

Cops Don't Keep Us Safe: When Survival Is Made Criminal

Speakers: Aviah Sarah Day (ASD) - Sisters Uncut; Melissa (M) - SOAS Detainee Support; Niki Adams (NA) - English Collective of Prostitutes; Ru (R) - London Campaign Against police And State Violence; Kelsey M (KM) - Sisters Uncut; Empty Cages.

In May 2019 SWARM hosted a three day festival involving panel discussions across a wide range of topics that impact on sex workers, and that connect and intersect with sex worker rights organising and broader struggles for justice.

This recording is from that festival.

00:00:00 ASD My name is Aviah Day. I'm part of Sisters Uncut, and welcome to this panel, 'Cops Don't Keep Us Safe: When Survival Is Made Criminal.' It just seems like there's never been such an important time to have this conversation. The fact that the prison population has more than doubled over the last twenty years, the fact that eighty per cent of those in women's prisons are survivors of domestic or sexual violence, on top of that, fifty per cent of those who are incarcerated children are from the care system, and recently it's come out in the press that private prisons are exponentially more violent than public prisons. It seems like a really important time to start having these conversations and start talking about the intersections between violence, survival and the prison industrial complex. So welcome to this really sick panel, where we're going to start unpicking that. Hey! You alright? So, we've got, Kelsey, from Sisters Uncut and Empty Cages. We've got R, from London Campaign Against Police and State Violence. We've got Niki, from English Collective of Prostitutes. And we've got Melissa, from SOAS Detainee Support. And I going to let them

introduce themselves and the organisations that they come from. So, first of all, do you want to... are you ready to start, or do you want...? [Laughs]

00:01:28 ? Do you want to start on that end?

00:01:29 ASD Yeah! [laughs] We'll start maybe with Melissa. Do you want to pass that down? If you just tell us, each of you, give a little introduction of who you are, what's your name and where do you come from? [Laughs]

00:01:40 M Hi, my name's Melissa. I am representing SOAS Detainee Support on this panel. We are a group that supports people in immigration detention, so people who are locked up because they don't have the correct immigration status in the UK. So what we do as a group is we visit people who are in detention and provide them with emotional support and case work support. And we basically try and get them out of detention and try and not get them deported, because that happens a lot. So, yeah, that's what I'm going to be speaking about loosely, and how that relates to prisons, and how cops are absolutely fucking terrible for everybody, but specifically for immigrants.

00:02:27 Niki Yeah, I'm Niki. I'm replacing Laura, because we had to move around a bit, because a couple of us were ill. I'm really glad to be on this panel first of all just because to put together the whole issue of policing and survival, and the criminalisation of survival, I think is really needed. The English Collective of Prostitutes is a long-standing sex worker organisation—back from the seventies actually, we started—and we're a group a women working both on the street and in premises, women from different backgrounds, and non-binary people. And we do a lot of day-to-day support and advice on issues like trying to report violence, what to do when you're raided, arrested, persecuted on the street, which of course particularly targets migrant sex workers, and especially now in the wake of Brexit, that has really increased. And so, we try to focus on kind of practical ways to deal with that kind of situation in the context of campaigning for decriminalisation and for economic alternatives, so that we can get out of prostitution if we want to.

00:03:49 R Thanks. I'm Ru. I organise with a group called the London Campaign Against Police and State Violence. We're actually mostly based in South London, unfortunately, for people based in North London. But we organise against mostly

racialised police violence—so, things around stop and search. We do 'know your rights' training sessions. We support people making complaints against the police—not that we believe that making complaints against the police allows people to get access to justice, but more so to demonstrate how inherently messed up the system is. And we do outreach stalls, meetings, and support other campaigns that are organising against state violence, where we may not have the kind of resources and capacity do it ourselves.

00:04:35 KM Hi, I'm Kelsey. Sorry about being really late! So I'm part of Sisters Uncut, and also the Empty Cages Collective. I came to this organising through like an anti-violence perspective, and that's where Sisters Uncut also started and what they're focused on in terms of... Sisters Uncut was started as a response to austerity cuts to domestic violence services, but as politics and as our learning has developed, we've looked more and more at the criminal justice system and the ways that survivors themselves are criminalised. And the more that we've developed that kind of intersectional thinking, it's been really clear that in order to fight for survivors, particularly who are people of colour, we have to look very critically at the criminal justice system, and the violence that the state perpetrates itself, and all of the ways that survival and just existing is criminalised. So, with the Empty Cages Collective, we're a prison abolitionist group, and we run workshops and campaigns around prison abolition and supporting people to start campaigns around various issues from an abolitionist perspective. So, for example, we're at the moment working around these secure schools that they're starting to build, which are new children's prisons, and there are various groups who are, you know, it's really obvious that the people who are affected by criminalisation and incarceration at a very young age are people who are excluded from education, people who are from backgrounds that are disadvantaged by these societal structures. And so, people are being criminalised from a really young age just for existing. Yeah, and I can talk a bit more about that later, but that's kind of what we're focusing on at the moment, and that's what I'm doing.

00:06:42 ASD Cool, thank you. So, I'm going to ask the panellists a few questions to kind of unpick some of these ideas that we've touched on already, and then we're going to go to the audience and get you to ask some questions to our panellists. So first off, one question I have is, what are some of the ways in which you see survival

being criminalised? So you've touched on it a little bit, but if you could go into a little bit more detail. Maybe we can start with Niki. How is survival criminalised?

00:07:14 NA Well, the fact—I mean, most, as has been said in the previous panel, people go into sex work for survival. I mean, they have this whole inquiry at the moment in parliament called, 'An Inquiry Into Survival Sex', and when they asked us about giving evidence, it was like they were expecting us to distinguish between people that were working for survival, and the rest of us, which is absurd because everybody's working for survival, and usually the decision to go into sex work is because it's your best option out of a set of very bad options. That's true of most of us. And the fact is, is that, those levels of prostitution have massively, massively risen in the last, well, since 2010, since the austerity cuts, which have mainly targeted women—eighty-six per cent of the cuts have targeted women—and what we've seen from our organisation is a really big rise, particularly of mothers, going into sex work to support themselves and families. But also, people going back into sex work who had managed to get out or having to work much more frequently and in more riskier situations. And the laws, as they stand at the moment, criminalise you if you work on the street and also together in premises. And then there's a whole raft of other laws, like the trafficking law that is particularly used to raid, arrest and deport migrant sex workers. And things like the social orders, the Anti-Social Behaviour Orders, and the Public Space Protection Orders, have now kind of imposed another whole massive raft of measures that are used to criminalise people. And it's been sneaky in some ways because the authorities have been able to say, "Oh, well, actually loitering and soliciting prosecutions have gone down," well that's because ASBOs—I mean, they're not called ASBOs now—but all that kind of raft of anti-social behaviour civil orders have increased a lot, and they think that it's so insignificant that they don't even keep figures on how many people, how many sex workers have been caught under those orders, and what has been the impact on people's lives. So people are now going to prison for breaching an order which is a civil order, and they bring it in with hardly any evidence that's needed whatsoever—it's virtually the word of a single police officer—but then if you breach it, you face a prison sentence. So that's happening on the one hand, and then in relation to people working inside premises, they've also said that brothel keeping prosecutions have reduced, but it's not even true, because what they do now is they just come round and they say, "If you're not out of the premises within three days, we're going to arrest you." So of course, what happens, everybody moves on. So even though there may not be an

official prosecution, you know, literally thousands of thousands of mainly women, but others as well, are being targeted under the criminal justice system, and hundreds of cautions are being given out in some areas. We keep figures, we keep a, we do a bulletin regularly, which is really useful because if you look at the national figures, they say that for prostitute cautions it's maybe a hundred a year, whereas if you count as they're happening, you'll find that a hundred have been given out in just Ilford. And I don't think Ilford counts as the whole of the UK. So, you can really see how they're slipping and sliding, pretending, trying to maintain this idea that policing is aimed at helping and supporting sex workers, that sex workers are somehow going to be characterised as victims and not prosecuted. But in fact, the actual reality is something very different.

00:10:57 ASD Yeah, that sounds absolutely atrocious. Actually, I live near Ilford, and it's one of the most horrible and reactionary places when it comes to sex work. Such a dangerous place for sex workers to be, honestly. Melissa, do you want to answer that? The question was, "What are some of the ways in which survival is criminalised?"

00:11:16 M Yeah. So one of the most in-your-face ways that survival is criminalised for immigrants is the hostile environment, wherein that makes everything impossible if you don't have the correct paperwork if you need to have right to rent. So, even if you somehow have all the money to pay London wages in your bank account, you're not allowed to do that unless you have documentation that your landlords are now obligated by law to check, and the government has made a really lovely website for people to sign on to it to check whether or not papers are legitimate. The same goes with studying, the same thing goes with accessing any sort of healthcare. Hospitals and GPs now are asked, and there are some organisations doing some really amazing work around this, but it is now law to have to ask for papers when accessing healthcare. The same thing goes for working, which is, like, one of the most necessary things in order to survive is to make money because we live under capitalism. And if you don't have the right papers, then you're not allowed to work. Which isn't to say that people don't work, because obviously people do work; they end up in precarious, exploitative labour. People getting paid £3 an hour to clean toilets in nightclubs, or getting paid £5 an hour for a twenty-four hour carer shift. It's often women of colour that are doing this kind of labour, and it's often women of colour that end up doing sex work because they make more money than

getting paid £3 an hour for cleaning toilets. And the way that this is all criminalised, it doesn't even need cops most of the time. Like, I know the panel is called, 'Cops Don't Keep Us Safe'—which they don't—but like, oftentimes you won't even face a cop, because the government is so focused on making ordinary people border agents. You know, you go into a school and the school asks you where you were born and give that data over to the Home Office. You go into a hospital, and they ask you for your passport. You try and find somewhere to rent, and again they're like, "What kind of visa do you have? And when does it expire? And how did you get it?" So even before entering the criminal justice system, or facing cops, like even before immigrants face cops, which is something I'm going to talk about more later, you have all of these barriers that are pushing you into the margins of society, and labour that is exploitative and insecure, and housing where you end up having six people sharing one room in a three-bedroom flat where every other room also has six people. And that's even before reaching the police or ending up in detention or all of these things that further criminalise your existence. There's also the idea of—one thing that I wanted to mention about what happens when you do end up in the criminal justice system, is the idea of being a foreign national offender. So this is a government term for somebody who is not from here and has committed a crime. If you are... if you end up in prison for more than twelve months, then you are immediately liable for deportation, no matter what your crime was, no matter if you've been here all your life, or even if you are a refugee from a place that it's unsafe to go to. And so, lots of people end up having a twelve-month prison sentence, and then immediately from there transferred into detention where they face imminent deportation.

00:14:49 ASD Ru, do you want to [inaudible 00:14:51]?

00:14:53 R Yeah. Thank you. I'm unfortunately going to start with a tiny history lesson. So, the Metropolitan Police, for those that don't know, was founded around the late 1820s; so quite late in the day, not a thing that existed since feudal times. And a thing that existed when slavery was abolished—that was around, what, 17 something. Obviously not a good history teacher. Don't worry, I don't teach children. Around the time that slavery was abolished, people that were slaves were then called apprentices, and they continued to work on plantations in the colonies, and instead of plantation owners being the ones that enforced the law for these slaves, the state employed a set of individuals that were like judiciary and basically cops to continue to

control the behaviour of people that were formally enslaved who, under the law, were free, but they were still apprentices working on this plantation. So when they were doing things like taking too long doing something, or you know not doing something to a particular standard, they were still facing punishment. The reason I'm talking about that is because we can see when we're talking about survival being criminalised—and Melissa made the point of people's existence being criminalised—the very formulation now has arisen out of slavery logic and colonialism. And that's really important to think about, because especially when you're thinking about reforming the police versus abolishing the police, fundamentally the police are never going to exist in a way that isn't inherently violent, specifically to people that are racialised as non-white, but certainly to working class communities, survivors of violence, people that have a precarious immigration status, because foundationally how it's built. So—sorry, to go back to the 1800s—so the police were formed in Britain, I think the first police force was in Glasgow and then London, and the Met kind of became the blueprint for how we see policing in this country now. So, where it was these informal networks before, mostly protecting property and kind of merchants and making sure people didn't get robbed, and that then became a kind of formalised structure that was enforced by the state through a series of successive legislation. And we know that the police, from its beginnings, was about protecting property, and specifically rich people's property, and it was specifically about enforcing social order for communities that are considered to be disordered, inherently disordered. So, certainly, migrant communities again, racialised working class communities, there's never going to be a way in which those of us that exist in these spaces are not going to be a threat to the police because it's inscribed on our bodies, especially for those of us that aren't white. So, anyway, talking about how existence is then criminalised, thinking about this imperialist history, and then how it has kind of fed into the policing that we see now, we have the sus laws, which were a way of being able to stop somebody if they looked like they might be able to, they might be about to perpetrate a crime. They got rid of that around the '80s, and then what we saw in the '90s was introducing stop and search laws, which was inherently pretty much the same as sus, but they had a few more rules about it, so outwardly it looked a bit different. And what we're seeing now is obviously returning very much to that kind of punitive, you know, young black people, specifically young black boys can't go out in public without being stopped and harassed wherever they're going, and regardless of age, right? We know there's organisation like Stop Watch that do a lot of work around stop and search, where they have had research that finds that

young people as young, well, you know, below the age of ten, eight years old, being harassed by cops from a very young age. What does that mean for those people, that form of physical violence that police represent? The sexual violence, like being man-handled by police in public, and also the kind of psychic violence, like what does it mean when you know it's not safe for you to go outside? And again, I'm speaking about it through the prism of people that are non-white and racialised, and specifically black communities, but it's exactly the same for sex workers, it's the same for someone who's 00:18:57 a precarious migrant. There's spaces, there's ways in which police control our ability to exist in the outside world. So, yeah, I mean, just to really reiterate, it's not just about survival being criminalised, but it's inherent in the existence, being criminalised—and I will get a chance to talk about this later—but when you understand that is why the police exist, and why, and the logic in which policing exists, I think it makes it much easier for us to understand that we can't just be reforming the police, because they will never be accountable to us. We have to abolish the police. But we can get on to that later.

00:19:35 KM I mean, I think all of you have covered a lot of the main parts of the aspects of survival being criminalised. I guess the only thing I could add is around the way that all of these people who are more vulnerable to that criminalisation also then makes them more vulnerable to interpersonal violence, and that feeds into then being trapped in violent relationships, and that it just all kind of feeds into itself. So the more marginalised you are, the more you are likely to be in precarious housing, therefore unlikely to find different housing if you need that space because there is violent people there; more likely to experience violence within the workplace, or exploitation, all of these things, because of your precarious living circumstances. And the way that the state is responsible for creating that experience for so many people, because of the criminal justice system, as Ru made the point, the point is not to protect us. The point is to force and control marginalised people, and that means that experience of violence, whether you've been criminalised yet or not, is in your kind of daily life. And the more that we have discussions, and more research, and all of that that comes out about the experiences of violence, of women of colour particularly, as well as trans and non-binary people, is that, when they're not supported by the state, obviously you are more likely to be trapped in those situations, but you're also more likely to then—basically, the people who have been criminalised for murder and homicide, who are held in women's prisons particularly, are very often people who have been in abusive relationships for a very long time. And the criminal justice

system does not allow for a nuanced understanding of that kind of violence, and what self-defence is. And so, people are just branded as violent, people are branded as criminals, from just based on their identity, and not actually on what has happened to them in their lives and who they actually are. If that makes sense? I'm a little bit all over the place, here. Yeah, I think I'm going to stop there, because we have more.

00:21:56 ASD Yeah, so I'm going to go into some questions more about prison abolition and abolition politics, which some of you have touched on, maybe starting with Melissa. Can you say like what is the value you see in prison abolition, or the abolition of policing, and how is it relevant to your work with SOAS Detainee Support?

00:22:19 M So, yeah, just to start with the very simple fact that just prisons don't work. Like even using the sort of narrative and logic of nation states and governments, the point of prisons in their eyes is to sort of, you know, "You've done a bad thing. Don't do that bad thing again." But that doesn't happen. Like, they're not, prisons aren't a place of healing, they're not a place of reforming, if that's language you want to use. Like, you don't just end up in prison and then, all of a sudden, all of your problems that led you to do the thing that you did are gone, and great, you're a functioning member of capitalist society. That doesn't happen. So just even using that logic, like abolish prisons, do things differently. In terms of SOAS Detainee Support—SDS—where I work, it's... we don't think, we are abolitionists in every sense. We don't think there should be borders, and therefore we don't think there should be detention because what is the point of locking somebody up for not having the right papers. It's almost as... it's ludicrous. And the thing about immigration detention is that, you know, supposedly you get charged with the crime and you do sort of, there's a process, and you end up in prison. But the process is bullshit, but you at least you've had a process. When you are put in immigration detention, there is nothing. A border guard finds you, either because you are working without papers and somebody's reported you, or you've reported a crime to the police, and the police have asked for your papers, which something I'm going to touch on later, or through loads of different ways. And they find you and they say, "Oh, well, you're now in detention." And then it is your responsibility to prove that you're not supposed to be there. So it's the opposite of... it is literally guilty, and then you have to prove that you're innocent. Why? And also, even using the Home Office's logic, the point of detention is that you're there because deportation is imminent. You're supposed to

be kept there because they have a plan to send you back to wherever it is they want to send you back to. But, in practice, people are in detention for months, sometimes years. Even using their own logic, that doesn't make any sense. It doesn't make any sense to lock somebody up for eighteen months because deportation is imminent, when if you haven't been deported in eighteen months, deportation is clearly not imminent. We don't think, we think detention should be abolished, because it makes no sense, in any way, no matter how you look at it. And, like Kelsey was saying, the people who end up in detention—well, she said prison, but like the same thing with detention—you don't just end up in detention. I am an immigrant myself, and the likelihood of me ending up in detention is really, really, really low, and that's because I have access to lots of, I am not, you know, I didn't flee a war-torn country, and I didn't experience the kinds of violence that the people in detention experience. I speak fluent English. There's lots of things that end up making you more marginalised and therefore ending up in detention, and then when you're released from detention, that has a massive impact on you, as a person, and in your ability to just continue on with your life. If you're whole existence has been criminalised, and you've just had this sort of stint in this—I mean, we call it detention to make a difference between being in prison for a crime, and being in prison for detention, but it is basically a prison. Like, it's, you're not allowed to leave, and you're locked up in there, so it's prison. The only difference is, you know, you have access to a computer, and you get to have a basic phone—you don't even get a smartphone. [Laughs] So, yeah, I mean, going back to the question of what we believe, why we believe in abolitionism, it's because we believe that you should not lock people up, regardless of their immigration status, regardless of what crime they've committed.

00:26:19 ASD I often wonder if thinking about detention is quite, hopefully, sometimes a good way of thinking about abolition generally, because detention, the way in which immigrants are detained, and how much more criminalised they are, like that's happened really, really quickly, and it's not like much has changed about society as a result of heavily criminalising. And that's happened in people's lifetimes, that in living memory. So I often wonder if maybe talking about abolition through the prism of detention and how much has changed so quickly in that respect, and what difference has it really made.

00:26:56 M It's also a more palatable way of getting people to, sort of, pushing people toward abolitionism, because you can say things like, "These people aren't

criminals”, which to me makes no difference, but these people aren’t criminals, they’re literally just people who are trying to live their lives, they haven’t committed—because, you know, one of the biggest questions that people ask when you talk about prison abolition is, “What about the murderers? And what about the rapists? What do we do with them?” And that’s a whole other question, but it’s like, okay, but these people aren’t murderers and rapists, they’re just people trying to live their lives. And you’re right that, if you link that, and you can say to people, “But actually there are people who’ve literally done nothing wrong who are currently in a prison,” then that’s a nice sort of easier way to get people to want to burn everything down, which is the main aim 00:27:49.

00:27:49 ASD Hopefully. Niki?

00:27:55 NA Sorry, I don’t quite know where to start.

00:27:55 ASD Do you want me to repeat the question?

00:27:56 NA No, I don’t. It’s just I’m distracted by the whole detention thing, because I actually do a lot of work with women asylum seekers, the All Africa Women’s Group is based at our women’s centre, and I do work with Legal Action for Women, and we’ve done a self-help guide and we have a lot of kind of self-help collective workshops. And, I’ve been distracted by the issue of detention, and I’m supposed to be in the sex work bit, but—

00:28:19 ASD You can do both!

00:28:19 NA —there is a lot of overlap, obviously, and I think one of the things that really strikes me, I suppose, on the question of abolition: yes, absolutely, we are for the abolition of prisons, as we are for an end to detention, as we are for an end to prostitution. And before I get quoted, saying I’m an abolitionist, I mean in the context in of the end of all work, you know, in that way, of us all having to sell our bodies and our time, which happen to be our lives, in order to survive. And I think the question for us as a movement is, how do you get from here to there? In a way—and the first thing has to be is that you have to be focused on building a movement, and insuring the people are able to be as active on their own behalf as possible. And it’s an issue that you’re always wrestling with because if you go out there and say, okay... you

make your most uncompromising demand, you, sometimes it's not even relevant practically to the situation that people are in, and sometimes what you're ending up having to do is really focus on ensuring that people are strengthened, but also that people stay alive while we're fighting. And so, I know with the whole issue of the restorative justice movement, I think there is a question there about the fact that it's being kind of envisaged under capitalism, and that is really problematic because what do you challenge? You have to start by challenging who gets even labelled a criminal in the first place. Why is Sir Phillip Green not in prison? You know, why is Tony Blair not in prison? Why are we in prison and not them? Kind of thing. So, but practically, in terms of how it impacts on us, we do campaign for safety. And we have actually actively campaigned to put a rapist in jail. Not just one, many, over the years. And we actually took a private prosecution because the Crown Prosecution Service refused to prosecute against a serial rapist who was attacking women at knife point, and they dropped the case. And the guy of course was let out of prison and came back to try to attack women, threatened their family, and they came to us, and we took—with Women Against Rape—we took a private prosecution. It was a massive piece of work, and it was a very educative process, because at some point the people who were most on our side was some local police officer who actually thought that it was pretty outrageous that violent men were allowed to stay free and attack sex workers. He was a creep, and demanded free sex from sex workers, so you know not a comrade, by any means [laughs]. But that's what we had to do in order to deal with that situation because, you know, the previous the previous panel spoke about how, one of the questions was about the project workers saying that sex workers, who are in the most chaotic situations—I never quite know what that means; I think they would consider me to be pretty chaotic—but you know don't really want decriminalisation. But actually, sex workers do want decriminalisation, and how we express it is we express it in many different ways. And sometimes we say, "I want the police off my back. I don't want the police out there, waiting for me, strip-searching me in the street, racially abusing me, the rest of it," or "I want to be able to work together with a friend," or "I want justice when I come forward and report this violence," or "I want that rapist in jail." And that is all part of our movement for change, and I think that we have to—but I think what we're looking for is we're looking for levers of power or a step that takes us in the right direction, and some of what is proposed as preliminary goals or intermediary steps I do not think does that. So, for example, the voluntary sector demand for a limit to twenty-eight days in detention, I think is a regressive step. I think it's behind where the movement is at,

which is demanding an end to detention, and I think that it is a proposal that's put forward that does not, that leaves the whole of the detention estate and all the corruption and profiteering that that embodies in place. And it is one of those—people spoke about demands being dictated by funding priorities, and you really feel that that's one. You feel like it's the one that people have gone to their funders for and said, "We've found an achievable aim." And I think that our job as a movement is to clarify when a so-called intermediary step is going to take us in the right direction and actually address the concrete situations that we're in, and keep us safe, and keep us alive, while we fight for something better, and the demands that take us backwards and undermine our movement.

00:33:20 ASD I've got a slightly different question for Ru and Kelsey on the question of abolition. So what are the alternatives to prisons and policing, and how do we build them? And I guess another personal question is, when we're talking about abolition, are we talking about revolution? Is the language of abolition kind of... is that what that means? Is that, you know, is the language of abolition kind of replacing revolution? Revolutionary language? Or... yeah.

00:33:48 R Okay, so things we can do. First of all, yeah, what about the rapists? I used to get so annoyed, because people would always say, "Oh, what do you mean, like, you're just going to let the rapists roam free." And I actually I think we should start with the difficult arguments first, and we shouldn't go for the easy ones of, "These people aren't criminals," or whatever. Let's go for the people that we think are criminals. Do we think rapists are in prison at it is? No. What is the conviction rate for sexual violence? It's like four per cent? Six per cent, right? So, people that perpetrate rape are already not in prison. People that are powerful are already not in prison. People that perpetrate violence against masses of people who are deemed to be not important by societal standards are already not in prison, so this system already doesn't work. So when we're talking about abolition, especially when someone makes that dickhead point, it doesn't work anyway, so what are you actually talking about? What people are actually talking about is, "But policing and prisons protect this like sense of safety that I feel I have," and obviously we know that sense of safety is classed, it's racialised, and it's obviously gendered. When we're talking about policing—and to get on to solutions, but really quickly—when we're talking about policing—and Melissa made this point—police don't just exist, or immigration enforcement, like on the street, they don't just exist going around in vans, they exist

in schools, they exist in healthcare, we have NGOs that collaborate with them—the point that Niki was alluding to. So when we're talking about abolition, we're not just talking about, "You just get rid of a prison," or "You just get rid of the police," it means radically transforming everything about how we operate as a society now to get to a point where the thought of having police and the thought of having prisons doesn't even make sense. So, again, another really irritating question I always get is, "Oh, what do you mean? We're just going to get rid of the police tomorrow?" If only! I wish! That's not going to happen. What is going to happen is, what we're building towards, what groups like ours are doing, is building the foundations for what we want to see in the future. So we're envisioning the future that we want to have, whether that comes through mutual aid, so the sort of support that a lot of us are doing, whether that comes through building accountability into our movements, which we haven't even touched on, but we have to reproduce the sort of behaviours that we want to see in the world. We're talking about restorative justice; one of the reasons that doesn't work often is because it's about a transactional exchange. A lot of people talk about transformative justice, like completely reimagining the models, not in this punitive way when we're talking about accountability, but also making sure those structures actually work, where there are consequences for things that people do. Because certainly on the left, there's a lot of ways in which people use transformative justice to basically let their friends get away with doing really shit. And what we need to do is actually talk about, what is accountability, which isn't just a punitive way of punishing people, but actually say that, when you do things that harm people, there is going to be something that happens as a result of that. So, yeah, when we're talking about abolition, I just really want to stress, there's a lot—I mean, in America, this kind of thinking is a lot more advanced than here, which I think there's specific reasons about the violence being so evident there. Not that it's worse than here, but it's just so much more evident that people are able to theorise around it more. But people talk about abolition as building something that's positive; we're building a future. Let's not talk about abolition as taking something away, but actually, radical transformation—what does that mean? What are the steps that we have to put in place? And sorry, yeah, really quickly, best ways to do that now would be accountability, refusals to engage with police—there's already groups that do that, but when something happens and the crime has been perpetrated against someone, actually think about whether calling the police is going to make them feel less safe or not, and more safe, rather, or not. Setting up mutual aid groups, around housing, around things, like sex work or precarious immigration, or policing. Sharing tips on

how to evade police surveillance, which of course doesn't just happen on protests; it happens on social media, it happens through a lot of things that people take for granted. Think about who's at risk when you're sharing people's details, even for an event like this. Getting—if you're part of a union, or part of the Labour Party—I'm not judging you—but you can do things within that. You can be disaffiliate—pushing those groups that disaffiliate with policing groups. There's certain unions that represent police; think, get them to think more critically about what they're doing there. And community self-defence—that's what we do as a group—and actually supporting people to mobilise against police violence. And really quickly, just to finish with, someone that I go on about a lot: Marion Kärber 00:38:12, an American organiser around police violence and transformative justice. If you haven't heard me rabbit on about her, or if you have, don't already read her stuff, go and look it up. But she makes a really important point, which is there are already communities that exist that live in an abolitionist society. They happen to be powerful, they happen to have money, they happen to be white. They're the sort of communities where they can get accountability when something is perpetrated against them. They can mobilise policing logics and policing support. When someone is a victim of violence, or suffers with mental health issues, they can get access to the support that people struggle to get from the state. So when we're talking about abolition as well, let's make it really important to stress that there are already people living that future that we want to see, they're just not the rest of us. They're usually the people that have the resources to do it. So anyway, yeah, abolition, think about it more positively and get rid of the police.

00:39:07 ASD Kelsey, you've got like four, five minutes before we open it up to our questions.

00:39:11 KM I mean, thank you for that. That was very comprehensive, and really, really insightful. Yeah! In terms of abolition, yeah, I think you're absolutely right, it's about thinking about the transformative approaches and the creative solutions that we can take. And when we're talking about, when people ask us about, "What about the rapists? What about the murderers?" And it is about... people are worried about violence, people are worried about their safety, and there's certain people who already feel supported by those structures, and there's certain people who've been existing without the support of those structures this entire time. And those people, regardless of whether you want to get rid of the police or not, those people still need

support, and I think we don't talk about healing and what that looks like enough. And I think often what we do... what we look at with criminal justice solutions and punishment is that's the framework we use for how we're going to take an issue seriously, and we really need to question that punitive thinking in the ways that we take things seriously, because often, when I've had these discussions with people who are trying to work on hate crime legislation and these kinds of things that are like, "Oh, well, so if this is a crime, then this needs to be a crime, because otherwise I don't feel like misogyny is taken as seriously as racism," or "disablism isn't being taken as seriously," but actually what we know is that if those people are at risk of violence, they're also at risk of state violence, and the police are not the people who are going to be the ones to help them. So criminalising that is not actually going to lead to support. What we've seen with misogyny, hate crime legislation, is there is a slight rise in reporting, but no more convictions, because people are not going to be going to prison for cat-calling, and that's not a productive use of our resources. What we need to do is to shift the culture that makes people think that it's okay to just yell sexual things at you for no reason. You know, all of these things, like why are these behaviours happening in the first place, why is violence happening in the first place. Criminal justice and prisons and policing do not answer any of those questions; they just feed into a binary of there's good people and there's bad people, there's people who perpetrate violence, and we know that those lines are actually not as clear as we want them to be. And that people behave in certain ways because of their experiences and the conditions that they are living in, and they make choices that are informed by a culture that creates violence, that creates rapists, that creates murderers, all of these things. And so, we need to really look at unpicking our own punitive logics that we use in schooling, in parenting, all of these things, and we need to think about what healing actually looks like. I think like a really clear example of this, if I have time to quickly share an anecdote that I think really visually summed this up for me, was that there's some CCTV footage where you see someone, a women, being cat-called by a man; she responds, basically tells him to 'fuck off'—I assume we can swear here—and essentially, he gets violent, and this is all on CCTV outside of a café. As soon as he gets violent, and then starts walking away, everyone at the café gets up and walks to the perpetrator and starts telling him off, trying to restrain him, trying to stop him. But in that moment the woman is just standing there on her own, and it's just like it was a really clear sort of visual example of how criminal justice and how our ideas of we want to show that we're really concerned that someone has been hurt, we're really concerned that someone has

been violent, but we don't finish that thought and think about that person has been violent and so that person has been harmed, and what can we do about that harm. And I think even sometimes our own punitive impulses are that this person has hurt me, so I want them to suffer. That's not necessarily what makes us feel better, and that's not necessarily what justice will look like in the end because sometimes you know people do get convictions and they don't always find that that is actually the end of their trauma. And what we need to look at is long-term trauma support, what we need to look at is ways that we can heal and ways that we can prevent violence in the first place. And I don't think the criminal justice system is really answering any of that. And we're actually putting so many resources into it! Like, I hate economic arguments, but even if you were to look at that, like the amount of money and resources that is spent on policing and prisons and all of this compared to the cuts that we've seen and the under-resourcing of all of our welfare services, all of our trauma support services, mental health services, and even just community spaces, housing, all of these things. Abolition—this is what I mean about an abolitionist perspective to all kinds of campaigns as well, is that you can be an abolitionist whether you're fighting within racial justice and feminism and the obvious things, but also in housing, in mental health, in healthcare, in education, all of these things can be done from a abolitionist perspective. And we can be not feeding in to criminal justice narratives, and good and bad people narratives, all of that. We can be hyper aware of that within our campaigns, regardless of what the topic is, and that will lead to the ultimate abolition. And also like, what you were saying is like—to quote Angela Davies—the obsolescence of prisons, right, is to create a world where they're not looked at as a solution, because we have all of these other things in place.

00:44:55 ASD Yeah. Thank you very much. Thank you for quoting Angela Davies.

00:44:58 KM Yeah, always.

00:44:58 ASD You're new friend. [laughs]

00:44:59 KM Our good friend.

00:45:01 ASD So, I'm going to open it up to questions from the audience. Don't be shy. The panellists are very kind. Everyone get your hands up really, really high because I can't really see that well. Yeah, anyone else as well? Yeah? Do you want

to start here and there? Yeah? And can I just point out that if anyone knows these panellists by other names than are on here, please just use the names that they've written on there. So I've got Melissa, Niki, Ru and Kelsey.

00:45:31 Q1 Yeah, so I've got a friend that basically came to London from Pakistan and started, studied, did a Masters, then after they'd done studying, they had to find work, found work, was going, was sponsorship, was going through the Home Office process. Thing was that the supervisor who was responsible for getting her sponsorship was basically sexually harassing people in the office and was—really wanted her to be his girlfriend. And it got to the point where he actually lied on her form to the Home Office, so basically said that she'd been doing forty hours a week, when in fact she'd been doing thirty-eight hours a week, and that put her just below the threshold where she gets... So, anyway I found it really kind of—well, it's ironic that she's come to a country that supposed to be better for women, and then is being treated this way. But yes, so she lost her right to work and she's not sure what's going to happen, and I just wondered if there's any resources I should direct her to or, and how she might, who she might complain to about that case, basically?

00:46:52 M Yeah, that sounds like every other case that I hear every other day when I'm working. Unfortunately, those things are just not in any way uncommon. There are—the first thing I would say is to try and get a solicitor. I know that's a big thing—we can talk more about that if you just find me after the panel, we can talk more how to go about doing that later. There's groups like Rights of Women, who have a helpline that you can call on Mondays and Thursdays, that do free immigration advice. And there's also a group called Migrant Help that you can call, that you can, yeah. And just to, that you can call, and you can talk to me more about that because actually just like a list of groups that I can name to you. Just to use that example as an example of somebody who did everything right, and is still suffering under this hostile environment, immigration bullshit thing that we live in. Like this person got a job, is contributing, paying their taxes, like they're doing, for all intents and purposes, everything right, and yet now she can't work, and her status might be taken away. Which, like Ru was saying, kind of goes into in order to abolish police, and in order to abolish prisons, we also have to abolish immigration controls, and borders, and all of these things that make it impossible for even somebody who is on paper doing everything right to thrive. Yeah, but come find me, because yeah.

00:48:28 ASD I think we had another question—

00:48:28 NA Did you mind if just add something, just a very thing.

00:48:28 ASD Go for it.

00:48:28 NA There's a very similar situation that's gone on in a number of London colleges—probably what you're referring to as well—and what some of the women there did is first of all they looked at what evidence they had about the number of hours that they were studying to be able to counter what that information that was given. But they also got together with other students and built a bit of a dossier against the particular supervisor or lecturer that was responsible for that, and went to the college with it, and then people also went to their member of parliament. I know that going to your member of parliament is very limited in many different respects, but sometimes your member of parliament actually has a bit added clout on immigration cases, and even because you're plugging into the so-called 'me too' movement, which I know has many, you know, weaknesses, there's a chance that you get more of a hearing on those issues now than you may have done maybe a few years back. And then finally I'd say Rights of Women are very strongly abolitionist on sex workers, and so if they're judgmental about sex workers, I would recommend them in terms of not being judgmental about other sectors or people.

00:49:39 ASD I think we're going to go to the person there? Over there? Yeah.

00:49:43 Q2 Hi, so, I moved to London from, I lived in Bradford, and certain communities had set up their own, the police had been cut—which I don't think is a bad thing, but anyway—and they'd set up their own community police in which was essentially a vigilante group, and I guess like, how do we control that not happening? So, we abolish the police, which is a good thing, but white powerful people aren't going to give up their perceived entitlement to have their possessions protected. So how do we get rid of the police, which is an oppressive negative force, but not have an even worse unregulated one pop up? And I'm not saying that we shouldn't try because this may happen—that isn't what I'm saying. I'm just... how can we control that situation?

00:50:37 ASD Good question. Ru, do you want to...?

00:50:39 R You abolish whiteness. I've got a quote here from an American academic called Ruth Wilson Gilmore where she talks about race as— somewhere, I've got it written down—oh, yeah—oh, no, where has it gone? Sorry. Oh, yeah, here you go: "race is the state sanctioned or extra-legal protection exploitation of group differentiated vulnerability to social death." In normal people terms, there's ways in which not just the state, but logics that inform the state, and also society, mark people out as being more likely to die in the society we live in. And we how that works out in not just policing, but access to healthcare, et cetera. Again, we're talking here about abolition. We have to radically transform how those things exist. We will not continue to have powerful white people that can mobilise their whiteness if we're imagining a future that has no police. But also, I mean I don't know the context that you're talking about that in, but it is really important, actually, especially places like Bradford, around Leeds, places like Rotherham, where communities are facing racist violence. In particular in Rotherham, right, where the far right has actually been bringing in people from across the country to be protesting in the centre of town every weekend. There was an old man that was killed two years ago, coming back from the mosque in Rotherham, where they were shouting racial epithets at him. So, yeah, I mean, of course it's dodgy if you suddenly mark up your, I don't know, like, your Mondeo as a cop car or something, and start driving around trying to apprehend people, but we do need to talk about, what are the rest of us doing to support communities that are already facing sustained violence? And that doesn't mean creating a private security force, but it does mean we do actually have to have these difficult interactions about how are we protecting those people? What is happening with people where they go to their religious institution, go to a mosque, or whatever, and face violence? What is reasonably is thing that we can actually do to support these people? What resources can we give them? And actually, in the time that we're existing in right now, that mightn't 00:52:46 require some form of things that we don't really want to have to deal with in the future, like a form of security. So, yeah, this stuff has a lot more nuance. It's not a one-size-fits-all at all. I think actually, also— and we can actually talk about this more—but I think about this a lot, and I have a lot of ideas on it, but I don't think I've got the answers to it, because I can't, because the system that we live in at the moment pervades every aspect of our lives in the that we think about how things work. But thinking about something that's totally revolutionary and different—to come back to when you were talking about revolution—is still quite difficult, even for those of us who dedicate a lot of time

thinking about it. So, I certainly wouldn't say I have the answers to what we would do in that. I would hope that we would firstly abolish the things that you're talking about. So yeah.

00:53:35 NA Yeah, I mean I think what you're talking about is: how do we stop shit happening? I mean, it's kind of a question, your question is about a particular situation, but it's applicable to many. And it's also a question of: how do we stop our victories being used against us? Ultimately. And that scenario, as soon as you describe it, it raises—I mean, it's majorly problematic. You know, in Ilford they've got this street watch group, and it is basically a group of vigilantes. It's called the same thing as the group of vigilantes that were in Balsall Heath, about fifteen years ago, and they were defending property values by attacking sex workers and trying to hound sex workers out of that area in order to be able to buy up women's houses at a very low down, you know, price, and profit. And they had the backing of the police, they had the backing of politicians, and in some ways in that situation the only thing you can do is organise. You just have to organise. You have to spell out what the impact is, you have to really tell people what's going on. And we're often really up against it. I mean, I feel like the strength of this event is for us to put the policing of sex work in the context of the policing of everybody, because it is the same police. When we talk about the things you've been describing, and everybody's been describing, of our experiences of the police, that's the same police that are policing sex workers. And the only reason I have to stress that is because when it come to sex work, suddenly, the police are presented as social workers. And the abolitionists who we're up against, who are campaigning for an increase in criminalisation, in the form of criminalising clients, as a gender equality progress, are calling for increased police powers. And it's important to stress that, because it means that on the left, so called, we have to get our heads straight; we have to know that we're not supporting the Nordic Model, because that's increasing police powers and increasing police discretion that isn't just going to be used against sex work, it's going to be used against everyone. It's not an accident that the people that have been arrested under the so-called new, the offence of paying for sex with somebody coerced, have largely been men of colour. And you know that's—and of course, the anti-trafficking laws are used to arrest and deport migrant sex workers, and the prostitution laws on the street are described by sex workers as the sus law for women in the way that the sus laws are used against men of colour in particular. So, it's a massive strength for us to be connected in that way, because it cuts through what we're up against. And it really

helps us, because we are up against an NGO sector who have been much too cosy with the police. And they've got a red umbrella project in Liverpool, funded by the police—bloody outrageous—and I think people in Scotland are complaining of something else similar. And all the actions against sex workers that are often done in the name of saving us from rape and violence are actually vehicles for surveillance and control and prosecution. So, we face saturation policing, but we don't get any protection in terms of—and when we do come forward and report violence, we get threatened with arrest ourselves. And so, there's really a lot to deal with, but it's so clarifying to be on a panel where the policing of sex workers is seen in the context of the policing of everyone.

00:57:02 ASD Yeah, go for it.

00:57:05 KM In terms of your question as well, I think the—and coming back to what you were saying, as well, and like, yeah, revolution, basically, and that if we want to focus on creating a world that has no prisons and police, but also focusing on a world where we've dismantled the big three, which is patriarchy, white-supremacy and capitalism. [Laughs] Yeah, so, and I think that while we're unpicking our punitive impulses and not trying to just recreate the police in various different ways, we're also going to be self-reflecting and recreating a culture that isn't based on these hierarchies and these power structures, so that it's not just that then a different group ends up being the ones in power perpetrating exactly the same things as, we're not recreating whiteness in a different way. All of these things, it's going to take a lot of dismantling all of that kind of thinking in order to, yeah, not be coming across that issue. And I think that often—like, there's something interesting about harnessing that urge for people to want to get involved and protect their communities, and things like that. There's something there, because at the moment, neoliberalism is very individualistic and people, they don't intervene when they see violence, and all they do is just want to outsource that kind of thing. Like I, in our workshops, we do some exercises of like, how would you deal with this issue without prisons and policing, and often more privileged people end up reinventing the police in some kind of way, or they just want to outsource it, where it's like, "Well, if there was this other entity that had all of this training to deal with this issue..." And it's like, "Well, why couldn't you have that training? What if we spent time because we're not all trying to make money in jobs that we hate to survive, we actually have time to gain the skills to support our communities and to actually figure out how to do that? And why can't we

do that ourselves? What is so special about someone else who's had mental health first aid training, and why can't you have it and all of these things?" So, I think there's something about harnessing the people, we do want community accountability, and we want communities to come together to support each other, and community-led approaches, but we don't want them to be recreating the same violent tactics and oppressive structures as what currently exists.

00:59:39 ASD Yeah, the example you brought up, Niki, of Ilford, which is near where I live, immediately came to mind when you were talking about these vigilante kind of, or community grasses [laughs], and like basically jumped-up middle class curtain twitchers who've taken it upon themselves to police women. But yeah, I guess, there was like, there are good vigilantes and there are bad vigilantes, and the Black Panther Party for self-defence comes to mind as a positive example of actually building communities that are resilient and can defend themselves—not only against the police, but against white supremacists and all kinds of violence. So, you know, I think maybe sounds like an expansive understanding of what that means. I think we had a question down here, and then over there, and there.

01:00:24 Q3 Hello. Yeah, so, it's for the person from ECP. It follows on quite nicely from what you were saying, because I'm thinking about my situation in Leicester. So, I work with women on the street, and a lot of them—so when we're driving around, we'll always see the police, and a lot of them work very closely with the police, and that's because they give, the women give the police information about drug sellers in exchange for their freedom, essentially. And so, I'm in a situation where I want to protect them as much as possible, so I need help doing that, and I don't know where to start or what to do. Because they want to work with the police, because they feel like that's their best option, and so I don't know about the relationship there is really disturbing.

01:01:09 NA Yeah, it's a really good question to raise. I mean, we've faced it as well in many different areas. We have a very big network in Soho, Central London, and for years we were saying to women, "Don't let the police in." And they were saying, "No, you know, it's alright. You know, they come in for a cup of tea and thing and thing." And then others, outside of that, like the projects, would say, "Well, look, you know, the women want, they want to have a close, or they work, they're friendly with the police," and you're saying, "There's no such thing as friendship between the

police and a criminalised group of people. You know, there's no basis for friendship or an equal working relationship. And what we, the thing that we did is that we tried to just make sure that people knew what their rights were. So we did have to kind of go on and on and on and say, "Look, you don't have to let them in." And what happened ultimately is that, I'm afraid, people had to learn by experience. They let the police in, they, over a period of eighteen months, the police came in on these so-called welfare visits, they asked women, "Who are you? Who are you working with? How often do you come in? How much do you earn? What are your clients like?" Friendly, friendly, loads of cups of tea, and then eighteen months later they came in mass raids, breaking down women's doors, handcuffing women on the floor, telling women's families that they were working—just gratuitously, you know, completely just to mess people up—and then tried to close down all the premises. And there was a very big community struggle, and it was a really big powerful moment, in that sex workers in Soho organised, led the struggle to reopen those places. It was not easy. People were very divided between different races; between who was a maid, who was a worker; who was migrant, who was not. But we did manage to keep it together, and fought over about eight months, and we got every flat reopened apart from two. And it was a massive blow against gentrification, and against police abuse, and what came out of that is that most sex workers in Soho don't open their door to the police anymore. You know, it's like that's the way that you—so I think in your situation, I think that looking to see how you can strengthen women's hand, if that's who you're working with, so to make them feel, to kind of point out the ways in which they're entitled to refuse. And then also look at the other organisations that are reinforcing that idea that women have to relate to the police, and tackle them, and say, "No. Get off their back. Let people work this out for themselves." And then, the other thing I think is really important for the projects is to really publicise the police abuse, because I think that there is a conspiracy of silence that goes on among sex work projects to hide the fact of how much of the abuse that we face as sex workers comes from the police and not from clients, local clients. So I think that's another thing that you can do because that changes the terrain, and it really puts those that want to collaborate with the police from a position of power on the back foot.

01:04:24 ASD I think we've got, yeah.

01:04:25 Q4 Hi. I suppose this question is more aimed at Ru, because Ru mentioned something earlier about community self-defence. Obviously, you can tell

from my accent, I'm from the States, so it's full criminalisation for both buyer and seller there. I was just curious—and this can go for anybody if they have thoughts, of course—but like, what would community self-defence and community organising look like in that kind of context, when even identifying as a sex worker, or in being public about it, is not only just stigmatising but also criminalising yourself, and then also even just organising with other sex workers is criminalised? So what could that look like? And obviously that's a huge question. I understand if you don't have a direct answer, but I'm curious to hear your thoughts. Thank you.

01:05:08 R I can begin, but I can pass it on. Sorry, yeah, first of all, just to really quickly pick up on the point that Niki finished with, which was conspiracy of silence—a really useful way of putting it—that happens generally with how the police behave, and how people respond to it in public. So the first thing I would always say is, not only doing 'know your rights' workshops with people that are affected by police violence—so we do them around stop and search, and I'm sure there's groups that do that with sex workers as well, so first of all people that know their own rights, but also for those of you that may witness police behaving in a certain, knowing how you can support that person. There's kind of two elements to that, and the latter one I think, actually, I think people fall down on quite a lot, and I don't think that's good enough. I think any time you see police in the street, particularly speaking to anybody and asking them questions and harassing them in some way, we should always be stopping. You don't need to address the police officers but have a conversation with the person that is being spoken to. The ways the police operate is knowing they can do things with impunity, and it happens in daylight on the street. So, for instance, if I see a stop and search happening, and these days I think you're going to see them more and more on the street because of the context of what's happening around so-called serious youth violence, making sure you're having a conversation with that young person. And of course, the police will often—and it's the same with immigration enforcement. We do, well, I do workshops around this on immigration enforcement as well. You know, they'll tell you to get back, you're obstructing, whatever. There's ways that you can do that safely—filming the interaction, do so with the permission of the person, and actually supporting them after the fact with even getting accountability for if they were being racially profiled when they were stopped in the first instance. So yeah, I would say, first of all, challenging police presence wherever you see it, and that doesn't mean you have to engage with them, it's to do with showing them that there are people that care about the ways that

they're treating other people, because they do get by by people just saying, "Oh, they've got a uniform. They're an authority. They probably know what they're doing." And of course, there's enough deaths of people in custody in this country that have happened because of that, because people have assumed that whatever the police are doing over there, when they're using excessive restraint against somebody, that is a justified thing to do, because they know what they're doing. So it's challenging that, and also, not just within yourself, but also asking those questions of people around you. A thing that I really quickly wanted to say was around abolition. We need to normalise this more around people that we know. So it's all very well us sitting in a room talking to people that are probably fairly like-minded. How about your family members? How about your parents, whatever? Talk to the people where this stuff, you can get through to them on these simple interactions of just make sure when you see something happening in public that you are asking questions. And yeah, know your rights, and I'm sure you'll have more specific ones.

01:07:51 NA Well, just very quickly, actually. I mean, it's true that it's not illegal to sell sex here, but everything you do, in terms of associating with everyone, with anyone else, is criminalised. And for us, as sex workers, what that means practically is that all the safety mechanisms that we would like to employ actually put you at risk of arrest—working together with someone else, you know, having CCTV—I mean, all that stuff, it's all criminalised. And specifically, there's women in our group who are working in a place that's nearby other flats, and one woman went 'round and said, "Well, why don't we put our wages up today? Why don't we put our prices up?" And she was threatened with controlling prostitution for that kind of organising to improve our working conditions. Somebody that helped a woman with a website got actually prosecuted for controlling, you know, so the laws are very draconian. And I think it's a crucial question of how do you, as a stigmatised and criminalised set of people, organise. And when we started, it was very different from how it is now. And we employed all these kind of little tactics. First of all, we would always do this mysterious thing where we would say, well, we don't say whether we're working or not. I mean, on the one hand, we say, "Oh, we're a sex worker collective." But then we don't say whether we're working or not. You know, it's like, "Fuck off. I'm not telling you about my own personal circumstances," because we saw how people then got picked up and attacked personally as soon as they were public. And also, it did allow women with less power in society to speak publicly, because otherwise you were going to be in a situation where the only people that could speak were the ones

that had immigration status, that didn't have kids, that had secure housing, you know, all the other things. So we tried to turn it on its head like that. And then we did things like, if we spoke in public, we would say, "My friend...", and do your whole speech as if it was your friend. You know, so we kind of adopted loads of things. But I have to say that things got much better, and a load of other women within our organisation started to be able to be a bit more public in different kinds of ways, and then things got worse. After Brexit, all the migrant women—at some point, I would say two thirds of the legal cases that we were fighting were of actually migrant sex workers, you know, fighting various things after Brexit, and now we're at the point where not one migrant women in the ECP can afford to be public in any way. And that really tells you how the climate has changed. But I think you have to just try and keep becoming, being as creative as you can, and making alliances with other people, and using their power to enhance your own as a criminalised group is very good. You know, we work very closely with Women Against Rape, and it's really helpful to be able to say to the authorities, "You're supposed to be concerned about safety. Why are you not concerned about sex workers' safety?" You basically try every trick in the book, really, and try—but people's safety is our absolute first priority. So we never do any media or anything like that if it's going to put anybody at risk, because we know that journalists are unprincipled and unscrupulous and only interested in the story. And it's just not worth it, you know, the consequences are too severe.

01:11:08 ASD I was going to ask you, Niki, on the question that came from the person here, you talked about some of the case examples of where women and sex workers have trusted the police. Have you got, is that written down anywhere? Because I just thought it might be good to like, if people wanted to publicise that, distribute that among sex workers who were thinking about working with the police, to actually be able to see where people have done that in the past and what the results have been might be quite useful for the person here.

01:11:34 NA Yeah, you're, that's really good, because luckily I can say, "Yes! We're doing it!" [Laughs] Usually, I kind of go, "Oh, no, sorry. We haven't." But actually, we're putting together, it's called a Soho scrapbook, because when we looked at it, we realised that we'd been actually organising sex workers had been organising in Soho since, I don't know, 2000 at least. Like, mass raids, over and over and over again. So we're actually putting it together and we're hoping it would be ready by July, so watch this space.

01:11:58 ASD Yeah. Look out for that. I think we had had... a question here? Anyone else putting their hands up? Okay, do you want to...? Okay, here, and then here. Yeah.

01:12:09 Q5 So for those of us who have friends, or perhaps I ought to say acquaintances, who happen to work as police officers, or maybe their, I don't know, lawyers, but they are part of the present justice system as it exists now, is it safe to have conversations with them about this sort of stuff? Not just for ourselves personally, but also maybe if I were to say something to that powerful person and they then react to that by going on to hurt someone else who's more vulnerable, and maybe I don't know about that. And how could that be productive, if we could do it at all?

01:13:02 AVI Anyone want to... How do we talk to cops?

01:13:06 R Unfortunately, you're going to have to disown any member of your family that's affiliated with the police in any way. It's the only thing you can do. I mean, I think there's ways, I think, I was actually going to say, there's ways you can work with people that have very different aims, political ideas to you. Even within our group, there's people that are abolitionist, there's people that believe in reform, it doesn't mean that we can't work together. There's ways that you can get through to people, and certainly if it is somebody that is your family member that you can convey to them, hopefully, in certain terms. I'm not taking that as a given, of course; there's sometimes ways in which you can't communicate with family. But yeah, I don't know, it's always useful actually when you can have access to somebody that has some sort of access to a lever of power. I don't think that that should be the end-point of anyone's kind of organising, but also, there's ways you can get through to people on certain things. You were making the point that getting solidarity from somebody for a campaign that you were doing that has wildly different political ideas to you. There's way that people are drawn to stuff that you might not think is a great route for them to get into it, but they are, and they're willing to support something, and I think we should—and when we're talking about building alliances, it doesn't mean that you have to get everyone round to your way of thinking, but at least you can agree to a point that you want to get to. So—and of course, you don't have to like... you can convince someone about stuff without saying, "So, on this street, I

know that there is basically a bunch of people that are doing sex work, and maybe this door number.” You know, you don’t have to give specific details about stuff, but certainly talking about things in general terms that aren’t going to potentially put people at risk I think is actually a really good thing to do.

01:14:45 ASD Did you...? Kelsey?

01:14:47 KM I mean I was just going to really say, “Don’t be friends with cops,” but, if possible, but there’s ways. So I think lawyers, for example, can be really useful. They are like potentially responsible for whether someone ends up in prison or not in loads of ways, so like have as many lawyers as possible whose mission is for people to not go to prison is useful. And there’s like various people within the criminal justice system who, if they were to take a more abolitionist, or at least a perspective that’s focused on decarceration, that they can definitely be useful. And so, yeah, there’s definitely, talking about these kinds of politics is useful anywhere that you go. I’ve found like so when parliament is consulting on new legislation or whatever, they’ll bring people from lots of different perspectives, and sometimes the police will be in on the same meeting that someone who’s an abolitionist is there. And so, there’s something really important it feels like about in those rooms saying like, “Well, guess what? There’s all of these people who are not going to be safe engaging with the police. What other solutions do you have?” And being that person in as many spaces as possible, I think, is really useful, pushing people to consider other solutions that aren’t criminal justice, even if they love the police—which lots of people do, particularly people in power—and they like to think of that again as being the way that they take things seriously, pushing them to be always thinking about what are the other things that they’re doing as well, that can be a good way of kind of getting past these things as well.

01:16:35 ASD There’s a really cool podcast called ‘Beyond Prisons’ that I’ve been listening to recently, and the people in that—I think the States is quite different, but they talk quite a lot about everyone having a responsibility to look at the way in which their lives are connected with enforcement, incarceration. I think the States are quite different because law enforcement and prisons are such a huge employer in the States that many, many, many families will be in some way connected with that system, and the prison-industrial complex. And many black people are employed by that, and that’s like where the families get money from.

01:17:11 K? And good government jobs [inaudible 01:17:12].

01:17:12 ASD Yeah, exactly, so like I think, from their perspective, from the States, they're kind of thinking, well, if we're in many ways connected to the people incarcerated and the people doing the incarcerating, getting reflective about that, and where you're personally situated in that, and whether you're benefiting from that, and how you are, and how people in your family life community are, and how you can start to challenge that. Like I said, it's slightly different here, but I think it's still very good to learn from that. But yeah, 'Beyond Prisons' is a really cool podcast. I think we had a question here, and then might be finishing up. Yeah. Okay, we're finishing up! [Laughs] Cool.

01:17:51 ? [inaudible].

01:18:02 Q6 Thanks. Yeah, just to follow up from what you were saying there, Ru, about if you see people being stopped by the police, and say you get their name and you record what goes on, and they get taken away, and it's clear that in their minds they've done nothing wrong, where would you recommend, is there like an organisation you'd recommend reaching out to straight away when that happens? And who is that?

01:18:24 R Yeah, so, with immigration, you can do it first of all, because they often take people to a police station before they might then try and detain them. I mean, for instance, a group that I've set up with friends in South London, we literally would follow the vans [laughs] and then risk being arrested. But, what you can do is try and get that person's details, or at least speak to them and say, "Is there a phone number of anyone that you want me to contact for you?" That could even be a family member, or if they happen to have a lawyer. If it is someone that has been arrested, what I've done in the past is, again you can try and do that, or you can... if it's the case of, they were being profiled by police, there's organisations, like there's an app called Y-Stop around stop and search, which actually, if you download it, it tells you what people's rights are in a stop and search, but also you can record stuff on there and actually send it to them if the person has grounds to make a complaint. Or, in the past, I've actually rung up lawyers, who've then rung the station where we think that person might be, to say, "I'm willing to represent this person." But sometimes that's

hard if you don't know their name. But yeah, we've kind of had some success of that in the past. And just, yeah, really, drawing that back to these aren't activist things you need to do. I used to work with someone who's mum is in her mid-eighties and has lived in Brixton for many, many years, and when she used to see young men being stopped in the street back in the '70s and '80s, she'd carry a notepad around with her to get their phone number, get a family name or friend, get a number for her to contact, and say to them, "I'm going to get in touch with that person for you, and let them know what is happening." So, that's like a basic thing that you can do. That's what I would suggest.

01:20:00 M Just like as a really quick add-on to that, just watching the police is really, really effective. I have seen instances where people have literally been in handcuffs, about to be put in a police van and taken to whatever police station, and they've been released, because there's been a group of five or six of us just watching the police, and talking to the person who's in handcuffs, and asking things like, "Under what power are you arresting this person? What crime have they committed?" Or "Is this person even under arrest?" Because actually people get put in handcuffs and they're not under arrest. They get put in handcuffs so that the police can search them. And once they know that you're watching and that you even sound like you know what you're talking about, even if literally have no idea, you have a phone on you most of the time that will tell you what the police are supposed to be doing and not. If you look a little bit respectable, if you're white, or if you have a posh accent, or you can put on a posh accent, or even if you're none of those things, but you sound like you know what you're talking about, like, they don't know what they're talking about, they're often not following their own rules—which, obviously I don't agree with, but they're not following them—and it fucking scares them to be watched. They get shaky, and they get confused, and they call their supervisors, and they step onto the side, and they radio their whoever, and are like, "What do I do now?" Like, it is really, really effective to just make them feel like they're being watched. And the more that that happens, the more likely it is to continue happening. We have to normalise that. We have to normalise the fact that the police are supposed to be accountable to us, and they're supposed to be protecting us, and we know that's all bullshit, but we can do things about that.

01:21:37 ASD Just to add to that, I think it's if you're white as well, you should really feel an extra responsibility to take on that kind of role, because you are much, much,

much less likely to get an aggressive and hostile response from the police, and involved in loads of things where black and brown people have done that and have been, but I think genuinely, I think, yeah. All of us in our communities need to be thinking about how we approach this stuff, and especially if you're in a really privileged position, you should be thinking about it even more.

01:22:12 NA Sorry, just before we finish, we have a campaign, Make All Women Safe, that is, got a government petition calling for the implementation of a parliamentary committee—sorry, this sounds so reformist. [laughs] Anyway, it's calling for the implementation of a parliamentary committee's demand, so... which would decriminalise sex workers on the street and in premises. It is not the revolution, okay, we know that, but it is a first step, and one of the things that would happen is that, if we got that, is that we would be in a better position to be able to fight for our rights and change the world. So, if you are able, please sign the petition. We've got eight thousand signatures; we need at least ten thousand, if not more, because the government is looking at research into sex work, and by the time that comes back to parliament, we want a bit of a groundswell of a presence of people demanding decriminalisation. Thank you.

01:23:06 ASD Thank you. Can we just give a round of applause to our panellists. Thank you so much. That was so sick.

[End of the recording]

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