

Decolonizing criminology theories by centring First Nations praxis and knowledges

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We challenge the dominance, values and methods of imposed colonial systems, practices and beliefs. We also embrace self-determination. Aboriginal people, families and communities are experts of their own lives. We have solutions to challenges that we face and are our own agents for change.

(Mundine, 2022, p. 27)

Introduction

Decolonizing criminological theories is more than changing ideas. It necessitates decolonial praxis where theory and practice speak to one another on a path to transformative change. Grounded in the day-to-day knowledges and expertise of First Nations peoples and collectives, decolonial praxis unravels the disciplinary theory that is produced in the ivory tower. These *post-disciplinary* epistemologies and praxis, built from generations of storytelling and activism, disrupt criminological orthodoxy. As Keenan Mundine (2022, p. 27) states, decolonizing theory requires recognition that First Nations people are experts and change agents. Decolonizing theory has a dual task: first, honouring the sovereign knowledges and actions of First Nations peoples in nurturing current and future generations; and second, exposing criminology for its complicity in the colonial project.

This chapter explores how Deadly Connections Justice and Community Services (hereafter referred to as Deadly Connections) enacts the decolonization of criminology by unsettling the positivist assumptions of criminological theory and its failure to account for the colonial logics across carceral institutions and practices. Deadly Connections is an Aboriginal community justice organization in New South Wales (NSW) that has offices and healing places on the land of the Wangal and Bidgegal people of Eora Nation (Inner-West/Canterbury, Sydney, Australia). It is run and operated by First Nations people with lived experience of prison, forcible child removals by the state, and colonial trauma. It relies on self-determination and cultural connections to promote healing, safety, and well-being for *mob*.¹ Unlike criminology, which looks at institutional reforms or ‘soft’ disciplines – such as health (e.g., Gisev et al., 2015) and psychology (e.g., Day, 2003) – for ‘solutions’, Deadly Connections reveals the power of post-disciplinary knowledges produced by First Nations collectives.

A decolonial theory asks different questions and builds different practices. It replaces criminological questions of “What causes Indigenous peoples’ offending?” with “Why do state harms against First Nations people evade criminalization?”, and “How can justice-involved Indigenous people be fixed?” with “How can First Nations peoples heal from the harms caused by colonial and carceral systems?” Decolonial approaches consciously work within and alongside First Nations movements to imagine a society without police and carceral institutions of control, where First Nations ways of being, doing, and knowing are respected. First Nations scholars remind us that First Nations people, specifically Māori people, as Moana Jackson (2017) attests, have no concept of prisons but have laws for regulating relations and wrongs. While the criminological discipline generates knowledge on crime and prisons, post-disciplinary concerns are directed to First Nations well-being, self-determination, and sovereignty (Anthony & Sherwood, 2016).

Through the prism of *Deadly Connections*, we turn criminology on its head – revealing that healing, well-being, safety, and justice for *mob* depend on self-empowerment, cultural pride, and community and family relationships. Building on the contributions of generations before us, *Deadly Connections* works as a change maker – advocating, protesting, supporting, organizing, educating, and making the change that is sought by community. We call for new ways to do research to decolonize criminological theories, which include:

- 1 Post-disciplinarity: Embedding First Nations practices, lived experiences, and epistemologies into theory to empower First Nations communities and, in turn, decentre Western knowledges and institutions. Their self-determined, place-based solutions decentre positivist, universal claims of criminological models and denaturalize carceral systems and notions of deviance.
- 2 Trans-disciplinarity: Identifying colonial-carceral logics as broader than the penal system (with which criminology is preoccupied) and as implicated in other Western disciplines (e.g., forensics, health, and psychology). In its contemporary manifestation, other carceral institutions include child residential and psychiatric facilities, and historically stem from missions, lock hospitals,² and children’s homes. These form part of a colonial-carceral archipelago, where First Nations people experience racialized harms beyond the prison.
- 3 Anti-disciplinarity: Speaking truth to power through fearless criticism of the carceral-colonial system to abolish institutions and systems that continue to inflict violence, trauma, and harm on *mob* and, consequently, expose criminology’s naturalization of the penal system.

We come to this chapter from diverse standpoints. Carly, a Wiradjuri woman, and Keenan, a Biripi and Wakka Wakka man, are frontline change makers, working to support First Nations children, adults, and families in the Sydney area, and advocate, research, and educate in relation to the harms of the carceral and child ‘protection’ systems and the strengths of First Nations-led and First Nations-designed initiatives to decolonize these systems. Keenan’s and Carly’s pride in community, family, and culture informs their work to strengthen *mob* and support well-being, healing, and connections to Country. They established *Deadly Connections* to expand their contribution. Carly notes that

Our combined professional and lived experiences told us there were no services that could support us in the way that we needed, that understood our cultural values and needs [...]. I’m connected to the community, I’m connected to the issues, I know what needs to happen to help our mob.

(*Deadly Connections*, 2020a, p. 8)

Thalia, who is of Cypriot heritage, and Harry who is a migrant from the UK, are academics and activists who provide solidarity and support to First Nations organizations and individuals in and outside of prisons. Thalia comes from long matrilineal (Costa) and patrilineal (Hatziantonis) lines of fighters for Cypriot self-determination – from previous British rule and current Turkish military occupation – and she brings up her children to honour this fight and act in solidarity with local First Nations anti-colonial struggles. In the UK, Harry witnessed how colonization created a blueprint for white supremacy and continued to buttress British privilege – of which he has been an outspoken critic. Harry and Thalia contribute to grassroots resistance movements in the colonized land known as Australia. They work with First Nations organizations such as Deadly Connections, Aboriginal Legal Services, Grandmothers Against Removals and Fighting in Solidarity Towards Treaty (FISTT), Tangentyere Council and the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre to support their activism and research that identifies colonial harms in the carceral and child ‘protection’ systems. Thalia is on the board of Deadly Connections and seven years ago Carly approached her about supervising her PhD. In the years since, Thalia has had the privilege of learning from Carly and Keenan beyond what the PhD experience can offer.

Some of us have lived experience in the penal system (Keenan and Thalia) and one of us has endured prolonged periods of incarceration (Keenan). We all, in varying capacities, teach in universities and publish research in relation to the carceral system. The four of us come together with a sense of shared commitment to transformative change and outrage against colonial institutions and ideologies. Together, we seek decolonization through strengthening First Nations societies and dismantling colonial-carceral structures and knowledges, including those embedded in criminology theory.

Criminology’s theoretical prisons

Before discussing the decolonizing of criminological theory, we will set out the tenets of what we call colonial criminology – because of its adherence to colonizing epistemologies and practices. Colonial criminology is rooted in Western positivism, which validates the role of the carceral system in settler colonies while disregarding the sovereignty of First Nations laws. It treats First Nation law and justice processes as pre-modern and belonging to the realm of anthropology (e.g., Bhambra, 2007) rather than relevant to the contemporary regulation of First Nations societies, for which First Nations people attest (e.g. Gaykamangu, 2012; McGuire & Palys, 2020). Colonial criminology spawned from forensics, phrenology (later, neurology), and psychology to naturalize ideas of ‘the criminal’. The originator of modern criminology, Cesare Lombroso (1911), developed the idea of the ‘born criminal’ based on studies of the physical features of people in prison. From his study of their brains and appearance, he found that people in prison were more likely to have “small skulls” (p. 11), “darker” (p. 15) features and “Darwin’s tubercle on the ear [monkey-like ear]” (p. 18). This research is replete with racialized logics that continue to taint penal institutions and agents.

Today, colonial criminology continues to slice and dice the characteristics of prison populations, including by age, gender, Aboriginality, citizenship, education, relationship status, and drug history (Fitzgerald et al., 2016). Studies about First Nations people in custody correlate child neglect, education, unemployment, and alcohol and other drug abuse with incarceration (e.g., Snowball & Weatherburn, 2006; Weatherburn et al., 2008). Criminologists’ fascination with the deficiency of people – especially First Nations people – in carceral systems feeds the system of risk management through prolonged imprisonment and control.

While positivists problematize supposed differences between people in custody, they validate state penal interventions as neutral, fair, and acting in good faith. While interventions may need

a bit of tinkering at the margins (which is good for the business of criminology), the role of police, courts, prisons, and parole is even-handed. For instance, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research NSW (BOCSAR) attributes the hyperimprisonment of First Nations people to their circumstances rather than to racist institutions. They attempt to prove this by showing that the courts objectively account for criminal history and the seriousness of offences in prison sentences (e.g., Bagaric, 2016; Weatherburn, 2014). Yet, these factors are constructs that bear the hallmarks of racialization. They are operationalized to legitimate First Nation peoples' 'risk', as determined through risk assessment tools, in sentencing assessment reports (Anthony et al., 2017).

Implied by positivist criminology's theorization of hyperincarceration is that First Nations people are bad or broken and their behaviours are worse than non-First Nations people. When positivists recognize colonial circumstances, it is only in terms of distal background factors of individuals rather than foregrounded in the carceral system. Weatherburn (2020) states, "getting rid of racist policing would do little to reduce the number of Aboriginal Australians in prison custody" (p. 23). Palawa woman, Professor Maggie Walter (2016) criticizes Weatherburn for failing to understand that First Nations' hyperincarceration is part of the "same landscape of inequality" (p. 103) that denies First Nations people access to other human rights. While criminologists rely on statistics and survey data (e.g., Weatherburn, 2014) to create a "veil of scientism" (Tauri, 2013, p. 220), they are adhering to a positivist theory that maintains structural relations. They dismiss First Nations people's lived experiences of systemic racism in the criminal justice system by claiming there is "little evidence" for its existence (Weatherburn et al., 2003, p. 67) and, in doing so, normalize hyperincarceration because, apparently, there is evidence for its legitimate use.

In the 1970s, a coterie of sociologists instigated a critical turn in criminology. They posited the theory that penal institutions and notions of deviance served to maintain social control and institutional power. Unlike other sociologists, such as Durkheim in the late nineteenth century, who regarded crime as having a positive effect on social cohesion, critical criminologists highlighted the negative effect of criminalization on social relations, especially for racial minorities and working-class people (e.g., Cohen, 1972; Hall et al., 1978). They analyzed the creation of crime waves through cultural production – especially mainstream media. Stuart Hall (2006), in turn, promoted Black artists to challenge racist stereotypes and engage them in widespread cultural production.

In the main, however, critical theories of penal institutions have objectified rather than decentred their role in society. There has been a strong focus on the prison in social death (Goffman, 1963; Price, 2015). Foucault (1995) wrote extensively on the archaeology of the prison and its Benthamite Panopticon architecture that enabled the internalization of surveillance. Theories on "the pains of confinement" (Crewe, 2011, p. 510) set up a binary between coercive prisons and the 'liberal' society, ignoring the continuities of colonial oppression between prisons *and* institutional racism in the community. This dichotomy neglects the broader colonial relations impinging on First Nations' lives outside the prison; the elimination agenda of the colonial-carceral project looms large in the experiences of First Nations people.

Criminology's attempt to fix the system

In response to increasing harms against incarcerated people, criminologists and think tanks have sought to reform carceral settings to make them more humane and even therapeutic. The idea that "jailing is failing" (Justice Reform Initiative, 2022), opens conversations on how jailing might succeed in promoting rehabilitation, health justice, and human dignity. This has created

a branch of criminology dedicated to creating culturally safe and healing prisons (Grant, 2016; Hyatt, 2013).

Proud Yuin woman, abolition activist, and incarceration survivor Vickie Roach (2022) reminds us that prisons are designed to segregate, control, and oppress First Nations peoples. Carceral institutions are built on the colonists' agenda to dispossess, segregate, and brutalize First Nations people and extend the mission to separate families. Bidjara man, activist, and incarceration survivor Ken Canning (2022) – also known as Burruga Gutya – states that “colonialists globally have used incarceration as a powerful weapon” (p. 50), including to take the lives of Aboriginal people through “brutality behind bars” (p. 51).

These sophisticated analyses of the penal system as a colonial machine (Fong, 2022), by people with lived experience of prison and activists on the ground demonstrates how criminology overlooks the role of prisons in structural oppression. It also fetishizes the role of prisons in the lives of First Nations people, failing to conceive how prisons interact with other carceral institutions, including police, parole, and child welfare agencies, in the colonizing project (see Canning, 2022).

Decolonizing criminological theory involves denaturalizing the carceral system. It exposes this system as a construct of colonial capitalism. As Canning (2022) informs us, First Nations people did not have prisons before colonization: “Our systems of punishment did not include locking men and women up in tombs of decay” (p. 51). Jackson (2017) discusses how Māori laws had mechanisms for repairing wrongs without requiring a carceral system. Colonizers imposed prisons and occupied vast lands as a penal colony, such as the land known as the Australian federal state of New South Wales. However, colonial carceralism was characterized not just by prisons but also by other segregation sites such as Christian missions, government reserves, and lock hospitals. These places facilitated the forcible dispossession of First Nation peoples from their homelands and expedited their deaths.

In addition, decolonizing criminological theory problematizes notions of crime and the criminal. It identifies such labels as a product of the colonial will to control First Nations people and actions, including their resistance to colonial violence (Clayton-Dixon, 2020). Equally, these notions exclude acts of state crime such as First Nations people's deaths at the hands of the police (see Day, 2020). The discretionary catalogue of crimes and their enforcement vindicated colonizers' punishment of First Nations people and obfuscated colonial harms. This renders legal the settlers' occupation of First Nations lands while criminalizing First Nations peoples' 'trespass' on land claimed by settlers.

Decolonizing criminological theory through decolonial praxis

A decolonizing approach to criminological theory accepts that academic disciplines do not garner the solutions for a decolonial and just society, but rather this is actualized through post-disciplinary knowledges of First Nations people through ways of being and doing. As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 36) state, decolonization is not an “and”, it is an “elsewhere” that is incommensurable with settler perspectives. Despite attempts by criminologists to decolonize theory through building academic hubs (Carrington, 2021), it is the work of First Nations leadership on the ground that realizes the decolonization of theory. In their critical contribution, Tuck and Yang (2012) state that “decolonization is not a metaphor” (p. 3) for an improved settler society. Instead, decolonization enlivens First Nations' sovereignty, and intellectual and activist contributions, and centres the “context of settler colonialism” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 3). Non-First Nations academics' and activists' solidarity work involves standing up to oppressive power relations in colonized societies and honouring First Nations sovereignty.

Decolonizing criminological theory also must be pursued as an act of First Nations self-determination and resistance to colonialism. The work of Deadly Connections illustrates a reality outside of colonial criminology – the role of First Nations collectives in providing safety, healing, and well-being for their communities despite, and in spite of, carceral interventions. Theory must be attuned to this work on the ground if it is to account for the lived reality of the penal system and to imagine a society beyond it.

Decentring criminological knowledges and institutions: post-disciplinary approaches

The crucial role that First Nations community and culture bring to the well-being, healing, and safety of First Nations peoples and societies is highlighted in the values and knowledges of Deadly Connections. Its work decentres the role of colonial-carceral institutions in our/their lives; the mindset of criminological theory. To use the concept of Edward Said (1993), the work of Deadly Connections creates a “contrapuntal” narrative (p. 66) to account for both colonialism and sites of resistance and First Nations sovereignty and thereby reveals what was once forcibly excluded” (p. 67). We refer to this as post-disciplinary knowledge that is grounded in community and serves to decolonize academic disciplinary theory. Such theory inscribes institutions as the exclusive determinant of social dynamics and change, whereas post-disciplinary approaches, examined through the lens of Deadly Connections, privilege First Nations ways of doing, knowing, and being.

The emphasis of Deadly Connections is on the social, cultural, and emotional well-being and strengths of the First Nations *mob* – a departure from criminology’s concern with risk, crime prevention, and criminogenic needs of First Nations people. Deadly Connections fosters the self-determination of First Nations individuals by creating healing spaces, supporting justice-involved and child-protection-impacted individuals and families, and organizing cultural and social activities for First Nation *jarjums* (children) and young people, including on-Country camps. The holistic and wrap-around approach of Deadly Connections builds on the lived experiences and the knowledges of community and operates within cultural frameworks. Our mission is articulated in terms of embedding “holistic, community-based, decolonizing approaches to connecting First Nations people to their cultural, inner and community strength” (Deadly Connections, 2022b).

The five elements of the Deadly Connections (2022a) model are: holistic, lived experience, self-determination, life course, and healing-centred engagement. Board member, Wiradjuri woman, activist, and scholar Lynda-June Coe explains that “culture and community [are] at the core of who [we] are and what [we] do” (Deadly Connections, 2020a, p. 6). Keenan Mundine (2022) recently wrote that our work is decolonizing in our challenge to dominant principles and practices by centring First Nations methods. A key example of this methodology is the establishment of Girra Girra Place in 2022 to provide culturally safe and supportive accommodation outside of the institutional ‘diversionary’ options. Girra Girra, which has separate men’s and women’s places, was developed by and for First Nations people to strengthen residents on their healing journey (Deadly Connections, 2020a, p. 18). It has a minimum six-month stay and is semi-independent living based on relationships and empowerment between staff who also have lived experience of institutionalization and residents. Girra Girra defies the straitjacket requirements of other diversionary programmes and criminological models that presuppose the solutions for First Nations lives.

Through its work with community, Deadly Connections is acting in its own power to assert First Nations’ collective self-determination. Their work animates Mohawk woman and scholar

Audra Simpson's (2014) concept of Indigenous refusal – refusing to acquiesce, assimilate, be appropriated on colonial terms and simply be ourselves. In contrast to family violence, policing models, and restorative justice practices that are imported from North America and valorized in criminology, the Deadly Connections model is place based. Whether it works with *mob* in urban Sydney or regional central-west New South Wales, it is sensitive to local community and the need to connect kids and families to Country. Decolonial approaches “sit in place” to strengthen First Nations identity and knowledges, whereas colonial criminology seeks erasure of place through its universalizing tendencies (Escobar, 2001, p. 140). Kamillaroi woman, novelist, filmmaker, broadcaster, and Distinguished Professor Larissa Behrendt (2019) notes that “asserting our place in the natural world and in our kinship network [...] is an assertion of sovereignty” (p. 176). A decolonial approach in Australia recognizes the power of First Nations people on place, including the significance of connection to Country for social, emotional and cultural well-being and the enactment of law and jurisdiction (Langton, 2020).

Resisting colonial-carceral institutions beyond the prison: trans-disciplinary

Unlike colonial criminologists, Deadly Connections recognizes the breadth, diversity, and harms of the colonial-carceral archipelago – which includes the carceralism of welfare interventions, diversionary avenues, welfare interventions, and psychiatric treatments. The colonial-carceral archipelago is akin to a camp in Agamben's (1998) sense that it excludes First Nations people from the right to life and legal protections, creating states of exception where the normal rules do not apply. Aboriginal communities are often violated in this way. For example, the police officer who shot and killed Kumanjayi Walker in the Warlpiri town of Yuendumu, expressed that it was like the Wild West, with “f *** all rules” (Park & Butler, 2022). Cameroon-born scholar Achille Mbembe (2003) explains how colonial power enables necropower – the power of death – by exercising “power outside the law” (p. 23) in relation to First Nations people. There are no legal protections, because contrary to the belief of criminologists, the colonial settler law is intent on eliminating First Nations societies. The colonial camp is geared towards structured dispossession, with the goal of “colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development” (Coulthard, 2014, p. 7).

Deadly Connections in its frontline work, programmes, advocacy, and activism responds to the “colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo, 2011, pp. 8/9; Quijano, 2007, p. 168) beyond the prison. Whether inside or outside prisons, colonial oppression is a heavy weight on First Nations people's lives and capacity to exercise self-determination. Racism affects child welfare, education, health care, experiences of rehabilitation, diversion, and policing. Settler colonialism requires “particularized modes of control – prisons, ghettos, minoritizing, schooling, policing – to ensure the ascendancy of a nation and its white elite” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 5). Darumbal/South Sea Islander journalist, scholar, and activist Amy McQuire (2016) observes that “even if you aren't confined by physical walls, sometimes the reality of being Aboriginal in this country can feel like a prison in itself”. Decolonizing criminological theory implores an engagement with colonial logics across various carceral settings.

Speaking truth to power through writing the narrative: anti-disciplinary approaches

As fearless change makers, Deadly Connections leadership and staff confront colonial-carceral institutions without compromise. In their advocacy for *mob*, they expose harms inflicted by child protection authorities, community corrections, prisons and youth detention centres.

This is done through direct action (e.g., speaking at Black Lives Matter rallies and organizing campaigns for people in prison during the pandemic) and through rewriting narratives about experiences of criminalization. Unlike criminologists whose partnerships with penal institutions make them beholden to such institutions, *Deadly Connections* is only accountable to *mob*. Its success is measured by the strength of community and individuals who engage with its programmes and activities. Following on from the documentaries *Incarceration Nation* (2021) and *Unheard* (2021) on penal racism in Australia, in which we (Keenan Mundine and Carly Stanley) retold our stories, Carly Stanley (2021) wrote for *Indigenous X*:

From the time the first fleet arrived, our mob has been controlled under the guise of protection. [...] While the historical era of “protection” has dissipated, such controls have manifested in new forms through our legal systems. The racially driven and carceral nature of missions and reserves was gradually superseded by the institutional growth of the child protection, youth and adult “injustice” systems. Systems that continue to disproportionately inflict violence, disruption and devastation for First Nations people, families and communities.

Throughout the pandemic, *Deadly Connections* has been tenacious in its criticism of inhumane conditions in prisons. It slammed the protracted lockdowns; the suspension of programmes, in-person visits, and employment; and the inadequate healthcare, especially for *mob*, and advocated for the release of people in prison. It did so by sharing the stories of people inside in mainstream, First Nations, and social media; at parliamentary inquiries; and in open letters. It did this alongside its tireless work of providing care for people during community lockdowns. To extend its advocacy and elevate the lived experiences of people in prison, *Deadly Connections* produced a survey of Aboriginal people in prison and their families, which found that 98 percent of people inside experienced detrimental effects to their mental health and well-being during the pandemic (*Deadly Connections*, 2020a). It proved to be a powerful counternarrative and context to the Corrective Services New South Wales’ own, and much narrower, survey that found 80 percent of people inside were happy with the rollout of family video visits during the pandemic (Community and Justice NSW Government, 2020).

In other advocacy work, *Deadly Connections* has made submissions and appeared in parliamentary inquiries on New South Wales deaths in custody, impacts on children of parental incarceration, and judicial impartiality. Its evidence highlights the systemic perpetuation of carceralism in the lives of First Nations people:

the state’s law enforcement model has continually subjugated, segregated and harmed First Nations people since the early period of colonisation. Collectively, these experiences and state interventions have meant that First Nations peoples have principally been dominated by, and had decisions made for them by non-Aboriginal decision-makers and society.

(*Deadly Connections*, 2020b, p. 10/11)

By rewriting narratives, *Deadly Connections* is exposing the partiality of positivist approaches to criminology and its complicity in the colonization of First Nations people. It provides a counterpoint to the stereotypes in criminology about justice-involved First Nations people and identifies the harms of institutionalization. It challenges the dominant narratives and provides narratives by First Nations people. This is a feature of its Bugmy Justice Report project. These reports for criminal sentencing change the criminological imagination from criminogenic risks and needs to the humanity and dignity of the person and centring the person’s own words. This project involves yarning with the First Nations person over several sessions and speaking

to family and community supports to tell the person's life story on their terms and highlight their strengths, and connections with family, culture, and community. Reports place the person within histories of colonization and systemic racism and emphasize the person's strengths and sacrifices in the face of oppression. Additionally, reports outline cultural supports, healing, and well-being strategies for the person in community, including with the ongoing involvement of Deadly Connections on their journey, which may include, for instance, placement at Girra Girra.

Through First Nations storytelling and advocacy, Deadly Connections is disrupting the "control-freak discipline" of Criminology that authorizes only a narrow set of methods and ideas, as Biko Agozino (2003) argues. Deadly Connections' narratives offset deficit depictions of First Nations people as offenders or passive victims and portray them in terms of their humanity, cultural connections, and resilience. Ojibwe woman Dr Heidi Kiiwetinepinesik Stark (2016) asserts that settler colonies cast "Indigenous men and women as savage peoples in need of civilization and constructing Indigenous lands as lawless spaces absent legal order" (p. 1) to justify colonial law. Deadly Connections tells another story – a story of strengths – demonstrating that First Nations power resists injustice and builds community. Deadly Connections' experience reveals how self-determination is a means for decolonization and a pathway out of carceral thinking and doing.

Conclusion

Through building community and pushing back on carceral institutions, Deadly Connections enacts decolonization. It refuses to conform to criminological tropes of First Nations people as statistics, offenders, and passive victims or to accept that carceral institutions serve First Nations people. The everyday practice of Deadly Connections furthers claims to sovereignty and disrupts the colonial criminological narrative that is bent on the control and confinement of First Nations people and the non-recognition of First Nations laws and justice processes. Where criminology contributes to colonial logics of dispossession, Deadly Connections rises up in collective action to empower First Nations people. Its work to heal, strengthen, and create self-determination for individuals and families lays the foundation for First Nations justice-making. The poetry of Jason Tighe Fong (2022), Kamilaroi man, incarceration survivor, and co-founder of Beyond the Bars Art, reflects on how justice is conceived through struggle and transforming the justice system:

We conceive justice
where there's more positive support networks
for any country brother in the city
thinkin they alone, no self-worth
the same for city brothers on country earth
yes, we will conceive justice
and will keep seeking justice
till that brighter day
when finally, maybe just finally
justice can and will conceive us (p. 7)

This chapter has advanced that decolonizing criminological theory must be constituted and informed by ongoing activism. Frantz Fanon (1991) emphasized that struggles on the ground give meaning to decolonization, rather than formal acts of state. As some of us have articulated

elsewhere, decolonization is a “verb rather than a noun” (Blagg & Anthony, 2019, p. 325) that requires continual refusal and resistance to the colonial system, including its disciplinary weapon of criminology. A three-pronged response to criminology is an enduring challenge: engaging First Nations epistemologies of law and justice and lived experience of carceral institutions (*post-disciplinary* approaches); a broad elucidation of colonial–carceral logics across various sites of confinement and oppression (*trans-disciplinary* approaches); and resistance to positivist criminology methods and institutions (*anti-disciplinary* approaches). As we have shown through centring the contributions of Deadly Connections, decolonial theory honours the lived struggles of First Nations people and the frontline work of organizations. Decolonizing criminology theories is, therefore, not simply about new theories but about engaging a decolonial praxis that translates ideas from and into practice.

Notes

- 1 The term refers to Nations people associated with a particular place or country. It can represent a family group, clan group or wider community group.
- 2 Lock hospitals were used to quarantine First Nations people in the first half of the twentieth century. Police would force First Nations people into these hospitals, which were purportedly for people with disease. However, it was common for First Nations people without disease to be forced into these hospitals to hasten their deaths. See Munro (2014, 48).

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