What will it take to end gender-based violence?

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Winner of the 2015 *Women's Studies Journal* Graduate Prize for a Feminist Essay

Introduction

In 2006, Andrea Smith and colleagues argued that the question for anti-violence movements to grapple with should not be, 'What is the best model of violence intervention?', but rather, 'What will it take to end the violence against us all?' (Smith, Richie, Sudbury, & White, 2006, p.10). They argued that the strategies of addressing violence against women, which rely on the state and the criminal justice system, are inadequate and often perpetuate violence against women of colour. In this essay, I want to engage with this question in order to move towards effective strategies for transformative change and gender justice in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Building on the work of other feminist writers, scholars and activists who have proposed directions to tackle the roots of the problem, I make a call to action to think and act beyond current institutionalised strategies of addressing gender-based violence. In particular, I want to raise the significance of gendered structural violence in the lived experiences of young South Asian survivors of family violence and propose some strategic directions for feminist anti-violence movements. I suggest a refocusing in terms of the conceptual tools used by feminist advocates, including intersectionality. I argue that gender-based violence is fundamentally a political and structural problem, and that the gender system itself should be abolished.

I write from the perspective of a 1.5 generation Asian feminist who has been involved in grassroots feminist activism, worked in the non-government organisation (NGO) family violence sector for Shakti – a feminist organisation for Asian, Middle Eastern and African women – and engaged with feminist research and theory in academia through disciplinary training in social anthropology and women's studies. These are the three places that inform my understandings of the issues and what needs to be done. I want to acknowledge all the people who have worked tirelessly to challenge patriarchy and gender violence across various communities and cultures. This is often thankless and stressful work, especially when dealing with intense trauma and violence. My aim is to build on previous and existing strategies for a more effective movement – building from the grassroots to widen the impact of anti-violence work.

I especially want to acknowledge the work of Māori women in the women's refuge movement in having to confront patriarchy entrenched by colonisation in their own communities, as well as racism in the Pākehā feminist movement. They first argued for the need for separate and culturally appropriate responses to domestic violence that are self-determined (Haldane, 2009). Their work has led the way for the setting up of Pasifika refuges in 1989 and later 'ethnic' women's refuges in 1995 (Haldane, 2009). It is often indigenous women who are most impacted by the combination of inter-personal and structural gender-based violence (Rose, 2012).

What makes violence gender-based?

I want to first clarify the meaning of gender-based violence. From an anthropological perspective, gender-based violence is 'an interpretation of violence through gender' (Merry, 2009, p.3). When thinking about gender-based violence, there can be a tendency to highlight the interpersonal men's violence against women in terms of domestic or sexual violence (Watts & Zimmerman, 2002). Indeed, the women's refuge movement and rape crisis and prevention organisations focus on the provision of social support services and prevention programmes targeting interpersonal gender-based violence. Wies and Haldane (2011, p.2) define gender-based violence as 'violence against an individual or population based on gender identity or expression.' Furthermore, this includes 'multiple forms of violence and reflects the political–economic structures that perpetuate gender-based inequalities among people and populations' (Wies & Haldane, 2011, p.2). In their definition, gender-based violence is not solely violence against women and considers the wider political–economic context in which gender-based violence occurs.

Gender non-conforming people, transgendered and intersex people are also targets of gender-based violence and have to deal with the tyranny of the cis-sexist binary gender system. Feminist analysis of gender-based violence necessarily needs to consider gender oppression beyond men's violence against women: 'Feminist efforts to end male violence against women must be expanded into a movement to end all forms of violence' (Hooks, 2000, p. 66). Thus, when I refer to gender-based violence, I do not only mean cis-men's violence against cis-women, but all forms of violence against all marginalised genders. Gender violence heavily affects transgendered people through gender policing and maintaining 'the heteronormative binary system' (Merry, 2009, p.7).

I treat 'gender' as a system of hierarchical classification that is socio-culturally constructed. Gender-based violence is accordingly based on forms of power and oppression: patriarchy, sexism, misogyny, transmisogyny, transphobia, heteronormativity, whorephobia and homophobia. I advocate that it is not just the inequalities between genders that are the problem, but the dominant system of gender. The fundamental problem is the classification of gender as a binary and hierarchical model. The way that gender is constructed is grounded in asymmetrical power relations, where the meanings of masculinity are associated with power, control and dominance. Meanwhile, femininity in heteropatriarchal societies is typically associated with weakness, passivity and submissiveness. Many women of colour feminists across oceans and continents have also pointed out the instability of the concept of 'women' as a universal category, often defined by middle-class White American women (Mohanty, 2003). 'Women' should also not implicitly mean cis-women or people who are assigned female at birth and identify as women. Eliminating gender-based violence requires a questioning of the gender system itself.

Furthermore, gender-based violence is not only interpersonal violence in the form of family/domestic or sexual violence and harassment. These forms of violence are perhaps the most visible, due to decades of feminist activism. Women are being murdered and raped by their partners, fathers and ex-husbands/partners. The statistics exist (see New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2015), but so do the more insidious violences of the gender system working in tandem with the political economy. Gender-based violence cannot be separated from structural violence. The Aotearoa/New Zealand prison system currently places transwomen in men's prisons, and while prisoners generally are disproportionately Māori, women's prisons have even higher rates (McIntosh, 2011). Richards (2014) provides a

feminist auto-ethnographic insight into Christchurch women's prison and the growing rate of incarceration of women in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The gendered division of labour and wage inequalities, benefit cuts, feminisation of low-wage work and poverty, border imperialism and the immigration system also enable gender-based violence. These external violences can be internalised in the form of suicide, mental illness and self-harm, which is often medicalised and treated solely as a 'health' issue rather than a political one.

The context of gender violence needs examination in order to avoid psychological and biological deterministic explanations that naturalise violence. Gender violence is 'embedded in enduring patterns of kinship and marriage, but it can be exacerbated by very contemporary political and economic tensions' (Merry, 2009, p.3). Merry (2009, p.19) elaborates:

> Gender violence is related to larger patterns of social inequality such as class and racial discrimination, histories of colonialism, and ethnic inequality and hostility as well as patterns of gender inequality, family organisation and marriage arrangements.

In my research with young South Asian survivors of family violence, gender alone was not sufficient as an explanation of the violence that occurred within kinship relations. The generational and age relationships mattered, and they worked symbiotically as a basis for assertions of power and control. They were not abused as women, but as wives and daughters, or daughter-in-laws. The gendered generational hierarchy or gerontocracy (I use this to mean the rule of elders or older generations) is a structure of power that requires further feminist critique. The concept of 'patriarchy' encompasses this, by highlighting the rule of the father, but it falls short of explaining when the perpetrators are mothers or mother-in-laws, which was the case for four of the five young women I interviewed. When we consider violence as 'gender-based', we also cannot separate it from other forms of structural oppression based on race, class, age, sexuality and disability.

Structural gender violence: Border imperialism and economic violence

Structural violence is a useful concept for thinking about the ways in which inequalities are not the problems of individuals or interpersonal relations but structural and systemic relations. These are forms of violence that are much more insidious and invisible because they are hegemonic, taken for granted and part and parcel of the social 'norm':

> The term 'structural violence' is one way of describing social arrangements that put individuals and populations in harm's way. The arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetuating such inequalities). (Farmer et al., 2006, p. 1686)

Structural violence disproportionately affects marginalised genders, non-permanent residents, indigenous people, poor people and non-Pākehā people in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I consider border imperialism as one form of this violence. Walia (2013, p.38) defines this as:

> The entrenchment and reentrenchment of controls against migrants, who are displaced as a result of the violences of capitalism and empire, and subsequently forced into precarious labor as a result of state illegalization and systemic social hierarchies.

Border imperialism had played a major role in the lives of the survivors who were marriage migrants. These are women who have migrated because of marriage, hoping for access to better education and resources, but who relied heavily on their husbands and in-laws for their visas. Their immigration status as non-permanent residents makes them vulnerable to both domestic and structural violence through the immigration system. They are at risk of deportation, precarious labour and exploitation because they do not have the same rights as

citizens and permanent residents.

Narrative accounts can have greater power to move people to action than 'dry statistics' in movements for social change (Walia, 2013, p.182). I want to share the experiences of a couple of young women I met through my research with Shakti (Fu, 2015). Their experiences speak to a range of complexities connected to wider structural issues of gender-based violence that cannot be addressed through the liberal feminist model of appealing to the state for support.

Rahilah and Nasreen's stories

Nasreen and Rahilah had remarkably similar experiences of violence and marriage migration. Rahilah was 19 years old when I first met her. Nasreen was 23 years old. They both moved from Fiji to Auckland for marriage. As Indo-Fijians, Nasreen and Rahilah are also descendants of Indian indentured labourers taken to Fiji by the British Empire. The history of colonialism and indentured labour in Fiji (Lal, 1985) is also an important form of structural violence, which underlies their diasporic journeys. Their relative poverty in Fiji compared with Aotearoa/New Zealand was an incentive for their fathers to marry them 'up' to a family in New Zealand where they would receive better educational and economic opportunities.

Rahilah was 17 years old when she got married. Her marriage was arranged by her father. She initially did not want to get married; she had just finished high school and had a scholarship to study medicine in India. But the New Zealand-based family who wanted to get their son married had persisted and promised her further education in New Zealand. This is how Rahilah described the disjunction between her expectations and her experiences of New Zealand and married life:

> Before I came, I thought [New Zealand] was a nice place, there's no violence, there's nothing, the life is so nice, don't have any violence, family problems. I thought it's a safe country, 'cause Fiji is not that safe. […] But when I came here, everything's opposite. I thought my country was better than this country. (Fu, 2015, p. 49)

Nasreen was 22 when her father arranged her marriage. She also did not want to get married at the time, but her ex-mother-in-law had also promised her education in New Zealand. She was one semester from finishing her law degree:

> My in-laws they promised my parents as soon as they get me here, they will do my student visa and like let me complete my studies. So they promised, but when we came here, they said, it's of no use over here. You can't study, we're not letting you study and stuff. So yeah, they told me to stay home and do housework. (Fu, 2015, p. 50)

Rahilah and Nasreen were both born in Fiji and came from working class families. Their fathers had pressured them to get married. They both travelled to Auckland on spousal work visas. When they got to New Zealand, they soon found out that their mother-in-laws had forced their husbands to marry them. Nasreen found out her ex-husband was gay through extended family of her in-laws, and Rahilah mentioned that her ex-husband had his own girlfriends and it hadn't been his choice to marry her.

After experiencing several months of control and violence, they contacted the police. Through the police, they were referred to Shakti where they received advocacy, support, food, clothes and safe accommodation. Rahilah and Nasreen talked about positive experiences of the safehouse – getting to know other women and their children, and sharing stories, food and chores. Their experience of the safehouse mapped onto the structure of a rite of passage (Turner, 1987). Shakti's intervention process operated as a liminal phase where many survivors found a sense of *communitas* with other women going through similar issues. *Communitas*

refers to the intense comradeship and bond formed when people go through similar transitions together (Allen & Wozniak, 2011, p.42). When they left the safehouse, their common struggles were related to housing, unemployment, immigration status insecurity, social isolation, depression and the ongoing effects of family violence and structural violence. Neither Rahilah nor Nasreen wanted to go back to Fiji due to shame and the likelihood of being pressured to re-marry.

One of the most common complaints that came up in my interviews with Rahilah and Nasreen was their frustrations with waiting. They both felt 'stuck' because of their immigration status:

> Rahilah: I'm still waiting. It's been more than nine months I'm waiting, waiting for my PR [permanent residency]. That's why I can't study. I can't work. Sometimes they need residents people to work in New Zealand. So many interviews I did, they said, 'oh we don't want visa ones cause we want permanent, we want PR people. We need citizens, residents people who can live here, who can work. (Fu, 2015, p. 89)

This desperation in needing income can lead to accepting precarious labour conditions. Rahilah had a full-time temporary fixed-term job initially for 3 months, but had been struggling to find work since then. She spent most of her savings on applying for her residency. In Nasreen's struggle to find work, she 'trialled' at a local butcher shop. They overworked her and gave her no remuneration. She wrote in her diary:

> Today [I']m so so so exhausted and very tired. I came to know from a friend, Priya, that there is a vacancy in [a butcher shop] so I went to do work at 9[am]. They made me work for 13 hours continuous without breaks. But they gave lunch which I had to finish within 5min and ate while standing. They said I have to do 15 days trial. First they said they gonna pay me little money but did not give anything. They made me work so hard and so much. It was a lot of hardwork and no pay. [I']m soo tired now. (Fu, 2015, p. 90)

Migrants, especially migrant women, are often put in positions with the lowest paid labour, in her case directly related to her immigration status and the immigration application process. In my second interview with Nasreen, she was working at a local video shop and getting paid $5 an hour under the table to slowly pay back her hospital bills. Nasreen had been really sick in winter and had to be taken to hospital. She was charged $1000 each night, so she received a $3000 bill at the end of her stay. This was money she did not have. Rahilah also had to use hospital services when she had fainted, and was billed $1000. They both felt outrage and a sense of injustice that they were domestic violence survivors and then were further financially stifled for seeking emergency medical care. This was a kind of involuntary debt incurred due to their immigration status. Permanent residents would not be charged for emergency hospital care.

The existence of borders, the costs of housing, precarious labour, appealing to the colonial settler government to be able to reside on this land and exchanging money for health care are forms of structural violence that often go unquestioned. Survivors of family violence were further restricted from living a life of dignity due to the intersections between the health care system, the immigration system, and capitalism. The primary causes of their distress post-family violence were these systemic constraints that determined their access to health, food and shelter. Their agency was significantly limited in this context, but I also want to honour their strength and power to survive in a world that can be so viciously violent.

The power and control wheel of structural violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand

While I was writing my thesis, I thought a lot about the role of structural violence in survivors' lives after leaving abusive families. Although the pain of family violence lingered in their lives, often their most immediate worries were related to their material and educational needs.

They had to learn to navigate the welfare system, the education system, and the health care and immigration systems. They had to find employment to pay for rent and food. The survivors who did not have permanent residency were dependent on their lawyer and the acceptance of the state to be able to live their life in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I thought about the familiar 'Power and Control Wheel' (Pence & Paymar, 1993) that is used by many domestic violence agencies to identify types of abuse and violence and to demonstrate the pattern of control that exists, highlighting the non-physical forms of violence. The different 'types' of violence and abuse enacted by the abuser to maintain power and control could also be applied to structural issues related to the political economy – how the state and ruling class maintain their power and control. I tried to map out what a 'Power and Control Wheel' for structural violence might look like:

Figure 1: Power and Control Wheel of Structural Violence
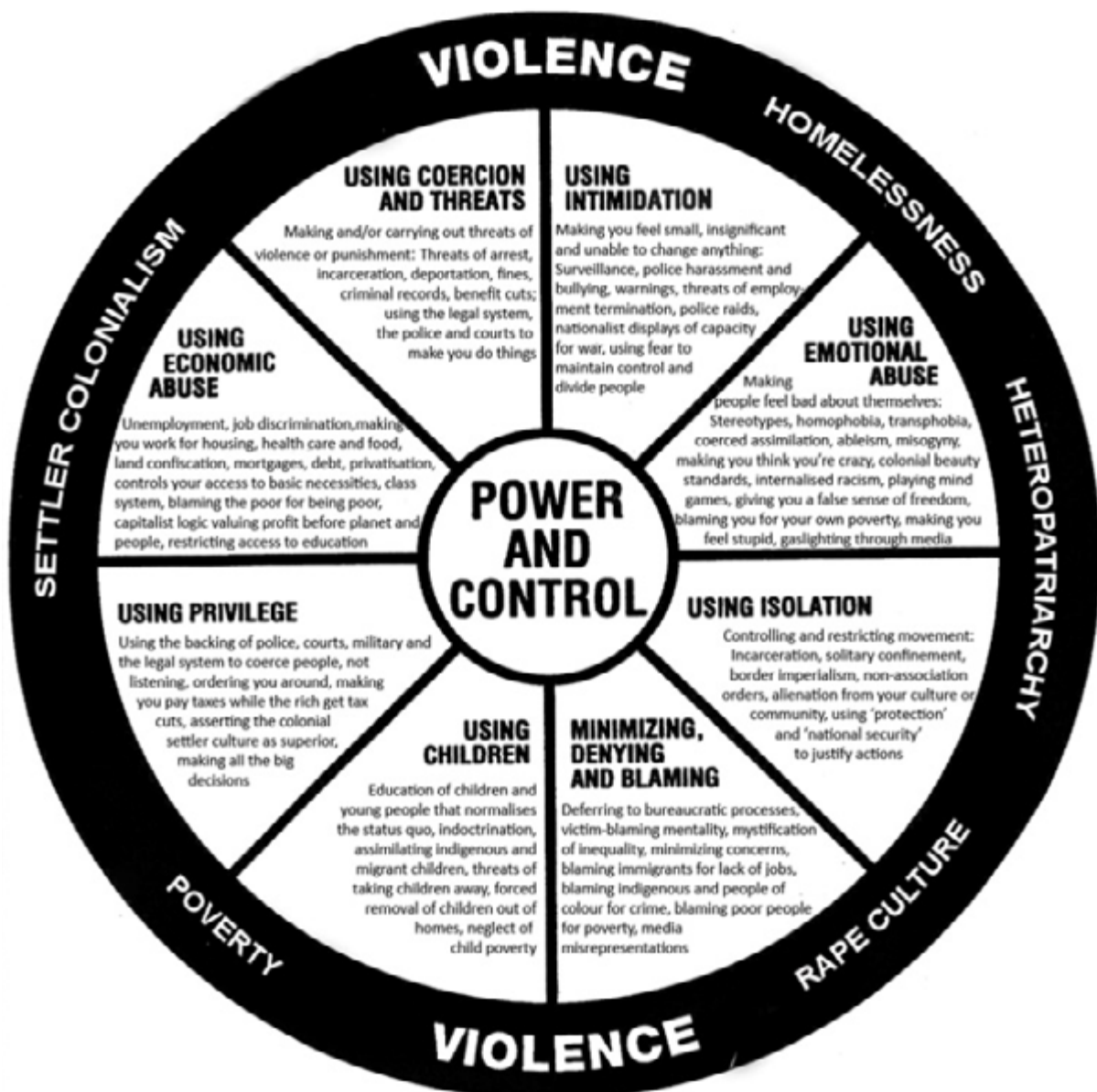
The primary and most common form of 'power and control' in terms of structural violence in the lives of the survivors I interviewed was economic. This was a major problem that played the biggest role in influencing their life decisions from their birth to life post-family violence. Four

of the five survivors I talked to disclosed childhoods characterised by poverty, in Aotearoa/New Zealand, Pakistan and Fiji. Most of them continue to struggle financially. Another survivor I interviewed, Aphrodite, who was 26 years old, shared some of her experiences of poverty after leaving an abusive father:

> So yeah, everyone thinks, people think, you know, New Zealand, you never have problems with the money. But you do have problems over here. If you don't have a job, there's nothing you can do. And the assistance you know, the disrespect they do when you go to Work and Income, the way your self-esteem is damaged. They would make you sit over there and then they would, you would tell them that you have a CV, you know, you have a CV, 'can you just go through it?' No, they would make you write the CV [from] scratch. And the way they – I couldn't take it. I just couldn't take it. So I just decided, I would rather go without money than go to Work and Income every day and getting, you know, your esteem tarnished. (Fu, 2015, p.92)

This is a clear example of how political–economic violence works to cause social suffering alongside interpersonal violence. Work and Income New Zealand (WINZ) as a state welfare agency is part of the structure that manages and controls poor/unemployed people's access to income, food, housing and other necessities of life. In Aphrodite's experience, the humiliation and degrading of self-esteem after she had already suffered abuse repelled her from accessing financial support to which she was entitled. After hearing these stories, I wanted to point out the importance of dismantling and ending structural violence.

The Power and Control Wheel of Structural Violence (Figure 1) I constructed is not intended to be a comprehensive mapping of all forms of structural violence, but a starting point for considering the ways structural forms of 'Power and Control' are also culpable for widespread social injury and disempowerment. Kleinman, Das and Lock (1997, p. xiii) observed that 'Much of routinized misery is invisible; much that is made visible is not ordinary or routine.' This is to demonstrate how some of the same tactics of power and control used in intimate partner relationships are also evident in the way the state and capitalist institutions maintain power and control over various marginalised populations.

Beyond intersectionality: What is to be done?

In more recent literature on gender violence and feminist theory in gender studies, much attention has been paid to the framework of intersectionality (Davis, 2008; Nash, 2008; Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005). Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality was an important part of bridging the seemingly separate movements of anti-racism and feminism; as a feminist of colour, I really appreciate this intervention. Intersectionality encourages us to consider oppressions as interconnected and simultaneously reinforcing each other. However, as other scholars like Jennifer Nash (2008) and Jasbir Puar (2012) have argued, intersectionality is an incomplete theory of oppression. Nash (2008) points to the ambiguity or absence of what intersectionality means in terms of methodology, the construction of Black women's bodies as the central intersectional subject, and questions the empirical validity of intersectional ideas about identity in people's everyday lived experience. Puar (2012) argues for an analysis of the frictional relationship between intersectionality and 'assemblages' to theorise oppression. 'Assemblages' is a term she uses from Guattari and Deleuze to mean 'design, layout, organization, arrangement, and relations – the focus being not on content but on relations, relations of patterns' (Puar, 2012, p. 57).

My argument builds on and supports Puar's application of 'assemblages' to feminist theory. She argues that the notion of 'assemblages' is important for not only what it means but what it can do, and one of the strengths is that 'categories—race, gender, sexuality—are considered events, actions, and encounters, between bodies, rather than simply entities and attributes of subjects' (Puar, 2012, p.58). The emphasis on identities or the above categories as 'attributes of

subjects' focuses the analytical gaze onto individuals rather than the relationships or processes of structural power that have created and maintained marginalisation and domination.

Crenshaw (1991) primarily explored the intersection of gender and race in her analysis of women of colour's experiences of violence. Take the metaphor of a road intersection. Intersections are points where two separate roads going in different directions meet. Gender is one road and race is another road. I would argue that gender and racial oppression are not separate roads that intersect at one point, but are entangled webs of inequality that are interdependent and that strengthen each other.

My second point is informed by the consideration of age, migration and generation. Gender and race are often seen as more or less fixed identities in racist and sexist contexts. However, age has a different character that necessarily evokes a dimension of time, of transience and temporality. Perhaps this is why age and generational hierarchies are often treated as less problematic than racism and sexism. Children and young people are guaranteed a shift in power when they reach a level of 'maturity' where they are accorded the rights and responsibilities of adulthood. Migration involves a change of place, mobility and entering different worlds.

Finally, an overemphasis on existential[1] identity is a third problem of intersectionality. The violence survivors faced in the family was not only based on their gender identity, but the specific gendered generational relationships that are hegemonically hierarchical – mothers over daughters, mother-in-laws over daughter-in-laws, and fathers over daughters. Thus, relationships should be the basic unit of analysis rather than the individual. By focusing on relationships or intersubjectivity rather than identities, perhaps we can better understand the operations of power and inequality, of structure and agency, and the possibilities of change. Critically, it is relationships of domination and subordination that are marked by somatic or performative differences (e.g. gender, ethnicity, age, disability, etc.) that feminists need to abolish. I consider class to be a relational category; however, in intersectional discourses, class is often treated more as an existential identity.

However, I do see the value of intersectionality as a strategy for connecting social movements and addressing power within movements and groups. In contexts where social hierarchy is considered natural and inevitable, violent forms of power, control and domination are interconnected. As Hooks (2000, p.64) argues, 'In a culture of domination everyone is socialized to see violence as an acceptable means of social control.' By thinking about gender-based violence as entangled with structural violence, we can move this problem from the realm of 'individual pathology to social responsibility' (Wies & Haldane, 2011, p.3). Echoing Smith's (2005) proposals for the USA, I want the anti-violence movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand to think about what the following would mean:

1. To think beyond the women's refuge system – beyond politics of inclusion and cultural competency (Smith, 2005, p. 418-419).
2. To prioritise ending/stopping violence rather than servicing survivors as a primary goal.
3. To develop interventions that address state violence and interpersonal violence simultaneously (Smith, 2005, p. 426).
4. To emphasise base-building approaches that see domestic violence survivors as organisers or potential organisers rather than simply clients (Smith, 2005, p. 428).
5. To develop community accountability strategies that do not depend on a romanticised notion of the 'community' and ensure safety for survivors (Smith, 2005, p. 428). This might involve expanding the definition of community.
6. To build transnational relationships in the fight to end gender-based violence.

The professionalisation of feminism both in academic settings and in non-governmental organisations that rely on state or private funding cannot be the main strategy to end gender-based violence. There can never be enough paid feminist jobs to complete the work of smashing

heteropatriarchy. Project after project, we might chip away at some of the overt expressions of misogyny, but this alone cannot end gender-based violence. Long-term transformative change comes from the grassroots and involvement of masses of people. While workers in feminist NGOs continue to do important and necessary work, ongoing grassroots outreach and mobilisation is critical, and such work will not be funded. Support for survivors of violence needs to continue. Intervention services are often a life-or-death support system for many women. Simultaneously, however, we need to be organising towards non-capitalist modes of economic organisation that are not driven by the profit motive and do not rely on a class system to operate. Accordingly, this is a call to re-think the directions of the feminist movement and to concentrate more efforts on addressing everyday structural violence.

In this essay, I have advocated for the need to pay attention and develop serious and practical strategies to end gender-based and structural violence. Structural violence is also often gender-based violence. Young migrant women I conducted research with had to deal with structural gender-based violence. However, there has yet to be mass feminist mobilisation in Aotearoa/New Zealand against border imperialism for example, at least to my knowledge. I do not have all the answers, but I want to organise around these issues and develop strategies to address Andrea Smith's proposals, albeit in an Aotearoa/New Zealand context. I think there are connections to be made and a broader movement to be built. These are the main points of connection/divisions and solidarities that I think need to be worked on:

1. Bridging the divide between different social movements, e.g. environmental, feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, queer, class-based struggles.
2. Connecting the divide between generations – in terms of different 'waves' of feminists, between younger and older generations.
3. Connecting the divide between nation-states – transnational strategising and learning.
4. Solidarities between indigenous and migrant people of colour against white supremacy, settler colonialism and border imperialism.
5. Yielding of privilege and power by dominant groups.
6. Building power among the most marginalised and encouraging leadership and collective action.

Some of this work has been done already or is continuing, but I want to see more and on a wider scale.

I believe that mass collective action is the most effective way to change relations of power, and I think this is a question to workshop in a collective setting with people directly engaged in anti-violence work. But I think, based on survivors' experiences, feminist social movements need to continue challenging and destroying systems of inequality that are structurally violent such as capitalism, state violence and border imperialism. We need a feminist movement against structural violence that subverts generational and age hierarchies as much as racism, the class system, heterosexism and cis-sexism. Once there is recognition that ending gender-based violence is meaningless, or impossible, without ending structural violence, part of the strategic goals of feminist anti-violence movements need to involve forging alliances with different movements that are challenging other aspects of structural violence. There is a need to form stronger multi- and inter-generational, as well as inter-cultural, connections that build the movement's capacity and capability for mobilisation and effective organising to end all violence and domination.

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