-ed, but it definitely is not now.

My fellow prisoners are all convicted of nonviolent federal crimes, mostly drug related and most based on the most tenuous of conspiracy allegations. Most are here for many years, many for decades....These are victims of the “war on drugs”, in reality merely one front in the U.S. Empire global war against the poor. Michelle Alexander’s bestselling book, *The New Jim Crow*, effectively indicts America’s penchant for mass-incarceration as the successor to slavery and “separate but equal”, the latest tactic of a racist society to maintain white dominance. Many of the other middle aged white men here are “white collar” criminals, not more guilty though than their peers who are outside and making out like bandits in business and finance.

... For the first time in years, I am on a payroll, 11 cents an hour, sweeping and mopping two flights of stairs twice a day.... The track is where I can find something close to solitude, especially when the temperature is in the single digits and the snow is blowing. The track also offers the rare opportunity for two people to have an almost private conversation.

Since I am over 50 years old, I am privileged to occupy a lower bunk in a cinderblock warehouse with 60 some inmates to a room. Most inmates are generous and tolerant and try hard to accommodate one another in tight quarters. Still, living with 60 guys is living with 60 guys. The library is heavy on crime novels but with a selection of classics. With books and magazines from the outside and a subscription to *The New York Times*, I have plenty to read.

Like the old coal miners’ company store, the commissary stocks a limited

selection sold at inflated prices to a captive clientele. My biggest expense is telephone time at a predatory rate of 25 cents a minute. Stamps are rationed to 20 per week and can't be sent from outside, and so I cannot begin to reply to the hundreds of cards and letters I've received... ("From FPC Yankton" <http://www.nukeresister.org/2013/02/15/from-fpc-yankton-by-brian-terrell/>).

As is typical of justice action prisoners, Brian Terrell productively links his personal "this is where I am, this is what I'm doing" story to the greater context, at once providing a picture of his daily life and the racialized, neoliberal realities of the modern prison. He also confirms what the BOP website hints at and what both justice action prisoners and critical scholars know: that prisons play an essential role in supporting American militarism. Traditionally and most commonly, justice action prisoners refuse any work that supports the military or the prison itself, but willingly take on jobs that help other inmates (such as cooking, cleaning, landscaping, and teaching).

Of course, many justice action prisoners also or only serve time in higher security federal prisons, as well as in state and local jails and prisons. Placement is determined by the specific charges in the case and can be influenced by the desires of the defendant, but is mainly a BOP decision based on space availability. Most of the justice action prisoners I spoke with chose to self-surrender into federal prison. To do so requires paying one's bond upon sentencing, with the instruction to self-report about one month later. For a number of folks, the requirement to pay bail is unacceptable as a form of complicity with "the system" and is regarded as an exercise of privilege (self-reporting is not an option for the poor). Hence, as Kathleen Rumpf tells her sentencing judges, "I want to be treated like the poor in this country," which means immediate detention in a local or county jail before assignment to a federal prison. Hence, justice action prisoners often spend time in state and county jails. For reasons that are rarely clear, they are also sometimes sentenced



to higher security facilities than is standard (Ken Crawley's six month's in maximum for aiding and abetting at the SOAW vigil, Derrlyn and Fr. Barrios's racialized treatment in high security institutions, Nancy Gwin's medium security designation). In general, jails are more difficult places to live than federal prisons. They are dirtier, noisier, more crowded, have fewer programs, and the populations are more transient. Indeed, one of the primary ways to deal with a difficult prisoner (such as an activist who likes to organize people) is to move them frequently from jail to jail—the stress of prison transport (“diesel therapy”), arriving in new places, and being with new (unknown) people is an effective way to create stress and wear people down.<sup>93</sup>

### **Gendered Institutions**

The differences in men's and women's prisons was brought to my attention early in my research, and reiterated throughout. My fourth interview was with Doris and Dan Sage, a couple in their 80s who jointly served six months in 1998 for protesting the SOA. Doris Sage, a storyteller and educator, went to Danbury FPC in Connecticut (the only all-women correctional facility in the northeast, where at least twelve of my participants served time), while Dan Sage, professor emeritus from Syracuse University, went to Allenwood FCI in Pennsylvania (at least 10 male participants went to Allenwood, Lewisburg, or similar institutions). Their simultaneous convictions gave the couple the opportunity to directly compare experiences, which they shared with me.<sup>94</sup> In further

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<sup>93</sup> Meagan Doty explained that she worries for POCs who are moved around, “because so much of what got me through were the relationships I was able to build.” Without these, prison life is “scary.”

<sup>94</sup> Other couples have also had this experience, but rarely simultaneously. Ann and Ed went one after another, Bill Houston and his wife Hazel trespassed together, but their sentences overlapped. Jean Gump's 12 year sentence was inclusive of husband Joe's action, trial, sentence, and release.

interviews with other justice action prisoners, Doris and Dan's different experiences proved emblematic of the ways in which men and women differently traversed their lives of imprisonment.

The following descriptions of men's and women's prisons are based on the information shared during interviews, as experienced by the justice action prisoners included in this research, and should not be read as providing a complete picture of the contemporary U.S. prison. However, the picture it provides is unique and important, and what it illuminates is worthy of further study.

The stories told by Doris and Dan Sage provide a good grounding to explore men's and women's experiences in prison. In the men's camps, the couple learned (and others confirmed) that there are a significant number of higher status men convicted mostly of financial and legal crimes. Hence, not only are the institutions gendered, they are also hugely affected by class. Doris described Dan's prison. "The population at Allenwood included people who were there for legal reasons... lawyers, doctors... men of power, there were more of those.... Men have power on the outside, they have power on the inside." Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit reiterated this observation of class difference, he told me that he never sees as many "yachting magazines and Wall St. Journals" as he does at Lewisberg Penitentiary.

Allenwood, Doris Sage related, had "carpeting, a library, the *New York Times*." The inmates knew that Dan was coming because they had read about his case in the paper. In many ways, male justice action prisoners fit well within this segment of the prison population: white and well educated, they are readers of the *Times* themselves. A TV reporter interviewed Dan Sage during his stay, but once the telephone interview was

underway, both realized that he did not have enough of a “story” to be interesting. “The place is dull,” he recalled telling the reporter, “there’s nothing I can put my finger on that’s really objectionable.” There were “good programs, study carrels, comfortable chairs” (Dan Sage). He advised the reporter to speak to his wife if he wanted “something more controversial” because “she was having a hell of a time” at Danbury.

In contrast to Allenwood, Doris Sage said that Danbury in 1998 was a “snake pit... totally out of compliance with international standards... the sewers backed into the dining room... the library was three foot lockers, opened on Tuesday and Thursday evenings from 7:00 till 7:30.” The women were “African American, Hispanic, and poor. Uneducated, mostly. And powerless. At the mercy of the system.” The women had few visitors, and were basically shielded from observation by the outside world. As a marginalized group, Doris implied, Danbury’s prisoners were kept invisible and abused by their lack of connections to those in power. In other words, and as confirmed by other participants, it was not just the fact that Doris lived in a women’s prison that mattered, it was because it was a prison inhabited by poor women of color (versus a camp peopled by a segment of “men with power”) that created the crucial difference in shaping Doris and Dan’s experiences.

### **Prison Communities**

In general, the men I interviewed spoke much less of their time in prison than did the women, and did so in less personalized, more institutional terms (eg., to speak of the inhumanity of the system, the realities of harsh drug laws, or racism—but not often of other inmates or themselves during or directly after incarceration). My unstructured methodology enabled this difference to emerge clearly, as participants were the drivers of

the conversations and largely determined the content of their interviews. To some extent, the degree of difference presented below may be misleading—it is possible that men and women’s experiences in prison are more similar than my data portrays. What is undeniable is that, for whatever reason, men used their interview time to reiterate “the issues” while women focused more on their own stories and experiences, and that this climaxed when they spoke of their time in prison. All women and men were presented with the same question, “tell me a little about yourself and your activism”—and so the difference in emphasis precisely proves that gender *matters*. Men could have told different stories, women could have relayed a different emphasis, but given the opportunity to be carefully listened to for a few hours, the pattern separating men from women was very consistent. For both women and men, the vowed religious were the outliers: priests spoke more of prison and prison activism than did lay men, and nuns spoke less of themselves and focused more on the issues that brought them to jail originally than did the lay women.

When I first started talking casually, among friends, about the differences I was hearing about in men’s and women’s descriptions of prison, the most common reaction I heard was along the lines of “but women just talk more!” As more “naturally social” beings, the difference was chalked up to predictable performances of mainstream gender roles. Alternately, Dan Sage suggested that his training in the army reserves made him good at following rules, a trait which served him well in prison. But Doris dismissed this out of hand: it was not her gift of the gab or lack of military training that made Danbury a “snake pit.” The difference, she insisted, was institutional. Whether “natural,” a result of

training, institutional, or some combination, women's prisons and female justice action prisoners' experiences within them are vastly different than are men's.

## **Men**

Through the men's stories, I learned that men's prisons are in many ways close to the stereotype one might have from TV and the movies: Groups of men fall into cliques organized by race, there is an ethos of "each man for himself," and physical violence and threat are omnipresent. The guards are not particularly helpful (and are sometimes deliberately harmful), are often corrupted by their position of power-over, and can turn a blind eye to abuses intentionally. Rules are arbitrary and all-encompassing, and the prevalence of prison "rats" (prisoners who snitch on others to curry favor) make organizing difficult. Randy Serraglia described Safford in Arizona, a medium security prison where he was housed for six months in 1997, as like a "high school locker room....with all of the bizarre, psycho, sexual, homophobic brutality" of that space. Administrative failures leading to real harm (rooming members of opposing gangs together, letting Ken Crawley out of solitary confinement on the same day that 10 child molesters were transferred and thus creating dangerous confusion) are a continual threat. The environment is loud, with nothing "soft" to absorb noise. Televisions constantly play "the worst shows" and yelling is the primary means of communication (Fr. Louis Vitale). The ethos of the men is chauvinistic, something frequently noted as problematic. Prisons are overcrowded, tense, and stressful. Randy Serraglio told me that he "needed" his nonviolence training in prison; it was the only way he was able to avoid fighting with the other inmates.

Men recalled prison as an oppressive place, a difficult place, a sad place, but also as a space for the development of faith. For former priest Bill Frankel-Streit, there is no need to travel to Greece or Jerusalem because prison is where one can truly study “the scripture in context.” Most of the scripture, he told me, was written under some sort of prosecution, “Paul was usually in custody,” so a prison stint can do wonders to deepen one’s faith life. Other men echoed this theme. Both Fr. Louis Vitale and Fr. Steve Kelly told me that they live in a “monk’s cell” in prison. Brian DeRouen recalled that his “prayer life” was “amazing” at Tafts, the private prison in California where he was held. It felt like a monastery, and he “learned more about theology” in that four months than he did in his graduate theology program.

Three men spoke of making “friends” in prison; for most, it was a solitary time. Seven lay-men described prison as inducing depression, stress, or feelings of violation. These men served in a variety of prisons and jails, and none experienced only a camp. For five of these seven, the emotional effects of incarceration were relatively mild—along the lines of loneliness—but both John Heid and Ken Kennon spoke of depression resulting from incarceration.<sup>95</sup> In contrast, thirteen men expressed no personal complaints during or after their incarceration. Nine of these were lay men sentenced to low security institutions or camps, while the four priests had significant experience with higher security institutions but still expressed no personal complaints. As such, among the men, religious identity trumped security levels as the most significant factor in determining the

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<sup>95</sup> John was depressed at the beginning of his two year Plowshares sentence at Cranston Plantations, a 22 hour lock-down maximum security prison (“It was like Shawshank,” he said—an image previously used only as a foil). Ken did not realize that he was depressed until several years after release, during which time he wrote a book about his experiences.

emotional quality of one's experience—those with the “easiest time” were those with deep faith lives, regardless of setting.

Interestingly, several men recalled their experiences of prison in a disembodied fashion. Jerry Berrigan was the most abstract. He spoke of prison as “Satan's terrain,” as Satan loves any place in which one human can “overmaster another.” Others described it as easy, dull, or even a “walk in the park” (Tom Mahedy)-- but not as *personally* challenging, difficult, or illuminating (though all learned about the system during their stays). Five told me about how much reading they did—more than they ever get to on the outside. Karl Mayer and Ed Kinane described prison as a “sabbatical” from their busy activist lives. Ed explained, “I spent a year reading.... It was fat city. Having been an activist I didn't get much time to read, and I love reading.” Karl's thoughts were particularly expressive. He said,

You don't hear me complaining about prison. There are some awful things that have been done and I hate the prison industrial complex, and Kathy (Kelly) and me and anyone who's been in, you'll see them strongly identify with people who are in prison, finding out that these are people like you.... So it wasn't risk for me....being in jail was almost a sabbatical from the stresses of working full time, and putting my income into running a house of hospitality and managing a dozen alcoholic and mentally ill men in a very crowded house of hospitality. So being in jail was like being on vacation, for me. In terms of difficulty.... I got knocked down by a guard but it didn't bother me much. (My first time in prison, when I was 19 at Riker's Island) I got threatened with rape, didn't bother me. Young guys got around me while I'm sitting on the toilet in these open toilets, a gang of young thugs from NY, I think they were sounding me out to see how vulnerable I was. They said, “if you were up in Greenhaven, it would be shit on my dick or blood on my razor.” I just smiled and said, ‘well, it's a good thing I'm not up in Greenhaven, then.’ So I wasn't frightened, it wasn't a dehumanizing experience of pain or violence.... I always said, Stalin would have broken me easily. You think I'm going to be broken by some country club federal correctional institution? Or even by a county jail in the US? You never miss a meal. I put on weight. I got edema during my six months in jail. These are country clubs. I mean, I've spent time in very crowded conditions and so on, but it's not like being

in Siberia. Have you read Solzhenitsyn? ... I'm honest about it. Stalin would have broken me in Siberia in a minute.<sup>96</sup>

Karl's easy dismissal of prison as a "country club" that is not frightening is a particularly masculinist way of understanding the institution—what he says, basically, is that he is "tougher" than American prisons. He recalled his experience as not risky or violent. Karl did share that he is an "unusually fearless" person, a quality that he has used in his nonviolent actions and that have served him "well" in prison.

Karl's story reveals an un/under-acknowledged racial/class/male privilege that is unexplored among the men who expressed similarly "easy" perceptions of prison: it is only as a white, "unusually fearless," and superbly intelligent man that we can understand how Karl experienced prison as a "country club." For those with fewer privileges, prison is experienced differently—and for those justice action prisoners who have endured harsher treatments, such as Ken Crawley, Kathleen Rumpf, and Derrlyn Tom, the portraits painted by men such as Karl and Ed are not appreciated, strongly felt to be counterproductive, and are quickly dismissed as non-representative and un-true.<sup>97</sup>

At the same time, the ability to have the kind of experience that Karl relays may be essential for the perpetuation of prison witness as a strategy—to an important extent, the tactic relies on privilege to be replicable. One cannot have a traumatic experience and

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<sup>96</sup> When Brian Terrell read this chapter, he took issue with Karl's dismissal's of difficulty or abuse. "If somebody said that to me," Brian explained, "I would be traumatized by that. I also think Karl would be fine in a gulag," Brian continued. Some people "just don't want to admit that they are exceptional people."

<sup>97</sup> This disagreement is complex; reading this chapter Ed Kinane reminded me that he places a "high value" on "intellectual honesty," and the truth is that his prison time *was* soft. This reality exists alongside other types of experiences, and does not negate them. In contrast, Ed explained that his presence in Baghdad during *Shock and Awe* felt riskier than anything he experienced in prison, however even then he was not terrified—a condition he credits to a "far less active imagination" than that possessed by most people



easily become a recidivist activist, or convincingly encourage others to engage. Most basically, prison as an “easy time” must be analyzed and understood by activists within the context of compound privilege: not simply the privilege of short and fixed sentences, but also of their visible and subjective identities.<sup>98</sup>

Compound privilege, however, may no longer be “enough” to guarantee any kind of humane treatment in prison. Brian Terrell confirms that prisons really have “changed” in the last 30 years. Today, he explained, they are truly are “horrendous.” Brian said that his time in a Honduran jail (the poorest country in the hemisphere, along with Haiti) was “not worse than the DC jail.” Other justice action prisoners who I did not interview, including Jerry Ebner, Judy Bellow, and Theresa Cusimano, endured hugely abusive treatments during their stays in federal prisons for reasons of conscience, and Sr. Jackie Hudson, a nun who participated in several actions with sisters Carol Gilbert and Ardeth Platte, died in 2009 hastened by extraordinary medical neglect while in prison. Privilege is not “enough” to guarantee an easy ride, but it definitely still helps.

### **Men’s Activism in Prison**

With few exceptions, the men I talked with did not continue their lives as outwardly engaged activists while incarcerated, in terms of working towards social justice causes. Several used the time to read and deepen their faith lives, a form of enriching their spiritual and political understandings and analysis that must count as valid activism, but few were able or chose to be outwardly “busy” within the prison walls.

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<sup>98</sup> Such an acknowledgement is very important when it comes to recruiting others to engage in prison witness. Not attending to the realities of the contemporary prison, the importance of privilege, good health, family circumstances, and “resources”—particularly inner resources—could potentially facilitate the recruitment of someone who could be greatly harmed by the experience.

When probed about the continuation of activism in prison—a historical legacy for male justice action prisoners and a theme among the women—men would often say that the time was a period of solitude, rather than agitation.<sup>99</sup> In explanation, I was told that the structure of the institution stymies organization (with the omnipresence of prison “rats,” quick punishments for gang affiliations, ever present threats of violence etc.). Indeed, Randy Serraglio was the only man who spoke about institutional troublemaking, which is common in the women’s prisons. At SFA Safford, some of the men made liquor using grapefruits and sugar stolen from the cafeteria. Randy helped smuggle grapefruits to them—perhaps not his most noble act of resistance, but most of the women relayed stories demonstrating similar types of collusion with other inmates that were not necessarily “political” but that demonstrated a generalized resistance to the institution as it verified their allegiance with the inmates.

Further and despite explanations to the contrary, within my sample security levels do not correspond with whether one maintains an activist lifestyle while incarcerated. Instead, it was religious identity that proved crucial in keeping up men’s activism. Among the men, a strong faith life correlates with the maintenance of activism in prison, while those less religious tended to wait out their sentences in relative isolation. Of the twenty men I spoke with, five spoke of organizing within its walls, four priests and Brian DeRouen. A few others maintained “activist identities,” such as Randy Serraglio, who replied to every letter sent to him (about 45 a day) and recorded every address to add to the SOAW mailing list—building the movement from inside the prison. So he kept busy

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<sup>99</sup> This is in stark contrast to male POCs historically. For example, conscientious objectors de-segregated the cafeteria at Danbury, led labor strikes, changed prison policies (see Lempe-Santangelo 2008; Wittner 1984).

doing organizing work, but it was of a type that kept him isolated from other prisoners, rather than engaged with them.

Brian DeRouen spoke differently about his time in prison than did the other lay men (though he is a man of deep faith; born into a devoutly Baptist family, he studied theology as a graduate student and now runs a Catholic Worker house in Virginia). He spent four months in 2004 at Tafts, for an SOA violation. He remembered being told by friends and colleagues that going to prison was a “waste of time.” This view frustrated him. He explained, for “in what four months of your life did you do such great work that if you would’ve missed it, it would’ve been a loss to society? Secondly, what do you mean? Those are people, too!” For Brian DeRouen, prison was not a place of rest, but a place to continue struggling for justice. He activated this through a habitual use of “jail solidarity,” particularly during the first years of the second war in Iraq (when he was arrested dozens of times in San Francisco). He described this important nonviolent technique:

If your name is Abdul Hussain, now all of a sudden you’re being charged with a felony...But because racism does exist, you’re in danger and I’m not. So if I am trained in nonviolence and can use jail solidarity... jail only works with the cooperation of those incarcerated. So if I can say, I will not cooperate in any way until my attorney tells me that you are being released with the same charges as me, at the same time as I am, then we’ll do it. So that’s how I ended up having those more intense nonviolent experiences. When I was in jail, I wouldn’t eat and I wouldn’t walk and I wouldn’t cooperate in any way with them, so they would use pain compliance... but it’s amazing when pain compliance doesn’t work and they need you to do something... so what can I do for you to get you to do this? And this freaks me out with excitement about nonviolence—that a person with absolutely no power... the jailed, the oppressed, is now the one being asked. They have the power. And I saw that working and so I saw that wow, not only does my privilege protect me, I can use my privilege to protect others, and I can use that to completely subvert... turn the system on it’s head.

Clearly, Brian DeRouen approached jail and prison as a site to continue nonviolent struggles for justice, which inherently includes a strategic use of privilege.<sup>100</sup>

In addition to Brian DeRouen, the four priests spoke of organizing within the prison walls. All have lived in a variety of jails and prisons (including maximum security institutions), and all spoke of the injustice of the system. However, none focused on hard times for themselves (even when times were hard, as they have been for Frs. Luis Barrios and Bill Frankel-Streit). However, all kept up their lives of service—though in strikingly different ways from one another, and from Brian DeRouen.

Fr. Luis Barrios spent two months at the Metropolitan Correction Center in Manhattan for a 2004 SOA action, a high security administrative prison. He spent the first three weeks spent in the “hole” (Segregated Housing Unit, or SHU) with a hallucinating man who had killed his last cellmate while he slept. “They gave me hell,” Fr. Luis said, “so I gave them hell also, ‘cause I started organizing!” A priest-professor-activist from Puerto Rico, he found himself “useful in the middle of that colonial environment. I say okay, I have these skills, I can build their strengths.... I went to prison, it’s not like I stop there and take a break. No! You take advantage of where you are, there is always an opportunity.” Agitating from within the walls of MCC led to an accusation of gang affiliation, but a guard told Fr. Luis, “Tell everybody to open a Bible, then nobody will give you a hard time.” I asked him what he did when he “organized” within the prison. He explained:

Well... they have these churches going on there, saying there is a strong possibility that God brought you here so you can have an experience of God. I say “ha! He didn’t put you here. There’s something else.... look around, who we are. So what is going on? (The issue of being black or Latino)....developing that

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<sup>100</sup> He credited Fr. Louis Vitale with helping him to learn how to engage in jail solidarity

critical thinking or knowledge...and not just something magic that God brought me here so that I can have an experience of God. That's bullshit.... Then, I started becoming part of the literacy program. A lot of these young men, they don't know how to read. ...And then, talking to people. I like talking to people, so we started building that network...also we often read biblical reflection from a liberating perspective....And then, the issue of positive thinking. I spent a long time on that, because it was incredible how these male chauvinist mentalities and reducing a relationship with a woman to sex....And because I reduce my relationship to sex, I am thinking that she is fucking someplace, someone. I said "my friend, why the hell do you need to waste your time with that stupid thought?" So it was very difficult....and it was so common...they turn off that light at 11 o'clock, and they think about, 'what she is doing right now, in bed, with whom?' And I, 'why do you need to think about that? Why not think about something else? And if all of you want to think about that, let's say she's in prison and you're outside.' That was the part they don't like!

Fr. Luis tells a distinctive story among the men, for the ways in which he maintained his identity as an activist (in terms of what he did each day) while in prison. Because of this, and despite the risks, in a short period of time and in an overcrowded high-rise prison under maximum security conditions, he managed to do work along a variety of levels. Assessing the impacts of what he accomplished (did people actually learn to read under his tutelage?) is not the point—the point is that he was engaged, from the beginning, in methods of challenging the institution as he supported its incarcerated population.

Other priests told very different kinds of "prison activism" stories. Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit told about a prison fight, in which he was badly beaten by a guard but "stayed nonviolent" in response. For him, activist work in prison entails nonviolently but forcefully challenging the institution from the inside out. "Staying nonviolent" means raising the level of tension (publicly noting abuses when they happen, challenging guards/policies when appropriate, instigating nonviolent conflict) and not responding with violence when it occurs as a result of such challenges. Fr. Louis Vitale spoke of trying to bridge racial differences within the jail—which remain their central organizing

principle—even though he is a “really really white person, middle aged... and to top it off, a priest!” (Father Louis was 82 when interviewed). One of the ways he does this is to celebrate Ramadan (“it’s a bonding”), which he has done each year since 9/11/2001.

Fr. Steve Kelly engages in a completely different kind of activism than that described by anyone else, or than is practiced among other justice action prisoners generally. In total opposition to the prison system (“it is the same system that dropped the bomb,”) he refuses to cooperate on any level with its dehumanizing demands. As a self-described “political prisoner” incarcerated for his beliefs, Fr. Steve says that it is “dehumanizing” for him to do a urine sample testing for drugs. Hence, he refuses. As a result, he spends his entire sentence in the SHU—he was released from his latest stint of 54 weeks in solitary (for the 2009 “Transform Now” Plowshares action) one month before our interview. Through his complete refusal to cooperate with it, he maintains his identity as a nonviolent resister to the war state. He also threatens the institution, through modeling a way of behaving that is not obedient in any way.<sup>101</sup>

Fr. Steve’s total non-compliance is well known throughout the disarmament movement, and he inhabits a sort of sacred position as one who is fully and *truly* committed—a sort of heroization of absolute noncompliance with “the system.” Interestingly, in today’s overcrowded prisons, Fr. Steve explained that his strategy is most effective within the prison walls, where he is better known in his absence than he

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<sup>101</sup> According to Fr. Frankel-Streit, Fr. Steve Kelly’s total non-compliance with the institution is viewed as a threat to the system by prison administrators. His behavior serves as a model for what “could be,” if prisoners routinely failed to obey the many rules imposed upon them. Demonstrating this, Fr. Bill remembered entering the prison at Fort Dix weeks after Fr. Steve was released from that institution. Fr. Bill was brought immediately to the warden. “What do you want us to do?” the warden asked, continuing, “Steve Kelly was a threat to this whole institution.” Bill thought, “Steve? The Jesuit?!” Such is the power, Fr. Bill explained, of nonviolence.

could be in his presence. The guards talk about the “crazy anti-nuclear guy,” the prisoners overhear them talking, and soon the whole compound knows about his “private witness”—in a way that being a part of the general population could never similarly accomplish. This witness is absolutely about disarmament, and does not include organizing around prison conditions or fellow inmates. But it is also absolutely justice-oriented (not complying with an evil system) and serves as a strong example of ongoing commitment to the principles that get justice action prisoners locked up in the first place.

Resolve to continue struggling against militaristic foreign policy/U.S. imperialism upon release is the most common consequences of incarceration for men, as they integrate back into “regular life” upon release. Of the men, only Brian DeRouen and Michael Pasquale have fundamentally shifted their activist work to include a prison agenda in their work. Brian and his wife Kathleen run a Hospitality House near Alderson prison in West Virginia, where they cater to women on the eve of self-surrender, as well as to their visiting families. Michael works for the Center for Community Alternatives in Syracuse New York, which helps released inmates find jobs. Brian Terrell and Ed Kinane both told me that they are prison abolitionists—they believe that the system cannot be reformed incrementally, and cite Michelle Alexander in support of the idea that the prison system is a continuation of slavery (Alexander 2012). So the politics of prison are important to each, though neither carry this knowledge specifically into their actions. Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit spoke about his personal commitment to talk about prison to the audiences who come to hear him speak about nuclear weapons and foreign policy, understanding that his experiences provide a unique way for people unfamiliar with the

carceral system to learn more.<sup>102</sup> He also serves as an expert witness (during other people's trials) about prison conditions generally, having lived in so many of them. Several men, as well as Plowshares philosophy, stress the interconnections between the war state and the prison, arguing that remaining focused on militarism already encompasses some version of prison reform/abolitionist activism.

In sum, most men experience prison as a stressful but solitary time that teaches them something about the prison industrial complex as it strengthens their resolve to fight imperial militaristic policies. However, they do not recall it in deeply personal ways, or in ways that shift their politics, beliefs, activism, or sense of self upon release (as do the women). Instead, the oppression and violence of the system serve as further "evidence" supporting their analysis of the militarized status quo, and their activist lives tend to stay focused on the foreign policy issues that got them locked up in the first place—as encompassing of the violences of the prison itself.

## **Women**

The women's prison was very much focused on, 'we're all in a really shitty position, let's focus on getting through it'.... There were women who saw me completely break down, there were women I saw completely break down... women who saw me so angry they had to calm me down. In such a unique setting, you really see the full spectrum of an individual in a much shorter amount of time than you would... on the outside.... I think you find out a lot about yourself when you go to prison. It's a trying place. And any demons that you may have carried, ya, they'll resurface... but it's also beautiful. It's also such a beautiful moment to

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<sup>102</sup> This dilemma—of including a prison agenda in one's work or not—is part of an ongoing debate within Plowshares, and the prevailing wisdom is not to: Philip Berrigan expressed that we must keep the focus on the bomb, and that work in prison is limited to #1, praying (most important) and #2, listening, because nobody listens to prisoners (Sr. Ardeth Platte). Despite the challenges and horrors of the prison system, this philosophy, (shared by most of the men from both movements), sees prison activism as a distraction from the real issue, which is nuclear weapons/war. Focusing on the "big" issue simultaneously confronts the smaller ones, of which prison is a part, but is not the issue of focus for justice action prisoners (Sr. Ardeth, Bonnie Urfer, Frankel-Streit).



discover both sides of humanity. And I'm willing again, to take those really terrible moments if I can also take the beautiful moments of humanity. You know? I'm willing (Meagan Doty)

Here, social worker Meagan Doty gets at much of what is thematic about the ways female justice action prisoners talk about prison: it is a sad, beautiful, strange, *community* in which they learned about themselves. Again and again, the women used this word: Ann Tiffany entered a “community of women,” Kathy Kelly remembered the “strange community” that women’s prison are. Derrlyn Tom said that there was an ethos of “let’s get through it together” that was especially strong for the Spanish-speaking women. In the focus group conversation, Rae Kramer said, “The community was experienced on a very personal, almost a family kind of level. The ‘gay for the stay’ was less a matter of sexual need than intimacy or connections. This one acted like the mom or the grandma, this one like the daughter...” Like the men’s prison, women’s community is organized along racial lines, but the feelings of—and tangible benefits of—community/sisterhood (a loan of shower slippers, advice, someone to talk about your kids with, someone to honor your birthday with a “homemade” microwaved jello cheesecake) are real and distinct.

Sometimes, women’s prisons are truly horrendous places—Kathleen Rumpf, Clare Grady, and Derrlyn Tom told hair-raising stories of institutional violence. More often, at least in the camps, my female participants described prisons as spaces of oppression, pain, and courage. Describing why she does not like the term “prisoner of conscience,” Kathy Kelly recalled her life at Pekin, a now closed women’s camp in Illinois.

When I was in Pekin in 2004, my bed was very close to a bank of phones, so I’d hear the same phone conversation going on again and again and again. It would very often be a woman, probably in for drugs, wanting to call the mom or the

grandmother who was taking care of the children, and just trying to keep that connection open, but it gets harder over time. And sometimes people would send a postcard asking, "I'll call at this time, can the kids be there?" And you just hear this disappointment: "Oh, they're not there"...And because of the impoverishment that the system imposes on women, they have to beg, "please put your money on my commissary...I can't send the cards I made for the kids because I don't have stamps, and I'm out of shampoo. Is there some chance that Uncle Bob can drive the kids to see me? It's been 2½ years, they don't remember what I look like anymore." And then you'd hear the person at the other end kind of saying, "Well, I'm out of resources. The lawyers are costing us money still. We can't do this." And just this sense of despair and frustration. Often you'd see a woman hang up the phone and just go right into the shower and into the toilet stall, and then come out and her eyes would be red and her face would be stained with tears. I was just amazed at how people found this kind of courage to face the rest of the day and the rest of week and the rest of the month and the rest of the year. Years separated, and the punishment that's just so merciless. And yet, I didn't find bitterness and intense cynicism. Women were trying to make the best of it and looking out for each other in ways that were often very kind, even looking out for some of these guards, who, many of them were veterans of wars who were pretty traumatized themselves. It's also interesting, within these very odd communities, there's actually more of a bond between the guards and the prisoners who've been there a long time. They start to know each other's kids' names. . . So it's a very strange community that develops. And that's why I never want to be, it's not even honest to say, "Well, we were the prisoners of conscience living with these other people."

Other women echoed the admiration Kathy expressed for the women she lived with. Megan Doty explained that seeing the power of the women with much longer sentences than her who "day in and day out, deal with complete humiliation... and.... manage to come out still managing to hang onto some little sparkle of their original humanity is amazing to me. Absolutely amazing to me. It's so easy to lose yourself." I heard many variations of Kathleen Rumpf's initially surprised observation that "these people are me!"

In general, women justice action prisoners told stories showing how they entered the population- intentionally and earnestly- made friends, organized, resisted, learned, and taught during their tenures there. Prison was not an easy time, but it was a fundamentally important and communal time in which they learned about themselves. Sr.

Mary Kay Flanigan told me that prison was “an important formation part of my life... and the relationships are bonded forever, among the people involved in it.” Sr. Kathleen Desautels said that her time in prison was “one of the richest experiences of my life. I learned a lot about life. It’s a good place to learn.” For Lois Puitzer, prison “ended up being very good for me.” For Alice Gerard, spending a night in segregation was life changing because “I learned that this is the worst thing that they can do to me... and I survived the experience. Therefore, I have no need to be afraid of anything. So I learned not to be afraid, and I used to be very much afraid.” Martha Hennessy spent three months in prison when her son was two years old, which was hugely difficult but also made her feel “to be a part of everyone in that prison, not just the two women I had entered it with.” All of the women I interviewed talked directly about friendships formed in prison, and/or significant learning about oneself (versus John Heid, Michael Pasquale, and Brian DeRouen among the men). Sometimes, incarceration led to too much pain. For most of the women, however, it facilitated personal growth that they are grateful for, if also scarred by. Like Meagan Doty, for all the good that they can do and the learning that they can absorb through intentionally being in that place, they “are willing.”

However, the violence of the institution should not be under-estimated. Regardless of what one looks like, in prison, privilege is not always “enough” to protect one from real abuses. Theresa Cusimano, the woman I *almost* watched cross the line at Fort Benning in 2011, endured such a violently abusive six months in prison that she barely survived. Upon her release from prison, she wrote a letter thanking movement members for their support—which she credits as saving her life while in prison. The letter is worth including at length:

*Hope: A Message to the Movement*  
July, 2013

... I entered prison because, like all of you, I believe torture is wrong and should not be a global export or a domestic product. The violence I survived during my six month stay in the five federal “holding” facilities confirmed my conviction. The United States’ Department of Justice likes to aggressively flex its muscles like a violent bully when it comes to the poor, sick, and people of color. We spend our privileged fortunes on building expensive cages for them to fall in, without even providing clean drinking water. The Bureau of Prisons does not belong as a branch of the Department of Justice, but rather belongs in the Department of Defense, where torture and mass murder are their specialties. (The)... Department of Justice... know how to use the sharp arrows that the eagle of their logo clutches in its left talon. I’m lucky to still be alive, their arrows nearly killed me.

My body gave out under the stress of being moved to four different facilities in two weeks’ time. My kidneys shut down without water or nutrition. My legs could no longer stand. The darkness of my 44 day seclusion, a “gift” to me from the feds on my 44th birthday, broke me. I lost hope when I was disconnected from all of you and your generous solidarity.

The strength of your collective prayers began to carry me out of the darkness of that rabbit hole. They shot me in the ass like a horse, to silence me. My eyes lost their ability to focus. They made me beg for my food and crawl, naked on concrete because I was unable to walk. You gave me hope that there are people who want to live a different way of life, centered on love. I wish to formally seek political asylum and live in your world...<sup>103</sup>

*Theresa Cusimano, SOA Watch Prisoner of Conscience*

I include Theresa’s letter for the important perspective that it provides about the institutional violence that the prison can produce—for though such violences were not a common experience among my participants, the reality is that such violences are a regular part of women’s experiences of incarceration more generally. Of the 23 women I spoke with, three had very difficult times in prison. All were in maximum security

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<sup>103</sup> Cusimano continues, “...I hope you’ll show up at the November vigil.... This is our time to raise our voices... Peace is possible if we commit to nonviolence. When we surrender our fear of death, amazing things can happen. I am living proof and you are the reason I am still alive. Let us all live to rebuild peace in our worlds. See you on November 16-18. We will close the SOA. I owe you a hug.”

prisons, and all were penalized far beyond any measure of fairness. Clare Grady and Kathleen Rumpf—as members of the 1983 Griffiss Plowshares action—are designated as “members of a terrorist organization,” making their post 9/11/2001 treatment particularly harsh. Completing her sentence at Carswell in 2002, the only federal medical facility for female inmates and the same institution where Theresa Cusimono nearly died, Kathleen watched several women on her floor die (of medical neglect) in a period of a few months.<sup>104</sup> She remains traumatized by the experience. Clare Grady’s story will be told in chapter 7, suffice to say she had an experience of “slavery” in America, and Derrlyn Tom is a Japanese American woman who was subjected to racialized prejudice.

Fourteen of the twenty-three women interviewed (and all seven nuns) did not talk about challenging personal experiences within prison, though all spoke of the injustice of the system itself and several spoke of their own activism or friendships built while incarcerated. Six of these women—and most of the nuns—experienced a variety of institutions, from county jails to maximum security. The other eight were only ever in camps. Seven lay women discussed prison as being a sad, stressful, and/or difficult time. Thus, like the men, religious identity proved more telling of the emotional quality of one’s experience than did prison security level.

In addition to religion, however, for all but one women, friendships with other women—a sense of solidarity, allegiance, and community, were described as central to

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<sup>104</sup> Traumatized by her time there and expecting something like a hospital, Kathleen explained that she “saw the faces of Nazis in America.” Carswell was, in Kathleen’s words, “like Germany,” with the ovens. The guards were “good people” with families and mortgages, who went to work every day “just like the Nazis.”

getting through the experience.<sup>105</sup> The focus on relationships with others is exemplified through women's many stories about the poor quality of medical care in prison.<sup>106</sup> I know that such stories similarly exist in men's prisons, but the men I interviewed did not tell them to me. This concern for others, the integration of one's experience in another's, and the decision to tell this other person's story as important to *their* story, is a crucial difference that gender makes.

### **Women's Activism in Prison**

In stark contrast to the men, women were almost all "busy" when they got to jail. They intentionally tried to break-down barriers between themselves and other prisoners, and they worked on their behalf: they allied with the inmates, not the guards. The women did little and big things—as Susan Crane explained, "There is so much to do" behind the fence, and doing it "brings a certain dignity to being there." Within my sample, Rae Kramer was the busiest woman. She worked with women directly as a teacher/mentor, challenged institutional authority daily, made visible systemic injustices, and continued organizing after release. Hence, I'll ground this section in her story—not as the norm, but as encompassing of the range of activities women described.

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<sup>105</sup> Derrlyn was the only woman who did not discuss her relationships with other women as critical in her experience. Part of this was purposeful; she explained that did not seek out relationships with her co-defendants, nor did she seek out friendships with the other women in prison. She said it was "easier to keep to myself." (Though her experience also proves the centrality of friendships to getting by).

<sup>106</sup> For example, Sr. Dorothy told of an inmate who died of a tooth infection, four and a half years into a five year sentence. Kathleen Rumpf remembered wailing as the dead women's bodies were taken from Carswell. Several women spoke of the omnipresence of Prozac, which was given out "like candy," showing how big pharma is used as the solution to force people to live inhuman lives.

“I preached nonviolence all the time, all the time,” Rae Kramer said of her six months in 2001 at the camp of Danbury prison. “I was a real pain in the ass.” She soon realized that she needed to “stop preaching and start doing,” and so she became the self-appointed litter lady and picked up cigarette butts. She started a recycling campaign, whose proceeds went to the women (the program was stopped after she left). She advocated for better art classes, art supplies, and more beauty in the women’s environment. Using her undergraduate skills as a sociology major, she wrote a survey and spent hours talking with over 70 women, listening to and taking notes about their life stories. She was trusted among the women, a point she illustrated with the example, “I could nudge the snorers.” She made a mug in ceramics class, etched with the words “if you want peace, work for justice” on one side and “question authority” on the other. She was a constant thorn in the administration’s side, but was careful not to overstep. She was regularly in trouble, but never “dangerously” so. Almost every day, she wrote cop-outs—the name of the complaint form for prisoners to tell the warden about problems in the prison. For Christmas, there was a sponsored project for women to make short videos to send home to their families. Rae brought eight pages of notes to her recording. Her video was “a litany of shit about Danbury prison” that the warden confiscated, but that Rae was eventually able to smuggle out.<sup>107</sup> Altogether, Rae felt that

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<sup>107</sup> For her filming, “I had no intention of saying ‘hi sweetie, this is mom and I miss you very much.’ I started by saying...I love you very much and I miss you, that was heartfelt, and then I said, ‘if I look a little tired, it’s because I was doing my laundry at 4:30 in the morning today, because there is only one working washing machine for 225 women. So I’m sorry if I look kind of tired. And then I continued. She (the woman filming) like perked up a little bit...She listened for about 2 minutes, and then left and went to get the warden. And she came back and the warden peeked in but never came in to the space, and the upshot was they let me finish filming the whole thing. They would let you see a

In prison, I did a number of good things for the women. I think my credibility was good... and I was seen relatively quickly as kind of interesting because sometimes I would get into trouble and people would be kind of intrigued by that... And as my credibility got better I think that the nonviolence conversations got a little bit better, and I stopped being quite as preachy. I didn't make my pitch in the abstract. It was the people I was getting connected to.

This connection is a crucial way to break through the very stuff that makes the prison work, as the system relies upon dehumanization to run efficiently. The cruelty of prison, Rae explained, is its “casual disregard for people”—a disregard that she challenged in her job as the “dessert lady.” Serving people their daily sugar rations, Rae brought an “ethos of service” to her role, exclaiming things such as “today we have jello!” as she dished up the colorful dessert, later serving leftovers to people like a waitress. Allowing people to make choices about which parts of the cornbread they wanted—center or side—may seem like a small thing, but in an institution that relies upon an erasure of individuality, insisting upon “regular” human interactions is a significant act (Sr. Kathleen Desautels).

Rae's activism on behalf of the women at Danbury continued after her release, and with fellow SOA justice action prisoner, the late Anne Herman, Rae was instrumental in pressuring the prison to get new mattresses and upgrade the bathrooms (when she was there, there were facilities for 40 in a prison housing over 200 women). Despite her incredible efforts, Rae said, “I still feel, and probably always will feel, I could have done more, I should have done more. Both while I was there and afterwards.”

After prison, Rae became a co-facilitator of a domestic violence class for male offenders in prison. There, she explained, her message to the men was the same as to the women in prison:

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little bit afterwards to know that it had worked, and then they were going to mail it for you.... And I didn't say, like, ‘so and so is mean’ I talked about it in terms of systems....



I would say to them, there is no scenario, leaving out self-defense...that justifies you being violent....She belittles you, she insults you, she aggravates you, she annoys you, she defies you—ya, that’s true. And to all of that, a violent response is not the right response. Never. Never. So it was very empowering, to be able to be so unequivocal and say ...there are *never* only two choices. So if you *ever* tell me that it’s this way or this way, right away your antenna should go up. ’Cause it’s fake! It’s an artificial description of reality.... If someone came along and said “I’ll give you ten thousand bucks if you can come up with two or three other alternatives’ you don’t think that someone would come up with two or three other alternatives?”

With creativity, humor, common-sense, and certainty, Rae was confident that her message of nonviolence could be heard. The self-empowerment she advocated for aimed at being in control of one’s own life, which Rae characterized as distinctly feminist. “I think that the same things that frightened the powers that be frightened the women,” she explained, which was, “you mean the world could be different???” She explained,

The message... was one of empowerment. You’re letting that person run your life. And what will happen is, you’ll get sent to segregated housing.... And you won’t get to see your kids this weekend. Why? Because she dissed you? Who gives a shit?... So they would start saying to me, well what would you do? I’d say... I’d walk away....I’d say, MY life, I control my life. Not her, me! ME! It was a revelatory thought for many of these women.

Rae connected the behaviors that led to discord among the women to an absorption of patriarchal ways of being, learned in a patriarchal culture, and that were obviously maladapted to life in prison.<sup>108</sup> Ann Tiffany concurred when she told me that the treatment of the male guards to the female prisoners was “demeaning and rough,” and “what they saw as flirting, I saw as demeaning behavior. The women were used to be treated, to some extent, the way the guards treated them.”

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<sup>108</sup> The nonviolence Rae taught mostly had to do with confronting “this attitude... you know, the don’t fuck with me... It seems such an absorption of a male way of dealing with the world... these women allow themselves to be suckered into arguments with lousy consequences.”

Coming from a different demographic than women “used to” being treated in such ways, Rae challenged such expectations as acceptable or normal. Her way of living was not “better,” she insisted, just “different”—and for this alone, was valuable. Hence, not only did her constellation of privilege enable the action, it is also what made her presence in the prison “good.” She was not intentionally flaunting her difference, but rather firmly and intentionally modeling a way of being that matched the expectations of her race, class, and level of education as a form of both education and resistance. Doing so provided a schism in the smooth workings of inmate expectations about what was “normal”—it was intended to make her fellow inmates think critically about the institution and their position within it. The “gift” of her incarceration was

The impact of people like us on the people in prison... and to me that was worth it, if nothing else. Not that we're good or special... but that we're different. And that to offer *women* who've been raised in... this patriarchal violent consumer oriented... to offer them that there are people who see the world differently... that was the gift, and it was fabulous.

During the focus group 18 months after her interview, Rae returned to this theme,

It was the chance for these women to get to meet women like us, people who were different...By virtue of the privilege... there was a feminist aspect to being women activists, that we had broken out in many ways, so many of the women who were there were there because of their association with men... (which is an) example of women's powerlessness both within the prison and outside. So to hear us talking about other things that were so foreign to them, I mean it was like a movie they'd never seen before.

Hence, it was her particular position that Rae used to connect with and challenge her fellow inmates. Her message was about personal empowerment and nonviolence, but her tools were distinctly those of her own identity.

Rae's experiences as a prison activist, connected to those around her, are echoed in the stories other women tell. From the first day, Ann Tiffany wanted to be “one of the

population,” rather than to be treated differently. Smoking and playing cards helped, she said, as did her colorful language (“they loved it!”). Many of the women spoke of going to religious services and attending classes, if only to insure that enough people signed up to keep the classes running. Alice Gerard spent a night in the SHU to protest the GED teacher’s sexual harassment of his students (and was only let out, she believed, because the inmates would have rioted had she been kept longer). Through her committed refusal, Ellen Grady participated in an organized action to have mandatory gynecological exams (what she called the “vaginal search”) stopped as standard procedure for inmates returning from court at a Connecticut institution where she was housed (personal email). Doris Sage organized clandestine storytelling sessions, after the administration barred her (a professional storyteller) from offering workshops. This gave the women a space to share some “really good, wonderful things about their lives.” Sr. Megan Rice asks those she lives with “what’s the root cause of all this?” as she listens to their stories, “And so it’s creating awareness and empowering.... Hopefully encouraging people to feel more confident about their concerns... (provide a) clearer understandings of root causes of a system, a very unjust system.” With a more confident picture of the system in place, Sr. Megan hopes that her fellow inmates “get empowered themselves and realize... they (can serve) in resistance, too.” From within the prison walls, Sr. Megan strives to cultivate critically-thinking and self-aware activists.

The women also frequently engaged in institutional troublemaking, like Randy’s grapefruit hooch smuggling—activities that are not necessarily political or noble, but that indicate where allegiances lie. Alice Gerard raised pet mice and grew tomatoes with seeds smuggled out of her sandwich. Nancy Gwin broke the rules by perpetually trying to

grow flowers. Sr. Ardeth Platte kept a locker full of supplies to give to new inmates in need of shower shoes, shampoo, a stamp, or a snack (gifts are forbidden in prison). Derrlyn Tom wrote letters to an illiterate woman's children, and was there for the arrival of this woman's first letter from her daughter. Alice Gerard insisted that all of the things that she did in prison are "perfectly legal" outside of the prison walls (growing tomatoes and having pets is not indicative of "bad" behavior) but it was rebellious under the circumstances. Interestingly, it seems that such troublemaking is not exclusive to female justice action prisoners, but that it is more common for incarcerated women to look out for one another, to exercise creativity, and to push against the administration generally than it is for incarcerated men (Bosworth and Carricombe 2012). Oftentimes, such "pushing" is small and not specifically political ("today we have jello!") but it is ongoing, and together demonstrates a different way of being within the institution than the men's stories portray.

Such "little" actions were supported by a general ethos of resistance among the women, an attitude that was gentle but firm. For example, on the day of Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan's release, the warden came in on her day off to supervise the activists' departure.

All of the inmates came out and stood in the courtyard when we left... one inmate came over to me and said, 'the warden's standing by the door waiting for you. You should go'. And I said, 'we've done a lot of waiting, we're going to say goodbye to people.'

With her co-defendants, Sr. Mary Kay explained that she chose to obey a different authority than that of the prison. Together, the co-defendants thought about "how are we gonna be in this place?... Whose laws are we gonna obey, God's or the prison's? So our

decision was God's, but we weren't going to broadcast it." This decision "shifted" the women's experience of prison, and enabled Sr. Mary Kay's distinctive departure. Thus, resistance in prison is about organizing, and can also be a private decision that impacts behavior during incarceration. Women's stories are told through the frame of activism.

In contrast to the men, for women the results of the prison experience are often long lasting, and frequently shape their future activism—if only to infuse guilt that they are not "doing more" (Doris Sage). Meagan Doty explained, "after going to prison, prisoners rights automatically become a new focus." Sr. Mary Kay seconded, "a lot of us go into prison with the SOA Watch agenda and come out with a prison one, too." Kathleen Rumpf was unequivocal: women justice action prisoners "all come out talking about prison. Every single one. Every one." Unlike the men, no women mentioned a tension between focusing on the bomb (Phil Berrigan's insistence) and working against the prison (though sisters Ardeth Platte and Carol Gilbert remain firmly focused on disarmament, as are many other Plowshares women).

Kathleen Rumpf is unusual in how fundamentally she has shifted her activism towards prison reform from foreign policy. She has been a key advocate for better conditions in both her local Syracuse Jail as well as for Carswell FCI in Texas, the medical facility in Texas where both she and Theresa Cusimono served traumatizing sentences. For example, she outed the Syracuse Jail for their use of the "Jesus Christ," a technique whereby prisoners are strung naked to the bars by their wrists, soil themselves for lack of alternatives, are forced to wear a Syracuse University football helmet, and are denied food. When she found out about this practice (from prisoners she worked with), Kathleen telephoned "60 Minutes," they agreed to do an undercover story. The resulting

production effectively documented the first verifiable instance of torture in the contemporary US. In addition, Kathleen worked for Jail Ministry for almost a decade, and continues to organize around the people who are sick and die in prison. She has been an outspoken critic of the medical neglect and abusive practices at Carswell, and has brought much heat to that institution (see Brink 2005 for details).

Many other women also include prison work in what they now do/have done since release. Nancy Gwin keeps up an avid correspondence with her Bunkie (cell mate), always thinking a “few steps down the line” towards what this woman will next want or need. Alice Gerard writes for PrisonTalk, a website for prisoners to support other prisoners. She has helped dozens of women to prepare for Danbury, and is pleased when they write to her to let her know that it was “as she described it.” Upon release, Derrlyn Tom “worked tirelessly on behalf of the women” she was incarcerated with. After her release, Lois Putzier did “a lot of work” with the women in the prison where she was incarcerated. When Sr. Dorothy Pagosa was in jail, the women pleaded with her to not stir up trouble while she was behind bars, but rather ““when you leave, please don’t tell them how uncomfortable the furniture was’...meaning, they’ll deal with the discomfort, get ‘em the hell outta here.... Go after mandatory minimums.” Hence, Sr. Dorothy concentrates her efforts around drug laws and legal challenges.

Unlike the men, the women also expressed a lot of guilt for not doing *more*. Rae Kramer said that she “doesn’t like” her answer about what she has done since prison. “I got distracted....I couldn’t fit it on the plate, and I’ve always felt badly about it.” Julienne Oldfield said that her knowledge of prison is now “always at the back of my mind, as a

burden.” Hence, even though they do a lot—both within jail and upon release, they feel burdened by all that they could still do. The men expressed no similar sentiments.

### **Analysis**

The differences between men’s and women’s prison experiences are vast, and my message is absolutely not that women’s ways of being are somehow “better” or more appropriate than are men’s. Instead, what my data shows is that gender matters, it makes a difference—even if only in the stories people chose to tell. Such stories are important, because they indicate what we think of as important and political.

Most basically, the difference between incarcerated women and men justice action prisoners is that women engage with other prisoners more than men do, and are more deeply and lastingly impacted by their experiences, both emotionally and personally. Whether vowed religious or lay, women live in prison determined to make other women’s lives better. Men are more solitary in prison and describe fewer instances of self or pain. It is primarily the priests who are vowed to lives of service who become “prison activists.” This difference between women and men is not simply the result of the “toughness” of male justice action prisoners, or because men’s prisons are more violent places (though they are), but instead, I argue, are also evidence that patriarchal norms around feminine caretaking and masculine autonomy have consequences that shape people’s experiences and understandings of what matters. There are three explanations that I find particularly helpful to understand these differences: gender performativity, feminist psychoanalytical theory, and the institutional differences in men’s and women’s prisons.

The first idea is that gender is performative (Butler 1990). Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity argues that men and women are expected to comply with the gender roles that match their anatomical structure. However, gender is

an identity tenuously constructed through time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler, 1990, pp. 140–141).

Hence, through our repetitive and stylized acts, we “perform” culturally appropriate versions of gender, which is in fact a socially constructed binary. Carrie Paechter argues that gender is not a “stable identity,” but rather that masculinity and femininity are constructed through belonging within particular “communities of practice” (2003, p. 69, see also Connell 2005). Through engaging in a shared practice, “apprentices” develop expertise through emulating the behaviors of the “masters” (Lave and Wenger 1991, quoted in Paechter), which Paechter suggests includes learning how to be a man or woman (2003, p. 75). In other words, we learn and model our gender behaviors based on our observations of the communities with whom we live, and women and men “learn” to perform their gender identities through emulation.

For justice action prisoners, whose belonging to various communities of practice are diverse (activist, religious, parenthood, professional...) there is a consistent division between men and women around what constitutes appropriate/normal behavior within prison. This is seemingly not a conscious division, and was never expressed to me as such, but the differences described among male and female justice action prisoners are sufficient to support a concept of differentiated gender “performing.” Constructing themselves as individuals through belonging in particular communities, the selves women



develop in prison are engaged, open, and activist, while the men cultivate a more private, serious, and spiritual self.

A second explanation for the differences between men's and women's experience is attributed to patriarchal norms that establish women's roles as care-takers and men's as autonomous beings. Much of the pain women participants described was around motherhood: either of their own identities as mothers, or through the sadness of being a part of a community of women apart from their children. Feminist psychoanalytic theory is useful to help understand how these differences between men and women come to be. The theory's argument is basically that boys differentiate themselves early on from their female caregivers, while girls identify with them (Chodorow 1978; see also Dinnerstein 1978; Gilligan 1982; Ruddick 1984). Nancy Chodorow explains, "women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother... (and) sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systemically curtailed and repressed" (1978, p. 7). As a result, girls experience themselves as "less differentiated" than boys, as "continuous with others," and with notions of self that are more "permeable" than boys. Boys, on the other hand, grow to develop a sense of self that is "separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation. The basic feminine sense of self is connected to the world, the basic masculine self is separate" (Chodorow, p. 167-169). According to this theory, as a result of contemporary mothering, the masculinity that boys develop is characterized by a quest for autonomy and separation while girls emerge "with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self" (Chodorow, p. 167). These differences are crucial, and Carol Gilligan argues that they manifest in the construction of different moral constructs. She explains,

For men, the moral imperative appears rather as an injunction to respect the rights of others and thus to protect from interference the rights to life and self-fulfillment. Women's insistence on care is at first self-critical rather than self-protective... the moral domain is... enlarged by the inclusion of responsibility and care in relationships (1982, p.100).

Gilligan's explanation sheds light on why men trying to be "good" may choose to live more "solitary" lives in prison, lives they are able to leave more completely behind upon release, while women are more likely to spend their time engaged and busy (caring for others), but still tend to leave feeling burdened and sad.

The experiences of men and women justice action prisoners during incarceration give credence to feminist psychoanalytic theorizations explicating differences between men and women's notions of self and morality. Both women and men are being "good" in the ethical constructs characteristic of their gender: male justice action prisoners demonstrate value towards autonomy and independence, while the women work towards integration with others paired with personal responsibility.

Thirdly, the prison is a gendered and gendering institution, one that maintains and strengthens unequal relations between men and women (Bhattacharjee 2002; Bosworth and Carribine 2001; Britton 1997; 2003). In her study of the "Gendered Prison," Dana Britton finds that prisons rely upon and reinforce unequal gender roles (1997). Reviewing feminist literature of the prison, Boswell and Kaufman find that the institution "solidifies and propagates particular (binary) constructions of gender throughout society" (2012, p. 189). For the guards who work within them, the "gendered organization" effectively functions as a "masculine organization," predictably rewarding performances of heterosexual masculinity over and above other performances of gender (Britton 1997). In their study of inmate resistance, Bosworth and Carrabine find that women inmates are "feminized" in prison—quickly punished for behaviors that do not fit an outdated model

of feminine complicity. Women inmates are encouraged mostly to sew, cook, and clean rather than to learn other and more useful skills (2001, p. 504). For behaviors that fall outside of these strict confines, women are often over medicated (2001, p. 504).

Feminist investigations into prison as a gendered and gendering institution are most often informed by a Foucauldian frame that view prisons not simply as repressive institutions, but also as enabling a “productive power” that can produce “individuals who meet certain normative expectations” (Hannah-Moffit 2001, p. 7 quoted in Bosworth and Kaufman p. 189). So not only do prisons rely upon particular notions of femininity and masculinity, they also actively produce them (Haney 2010; Britton 2003; Comfort 2003).

The impacts of the growth in women’s prisons populations is relevant to this discussion. The United States today is a prison state, boasting the highest number of incarcerated people in the world; over two million. The country is home to 5% of the world’s population, but houses 25% of the world’s prisoners (Bhattacharjee 2002, p. 4). Of this, the largest growing sectors are women’s prisons and immigrant detention centers. According to *The Sentencing Project*, a non-profit tracking organization, there has been a 646% increase in incarcerated women between 1980 and 2010 (versus a 419% increase for men), when there were over 205,000 women in U.S. prisons and jails. Most women are convicted for nonviolent property and drug crimes; only 10% are convicted of violent offenses (Haney 2013, p. 105). Sixty-two percent of incarcerated women are mothers of minor children, and one in twenty-five is pregnant when admitted ([http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc\\_Incarcerated\\_Women\\_Factsheet\\_Sep24sp.pdf](http://www.sentencingproject.org/doc/publications/cc_Incarcerated_Women_Factsheet_Sep24sp.pdf)). These statistics support what female justice action prisoners repeatedly observed about women’s federal prisons when they told me that they are warehouses for

the nation's poorest and most vulnerable women, and that their incarcerations hugely affect whole families rather than just the individuals behind bars.

When I visited Nancy Gwin in 2010 at Danbury FCI, I had a powerful personal experience of this, and specifically of the violence that the institution can inflict on women in their roles as mothers/providers for the family. Sitting with Nancy in the visiting room (which resembles an airport lounge with no airplanes by which to depart), she told me about the other women in the room. A young mother held her baby intensely, and Nancy explained that she had given birth while at Danbury (an ordeal that still standardly includes chaining the laboring woman to the hospital bed, and very limited contact with the child after delivery). The woman's mother and baby had traveled via an elaborate bus route from New York City to visit. Another family picnicked on vending machine goods, sitting in a circle around Snickers bars and Gatorade, laughing and talking. After an hour or so, a woman inmate named Cadence (pseudonym) walked into the room. "She is my music teacher," Nancy explained. "She stands on the picnic tables and plays jigs on the violin." Cadence is a young white woman, and she had braided her hair so that she looked like a Renaissance maiden, dignified in her neatly ironed tan uniform. "Her husband and daughter are visiting from Idaho," Nancy told me, "and things are not going well with the husband, so who knows when she will see her daughter again." Cadence and her five year old pixie of a daughter giggled and played for three hours--without breath--while the father sat apart. Wanting so much to talk to Nancy, I could not take my eyes off of them. In this sterile place that discourages feeling, they were a contradiction: love, smiles, silliness, play. Nancy and I talked until visiting hours were over. I watched Cadence and her daughter blow kisses to each other across the span

of the room, Cadence catching each one like a gift, playfully shoving each into a pocket for safe-keeping. The girl was delighted and blew kisses wildly as the iron doors closed in front of her, separating her from her mother. As soon as she was out of sight, the playful joy that had filled Cadence for the last three hours vanished, and she melted into the arms of a nearby inmate, quiet tears streaming. In that moment and in a profoundly visceral way, I experienced the hubris of the criminal justice system: the costs of monopolizing judgment about what and who are right and wrong, and the real effects of a system that is empowered to define individuals as “criminal” and hence to punish them and their families in severe ways. The vast breadth of who is included in the punishment of women in prison hit me hard that day, and sitting in my car in the parking lot after our visit, I sobbed until I was too tired to cry anymore. Nancy was doing fine, but in just the few hours during which I was there, Danbury had broken my heart.

Of course, this experience cannot be compared against men’s prisons in any sort of fair way. Certainly, men’s institutions are just as abusive and arrogant as are women’s, and the effect of fathers being separated from their children can be just as severe. However, from the stories relayed in this chapter, it does seem that the relationships developed in women’s prisons—whether between the prisoners or with those outside—critically shape how people experience their lives while there. The men (in general?) are simply more solitary, and so other people’s stories affect them less. Further, while many male prisoners are fathers, this role was not described to me as important in shaping people’s prison experiences. Motherhood, on the other hand, was crucial. It was crucial, and it was tragic. Women’s incarceration tore families apart, and people did not recover. Like me, the women who observed these separations felt their impacts deeply. This

simple fact permeates the women's experiences, and it clearly has an important role in shaping their how they live and what they learn during incarceration. It is fundamentally different from that of the men included in this research.

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

Women and men experience prison differently, with women living in a more activist, communal manner and men spending their time in ways that are more solitary and restful. For both, it can be a time of deepening faith. The most notable exception to the gender divide is male priests, who tend to maintain their activist selves while incarcerated, though in remarkably different ways from one another (from Fr. Luis's "being useful" in whatever environment he finds himself in versus Fr. Steve's private witness in solitary confinement). These differences in experience are partly the result of differences in story—my unstructured interviews enabled participants to determine interview content. Generally, women may not have been as motivated to share their knowledge of the issues with me, or men to include their more personal stories of prison. However, whether as a result of actual experience or story telling, the data shows that gender is a crucial determinant of people's experiences, and the differences between men and women reveal deep divides between how women and men conceptualize what is important, good, and real. Such divisions support feminist psychoanalytic theory and conceptions of gender performance, theorizations meant to account for differences between women and men. They also confirm Doris Sage's insistence that "the difference is institutional." Certainly, part of what explains the different ways that men and women experience prison has to do with the different kinds of places they temporarily call home.

## Chapter Seven

### A VISITOR IN SOMEONE ELSE'S HOUSE: THE STANDPOINT OF JUSTICE ACTION PRISONERS

The sun... I dreamed that the sun  
Came alive in my brain.  
I felt light pour in  
To my skull, and I *knew*... and I saw  
All things that are to come.  
Then he said, "Now pay me.  
Give yourself now. Let me own you  
And I will give you time to rule  
Forever"... I was frightened.  
I said I would but I could not.  
My mind was riddled, scorched  
With too much seeing and brightness.  
...all I wanted  
was to hide from him, from seeing.  
I hid. I shut my eyes...  
Whiteness... his heat is white  
And despair is white and madness...  
Please, Apollo, I cannot  
Give you myself. I'm frightened.  
Then he said, 'so be it,'  
And he grew quite and gentle.  
He begged one kiss of me.  
I gave my lips to him.  
And he spat into my mouth  
And said, 'keep my gifts.  
Keep my brightness in you.  
See it all, the truth  
About the war and all things  
But since you lied to me  
When you tell that truth  
It will seem to those you tell it  
Toys, baubles, babble,  
And they will laugh at you."

■ Euripides, *Hecuba*[\[1\]](#)

■

*"I see, I've seen, I remember... I saw, I saw, I saw....I've seen a lot...I see the people who don't matter, I see through their eyes..."*

*"I was so many times called crazy. It is so hard to get any credibility when you are a woman."*

*---Kathleen Rumpf*

Cassandra's words from Euripides's 424BCE play haunted me as I left my interview with Kathleen Rumpf. This chapter is a result of that haunting. It is about the political standpoint that is gained through incarceration, a way of seeing that is produced by participating in the strategy of prison witness, and specifically during incarceration.

The gaining of a political standpoint, as described by feminist philosophers such as Sandra Harding (2004), Donna Haraway (1988), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), is a continuation of the "identity-work" that is undertaken to *become* a justice action prisoner, and is distinct for *where* it is achieved. As Randy Serraglio explained, "prison breaks you" into two parts—and you may recover, but you will always be the person you were before you went to prison and the person who came out. Thus, echoing what women expressed about prison (chapter 6) and the work of identity (chapter 4), prison may provide a new self, but it also provides a new standpoint. The perspective gained is partly the result of one's public identity as a former prisoner, but springs primarily from the personal changes in one's subjective identity: for men and women, the experience of prison changes how one knows oneself, one's idea of who one is, and how this connects to one's structural/political location.

For almost everyone I spoke with, prison was described as a huge learning experience that fundamentally affirmed their political analysis and commitments to social justice and resistance. It opened their eyes to the ongoing realities of racism, imperial power, capitalist goals, militarism, and their own privilege. This learning was described as very meaningful to participants. As Sr. Mary Kay Flanigan explained, despite its difficulties she is glad that she went to prison because "I understand so much more about the whole prison system from the inside out." These fuller understandings are highly



valued. The experiences recalled were different from one another, but no one returned home un-changed. Not surprisingly, the standpoint that is gained differs between men and women, and as described in chapter 6, the result of incarceration for men is most often to deepen their commitments to resistance work in the areas of disarmament and foreign policy, while women leave prison also talking about women's stories, drug laws, and the broad injustices of the carceral state.

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Most fundamentally, feminist standpoint theory includes the idea that “where you stand determines what you see”—knowledge is situated, context specific, and arises from experience (Code 2000; 1995; Haraway 1988; Harding 2004; Hartssock 2004; Hill-Collins 2000). Knowledge is always “partial and perverse” (Harding 2004), but better knowledges may be achieved by those embodying more marginalized perspectives. Like Dorothy Smith's “bifurcated consciousness” (1987), Chela Sandoval's “differential consciousness” (2001) or W.E.B. Du Bois's “double consciousness” (1903), standpoint theory proposes that members of oppressed groups must develop understandings of at least two worlds: the one in which they live and that of the dominant. Hence, the oppressed see “better” (Harding 2004; Hill Collins 2000; Mills 2007). For the oppressed, some form of double consciousness is necessary for survival (hooks 1999, see also Sandoval 2001). On the other hand, the dominant have little incentive to see “differently,” and indeed, may have a “positive interest” in seeing the world “wrongly” (May 2006; see also Alcoff 2007; Mills 2007).<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Sr. Kathleen Desautels had an interesting description of her unusual standpoint, as a Catholic Sister. She explained that “being a woman in the Catholic Church” helps her to

Crucially, a standpoint is political: it's not just feeling like you are being your true self, it's taking that self and placing it in a larger, systemic context. A standpoint is the result of effort and struggle, rather than private observation—it is an achievement rather than a birth-right (Harding 2004). It is not just “standing elsewhere” that produces new lines of vision, but *critically thinking* about oneself and one's location that results in the generation of a new standpoint.

Through their acts of resistance against the state, justice action prisoners become its wards. As such, they occupy “new ground” from which they may be able to develop a new political standpoint. By saying “no” to U.S. imperialism, they are privy to its underside. “Naturally” empire's greatest beneficiaries (white, Christian, well educated), they live among its most ignored and hated populations. Unashamed of their reasons for being incarcerated; politically aware of the imperial and militarized connections between where they are and racism, labor, and the military state; and generally more impervious to some of the most common violences perpetrated by the prison system than other inmates (shaming, isolation from community, dehumanization), their presence and learning during incarceration provides an unusual window into violences of the prison industrial complex in their various forms, as well as into their own positionalities and identities. This is not to say that prisoners who are not incarcerated “on purpose” lack such analysis, nor that activists who do not go to jail are inherently unable to similarly produce it. Instead, it tells us that the circumstances around justice action prisoners spending time incarcerated provide an unusual mix of factors that often lead to particular learnings, experiences, and conclusions that together can comprise their own “standpoint.” What is

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“understand what it means to be a little bit on the fringe... Not in the same way (as being a person who is oppressed), but it can't be dismissed.”

“seen” and “known” through this standpoint is useful for understanding systemic forces, inequality, violence, and transformation more broadly.

Among my participants, there was some disagreement about whether or not time in prison was necessary for the achievement of certain knowledge. Liz Deligio explained; “I learned a lot there.... Some things you could learn in other ways. I think there’s something very specific about going to prison that just requires going to prison.” Derrlyn Tom disagreed. She said, “I did learn a lot... but, the big but is, I don’t think anybody has to go through it in order to know that. I mean, I don’t have to go through war to know that war is bad.” Even with the experience of somewhat lengthy incarceration, there is a limit to how much justice action prisoners can know and understand, Kathy Kelly added. Still, “there’s nothing like being locked up... to get a quick education.”

Whether living in prison is absolutely necessary or not as an experience, the learning that results from incarceration is of two kinds: one systemic—learning about the prison industrial complex as part of broader systems of violence, and one personal—of oneself personally and structurally. This chapter explores each in turn.

### **How Other Inmates See Justice Action Prisoners**

An interesting way in which people noticed that “where you stand determines what you see” was when they talked about how other prisoners viewed them and understood (or not) their actions. These understandings varied depending on the particular standpoints of those incarcerated—in other words, the particular mix of who one was incarcerated with mattered in shaping other prisoners’ views of the incarcerated activists. Again and again in interviews, I was told that in maximum security prisons, the incarcerated men “get it”— they understand justice action prisoner’s reasons for being

there. Further, these men tended to like and admire the activists, for there is a lot of “sympathy” among the inmates “to be anti-government” (Ken Hayes). Conversely, at the men’s camps (where there are a segment of well-connected and more privileged men, as described by the Sages), other inmates were more likely to be confused or even angry with the justice action prisoners. These men did not agree with the justice action prisoners’ actions or understand why they had been carried through. Conversely, I was told that in all of the women’s prisons and camps, the women “get it,” but even more so in higher security institutions. For everyone, understandings were impacted by race, with inmates of color being the most likely to “get” and support the justice action prisoners’ critiques. The reasons for these differences were explained to me in various ways.

Of the men in maximum, Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit said of his action: “they saw it as confronting the whole system, and a system they were victimized by as people of color... (they were) very sympathetic, they got it... whereas the whites, or even some of the blacks or Hispanics in the camps, they were just a little confused about it because they were just more tied into the system.” In other words, the further one stands from the mainstream (hegemonic center), the more likely one is to value and understand the need for profound resistance. Professor Bill Houston explained that “the prisoners could all understand why you’d be against the government. They might not understand why you’d commit civil disobedience and go to jail... (but) they had been screwed by the government” and so they were sympathetic. (At least to the message, if not always the means).<sup>110</sup> Susan Crane said that the women she lives with in prison understand her

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<sup>110</sup> Illustrating this, Bill Houston explained that he was in prison in September of 2001, and with his fellow inmates watched the two planes crash into the Twin Towers in New York City. He said that, though the range of reactions the attacks produced was the same

actions “because of the poverty they’ve grown up in.” Meagan Doty explained that the women in FPC Pekin, though not necessarily well versed in U.S. foreign policy (and in contrast to the more privileged audiences she speaks with outside) understand her action quickly, completely and correctly. The women said, “hell yes I believe the U.S. runs schools of torture. They run THIS place!”

Hence, depending on where we stand, we understand the systemic critique of nonviolent resisters differently. Our standpoint determines what we see, what we know, what we value, and what we believe to be real. It is a fundamental lens through which we filter and process information, and hence, a transformation in one’s standpoint can be radical work indeed.

### **The Ground on which they Stand**

Justice action prisoners are unique prisoners. They are not just “privileged,” in structural terms, they are also empowered—in terms of feeling in control of their lives no matter where they live.<sup>111</sup> This reality exists in stark contrast to the lives of most prisoners in this country. In the popular imagination and lived experience of most prison inmates, criminalization is considered the appropriate/logical result of individual shortcomings—it is perceived as the “fair” punishment that results from one’s own bad behavior (Comfort 2009; Haney 2010; Silliman et al 2002; Wacquant 2009). Within the system, responsibility for criminal acts—which are most often crimes of daily survival

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as among those on the “outside,” the distribution was different in the prison. He “had the impression that a far larger proportion of the prisoners could see why someone might want to do something like that... could see why they might hate the U.S. government” than could those on the outside.

<sup>111</sup> And when they don’t feel this way, when the abuses of the prison system are so great that justice action prisoners lose their sense of empowerment (as in the cases of Kathleen Rumpf, Theresa Cusimano, and Derrlyn Tom) then the strategy of prison witness becomes untenable, harmful to its actors, and cannot be repeated.

(drug couriership, prostitution, welfare fraud) lies solely with the individual, for the system is presented as “just” and the world in which people live is considered an equal playing field. The proper attitude for the prisoner, then, is one of guilt and repentance. It is certainly *not* one of pride or empowerment, justice or a sense of biblical obedience. This difference is significant, and an important part of what makes the justice action prisoners’ standpoint distinct comes from their lack of repentance for whatever “crime” has landed them in prison. They do not appropriately embody feelings of guilt, personal responsibility for wrongdoing, regret, or sorrow, but instead tend to feel sure, proud, and righteous of their actions and their consequences.

Further and importantly, though they live among them, the standpoint of justice action prisoners is not that of the oppressed, for their privilege always still blocks this. However, it can be a closer approximation to such a way of seeing. It is also distinctly different than what could be achieved otherwise for justice action prisoners—it is a privileged perspective gained in the bowels of the imperial beast, gained alongside those who bear some of its greatest harms.

In terms of what they know, the experience of prison confronts privileged justice action prisoners’ “epistemologies of ignorance” (what they don’t know, based on who they are) through challenging their own entrenched dominant/wrong knowledge (see Mills 2007). Such learning—often initiated well before incarceration—can make injustices and hierarchies of power differently visible to justice action prisoners, as it also more clearly reveals the workings of privilege and marginalization. Indeed, living in prison is a way to overcome some deeply engrained epistemic ignorances for the dominant, and regardless of what justice action prisoners know before prison, they know

their privilege, specifically, differently upon release. Despite Derrlyn Tom's argument that time in prison is not essential for such learning, my research shows that for people of compounded privilege, there is something distinctive about incarceration that is not easily replicated otherwise. The information provided is not necessarily "new" or novel (indeed, the systemic knowledge gained maps quite well onto abolitionist/critical scholarship about the prison industrial complex, as well as scholarship about racism, anti-capitalist struggles, etc.) however the way in which it is known is different, for it is based on personal experience. Indeed, there is an important component of "self learning" that takes place through the experience of incarceration that no amount of radical reading can replicate in the same ways. Certainly, not everyone who goes to jail for justice gains such a highly political standpoint, but it is generally true that prison enables the formation of different perspectives and knowledges than could be predictably or reliably produced otherwise.

As in any standpoint, there is still always a limit to what one can know. Fr. Bill Frankel-Streit explained,

Going to jail means going to the house of the poor. We have Catholic Worker houses... where the poor come to us, and no matter how much we try to break down those walls, they still feel like they're going to somebody else's house. And I guess, honestly, that's the way it feels going to jail. It's still not my house. It's the house for the poor, and there's a whole culture there...I can't change the color of my skin, but I can try to be where they (people of color) are, and prison is a place where they are.... I think going to jail is a very good way to fight our own internalized racism, in that breaking down those structures of domination by stepping out of or confronting them or being a victim by them, too.

I find this image of Fr. Bill's generative. He explains that for privileged people serving time for nonviolent crimes of resistance, going to jail/prison is to be a visitor in another person's house. It is important to go there, to think deeply, and to work on one's own

internalized dominations from within that space, but one must never think one “knows” what it means for *that* house to be *your* house. There is no arrival, just continued struggle towards better understanding. Similarly, Kathy Kelly explained her limitations as a privileged woman incarcerated. She said,

I’m very much a subscriber to the idea that where you stand determines what you see and that it’s important to try and stand alongside people bearing the brunts of various kinds of warfare, including the war against the poor. Because of, in my case, education, sort of middle class experience, white skin...to some extent verbal abilities, but mostly because I felt no shame, zero shame for what I did, there is always a limit to how much I could really be standing with people. And of course as they used to say in 1988, ‘you ain’t nothing but a minute.’<sup>112</sup>

Structurally, it is impossible for Kathy to say that she “knows” what it is like to be a poor woman of color in prison, and she will never make that claim. Privilege is an obstacle to understanding, as Sr. Dorothy Pagosa explained, for even when you are strip-searched in prison, as a white nun/justice action prisoner you still “don’t have nothing”—i.e., your privilege is always still “something.”<sup>113</sup> Hence, understanding—in the sense of truly knowing what other prisoners are going through—is always limited. Fr. Louis Vitale told me that despite his many long stints in prison, he still does not know what it feels like to be a prisoner. “You can say you surf,” he explained, “but are you a surfer?” Fr. Louis is simply a regular visitor in another person’s house.

These specific limitations are crucial in making the standpoint distinct: it is because justice action prisoners are people of compound privilege living in Empire’s underbelly that they are able to “see” differently—than either their privileged peers or

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<sup>112</sup> A reference to justice action prisoners’ fairly short sentences

<sup>113</sup> Which is not to say that strip searches are comfortable. Lois Putzier explained that they are “not pleasant,” and make you feel isolated. In her first two “awful” days in prison, Lois felt “like I was trying to vacate my body.”



those more oppressed by the system. In addition to understanding how their action is impacted by their connections to privilege, justice action prisoners have an experience (that often supports previous analysis/education, identity-work) of witnessing the effects of racism, militarism, and poverty through living in this nation's jails and prisons. They see its underside, they see its effects, they see oppressive forces as *real*. Such experiences are powerful and intimate, and they effectively (and significantly) change people.

Living in prison also gives justice action prisoners an opportunity to experience a lack of privilege—limited, surely, but nonetheless an experience of being under someone else's control. For people of compound privilege, the experience of not being in charge of one's life can be hugely illuminating. To explain what is significant about having an experience of not being in control, Rae Kramer told me that she loves teaching domestic violence prevention classes to people in prison (in contrast to people otherwise mandated to take such classes) because the incarcerated men “get the point of what it means to be under someone else's control” so differently in that environment. She continued, “there was such a visceral understanding of what it meant to be an adult and have some other adult deciding things that impacted your every movement.” To some extent, justice action prisoners are also able to have such experiences because they are in prison, experiences they are usually protected from.

### **Inequality Locked Down: The Work of the U.S. Prison**

The perspective that justice action prisoners gain about the prison industrial complex, and particularly how the system integrates, supports, and furthers a broader and deeper unjust status quo, mirrors and builds upon critical and abolitionist scholarship about the U.S. prison (Alexander 2012; Davis 2005; 2011; Haney 2010; Silliman,

Bhattacharjee, & Davis, 2002; Sudbury 2005; 2008). For this reason alone, this scholarship is worth reviewing. Within the social sciences, the prison is oft-theorized as a institution that shows how power operates, as well as how the prison does work that assures the perpetuation of an imperialistic, militarized, neoliberal, racist, classist, sexist American system (Alexander 2012; Bosworth and Carribine 2001; Bosworth and Kaufman 2012; Britton 1997; 2003; Davis 2005; 2011; Fine et al 2006; 2004; Foucault 1977; 1978; Haney 2010; 2013; Rodriguez 2006; Silliman, Bhattacharjee, & Davis 2002; Sudbury 2005; 2008; Wacquant 2001; 2009). As Barbara Ehrenreich argues, “if there is any handy measure of a government’s repressiveness, it is the proportion of its citizenry who are incarcerated, and at least by this measure the U.S. leads the world. We don’t, in other words, have a soft, cuddly government of the kind that could be derided as a ‘nanny state.’ We have a huge and heavily armed cop.... Only the helpful functions of government are shrinking.” (Ehrenreich, quoted in Silliman et al 2002 p. xv).

To illuminate the role that prisons play in perpetuating the violent structures of the state, as well as in supporting unequal divisions between people, “thinking together”—in the feminist methodological sense—(Davis 2010; see methods chapter) is generative. For example, in her 2008 article “Maroon Abolitionists,” Julia Sudbury “thinks together” the prison and sexuality, highlighting a cruelly intimate aspect of the work prisons do. Through interviews with transgender prison activists, Sudbury shows how the prison is a site of classification that harms some of its most vulnerable residents. Because transgender people are disproportionately surveilled, have an increased likelihood of street life and homelessness, and are more likely to live non-conformist lifestyles, they are more likely to be incarcerated. Thus prisons are places of heightened

gender tension and variation (Sudbury 2008, p. 16—and as *Orange is the New Black* popularizes). At the same time, prisons are divided into two neat categories: men’s and women’s prisons, and admittance is determined by genitalia alone. The ongoing maintenance of particular gender roles is policed and sustained through regulatory daily practices in the prison, enforcing continued conformity. Not conforming leads to heightened sexual and other violence, with little protection from the authorities (Sudbury 2008, p. 17). In examining the contemporary prison through the lens of compulsorily heterosexuality, Sudbury is able to show how, through unyielding and restrictive practices of classification as legitimate and real, and through the policing of “appropriate” gender roles, the state enacts and perpetuates gendered, personal, and embodied violence that is difficult, at best, to resist.

The prison also does work to assure the smooth maintenance of dominant U.S. capitalism. Highlighting its deep connections to American militarism, scholar Mike Davis coined the phrase “prison industrial complex” to describe the connections between corporate interests and the build-up of U.S. prisons (1995). The phrase captures two primary processes: the transformation of prisoners into profits, and the “cementing of the prison into local economies”—transforming economies previously made viable by agriculture and industry, for example, into economies dependent upon prisons for sustenance (Sudbury 2004, p. 13). In addition to providing demand for labor, sociologist Loic Wacquant (2001) explains that the prison absorbs an excess of (black, male, poor) labor, while feminist scholars insist that incarceration absorbs women made redundant through the retrenchment of the welfare state (Haney 2010). “This then,” Haney argues, “results in a vicious cycle through which neoliberal policies make groups of women

economically superfluous, leading them to engage in criminalized activities that land them in prison where they become part of a captive workforce” (2010, p. 78).

There are over 2.3 million people in prison in the U.S. today. As workers, prison labor directly benefits national and international business. Haney explains:

With the 1979 Justice Systems Improvement Act’s repeal of many restrictions against prison labor, there was a resurgence of prison work programs. Since then, roughly thirty-six states have enacted policies allowing companies to set up shop in prisons, especially in traditionally feminine areas like textiles, data entry, and light industry (Parenti 2001). As a result, companies ranging from IBM to Starbucks to Revlon to Boeing to Microsoft now use prison labor (Evans 2005). And their profits can be enormous: not only do minimum wage requirements not apply to the incarcerated, but large portions of inmates’ wages can be deducted to cover their room and board, leaving them with only pennies for take-home pay (Lafer 1999). Prison labor is often marketed in precisely these terms: in its promotional materials, California’s Joint Venture Program promises to give business a “competitive edge” while instilling a “work ethic in idle prisoners” (2010, p. 77).

Hence, not only is the extraction of prison labor good for business, it also ensures a “docile” workforce—labor serves to “discipline” those incarcerated in hegemonic ways (Haney 2010). So prisons are a receptacle for the millions of workers rendered obsolete by neoliberal policies and a source of captive labor, as they are also a holding place for the ill, unruly, addicted, and unlucky. They contain, quiet, and disenfranchise a population of the most vulnerable citizens, who are also the people who benefit least from the current system.

The prison is also a deeply racist institution, 70% of those incarcerated are people of color (A. Davis 2005, p. 100). Those calling for its abolition make explicit connections to its roots in American slavery (Alexander 2012; Davis 2005; 2011; Rodriguez 2006; Silliman et al 2002). Angela Davis (2005) locates the prison historically, as a consequence of the failure of abolition to achieve its needful goals (p. 34). Abolition, as a

historical process, was successful in making slavery illegal, however it never instituted the constructive programs necessary for creating true equality, such as the provision of education, housing, and health services. Today, these shortcomings are exacerbated and prisons are a “way of disappearing people in the false hope of disappearing the underlying social problems they represent” (A. Davis 2005, p. 41). Racism essentially fuels the prison industrial complex, and it can be seen as the contemporary enactment of a brutal historical legacy that is not yet resolved.

It is not simply race, however, that predictably lands people in prison. Loic Wacquant documents how the penal system engages in what he calls a "triple selectivity": (1) by class, (2) by race, and (3) by space. Only by recognizing this triadic “selectivity” can we begin to understand the hyper-incarceration of poor black urban males in the United States (Wacquant 2009). Neoliberal policies have thus worked against the poor doubly; both by decreasing social welfare and by increasing the penal state. For poor urban African American men, Wacquant argues, the combined effect has served to strictly “regulate” their lives. Indeed, under the neoliberal ideology of “deregulation,” contemporary policies work to loosen the bonds on the most elite, while those at the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder are more restricted—and more harshly penalized—than ever before (2009).

In sum, the prison is an important site in which current relations of power, entrenched inequalities, and predatory systems of governance are practiced, solidified, legitimized, and enabled. Differences that divide people are sharpened, as hegemonic structures are reinforced as normal and inevitable. In all of this, real people bear the costs, but are thought of and made to think of their problems as personal failures rather than

intentional patterns that do extremely useful political work. Identifying the prison as a crucial player in a neoliberal, militarized American system verifies how justice action prisoners experience the institution, as well as why their experiences, interpretations and insights deeply matter in the quest for social justice.

### **What does the Prison Standpoint See?**

Both men and women leave prison impressed—and depressed—by the ways in which the “injustice system” (Kathleen Rumpf) systemically perpetuates, instigates, and assures violence in the lives of those it touches. The understandings that are solidified through the experience of incarceration do not vary significantly between men and women, despite the differences in their experiences as reviewed in chapter 6. Often, the standpoint gained by justice action prisoners is about showing “the system” as a system. The correctional system, the long arms of imperialism, the ways in which certain divisions (race, class, gender) predictably challenge humanizing solidarity work, the ways that privileges shape experience and makes certain violences feel intractable. The standpoint gained is absolutely about prison, and how the prison industrial complex fits into a larger context of neoliberal U.S. Empire. It is also about oneself, however: one’s positionality, privilege, capacities, and important life-lessons.

### **The System**

Justice action prisoners experience how the prison-industrial complex increasingly propagates its construction of “warehouse” prisons, as they provide “recession-proof” employment to economically depressed communities throughout the country (Kathy Kelly). The expansion of the prison industrial complex provides much needed employment to America’s rural communities, and class-wise, prison guards are

often not far different than those whom they keep (Karl Meyer). As an essential player in capitalism's easy continuation, prisoners are forced to work—often for for-profit companies and in the service of increased militarization (Ed Kinane). Much of the wealth prisons produce is privatized, earned through the inflated prices charged for commissary and phone calls. For example, Kathleen Rumpf told me that the jail in Syracuse, NY (the Justice Center) earns \$35,000 a month on phone calls, charged to some of our nation's poorest residents. (Recall that Brian Terrell earned \$0.11 an hour sweeping the stairs at Yankton, where telephone calls cost \$0.25 per minute).

Not only does the prison absorb more than two million mostly marginalized people from the outside world (hence removing their names from the rolls of the unemployed, the sick, the homeless), the justice system also employs a huge number of well educated, middle and upper class folks, Karl Meyer added. Indeed, a robust prison population, Kathy Kelly explained, is required to keep middle class dreams alive—otherwise, “what would we do with all of our lawyers, judges, and clerks?” The system in place is built to “serve the interests of people who've got far more in our society than would be needed or fair,” Kathy explained.

At the same time as it helps to keep middle class America's dreams to come true, incarceration obscures social problems such as unequal and inadequate public education, poor universal health care, and lack of social services. Instead, the logic of criminalization names these shortcomings as personal. To be incarcerated is to take social/structural problems on as “my fault.” The proper attitude of the criminal is one of shame, regret, and guilt. As John Heid said, prison is not about forgiveness but its opposite: “there's nothing structurally to help individuals help to forgive themselves,” but

rather the logic of incarceration is to make one's worst mistake “the hallmark of your life by which everything else is defined.” Prison is a waste of “time, energy, and resources” for the tax-payer (Rae Kramer), and the educational programming that is offered is measly and insufficient (“and we know that education is a route” out of crime, said Susan Crane). If restorative justice were truly a goal—a justice that helped inmates to move forward in their lives—participants told me that the methods to achieve it are no mystery (education, healthcare, jobs, job training, addiction counseling etc.) and would be much more broadly implemented. All of this is to say that the primary work of the prison lies not in rehabilitation, according to justice action prisoners, but elsewhere.

The prison is integrally connected to the military state, a connection that is paramount for justice action prisoners. As the BOP website makes clear, many prisons, especially camps, are located on (and serve the needs of) military bases (<http://www.bop.gov/locations/institutions/index.jsp>). Participants in this study were incarcerated at Fort Dix, Fort Bliss, and Fort Worth, for example, and prison inmates make things for military use. Indeed, some of the best paying jobs in prison (through a company called Unicorp) are for military contracts—you can earn as much as \$2 an hour making parts for weapons, while Ed Kinane earned \$0.12 an hour for supervising the tool shed at Allenwood.<sup>114</sup> Prisons also employ many former military personnel as guards, and the institutions are run in a militarized manner. These connections are why Fr. Steve Kelly cannot comply with even a standard urine test upon entry: it is against his principles to demean himself with the “same administration that dropped the bomb.”

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<sup>114</sup> In a personal email, Ed shared that he and his fellows used to joke: “they pretend to pay us, we pretend to work.”



These connections also provide rationale for the witness—they are why it makes sense to protest the bomb in prison, for prison and the bomb are one and the same.

Learning about the system in such political ways basically serves as a continuation of the “counter hegemonic knowledge” (chapter 4) required for participation in action. For most participants and notably the men, the new learning gained works to re-affirm their commitment to social justice and the analyses that brought them to prison in the first place.

For example, Ken Crawley twice served six month sentences for actions against the SOA, the first in 2001 for illegal trespass, the second for aiding and abetting in 2005. He served both terms in Beaumont, Texas, the second term in maximum security. In prison, he learned a lot about the system into which the prison industrial complex falls, and the people who are required to keep it going. He explained,

That year (2005) was really important in my life. I learned a lot and it helped me formulate thoughts and ways of relating to different levels of society....The main thing I got out of it is that you get closer to being empathic about the poor. All these people have incredibly horrible childhoods, abuse, throughout their lives, at one level or another.... (in prison) you're living with the consequences.... And you're living with people, two thirds of whom never have a visit, never have a phone call, and have no money at all. It's just a horrible existence. It really *shows* you rather than teaches you why people are there.... The people at the bottom of the ladder always have trouble because they're hanging on....

I think I learned a lot about violence in prison, and especially in the second prison. You see how their psyches or their emotions are so worn...there's just so much rage in there, and basically, it comes from the fact that, there they are. Whatever they had outside, which was usually nothing except a gun and some drug pushing... they get in there and they didn't even have that. They didn't have anybody on the phone, they didn't have any family that cared about them, they had no prospect for anything better when they got out, and when something went wrong, they just flipped, because they had no resources. Basically, it's what we all know: Economic inequality is the ultimate cause of violence. Because even if you just have something, it deters people—at least, I thought. This is sort of simplistic analysis. It does seem like it's the way a lot of these people live. They'd just been screwed all their lives. The pitiful thing is that it doesn't take a whole lot

to undo a lot of this damage... it doesn't take a lot of money, it doesn't take a lot of critical thinking, it doesn't take a lot of resources to undo what's happened.

Here, Ken neatly links his visceral learning of the consequences of a system that leaves some people with “nothing” with his activist commitment that this is changeable: prison is not an inevitable consequence, but a legislative and human choice that is the result of racialized and class-based impoverishment. He cited the Marshall Plan, after World War Two, as an example of what even a little bit of commitment towards education and job creation could do. However, despite the fact that “it doesn't take a lot” to change things, it is hard. “And I've been trying,” Ken quipped.

By spending time in prison, Sr. Megan Rice said, you learn about the human costs of the prison system. She explained that you “realize all these people... are the fallout of the drug trade... you get the real story of the dregs of society.” In Susan Crane's words, through the prison system “we are just warehousing throw-away people.” The prison does other work as well, participants said. It invokes fear and a sense of order and security to the mainstream/white/middle class population in the outside world, providing a feeling that those who do bad things will be punished while the “good” will be protected. As privileged white folk, justice action prisoners benefit from this assumption; indeed, it is a key part of what makes prison witness “work.”

As evidenced in Brian Terrell's letter to the *Nuclear Resister* from Yankton FPC (included in chapter 6), justice action prisoners often weave their understandings of race and capital into their descriptions of prison. These are some of the richest insights into the prison industrial complex, for they are personalized experiences demonstrating the connections that critical scholars write about. Clare Grady had the story best dramatizing

her bodily learning of *how* the prison system works as the continuation of slavery (the argument of the abolitionists), and how this learning permanently changed her.

Here is her story. Clare Grady spent six months in FDC Philadelphia for a disarmament action in 2004. It is an administrative men's prison, located in a converted parking garage in Philadelphia's historic district. Generally, it houses about 1200 men and 200 women. The women's section was added because the men did a "go slow, refuse to work" action some years ago, so the administration brought women in to do the work of the prison. Of the roughly 200 women prisoners, about half are pre-trial (and hence cannot work), leaving about 100 women to do the cleaning, cooking, laundry, etc. for a facility of 1400 people. During Clare's stay, a cell phone was found in one of the two women's units, which resulted in a lock-down of that facility. As a result, the women's workforce was divided in half once more. It was "a slave labor camp," Clare said. "It was terror and tyranny and domination to the worst extent."

Clare worked in the kitchen, something she had done at a community kitchen for 17 years in Ithaca, New York. She thought, "what could be bad about a kitchen?"

They just kept saying, the way they treat you. Well when I got down there I was just all smiles, in my determination. After a week I was chilled to the bone.... In that kitchen I experienced... a sweatshop. There are no windows, you could be in hell....(In the community kitchen), you greet people like 'here, here's Christ'.... And there it's the opposite... it's 'here's a new batch of workers'... and I saw the batches of women become more bedraggled. It looked like they'd come from some serious street scene, abuse, and needed more TLC than anything, but they were the fodder. (Three meals a day for 1400 people could be smooth), but if you're coming in with a fresh batch of women who've just come from their addictions and abuse, and nonviolent communication skills are not at an all time high, then all the guard has to do is pass the invisible whip. I saw it one day—classic—'ladies, if you don't do this by 11 o'clock nobody's going up for lunch' and walk away. And the biggest bully would take that whip and start doing the appropriate whipping. It didn't even have to be physical, it was 'whack.' It was 'whack' and it was wicked....When I got out I read some narratives of how that worked (slavery), with the whip... all of this stuff is so real to me. So real to me.

There was a time when George Bush went to a vegetable plant in Guatemala....And I was like (makes the sound of a whip cracking), I was in tears... knowing the terror piece. Like if you stop for a second, or complain, or ask for your humanity, you're gone. You're gone. And in those cases, you know, it feels like life or death....When I heard the 'Lucifer Effect'<sup>115</sup> interview on Amy Goodman when I got out of jail, I literally fell to the ground and I went 'that is fucking what they are doing!' So intentional. There's no randomness about this.

Clare's first assignment in Philadelphia was to wash the pots and pans. The chicken was baked with no liners, and the pot washers were given no scouring tools. Seemingly, they were to scrape the pans clean with their fingernails. The absurdity of the carceral system and its many tiny cruelties are for me evident in this simple image, of a small group of women hurriedly scrubbing stacks and stacks of pans clean of their gluey, greasy chicken with their bare hands. As if this were a normal thing. Working as if their bodies, with their presumed sharp feminine fingernails, were built for such work. Women cleaning up men's messes is so normal as to be invisible, so acceptable as to be unremarkable, and women continue to take care of FDC Philly.

In short, justice action prisoners have a bodily experience of how the prison industrial complex is built to support the status quo, at the expense of those incarcerated. The prison is a construction of justice, but it is built on violence of a deeply personal and harmful nature. Kathleen Rumpf remembered a late spring cold snap one year at Alderson prison, in West Virginia. The heating had been turned off for the season, and the administration would not turn it back on or get plastic to cover the windows. "It's like the death camps," Kathleen said. The incarcerated women were freezing. They huddled together as they watched truck loads of plastic to cover the flowers be delivered, to protect the spring plantings. In the aching chill, the message was clear: what was

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<sup>115</sup> Zimbardo, Philip (2007). *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*. Random House: New York.

important was that it looked pretty outside, but not that the women who called Alderson home be warm.

### **The Self**

Coming up against themselves in the challenging, dehumanizing, and structurally unjust environment, justice action prisoners learned about themselves in prison. Most significantly, this learning was about knowing themselves better, their values and limits. It was an embodied knowledge of what it feels like to not be in control of your life and decisions. Such deeply personal learning is exhausting, Clare Grady said. “Every day” in prison, she explained, “you have to make a thousand little decisions about where to draw your lines.” Continually facing such dilemmas, based in one’s sense of self, results in profound personal learnings toward the development of a political standpoint, and it alters people’s lives. Personal learning includes coming to know oneself in an environment of dehumanization, as well as more specific lessons around deepening faith life, attachment, and social privilege.

At its core, the prison is a machine of dehumanization. From the moment of entry, my participants told me, incarceration works to make people into things rather than to feel like individual, sentient, and worthwhile human beings. Jerry Berrigan described prison as “a living death... it’s where you are forced to live as a thing, rather than a human being.” As Derrlyn Tom explained, “our penal system... is about breaking you. It is about taking and stripping you of everything that you hold dear.” Quite literally, upon entrance the prison strips you of your identity and replaces it with a new one (you are a number). The challenge for justice action prisoners is to accept the stripping away but to reject the new identities pedaled, and instead to do the work of finding out who they most

truly are in this oppressive and difficult space. This self-learning is not just about what they like and can do, but is also crucially about who they are structurally, in this place that enables seeing things as they have never seen them before. In important ways, seeing how dehumanization works—given their slight edge of protection from shaming (they are not ashamed of why they are there)—is part of what enables the development of the justice action prisoner’s distinctive standpoint.

In different ways, several participants spoke about the “stripping away” of their identity that incarceration enabled. Most often (and in contrast to Ann Tiffany), this was to tell me of an experience of dehumanization. The most basic human interactions and needs are affected by the dehumanizing practices of incarceration. In a personal letter to me from FPC Yankton, Brian Terrell described how touch and intimacy are made “dirty” in prison, quoting Solzhenitsyn to describe the strip search as “dirty fingers on a lacerated heart” (*In the First Circle*). This strip-search is the “most intimate touch” in a prisoner’s life, Brian continued, and is “all the more demeaning” for this. Dehumanization is accomplished through assigning (and referring to) each person by a number rather than a name, by denying an outside life or relationships, by mandating uniforms, by discouraging the development of friendships, helpfulness, sharing, or community, and by rigidly imposing lines between guards and inmates as “us” and “them.”

What it means to be a prisoner in this country, fundamentally, is that somebody else is in charge of your life. In practice, this means that mail sent to “Reverend Kenneth Kennon” is returned to its sender because *in prison* Ken is an inmate, not a Reverend. If a loved one dies, it is someone else who decides if you can attend the funeral. If you are not feeling well, it is another person who determines if you are *really* sick and need care, or if

you are just “faking it” (and according to justice action prisoners, everyone fakes it, if we are to believe prison personnel). Beyond very limited choices, you don’t decide what to wear, watch on television, or eat for dinner. Prison is, in Randy Serraglio’s words, “the center of the universe of arbitrary authority.” The only rule that is certain, if you are a prisoner, is that you are not in charge.

Taken singly, these discomforts are not particularly harmful. In the best U.S. prisons, there is nothing directly “objectionable” about the treatment, in the words of Dan Sage. But according to my respondents, the “ongoing trauma on a mild level” can ultimately wreck you (Meagan Doty). “For six months,” retired mathematics professor Bill Houston said, “it was fine. It would have been hell for longer.”

One of the ways that prison works on the body is to transform you into a *prisoner*. Kathleen Rumpf described this, when she spoke of her total surprise at being released on her own reconnaissance during the 1984 Griffiss trial. She recalled her initial inability to embody “freedom.” She said,

There's a picture of me coming out of the courthouse, off the elevator, I'm the first one out, and I'm like (mouth open, awe-faced) and I'm still being told what to do. I- I can't function. I've been in jail, and I've been told what to do, and all of a sudden you're free and it doesn't compute. So I'm standing there and they take the picture and I'm like in total shock, I never thought I'd get out, I mean, never!

This is a powerful description of how the dehumanization of the prison works upon the body, to transform it from an agential subject (and in Kathleen’s case, a committed, thoughtful, intentional subject) into an incarcerated object who is literally unable to function (move, talk) without being told what to do. For Derrlyn Tom, after months of insult at the hands of her jailors, “I just thought, do whatever you want.... I remember saying that to the warden...And that’s what gets created. I mean, you’re going to treat me

like this? I am going to act like this!” For Derrlyn, the prison environment, it’s cruelty and insensitively, brings these qualities out in its inhabitants.

Randy Serraglio spoke of the lasting impacts of incarceration on the body and spirit. He said,

after six months, you become a prisoner. And if you’re in for long enough, it definitely breaks you. It doesn’t necessarily ruin you. You end up coming out of it as sort of two people—the person you were before you went to prison and the person you are after prison. So it doesn’t necessarily break you in a destructive way. You could grow from it... but it definitely breaks you.... I thoroughly believe that.

Even as a strong, well-supported, and proud person who was unafraid of his incarceration and whose prison term was “tense” but uneventful, Randy explained that prison was hugely impactful on his life in negative ways. It changed him, “broke” him, ultimately cost him his long-time partner, and he had to adapt to his “new” self afterwards in a lengthy process of healing.

Kathleen Rumpf described another consequence of the prison’s dehumanizing practices. She said that “prisons are a theft of people’s stories.” Stripped of their individuality, their backgrounds and communities, people become lost in a system that does not care about them. This severance is able to happen because prisoners are “the most hated population,” she explained. In a 2010 action to highlight the plight of prisoners in Central New York, Kathleen built a cage and lived in it for 10 days in front of the Syracuse Justice Center. She held a sign that said “Jail is low income housing.”

Her witness in the cage

became a place for people to tell their stories... I mean, everybody was telling their story.... The legal system, it’s a theft of stories. They steal our stories. And then they tell you who you are, what you are.... These people have no stories, so it is important to sit with them and get their story, then you understand.



Of this action, she wrote to the *Post-Standard*, the daily paper in Syracuse, “I sadly realized that the space I occupied became the place for people who had been brutalized a rare opportunity to be heard. The very nature of the jail is an abuse. We have built walls to keep the lost and hurting from our line of vision” (2010). Her action was meant to bring these disappeared people back into view, and to provide a place that could hear and honor their stories.

From within this site of dehumanization, justice action prisoners often learn more deeply what it means to be an activist, a person of faith, and/or person of privilege. For example, working in that dreadful kitchen, Clare Grady had an experience of loyalty to her fellow inmates that produced an understanding of what it means to do resistance without supportive community. She explained,

I went on my day off to help the women in the kitchen... because I wasn't gonna let them be alone. And in that moment I realized that this is exactly what you hear young people say that go to Iraq or Afghanistan, 'I don't support this war, but I'm not gonna let my buddies down.' Right?.... I got a deeeper appreciation of what it's like to non-cooperate from within the beast, without your community. To be a whistleblower of any kind, to step out in any way, what that meant. It wasn't even because the guard is gonna cut your head off... it's psychology 101. It's the relationship of the community of women who are just barely surviving.

So even though the administration that she was supporting in her agreement to work was wicked and tyrannical, Clare's allegiance to her fellows overrode these hesitations. This experience put her in better solidarity with soldiers and whistleblowers, as it gave her an understanding of the courage required to speak against institutions, cultures, and systems without a network of support.

## The Gospel in Context and Other Lessons

Several participants told me that being in prison is an opportunity to learn about the Gospel in context. Being there allows one to understand Christian teachings in different ways. Once again, Clare Grady had the most vivid example of this. Reading the resurrection story, she explained, she has always been curious about the detail provided about how Jesus's garments are stacked in a particular way. In prison, she realized:

Oh! It's really important to the author of this Gospel to have us see that Jesus took this off, *by hand*. That he didn't just disappear into the sky... this BIG effort put into making you get that he resurrected, in the body, that he went like this [she demonstrates unwrapping a garment from around her head]....And why is that important? Because if you live with tyranny and terror and death and torture, it is good news to know that the ultimate weapons of empire still have no hold on you. THAT is good news. Like, for somebody sitting in a pew, who's raised in a pious way looking at the Bible, it's sort of like 'how nice.'... but it doesn't get the full whammo of WHY THAT'S SUCH GOOD NEWS!

For a Christian person living under tyranny, knowing that there is an afterlife, that Christ resurrected, that there is an authority much greater and more just than the one currently strangling you, is *liberating* information. The carefully described pile of clothing is the Gospel author's way of letting you know that this is *real*. Jesus didn't just "poof!" magically disappear, he took his garments off carefully, by hand—and this information is specifically important for those living under oppression (Clare). So other prisoners "got" what Clare would say in ways that were less profound for those living outside such limitations. Smiling, she explained, "I started writing these Easter greetings to everybody, and I would... make a Sun and these radiant things and I would write things like "Resurrection! Freedom from tyranny, terror, death!" One of her cards was reprinted in a Catholic newspaper, which was read by man in Elmira prison in upstate New York. "A

woman I know from church... has this guy tell her, ‘did you see this??? Did you get this???’” Her friend seemed to be ambivalent about the vivid message of Clare’s greeting, but the guy living behind the bars “got it,” and he was excited. The message was “for” him—for the Gospel was written by and for those who are oppressed.

Freedom from tyranny means something fundamentally different to those living under oppression than to the privileged devout sitting in pews reading. Clare’s story reveals how her own experience of “oppression”—even for a relatively short time—changed her understanding of religious texts, but also of such things as slavery and labor abuses internationally. Through experiencing it herself, she now sees oppression and domination differently. This shifts the way she understands the world generally, as it also re-affirms her commitment to disarmament action.

There were other kinds of lessons learned in prison. John Heid told me that he learned about attachment, in the Buddhist sense of holding onto, through the experience of having very little. Though all he had at Cranston Plantations (a maximum security facility where he served two years for a Plowshares action) was a pencil, a tablet of paper, and a Bible, he kept his cell door closed because he did not want anyone to take these objects from him.

And I realized that all—we have this amount of energy in us... and I can spread that energy out over my room full of stuff... and that same energy can be concentrated into three things, a Bible, a pencil, and a tablet. The same... fierce attachment.

John also experienced some of his finest lessons of disarmament in prison, watching regular men break up violent fights with honest words.

One of the most common lessons learned in prison was around privilege, and specifically whiteness, as both a structural force and a personal possession. When John Heid is arrested with African Americans, he knows that their experience will be more difficult than his. “The first time or two, I didn’t” know this, he admitted. Knowing that one’s experience as a white person will be different than a person of colors’ is the first step of understanding how privilege matters in resistance work. Ken Hayes told me that David Omandi (an African American Catholic Worker from Los Angeles who served six months for an SOA action) “had it rough” when he was in prison. Liz McAlister said that she thinks about her privilege “all the time, all the time” in this work, and especially when she is in prison. Fr. Luis Barrios and Derrlyn Tom’s experiences show the differential treatment that race enables. Class also comes into play, not simply in enabling the experience but also in shaping it. Rae Kramer knows that “the more connected one is to mainstream life” the more “powerful is the witness.” She told me that the Sages’ action was “powerful” because of who they were—white elderly professionals, and not because of what they did politically. This is fundamentally an understanding of privilege, and how it may be used strategically. Occasionally, going to prison was articulated to me as a way to work against one’s own internalized racism. Fr. Steve Kelly said that his extensive time in prison is a way to “wear down” the privileges bestowed upon him structurally, privileges that he feels as a burden.

There were also many examples of justice action prisoner’s privileges impacting their experience during incarceration in *positive* ways that made their lives easier. John Heid remembered an officer who was hesitant to arrest him, and when he finally did so (after a few hours of waiting patiently for John to cease and desist in his protest) told him

“next time, get a permit,” meaning, John explained, “we have permits for people like you—you are not supposed to get arrested.” Brian Terrell recalled a time in 1980 when he was serving a short sentence at the city jail in Davenport, Iowa, where he was also a part of the Catholic Worker. During his stay in jail, a man he knew from the community was arrested and the social worker assigned to the man’s case needed somebody to sign for the man’s release. Though he was in jail himself, the social worker accepted Brian’s signature as a trustworthy reference. The man walked free on Brian’s word, while Brian stayed locked up (personal communication).

Many of those I spoke with talked about their privilege as an important motivating reason for their action, but no matter what they knew before prison, they understood it differently after incarceration. As Julianne Oldfield said of the impact of her white skin, “if we didn’t know it before, we certainly knew afterwards.”

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

Both men and women learned things through their experiences that generated a distinctive standpoint, as a person of privilege who is able to live more closely among those who are oppressed than would otherwise be easily possible. The standpoint that is gained is highly political, it is a way of seeing that privileges connections, identifies patterns and abuses as structural and purposeful, and locates the self as a privileged and partial knower who knows oneself differently upon release. One result of this is to see the prison system differently; as inmates who are not ashamed of their reasons for being there, they are particularly capable of making the “work” that the institution does visible.

Much of this insight gained maps well onto critical scholarship about the U.S. prison system, in terms of locating the prison in its structural place as a critical player in

ensuring, maintaining, and furthering inequalities between groups. However, it also exceeds this, as the knowledge gained is embodied and visceral; it is learned through direct experience. What is known is not simply “intellectual,” but bodily: justice action prisoners may have experiences of oppression themselves, or they may see how their treatment differs from others with whom they live because of their privilege, but they are also still treated as a “prisoner.” In any case, the knowledge developed through the experience of prison changes people, and they can never again “see” in the ways that they did before prison. Prison transforms people, seemingly permanently, and to varying degrees. For some—mostly the women, they can never go back to their lives as they were, for the “burden of knowing” rests too heavily upon them. For others, incarceration works more narrowly as strong reinforcement of their disarmament goals: when one intimately knows a system to be so broken and hurtful, for most the only route forward is continued resistance.

## Chapter Eight

### CONCLUSION

*There is this attitude, especially among Americans, that we're just so much more important than everybody else on the planet and that we're so much more important than any other species on the planet. That's just profoundly disgusting to me.... And if we create a planet that goes down this path towards privilege and selfishness and warfare... our planet will become uninhabitable. You won't be able to live on it, no matter how high tech or safe you are in your little imperial cocoon. Your fate is intertwined with the fate of that person in Colombia. I mean, it really is.*

—Randy Serraglio

Partway through my first interview with Ann Tiffany, I knew that I wanted to tell this story through the words and lives of its participants; to make the activists the center of my attention, and to examine what they “do” through a framework that was both more intimate and more broad than an analysis of social movements, politics, or nonviolent power. There is wonderful work in social movement theory about what draws people to activism, movement strategy, how people stay in movements, how they grow and shift through participation, and what the widespread results of such participation can include (Guigni 2004; Guigni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999; Hunt, Benford and Snow 1994; Jasper 2004;; McAdam 1986; Nepstad 2004). In nonviolence scholarship, there is inspiring testament to what can happen when a committed group of nonviolent activists get organized, and clear acknowledgement that the act of participation can change not only the structure/system, but also the people involved (Bartkowski 2013; Lynd and Lynd 1966; Holmes and Gan 2012; Nagler 2001; Zunes et al 1999). However, the story that Ann told exceeded this—or more accurately, I found little match-up between the major theoretical frameworks describing social, political, and nonviolent activism with the experiences of participation that Ann described, and this sense was strengthened as my

interviews progressed. At the same time, even during that first interview I knew that the potential for transnational feminist theory to shed light on Ann's experience was immense, for its insistence on beginning with the personal while connecting to the global, and for its work on the subjects of identity, privilege, and solidarity. Not only would such theory help me to understand Ann's story, but her story could also speak valuably to transnational feminism. Hence, in under two hours of actual "research," the edifice of the project as I had first imagined it transformed, and this project took shape.

In this chapter, I review the major theoretical contributions of this research, which are framed around its original questions: 1) How do justice action prisoners' conceptions and enactments of identity form and transform during their journeys through prison witness? and 2) how does gender matter in shaping their experiences? This dissertation has examined these questions chronologically and through story, in the activists' own words. It starts at the beginning of justice action prisoners' journeys (chapter 4), and follows them through their releases from prison (chapter 7). In this concluding chapter, the central themes that emerged are organized to make clear the theoretical and activist contributions that justice action prisoners' experiences most importantly illuminate.

As a praxis committed to liberation, grounded in the individual and connected to the global, and fundamentally concerned with questions of identity, responsibility, privilege, domination, representation, "speaking for," crossing borders, solidarity, and transformation, transnational feminist theory is at all times the basis for this study's analysis. However, the work also furthers and belongs within nonviolence theory, and the twin frames remain essential. In this chapter, I review six major theoretical and activist contributions, and then discuss shortcomings and directions for further work.



## **Contributions**

The first important contribution of this project is its focus on justice action prisoners' identities, and how this specifically speaks to and furthers post-positivist realist theories of identity (Alcoff 2006; 2010; S. Mohanty 1993; Moya 2006; Moya & Hames-Garcia 2000). In the realist theoretical framework, identity is known as an interplay between structure (where we are born, what we look like) and agency (personal volition or will). We are shaped by the systems/places into which we are born, but we always still have some capacity to change and transform "who we are" (Moya 2006). The ways in which justice action prisoners' identities are constructed, utilized, and transformed confirm such theorizations, and are particularly interesting for how they simultaneously rely upon and challenge one's visible aspects of identity as they are grounded and motivated by one's subjective sense of self, an idea of "who I am."

As told in this thesis, the journey of the justice action prisoner is fundamentally a journey of identity that begins in the discernment of action and culminates with one's release from prison. In determining to act, justice action prisoners often expressed a sense of responsibility or obligation, in which their status as a "beneficiary of empire" demanded their resistance, specifically (Ed Kinane). This awareness was built upon a knowledge of who they are structurally; it was because they were white, well educated, U.S. citizens that they needed to work against nuclear weapons, U.S. imperialism, and militarism. However, the actual decision to act was most often made personally: though they usually knew about their structural location, they ultimately determined that resistance was necessary because they felt they had to bring their self-conceptions into better alignment with what they *do*. Their values needed to be enacted through deeds.

*Identity-work*, then (the labor of aligning one's actions with one's values), is the product of awareness of one's political/structural location and how this impacts identity, but the actual doings of it respond to one's subjective sense of self. Being responsible to one's location suggests action, and being true to "who I am" makes it necessary as it gives ones actions form. In short, justice action prisoners "act" as a result of a sort of conflict between their subjective and ascriptive selves, and in which resistance to and awareness of privilege is a crucial part of how they imagine and construct their identities.

The work of alignment (identity-work) is ongoing. In the case of justice action prisoners, it can entail a commitment to learning (counter-hegemonic knowledge), to nonviolent living, and to working in solidarity with others with an understanding of one's own positionality and privilege. The commitment and the perseverance to do so; to continue learning, to live in community/voluntary poverty/on the political fringe, to renounce many of the perks of privilege (driving cars, holding regular jobs, earning comfortable incomes), and to choose instead to do work that gets one locked in prison are, at the core, labors of identity, though such work has not been theorized as such. Of course resistance is also about politics and faith, but ultimately people "do it" because "once they know" about the violences of the system under which they live, "not doing it" would be harder (Meagan Doty). In other words, once one has defined oneself by a particular set of values and gained a particular kind of knowledge, one *must* act, for not acting would be a violation of one's deepest sense of self. To violate one's self-concept is felt as a greater burden than is the discomfort of six or more months in prison. On the other hand, acting in resistance is described as "doing the work I was put here to do" (Randy Serraglio), and it feels *good*. Saying "yes" to prison witness is thus likened to

getting a Chiropractic adjustment; “pscht!” Clare Grady exclaimed, with a sense of relief that now everything was in its proper place.

The “work” of identity continues throughout the experience of resistance. In particular, living in prison consolidates what one knows as it cultivates the development of a “new” political standpoint (Code 2000; Harding 2004; Hartsock 1988). This standpoint is achieved in part as a result of the identity-work that leads justice action prisoners to prison in the first place; the two are connected.

As highly privileged people living in America’s prisons, by choice to an important extent, justice action prisoners emerge with an understanding and analysis of the institution that can be unique. Explicating the ways in which this significant perspective is gained is the second important contribution of this work. This standpoint is comprised of two basic parts; an analysis of the prison system, and learning about oneself. The former furthers critical/abolitionist/feminist scholarship about the prison system, highlighting connections between the imperial state, militarism, slavery, neoliberal capitalism, poverty, and a generalized insistence of enforcing what Brian DeRouen called the “false divisions” between people as crucial to the work that the prison does (Alexander 2012; Davis 2005; 2011; Haney 2010; 2013; Silliman et al 2002; Wacquant 2009). However, the standpoint that is gained is also personalized, and is an embodied learning that transforms how justice action prisoners are able to *see*. Thus, for example, as a bright and stable white woman from Central New York, Clare Grady is generally protected from experiences of oppression. However, at FDC Philadelphia she experienced a “slave labor camp” that forever changed how she understands relations of domination. Now, when she hears certain kinds of stories, she has a physiological

reaction and understanding of what the story *really* means, a political consciousness more closely akin to those who are oppressed (poor, of color) than those who generally look like Clare. Her standpoint exceeds her positionality, then, because of where she has stood. (And where she has stood has been intentional; she has put herself in different places in part to be in better solidarity with those she works and struggles for). This standpoint, crucially, is a continuation of identity-work, and inherently includes a new range of vision that is distinct among those of compound privilege.

Gaining a new standpoint, one that is distinctive for how it both better approximates that of the oppressed and is shaped by one's access and connections to privilege, has the potential to permanently change people. It is also a way to shed "epistemological ignorance," such as white ignorance (Mills 2007, see also Frye 1992). Most basically, such changes are grounded in one's sense of self: seeing differently, one knows and feels things differently. This, in turn, effects how one interprets experiences and information, makes sense of the world, determines what is real and true, and ultimately shapes what one "does." Experience, identity, knowledge, and standpoint are thus iteratively and securely connected to one another, and in the case of justice action prisoners, jointly work to shape how one experiences the world and lives within it. Explicitly connecting identity-work to a conception of feminist standpoint is a significant articulation within this research, and one that calls for further study.

A third major contribution of this research is its push for nonviolence theory to more carefully distinguish the various forms of "people power" available to its participants—to distinct groups, and also within particular nonviolent strategies. Nonviolence theory recognizes that "people power" is the fundamental strength of

nonviolent activism, and transformative change is enabled when the authority of grandmothers and students is able to equal that of young military men (Ackerman & Duvall 2000; Dudouet 2008; Schock 2003). In movements of mass unrest, “people power” works as a sufficient analytic to explain the power of nonviolence, but in the case of prison witness—which relies upon individual actors undertaking bold actions solo—it is not adequate. Instead, the power that is most importantly activated through prison witness today (from a secular perspective) is “privilege power.” This is the social power of nonviolent actors beyond what they do politically; the power that they have based on their whiteness, class status, professional achievements, moral standing, religious identities, heterosexual/chaste identity, and U.S. citizenship. The justice action prisoners I spoke with (in contrast to most scholarship about them) understand that their privilege is hugely significant—they know that the power of their witness is partly based on who they are, as well as what they do. Some of the evidence that privilege power matters includes how justice action prisoners are portrayed by the media, the cognitive dissonance participants produce through their actions, how the technique works and what it relies upon, and the different kinds of experiences people of various levels of privilege recall.

Though this thesis has not specifically analyzed the different ways in which different actors are framed publically, or how they are sentenced (a fruitful topic for further study), the stories and anecdotes relayed during research (as well as informal review) suggest that participant Rae Kramer was right when she told me that the closer one is to the “mainstream” the more “effective is the witness.” In other words, differential attention and valuation of different identities underlies the reality that priests and nuns receive more attention for their actions than do lay people. Priests and sisters, professors

and teachers, almost always receive *more* attention than Catholic Workers or activists. For example, retired professionals Doris and Dan Sage had their line crossing at Fort Benning covered by the *New York Times*, while most Catholic Workers who go to jail receive coverage in local papers, Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now*, and peace and Catholic newsletters. Hence, their "power," in terms of spreading their messages widely and deeply, is not directly or solely connected to *what* they do, but it is hugely connected to "who they are," publically and visibly.

Further, how the strategy "works" depends on privilege. The "cognitive dissonance" that prison witness inspires—the realization among the general public that there is a discrepancy between the crime and the punishment that deserves attention—relies upon one's identity as a "good person" (Liz Deligio). No matter how we may wish and work towards otherwise, an elderly white nun as a "good person" remains widely and easily believable, while a young man of color will have a harder time convincing others of his inherent "goodness" to a similar degree. This reality is highly complex in what it means for the strategy of prison witness as potentially a strategy reserved for the privileged (or perhaps, as a strategy to raise awareness beyond the subject of action, to include such issues as racism). At the very least, what this dissertation has shown is that an explicit awareness and understanding of privilege must be deeply and broadly implemented as a critical part of activist and scholarly discussions of such activism. The consequences of failure here are profound; ranging from feelings of "resentment" by other movement members and outsiders, to actually reinforcing the very types of systemic inequalities and injustices that prison witness is meant to uproot.

In general, I have found that activists (particularly within the SOAW) understand the significance of privilege more than do the nonviolence and social movement theory describing what they do (where only a handful of scholars make up the critical conversations, including Boothe and Smithey 2007; Coy 2007; 2010; Koopman 2008a; 2012; Kraemer 2007). However Derrlyn Tom's experiences and critiques of nonviolence (Churchhill 2007; Gelderloos 2007; Myers 1994) demonstrate that white ignorance (Bailey 1998; May 2006; Mills 2007) can still permeate movement and activist understandings of what they do, as they show that current understandings of oneself in structure may not be sufficient (though this thesis has not focused on such shortcomings). Instead, in continually highlighting privilege, this dissertation has marked the various and multiple ways and places in which its functioning is present within the process of prison witness; specific activist and scholarly awareness needs to be continually drawn to each.

Privilege is also crucial during prison time itself. Certainly and increasingly, no matter what one looks like, no one is immune from the potentials for gross violence from the prison industrial complex (as Kathleen Rumpf and Theresa Cusimano's prison sentences tragically prove). However, *in general* those of compound privilege have an "easier" time in jail and prison than do those of any marginalized/non-normative status. Connection to privilege is thus an important part of what makes the strategy replicable; in order to undertake an action that involves incarceration—and to do it again (or sincerely recommend it to others)—one should have an experience that is not marked by significant abuse and violence. It is not a coincidence that those who utilize prison witness today are almost all white, heterosexual, formally educated, and financially stable. For, not only is the "cognitive dissonance" inspired by the action greater when

perceived “good” people go to jail, but the activist’s experience itself can be softened by their belongings in particular groups of privilege. Nonetheless, this reality needs to be more firmly acknowledged by both movements. It is something that needs to be named and confronted directly so as to not rely upon the hierarchies that entrench an unequal status quo while struggling towards transformative systemic change. In other words, to “work,” movements *must* include sophisticated understandings of privilege. Similarly, nonviolence theory needs to more clearly acknowledge such different sources of power, and deeply recognize that not all “people” have equal access to “power” at all times.

In the best cases documented in this research, the activation of privilege is carried through in very careful ways. It can be consciously utilized in the attempt to produce systemic change. Identifying the particular strategies designed to confront and challenge (as they rely upon) privilege make up the fourth major contribution of the work. In these cases, the aim of “using privilege for good” is to “use it up,” in the words of scholar Sara Koopman: to use privilege so as to make it disappear. This reality lands the activism of justice action prisoners directly in the terrain of feminist theory, which is critically interested in questions of privilege, solidarity, and representation (Alcoff 1997; Bailey 2008; Cole and Luna 2010; Kaplan 1994; Lyshaug 2006; Narayan 1997; Mohanty 1991; Tuhiwai-Smith 2008).

The use of the master’s tool of privilege in the aim of systemic change is hugely complex. On the one hand, no matter what privileged white Western activists do “on behalf of” those most/made marginalized by the realities of U.S. empire, they will be replicating and relying upon longstanding legacies of inequality. “Using privilege for good” always and inherently entails reliance upon that privilege, as well as the underlying



systems that support unequal divisions between groups. For Audre Lorde, the use of such a master's tool can *never* dismantle the master's house, and we must begin anew—with new tools, new language, new ideas, and new identities to forge change (2003). Sara Koopman reminds us, however, that most of our tools must still be fashioned from the remnants of the master's house, as his house takes up most of the ground (2008a). Thus, it is hard to move without some degree of assimilation. Acting in any political capacity, then, requires acceptance of imperfection: as Kathy Kelly told me during our interview, “if we wait until we're perfect, we'll wait a very long time.”

In contrast to “using privilege for good,” “not using privilege for good” is also a form of using privilege—and doing nothing is a poor alternative to either. There is simply no such thing as a safe or neutral political place in this world, and the challenge is how best to move towards transformative change, given the constraints of where we actually stand and what we can actually do (Alcoff 1997; Bailey 1998; Carty and Mohanty forthcoming; Koopman 2012; Mohanty 2003). In this, justice action prisoners' conceptions of solidarity, their potential carefulness around speaking “for” and “with,” and the particular ways they think about, respond to, and use privilege, are models well worthy of analysis.

Transnational feminism is also concerned with questions of solidarity. As a praxis dedicated to liberation, working “on behalf of” others is fundamental. At the same time, and largely as a response to the transformative critiques by women of color feminists, feminist theorists worth their salt know that feminism cannot speak “for women” or across boundaries without risking reification of the very imbalances of power that they claim to so staunchly oppose (Alexander and Mohanty 1997; Mohanty 1988; Narayan

1997; 2000; Rich 1984; Spivak 1999). How to best “cross borders” then, is a central question for the field: the challenge is how to speak-for and -with and work together, without erasing, essentializing, or distancing the intersectional and diverse differences between women across the globe. Transnational feminist theorists have taken up this challenge (Brah 2001; Carty and Mohanty forthcoming; Cole and Luna 2010; Kaplan 1994; Lysaug 2006; Mohanty 2003), and argue that to engage in solidarity work with others, one must begin from a standpoint of deep self-knowledge. One must understand one’s privileges and capacities, and be willing to work with others through shared struggle rather than a notion of shared identity (Brah 1996; Mohanty 2003; Reagan 1983). The work of justice action prisoners maps fairly well onto such frameworks, as it also provides a model for different (better?) ways for privileged white/western/northern folk to work “on behalf of” others, and specifically those who bear the greatest burdens of imperial aspirations. Doing and understanding such work need not necessarily include a term in prison, and there is much to be learned from knowing more about justice action prisoners’ notions and enactments of solidarity.

For justice action prisoners, solidarity is conceptualized as an ideal and an action; a goal and a method. For Brian DeRouen, solidarity is a way of interacting with others, and is about connecting his “whole suburban world” with realities that are foreign to them, but which he as a messenger has the chance to relay. For Fr. Luis Barrios, solidarity is about creating space at the table, and as such is “the most important sacrament.” The goal is to bring others “in”; to increase chances for connection, acceptance, belonging—and hence change. Such work must be engaged in carefully, and Sr. Dorothy Pagosa warned of the reliance on privilege that can result from attempts to

“help” others. The challenge is to create space for “those most affected to talk” (Sr. Ardeth Platte), and then to shut your mouth and “listen to them,” because “that is what we’re all about, right?” (Randy Serraglio). In other words, the challenge is to use one’s privileges to “gain entrée” (Sr. Dorothy) and then to stop; to “use it” but not “abuse it” (Sr. Kathleen Desautels)—to know and honor limits on the use of privilege. The difficult trick is to not use privilege for more than access or translation. An important project of this thesis has been to make available the model and articulation of responsible and accountable border crossing solidarity work enacted by a handful of very thoughtful justice action prisoners, a model based in self knowledge, and well placed within the framework of transnational feminist theory. A needed further study would be to contextualize and analyze this model more carefully within this literature—to analyze it deeply theoretically, and to illuminate more clearly its most productive, transformative, and dangerous parts.

Making more available the production of justice action prisoners’ articulations of the modern American prison is the fifth contribution of this work, and a novel use of privilege power. Equipped with a “counter-hegemonic knowledge” that can be both savvy and critical of the prison industrial complex, as well as freed from most external judgments of “guilt” or “deserving it” that may cloud the public’s interpretations of stories of prison, justice action prisoners occupy a distinctive and privileged position from which to speak about and be heard on the topic. Further, as empowered subjects who are generally proud of their reasons for incarceration, they experience the institution differently than do most other prisoners, and their insights are valuable for this reason alone.

Most often, the realities of living in today's prisons were apparent in the simplest stories, stories that were usually told in interviews without fanfare. For example, Ellen Grady talked about how the inmates grew and ate from a bountiful garden in Niantic, Connecticut (York Correctional) in 1981. There and then, sufficient and real food was served in a cafeteria, and she never remembers feeling hungry during her one year Plowshares sentence. In contrast, during her six-month sentence in 2012, Theresa Cusimano nearly died as a result of the malnourishment and lack of potable water available to her in prison. Clean water truly cannot be counted on for today's prisoners, and nourishing food is not a priority for an industry built around profit. Today, industrial food is often served to inmates (often in their cells) on prepared trays; a change that at first glance seems relatively insignificant, but in reality produces malnourishment (especially for those with dietary restrictions), ill health (and hence potential death), and a lack of community among inmates *as it also* solidifies the commercialization and profit making possibilities of the prison system. Food is now a commodity to buy rather than a community project to grow, harvest, prepare, and cook (as in school cafeterias, "cooking" in today's prison is mostly a project of heating-up)—and all of this actually matters. In terms of impacting people's lives, these "little things" add up. In prison, justice action prisoners relay, a good library is a critical part of the difference between a "dull" experience and one that feels inhumane. Good vocational programs/addiction counseling are the differences between recidivism and the chance for positive personal transformation. A cruel or helpful counselor is the difference between communicating with and staying connected to one's support community or not. And staying connected with one's community of support can be the difference between life and death (Cusimano

2013). Seeing the little stuff and showing how it matters, in a way that “regular people” can value and see is thus a significant offering that justice action prisoners can use their privilege, their knowledge, and their unique standpoints to provide.

How the public often interprets and judges the tactic of prison witness is revealing of how we collectively/publicly think about the prison (a needed institution, a public good, an unthinkable violence). Understanding this can help shape how we think about activist strategies for change. Justice action prisoners are frequently told that it is a “waste of time” to spend months and years in prison, when they could be agitating (ostensibly more effectively) from the outside. Such a judgment reveals Kathleen Rumpf’s observations that “prisoners are the most hated population” who are also the “disappeared in this country.” Hidden from view, prisoners can be neglected and abused in the worst sorts of ways. Having justice action prisoners live among them, then, is an unusual way to humanize the population: to make the incarcerated real to people who do not know about the actual costs of making the prison industrial complex work. Taking justice action prisoners seriously and listening to their stories about prison is thus an important social justice task. In order to change the institution, we need to learn more about it, to learn new ways to tell its stories, and to humanize and make it more real to a population currently protected from knowing about it in any real sort of way. In my view, the (globally expanding) U.S. prison industrial complex is one of the world’s most egregious and ongoing abuses of human rights, and in their roles as former prisoners who have “been there” and “know” about it, scholars and activists with prison abolition/reform agendas would benefit from taking justice action prisoners seriously, and fundamentally including them in their work.

Further, for those who are not severely abused during their tenures in prison, in no ways can justice action prisoners' incarcerations be considered a "waste of time." Not only for the impact of their witness on other prisoners, as Rae Kramer articulated, or for what the public can learn about the prison through their stories, but also for the potential "efficacy" it can produce. As Brian DeRouen explained, as a former prisoner (more so than a Catholic Worker, theology grad student, or white American man), he now holds legitimacy as a political subject in spaces where he did not previously. Classrooms, newspaper op-eds, conversations on the street—all gain value based specifically on his status as an ex-con. In the work of social justice, expanding the platform from which one can speak—increasing one's legitimacy and one's interest as a speaker/knower to greater and more diverse audiences (another form of privilege power)—positively "works" to spread awareness and politicization. Being "heard" is an essential part of the work of change.

Further, the experience of prison is valuable for what it reveals to justice action prisoners themselves, and how it can connect their analysis of foreign policy with what happens domestically. The end result of incarceration is most often the gaining of a new political standpoint, from which justice action prisoners can more effectively, clearly, complexly, and compassionately comprehend and articulate how they see and understand the world.

Sixth and last, this research has contributed to the vast literature documenting the "difference" that gender can make, and particularly gender as impacted by age and religious status. Both the "moment of action" and experience of prison are crucially differentiated by gender, with women and men recalling strikingly different stories and

interpretations of each. Nonviolence theory recognizes that engagement in resistance actions can be felt as a “peak experience,” an exhilarating moment of empowerment that feels effective and exciting (Nagler 2001). Social movement literatures recognize that movement participation is gendered, but do not follow this through with how it may shape experiences and life-long interpretations of events (McAdam 1988). However, in the stories that men and women told, the moment of action clearly emerged as a moment that was shaped by gender, a fact that is absent from nonviolence and social movement theorizing (Brown and Pickerell 2009; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Juris 2008). Fundamentally, the difference between women and men during the moment of action was that in general, women experienced their participation as personally empowering, while men described the sense that they had engaged in a strategy that is powerful. This difference is important, because it serves as evidence that—even among people who are otherwise highly privileged and similar—at the root, men ultimately feel “legitimate” as political actors, while women’s participation must often also include overcoming (personal) barriers to their participation. Hence, in acting, they not only participate in an effective strategy, they also—crucially—newly feel that they participate publically as legitimate political subjects, *as women*. Acting itself is thus important, and proves to be transformative in some women’s lives. Such experiences of empowerment are especially strong among lay women between the ages of 50-70, and are mitigated for the vowed religious women.

The experience of prison also proves to be hugely impacted by gender. In general, the men experienced prison as a solitary, sad, and deeply spiritual time, while the women lived in “communities” that they were actively a part of and worked to positively

transform. The different ways of being in prison impacted how people left the institutions, with men more likely to return to lives as disarmament activists and women more likely to include a prison agenda in their activism, or to feel guilty for not doing so. Again, religious identity proved the exception to this general story, with male priests remaining more active while in prison, in contrast to their lay counterparts. In any case, however, the different trajectories travelled in the men's and women's prisons is evidence of the very different kinds of institutions women and men are moved into, as well as the reality that men and women's dominant performances of gender and patterns of socialization (men as autonomous, women as caretakers) play out very clearly in environments of extreme stress. Importantly, the specific limitations of this project's methodology (unstructured, speaking to me) may have exacerbated the gender differences relayed in various stories, with men proving themselves to be experts and women to be *companeras* during their interviews with me, but the reality and the consistency of *difference* holds true.

### **Shortcomings and Directions for Further Research**

As a relatively small-scale, qualitative research project, this research involves trade-offs for which there are inevitable costs. Specifically, because my interviews were so very open-ended, it is possible that I missed important pieces of some people's stories. In failing to ask particular questions, I may have missed important insights, similarities, and differences. My working assumption has been that if something was really significant to a participant, they brought it up during our conversation—but particularly for the less chatty among them, this assumption cannot be fully trusted. It is absolutely possible that someone really wanted to talk about x but because my first question was about y, felt



unable or unsure about how or whether to do so, and hence did not bring it up. In general, participants spoke with such fluid ease and at such length, I do not worry that missing a grand “something” during interviews was a common or major factor. However, its potential reality cannot be denied.

More worrying is that, because I did not ask specific questions about privilege or gender, for example, I missed insights from people who may have thought about these things but did not happen to bring them up during our interview. My findings thus reveal particular trends in the data (women tend to do this, men that...) that may not actually be so neatly true. What is absolutely true is that, given unstructured time to talk, men talked about certain things and women other things—and though I have tried to be careful around specifying differences in *story* (and not just “reality”), the narrative that this dissertation tells is inevitably partial. It would be hugely useful to further this research with more structured methodological approaches; to create a survey instrument, for example, from which to infer more generalized trends. However, no method is perfect or complete and—at the end of the day—the diverse and personally rich stories that were able to emerge from such an unstructured approach proved compelling and useful, and I still believe that its strengths outweigh its shortcomings. Given the opportunity, I would not do things differently, I would just like now to do *more*.

A second shortcoming of this research is that it is totally focused on justice action prisoners themselves, and is not contextualized more broadly (Riegle’s second volume, helpfully, is concerned with the families and loved-ones of justice action prisoners). The impacts of justice action prisoner’s activism affects a far wider circle of people than justice action prisoners themselves, and it would be fascinating to conduct a follow-up

study with the people associated with justice action prisoners, such as parents, spouses, friends, judges, bailiffs, jurors, attorneys, arresting officers, prison guards, journalists, and people in the communities where actions happened. Such a study would be particularly useful to activist communities in regards to “efficacy,” a major issue of concern for justice action prisoners, activists, peace and social movement scholars, and others. Also useful for understanding efficacy, and particularly to social movement analysis, would be some sort of textual analysis—how media coverage of prison witness has changed since the Catonsville Nine action in 1968, for example, or a discourse analysis of media coverage and trial transcripts. Further, it would be fascinating to take this research across national borders; to compare what happens in the U.S. with what happens in other places, and particularly in places in which the experience of prison may be even more deeply damaging. Lastly, this research has been quite focused within the frames of transnational feminism and nonviolence theory, but there would be much to gain through analysis via alternative and multiple theoretical perspectives. Of course, one cannot do everything at once—but there is definitely plenty of space for useful and interesting follow up research on this topic.

A final shortcoming and opportunity for further research is my lack of analysis around questions of “efficacy.” In some ways, this is strange, as “does it work?” is the question that I am most often asked in regards to my research. Similarly, social movement theory is critically concerned with questions of “success” and activist communities want to know what “works” so as to best design effective movements and techniques for change (Guigni 1994; Guigni, McAdam and Tilly 1999). Most fundamentally, I do not engage in the question of efficacy because this dissertation is not

an evaluation of prison witness, but a study about the people who enact it. It is interested in their experiences and learnings, rather than the specific results of their actions.

However, because it is an issue of such interest to others, I will share a few brief thoughts on the subject. Quite simply, in terms of changing policy (closing the SOA, abolishing nuclear weapons), prison witness has not “worked.” After decades of resistance, the school is still open and the presence of nuclear weapons has not been substantially threatened by nuns with household hammers. However, there are many things that *do* change as a result of resistance. Measuring results is notoriously difficult (who is really to say what impacts what?), and as in all things, the answer to “what constitutes success” largely depends on what we measure, and across what span of time. Personal transformations should not be discounted as insignificant, nor should what happens “elsewhere” be disconnected from what happens “here.” Further, the history of nonviolent action demonstrates that change sometimes happens when we least expect it: unlikely people become allies, regimes “suddenly” topple—and so it is always useful to maintain resistance because one never quite knows how things are going to change (Ackerman, Kruegler, Sharp, & Schelling, 1994; Stephan & Chenoweth 2011; Karatnycky and Ackerman 2005).

Certainly, through the process of prison witness, justice action prisoners change, guards and judges change, courtroom witnesses change, and newspaper readers change. Such personal impacts may feel microcosmic in the efforts towards transforming empire, but they cannot be discounted. Justice action prisoners themselves will often speak about their wishes to be “faithful” rather than effective, though ultimately the majority of those who participate do so because “of course we want to be effective!” in the words of Brian

Terrell. By this, they mean that they want to change policy—i.e., they want to close the SOA and abolish nuclear weapons.

Thinking beyond the achievement of direct goals (closing the school), the successes (and significance) of prison witness becomes more clearly apparent. An important goal for justice action prisoners is to keep open a fundamental channel of democratic governance; the court. It is a fact that nuclear weapons, torture, and various kinds of warfare are illegal—but the U.S. continues to engage in such practices. By providing compelling cases to judges and juries that question such engagements, justice action prisoners are giving the courts the opportunity to reject nukes, drones, and schools of torture. Interestingly, this “check” is apolitical, in terms of method, but most of the people who use nonviolent witness do so to protest militarism and war, so prison witness is associated with these groups. From this view, the “work” of prison witness is fundamentally an attempt to safeguard and ensure a functional democracy in which law plays its rightful part as a determinant of what is just. The fact that the activists hardly ever win their cases in court is unfortunate for a variety of reasons, but through the very exercise of going to trial, the court is pushed to remain a space that has the potential to enforce the law and uphold justice.

Another part of what justice action prisoners do is pedagogical: they are building and sustaining a counter-hegemonic knowledge, built on a critical consciousness, that widens and deepens what it means to be a person of conscience involved in social justice struggles today. In their actions, justice action prisoners are “doing what they have to do,” but they are doing it in a way that is specifically meant to teach and inform both themselves and others. This “teaching” is about weapons and policies, but it is also about

self-awareness and accountability, the prison and complicity, race and privilege. What they are doing, then, is broader than protesting nukes and torture, and hence how we look at the effects of prison witness must also be complex. Hence, the answer to the question of efficacy ultimately depends on scale. It depends on what we measure. I know that this “answer” is unsatisfying, but it is the plainest truth.

### **Conclusion to the Chapter**

From the beginning, crafting this dissertation has been a wonderful and remarkable pleasure. It was extraordinarily heartening to listen to the forty-three participants talk about their lives and work, and it has been an eye-opening and exciting process of revelation to analyze and write up what their stories collectively reveal.

Following the trajectory of identity has of course left many interesting pieces out of the picture—movement analysis, efficacy, theological implications, analyses of imperialism—however, what has been gained is useful, and significantly contributes to both activist and scholarly knowledge in unique and needed ways. For critical theorists, the concept of identity-work is helpful, and specifically when tied to a notion of feminist standpoint. It is significant that, in the process of “doing” what they most deeply believe, justice action prisoners “stand” elsewhere—they change their positionalities intentionally, and as a result they both learn things and shed ignorances, in ways that permanently change them. For both theorists and activists, the insistence on understanding and being accountable to privilege is essential, and has the potential to helpfully carve nonviolence strategies to work more cleanly, fairly, and transformatively. Within this dissertation, this insistence is aimed towards nonviolence theory and activists, and is grounded in critical theory. Similarly, for those interested in transforming the U.S.

prison industrial complex, the perspective of justice action prisoners is helpful, and should be more broadly taken up. For transnational feminists and those interested in the ethical crossing of borders of all kinds, justice action prisoners' notions of solidarity are novel and important; they provide a model to learn from. The deeply lasting impact of gender differences is also illuminating, for what it shows us about how power works and what takes shape as "real" based on where we stand and what we experience. Together, the contributions of this research further both activist and scholarly goals, through a framework that is new for this subject matter.

It has been my goal to illuminate these contributions in a way that honors the words and lives of its participants; that lets them tell their own stories but in a context that is analytical and connected to other/different bodies of critical work. I highlight activist voices for a variety of methodological and ethical reasons, but at the end of the day, I mostly do so because their own words are so good. I give eternal credit to my participants for their insights, their humor, and their deep thinking. These things have kept me perpetually interested in this project, and to the extent that this is a useful or valuable piece of research, I maintain that it is because I have such good "data."

It is my dearest wish that this work may valuably contribute to what we know and understand about this world, injustice, and productive strategies for change, and from the bottom of my heart I thank its participants for their courageous work in building, creating, and refining powerful, courageous, and nonviolent ways to do so.

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