

‘Would you want a jail on your street?’ Sensing Opposition and Support for a Youth Detention Centre in Ottawa

Elizabeth Venczel and Justin Piché (University of Ottawa)

Abstract:

This study aims to make sense of past opposition and support for prison building in and around Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, by examining the last new facility construction project of its kind in the region – the William E. Hay Youth Detention Centre (WHYDC). Engaging with literatures on prison siting and Ben-Moshe’s (2020) conceptualization of political and affective economies that contribute to the entrenchment of imprisonment, we argue that opposition based on a Not In My Backyard sentiment expressed vis-à-vis the WHYDC at the time of its placement offers insight into potential fissures that can be mined and shifted in current struggles against prison construction premised on Not In Any Backyard arguments that reject carceral expansion altogether, creating other ways of sensing and doing justice that challenge and serve as alternatives to criminalization and punishment. To this end, this paper begins by reviewing literature on prison construction followed by a brief note on method. From there, we trace the rise of the WHYDC, along with arguments advanced by opponents and proponents of the project. We then end with a discussion on what can be learned from the WHYDC experience and how that can be applied to the current campaigns to stop carceral expansion, including the proposed Kemptville prison.

Keywords: Carceral expansion; prison construction; prison siting; youth; Canada

Introduction

In the spring of 2008, scholars from various disciplines assembled in Tiohtià:ke / Montreal for a Joint Annual Meeting of the Law and Society Association and the Canadian Law and Society Association (CLSA). During one of the sessions, a discussion was held regarding whether the CLSA was an adequate home for justice studies researchers and critical criminologists to share their research and in-

sights with other scholars, as well as have exchanges with practitioners and advocates beyond the academy. What emerged from these, and other conversations were two annual conferences held outside the confines of scholarly associations, which have helped shape the landscape of justice and criminological studies in Canada.

First, members of the Centre of Interdisciplinary Justice Studies at the University of Winnipeg – situated on Treaty One Territory and the home of the Métis people – organized their first annual justice series conference in 2009 entitled *Theorizing Justice: Interdisciplining the Divide*, which aimed to “bridge the gap between disciplines, community agents, and institutional forces [...] to identify the division between disciplines and to build an inclusive approach” to academic inquiry (Kohm & Weinrath, 2010, p. 5). Second, several professors and graduate students from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, the Department of Law and Legal Studies, and the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Carleton University, as well as from the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa, organized the first *Critical Perspectives: Critical Criminology and Social Justice* national conference in 2011, with the aim of bringing together criminological scholars, practitioners, and community advocates to make sense of, and challenge, the punitive and securitized status quo.

Years later, the two groups of scholars joined forces to organize *Critical Criminology / Representing Justice: A Joint National Conference of Critical Perspectives: Criminology and Social Justice and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Justice Studies*, which was held May fourth to fifth in 2017 on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory at the University of Ottawa. The conference was memorable for several reasons, including the lively discussions taking place in the packed rooms where the four-panel concurrent sessions, end-of-day keynotes by Didier Fassin and Michelle Brown, as well as the end-of-conference “Roundtable on the Future of Critical Criminology and Justice Studies in Canada” took place. Also memorable was an unexpected development that occurred shortly after the first set of concurrent sessions began on day one of the joint conference.

While the second author of this paper (Justin Piché) was chairing the “Penal Institutions” panel, which was being held in a small seminar room that was so packed that extra chairs were being brought in from nearby seminar rooms and many were forced to stand, a member of the Criminalization and Punishment Education Project (CPEP) entered the room and passed a note to someone standing in the back with the instruction that it be delivered to the session chair. Usually, such notes contain information about conference matters that organizers want session chairs to share with attendees at the conclusion of panels. This was not such a note. Instead, it broke the news that Ontario’s provincial government, then led by Liberal Premier Kathleen Wynne, had announced a plan to build a 725-bed jail to replace the 585-bed Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre (OCDC) (Crawley, 2017). For the second author – who was a founding member of CPEP, had been working with graduate students on the #NOPE / No On Prison Expansion initiative documenting prison infrastructure projects from across the country via online content searches and Freedom of Information requests (see Green *et al.*, 2017), and had advocated against resolving crowding issues at the Ottawa jail through carceral expansion – including through submissions to the OCDC Task Force (e.g. Doyle *et al.*, 2016a, 2016b) that ultimately did not recommend a facility – the announcement came as a shock. As the second author sat stunned at the head of the seminar room and the discussion period began following the four presentations, audience members inquired about what was wrong, at which point the discussion around the new Ottawa jail announcement and organizing against it began.

By lunch time, a petition demanding a provincial prison construction moratorium in Ontario and the reinvestment of the funds allocated towards the new and bigger Ottawa jail towards community supports was already circulating and being signed by conference participants. Under the #NOPE banner, later renamed the No Ottawa Prison Expansion campaign, several actions were taken. These included research and social media efforts, like making infographics about reasons given for past jail projects and suggesting what community services could be funded instead with the \$1 billion allocated for the new jail. Additionally, there was a significant protest in May 2018 outside the location of a planned meeting that got canceled due to

pressure from CPEP to include more people and groups from the city and surrounding area affected by prison expansion (see Doyle et al., 2021). Ultimately, the project (later dubbed the “Ottawa Correctional Complex”), which had been opposed by several groups in the city that endorsed the #NOPE campaign, was abandoned for reasons that have yet to be fully disclosed by provincial officials.

What is known, however, is that on August 27, 2020, Ontario’s provincial government, led by a new Progressive Conservative Premier Doug Ford, announced the Eastern Region Strategy, which includes a series of new prison infrastructure projects to expand human caging capacity in the region, including a new 235-bed facility located on the grounds of the former Kemptville Agricultural College. The announcement, which came without prior consultation with Kemptville residents and their municipal government representatives, immediately received significant backlash. Much of this backlash initially included opposition based on Not In My Backyard (NIMBY) sentiments that did not question the need for carceral expansion (e.g. concerns for rising ‘crime’ rates, declining property values, loss of community identity, etc.), but were hostile to the idea that a rural farming community was the appropriate location for such a project (Plumb, 2023). A few weeks after the announcement, CPEP joined the newly-formed Coalition Against the Proposed Prison (CAPP), which has led the campaign to stop the proposed Kemptville prison since October 2020. Part of CPEP’s contribution to CAPP has been to conduct research to inform our collective organizing.

This study, which is historical in nature, aims to make sense of past opposition and support for prison construction in the region by examining the last major standalone infrastructure project of its kind in the Ottawa region – the William E. Hay Youth Detention Centre (WHYDC). In so doing, we contribute to scholarship on the emotions that sustain a “carnival of punishment” wherein the retributive practice of human caging is seen as an appropriate response to transgression (see Carrier & Piché, 2015, para. 12-20). More specifically, by engaging with literatures on prison siting and Ben-Moshe’s (2020) conceptualization of political and affective economies that contribute to the entrenchment of imprisonment, we argue that opposition premised on the kinds of NIMBY sentiments expressed vis-à-vis the

WHYDC at the time of its placement, which did not question the need to incarcerate youth, offers insight into potential fissures that can be mined and shifted in current struggles against prison construction premised on Not In Any Backyard (NIABY) arguments that reject carceral expansion altogether. We argue that creating other ways of sensing and doing justice that challenge and serve as alternatives to criminalization and punishment requires fostering political and affective economies of NIABYism, rather than NIMBYism, that have often characterized opposition to prison construction to date. To this end, this paper begins by reviewing literature on prison construction followed by a brief note on method. From there, we trace the rise of the WHYDC, along with arguments from opponents and proponents of the project. We then end with a discussion on what can be learned from the WHYDC experience, which can be applied to the current campaigns to stop carceral expansion – including the proposed Kemptville prison – as part of a longer struggle to abolish prisons (see Herzing and Piché, 2024).

Locating Opposition to and Support for Prison Siting

As has been documented elsewhere (see Piché, 2014), there is a significant amount of research on the phenomenon of prison siting, which offers a window into arguments that tend to be made in opposition to and in support of the prospect of having one’s community become host to a new site of confinement. With few exceptions (e.g. Garcia *et al.*, 2017), most of this literature concerns developments in the United States, where a significant prison construction boom began in the 1970s (Gilmore, 2007). Interestingly, apart from abolitionists, both opponents and proponents to these projects tend to advance arguments that are not supported by scholarly findings concerning the long-term impact of becoming a prison town or city.

On the one hand, opponents of these projects tend to reject not new prison construction altogether, but rather *where* it is taking place, seeing these sites as “locally unwanted land uses” (Popper, 1981, p. 12). The NIMBY arguments they often advance, which are largely unfounded, usually entail concerns about the impact of new prisons on safety, property values, and the character of their communities (Sechrest, 1992). Such concerns are particularly heightened when governments adopt an adversarial “closed siting” approach (Sechrest,

1992, p. 97) whereby they “decide, announce, [and] defend” their decision to locate a facility of this kind without public consultation beforehand (Chambers, 1989).

On the other hand, proponents of these projects tend to emphasize the employment and economic activity associated with building and running a new prison, claiming that it will be beneficial for host communities (Christie, 2000). Such claims are made despite evidence indicating that regions with such facilities tend to perform worse economically than others that sought other means to spur economic growth (Hooks *et al.*, 2010).

Apart from abolitionist interventions that aim to stop carceral expansion – such as the efforts of Decarcerate Monroe County to campaign against a new “justice campus” in Bloomington, Indiana on the site of a former factory (see Schept, 2015) – struggles around the erection and even closure of sites of confinement tend to be characterized by an underlying acceptance that human caging is inevitable and necessary (Piché *et al.*, 2017). Ben-Moshe (2020) argues that underlying this idea is a political and affective economy that entrenches confinement, which is tied with moral, ethical, and affective considerations. In the context of confining youth, she notes that both legal discourses and cultural norms in Western nation-states link childhood with notions of innocence and lack of reason. However, these notions are generally only afforded to white, able-bodied children and youth. Ben-Moshe contends that the construction of innocence and childhood are paramount to justify institutionalization of youth pushed to the margins.

The trope of innocence and the need to protect children are often used to expand the carceral state by framing carceral control as care (Meiners, 2011). As Guggenheim (1979) argues, “[a]s long as we maintain the myth that the juvenile justice system is designed for the children’s welfare, they will be deprived of their liberty without cause and without meaningful rights” (p. 25). Annamma and Morgan (2022) bring our attention to the fact that, while some youth detention facilities tend to have fewer prison-like features than adult detention facilities, research has found that they still run on a pathologizing mindset that focuses on labeling, surveillance, and punishment. Like the imprisonment of adults, youth incarceration is incredibly prob-

lematic because it hyper-focuses on changing youth's behaviour without addressing the social contexts of their lives and the systemic inequities they face (Annamma & Morgan, 2022, p. 478). The carceral state also exposes youth to invasive strip searches, solitary confinement, violence, and other physical and psychological harms. They argue that “there is no way to make a gentler and more humane system that is built on caging kids” (Annamma & Morgan, 2022, p. 503).

Schissel (2006) notes that, in the Canadian context, efforts to criminalize and imprison youth often involve their scapegoating for political purposes and the creation of moral panics that lay blame for unease at their feet, even though (a) there is relatively little youth violence, (b) most of their criminalization stems from petty acts, and (c) the behaviours for which they are arrested and incarcerated are more often matters of health such as drug use (p. 14). He adds that media perpetuates this moral panic by constructing the news to “appeal to the demands of a frightened audience and a political-economic system that casts blame” (Schissel, 2006, p. 15). The decontextualization of youth legal transgression, which media perpetuates, ignores the fact that youth who come into conflict with the law are often victims of socio-economic conditions beyond their control and are more likely to be repeatedly harmed while entangled with the legal, education, and social welfare sectors.

Returning to struggles over prison siting, it is important to note that while there is research emerging on adult carceral facility construction in Canada (e.g. Piché, 2014; Piché *et al.*, 2017; McElligott, 2017), youth detention centre construction remains largely unexplored in this context, despite studies that have shown child incarceration to have profoundly negative impacts on their health and well-being (Barnert *et al.*, 2017). As such, there is a need for a greater understanding of political and affective economies influencing efforts to oppose or support new carceral enclosures that legitimate or challenge human caging, as this study aims to do.

The Case Study and Other Notes on Methods

For this project, we elected to conduct a case study, which is one of the most extensively used strategies in qualitative research (Priya,

2021). Our exploratory case study focused on the William E. Hay Youth Detention Centre, which was originally built in the early 1990s as a 24-bed secure detention centre for male youth awaiting their trials and serving sentences. By way of background, it is important to situate the context in which the WHYDC emerged.

Since 1908, Canada has had three youth justice statutes: the *Juvenile Delinquents Act* (JDA) (1908-1984), the *Young Offenders Act* (YOA) (1984-2003), and the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* (YCJA) (2003-present) (Department of Justice Canada, 2003, p.1). Prior to 1908, there was no separate penal system for youth and adults (Doob & Sprott, 2004, p. 190). This paper focuses primarily on the period the YOA was in place, as this was the time in which the WHYDC was constructed and opened.

When the JDA was replaced by the YOA in 1984, there were changes in the way youth penalty was operated and framed. For instance, the age range was changed from seven to 15 years old to 12 to 17 years old, with youth now being entitled to due process rights, such as the right of appeal, the right to a lawyer, and definite sentences. Terms such as “young persons in conflict with the law”, “young offenders”, and “juvenile delinquents” were adopted in a stated effort to reduce the stigma associated with lawbreaking (Doob & Sprott, 2004, p. 195). Under the YOA, when a young person was committed to custody, the court had to specify whether it was “open” or “secure” custody. Open custody meant admission to group homes, community residential centres, wilderness camps, and the like. Secure custody referred to admission to facilities specially designated for the secure containment or restraint of youth, including physical barriers and 24-hour supervision (Government of Canada, 1988). Although major changes were made from the previous legislation, Tustin and Lutes (2018) argue that the YOA contributed to a lack of confidence in the youth legal system because it failed to provide a clear legislative direction, which led to inconsistent interpretations of the law (p. 2). For example, some argue that the YOA sentencing options were inadequate to deal with youth who had engaged in violence and that jails sentences were being over-used for youth involved in other criminalized acts who could be better served through community-based approaches (Law Foundation of Saskatchewan, n.d.).

While the YOA was in force, Canada had one of the highest youth incarceration rates among Western countries (Corrado *et al.*, 2014, p. 43). For instance, the average daily count of youth in secure custody in 1997 and 1998 was 4,937, with 2,020 youth incarcerated on a given day in Ontario alone (Statistics Canada, 2023). With a sizeable youth prison population and legislation that envisaged 12- to 17-year-old's being held in facilities apart from adults, the conversion of existing carceral institutions like the Cecil Facer Youth Centre in Sudbury – which opened in 1971 as a training school for boys and was repurposed as a youth detention centre in 1985 (Government of Ontario, n.d.) – and the construction of new youth-only secure custody facilities like the WHYDC became a fixture in the latter half of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

It is also important to note that the WHYDC was expanded from 24 to 40 beds in 2009 as part of a larger youth detention centre construction program that also saw the erection of new youth detention centres in Brampton, Fort Frances, Sault Ste. Marie, and Thunder Bay. Such infrastructure projects were undertaken in a stated effort “to provide young people with more effective programs and more opportunity for rehabilitation as close to home as possible” so that they could “make the transition back into their community better prepared to make the right choices and a positive contribution to society” (Government of Ontario, 2009).

The purpose of an exploratory case study is to study a phenomenon with “the intention of ‘exploring’ or identifying fresh research questions which can be used in subsequent research studies in an extensive way” (Priya, 2021). For our purposes, we seek to use these findings on the construction of the WHYDC in struggles opposing carceral expansion, including the current fight to stop a proposed prison from being built in Kemptville, which is situated on unceded and unsurrendered Algonquin Anishinaabe Territory roughly 45 minutes by car from Ottawa.

As part of our case study, a search of articles published in the *Ottawa Citizen* using the key search words “William E. Hay Centre” was undertaken. This publication is the longest running news outlet in the city dating back to the mid-1800s. Based on this, articles published during and after 1989 – when the project was announced – were se-

lected and analyzed. Once the newspaper articles were gathered (n=117), a qualitative content analysis using an open coding grid was used to identify themes (Clarke & Everest, 2006) related to the placement of the WHYDC. In the first round of coding, article excerpts were divided into two broad categories (i.e. opposition versus support for the project and selected site). A second round of coding involved identifying key themes and sub-themes found in the arguments advanced by opponents and proponents of the prison infrastructure project.

According to our analysis, opposition to the WHYDC was mostly rooted in four concerns: (1) the proximity of the proposed facility to residential neighbourhoods and anticipated safety impacts; (2) the anticipated impact of the facility on home values; (3) a desire for alternative land uses, namely more housing construction; and (4) the costs of the infrastructure project. Those who supported the WHYDC advanced three key claims: (1) that the separation of youth from adults in custody was beneficial for the rehabilitation of the former; (2) locating a youth detention facility in a neighbourhood environment would positively influence youth in conflict with the law; and (3) the facility would create local jobs. Each of these themes, which we discuss in our findings below and address at the conclusion of our article, are generally consistent with past findings concerning opposition and support for prison construction.

Sensing (In)justice in the Struggle Over the Location of a New Youth Detention Centre in Ottawa

According to news articles published in the *Ottawa Citizen*, the process of selecting a location to for the WHYDC caused significant uproar from residents living in the neighborhoods of the proposed locations. As briefly noted above, stated rationales for opposition included concerns about the perceived negative impact of the facility on neighbourhood safety and housing prices, other possible land uses such as the construction of more housing, and the high cost associated with building a detention centre.

Although lower in number, there were also articles identifying some support for the proposed youth detention centre. Stated reasons for supporting the project included the beliefs that the separation of

youth and adults in custody is beneficial, the neighborhood environment could positively influence imprisoned youth to change, and that new jobs would be created in the neighbourhood where the detention centre was to be constructed. In this section, we review what these positions concerning the WHYDC reveal about the political and affective economy of carceral expansion and the kinds of sensibilities they foster around (in)justice. However, before doing so, we review some basic details about the penal infrastructure project.

The WHYDC was first proposed to be built on a 9.4-acre piece of vacant land near Dumaurier and Grenon avenues, then owned by the Ottawa Board of Education in the Britannia Heights neighbourhood, which is situated in the west end of the city. This detention centre was set to replace a smaller 14-bed centre at Bronson and Sunnyside avenues, which was so crowded that many criminalized youth were being sent as far as hundreds of kilometres away to Oakville and Sudbury to be imprisoned, far from their families (Ibbitson, 1991).

The residents in Britannia not only fought against the construction of a youth detention centre in their neighbourhood, but also stated that “we also do not want any more public housing” (Ibbitson, 1990). Different interest groups presented various recommendations for the use of the land in Britannia. Then, Ottawa Board of Education Trustee Cynthia Bled suggested using part of the 300-acre MacSkimming Farm for the project instead (Hoy, 1990). Meanwhile, city planners recommended that the proposed location for the detention centre be rezoned instead from public institutional use to allow a mix of low- and medium-density residential development (Eade, 1990).

With local opposition emerging, a resident who had been trying to sell her rural 10-acre property in Winchester called for the WHYDC to be built in her community, situated 45-minutes south of Ottawa. She stated, “Bring this (detention centre) out to us. We need the jobs. We’d love to have the facility here” (Buchanan, 1990). Several months later, the planned Britannia siting was cancelled, with officials declaring their intention to try for a site near Walkley Road instead (Taylor, 1990), which was then located in the south-central end of the city. Promoters for the new detention centre location argued that “it would not present a threat to the neighborhood, would not

lower property values, and would look better than the higher-density housing destined for those sites” (Hoy, 1990).

In August 1991, the city’s planning department sent letters to residents near 2464 Russell Road seeking feedback on potentially constructing the youth detention centre in their neighbourhood. The vacant six-acre site, on the corner of Hawthorne Road, was being sold by the National Capital Commission (NCC), which is responsible for managing lands owned by the Government of Canada in and around Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec. At the time, the NCC lot was zoned for major industrial use. The municipality’s planning department argued that this was an ideal location, as it was not in “anyone’s backyard” (Kainz, 1991). In November 1991, the land at 3000 Hawthorne was bought for the construction of the WHYDC. Lee-Ann Coveyduck, an Ottawa planning official at the time, stated that this site was “the only site that met all the criteria that staff and the William E. Hay Centre were looking for” (Buchanan, 1991). The remainder of this section focuses on the opposition and support for the WHYDC relating to both the Britannia Heights and Hawthorne Road locations, the latter of which would ultimately become the site of the youth detention centre in Ottawa.

Opposition to the Construction of the Youth Detention Centre

In the months after the WHYDC was announced, resident outcry was significant. The residents of the first proposed site in the neighborhood of Britannia Heights were the most outspoken. “Not in my backyard” was the most common sentiment expressed concerning the project from these residents. This was largely driven by their belief that imprisoned youth and their visiting family members would threaten safety and cause problems in the neighbourhood. Below are a series of quotes that capture this sentiment:

“Be honest. Would you want a jail on your street? Not me. Particularly when it’s a jail for serious criminals, murderers, armed robbers, rapists, that sort of thing” (Hoy, 1990).

“I wouldn’t buy a house next door to a jail. Would you? And it should hardly be surprising that women in particular would feel insecure knowing that serious criminals are living just around the corner” (Hoy, 1990).

“Who wants jailhouse neighbours? [...] not me” (Hoy, 1990).

While the residents of Britannia Heights opposed the location for the project, their statements implied that they would be amenable to having the WHYDC built elsewhere. This is captured in the following statements:

“It is inappropriate to place a secure detention centre in a settled residential community” (Bell & Maloney, 1990).

“It’s an outright insult to the community. It’s simply the wrong location for this project” (Tolson & Eade, 1990).

“A lot of people don’t want a jail in their backyards” (Ibbitson, 1990).

“It’s just as inappropriate to locate a secure detention centre in that neighborhood – in my neighborhood as a matter of fact [...]” (Ibbitson, 1990).

“I’ve always believed the best setting for a youth detention centre is a rural setting, away from the city that caused the alienation and the problems that disturbed the youth in the first place” (Eade, 1990).

Another common theme among residents’ discourses opposing the new facility was the belief that it would bring down the value of homes in the surrounding area. As the newspaper article excerpts below highlight, residents argued that a prison was not a good financial decision for the neighbourhood, and they were worried for the impact on their own homes.

“Residents are particularly worried that a detention centre would mean a drop in property values” (Tolson, 1990).

“They feared the centre would lower property values and put residents at risk” (Kainz, 1991).

““They just want to throw everything in here” [...] She and her husband William fear the centre will lower property values” (Ibbitson, 1991).

While expressing their opposition to the WHYDC, residents also suggested that the proposed land be used to construct more residential buildings, believing that such a plan for the Britannia Heights site involving “single homes on the school site” (Eade, 1990) would be more likely to positively impact their own property values and create a better neighborhood environment.

During the struggle over the WHYDC, opposition to the project irrespective of its location was rare. In one such instance, criminologist Matthew Yeager denounced the facility, stating:

“ ... it would cost \$320.00 per cell to build (housing up to 24) and another \$2 million per year to operate, about \$80,000 per resident. “For that amount of money, I’ll take a kid and probably keep him delinquent-free”” (Buchanan, 1991).

At the time, the NIABY sentiment concerning a new youth detention facility and expressed desire to take care of criminalized youth in the community did not gain traction. This is not atypical of public criminology interventions that are not connected to community organizing (see Piché, 2015, 2016) that can foster an affective and political economy of broad, rather than narrow location- and stereotype-based carceral opposition. This is a point we shall return to at the conclusion of the paper.

Support for the Construction of the Youth Detention Centre

Although there were fewer residents who supported the decision to build a new youth detention centre, the arguments they and other proponents of the project made ultimately prevailed once the site changed. One such argument was that the WHYDC would allow for the separation of criminalized youth and adults in custody, which would prevent victimization and harm of the former at the hands of the latter, along with better programming better attuned to their developmental and reintegration needs. Examples of such sentiments can be found in the excerpts below, related to both WHYDC’s original construction in the early 1990’s and subsequent expansion in 2009.

“We have a need for these facilities in the community and there must be compelling reasons why it shouldn’t be there” (Eade, 1990).

“Traditionally, the older youth or those with the most severe charges might be held at Ottawa-Carleton Detention Centre [...] the province has indicated that it is committed to creating a youth justice system that is separate and distinct from the adult system” (Schulemberger, 2009).

“In a move being hailed by youth justice officials, the separate youth unit at the (Ottawa-Carleton) detention centre will be closed and all offenders will be transferred to William E. Hay Centre on Hawthorne Road” (Shufelt, 2009).

In a similar vein, one such resident took issue with how the facility was being characterized and the dehumanization of criminalized youth, although in a way that made distinctions with and degraded criminalized adults reflecting a “politics of innocence” (Gilmore, 2017) that legitimates punitive injustice, with a journalist noting:

“Wiseman objects to calling it a jail. “That’s a convenient shorthand that conjures up some of the worst fears people have. We’re dealing with 12- and 13-year-olds. We’re not dealing with hardened criminals”” (Hoy, 1990).

In contrast to those who opposed the WHYDC from being built in Britannia Heights, other residents argued that the neighborhood environment could positively influence young people to change, believing that it could successfully support their rehabilitation and reintegration.

“More important, putting these facilities in a quiet, middle-class neighborhood can help the kids understand there are alternatives to the lives they’re in danger of leading” (Ibittson, 1990).

“Proud, solid communities offer a way of life most of these kids have never thought possible. This prison is our last chance to get them to consider that it might be” (Ibittson, 1990).

“[...] if we really want to rehabilitate those wayward kids, where better than a nice middle-class area where they can see the joys of living a crime-free life?” (Hoy, 1990).

“Rehabilitation can only hope to succeed ... if the environment the inmates are in works for them, rather than against them” (Ibittson, 1990).

Proponents for the Britannia Heights location, which was more accessible than other areas, was also seen as important for keeping criminalized youth connected with their families as a vital ingredient in community safety. This is captured in the following excerpt:

“But I don’t think we’re ready to abandon the idea that those kids belong in the community (Ottawa). That’s where they’re from. Visits from family decrease drastically “the moment you take it away from public transportation”. And these visits are crucial to the rehabilitation of young offenders” (Buchanan, 1990).

In regard to the location of the facility, some project proponents applauded the decision to build the WHYDC, believing it would create new jobs in the community. This was especially evident in rural areas where the facility was seen as a “kind of an economic boom to the area” because “We need the jobs. We’d love to have the facility here” (Buchanan, 1990).

Where opponents of the WHYDC claimed the project would negatively impact neighbourhood safety and property values, the following excerpt noted that “Promoters for the jail [...] argue it would not present a threat to the neighborhood, would not lower property values, and would look better than the higher-density housing destined for those sites” (Hoy, 1990). Ultimately, proponents of the project prevailed, albeit with a different location than the original Britannia Heights plan, which highlights the limits of affective and political economies of NIMBYism and the salience of the same in favour of carceral expansion.

From NIMBY to NIABY: Towards an Alternative Political and Affective Economy of Prison Construction Opposition

In our examination of opposition and support to the siting of the William E. Hay Youth Detention Centre more than three decades ago, we have documented the existence of a political and affective economy generally associated with imprisonment and the incarceration of youth specifically that, with few exceptions, legitimates exclusion, albeit in different ways. In the case of opponents to the project, most were supportive of imprisoning youth, but did not want the WHYDC in their neighbourhoods because of perceptions around diminished safety and property values. In short, NIMBY sentiments that have long been documented in criminological literature (e.g. Sechrest, 1992) were readily present in most opposition around the Ottawa youth detention facility. What the continued salience of such negative sentiments vis-à-vis prison construction reveals is these concerns tend to transcend both time and geography.

In the case of proponents to the project, most support for the WHYDC was articulated on the grounds that it would expand the infrastructure to separate youth from adult prisoners and that keeping criminalized young people in or near their community while incarcerated would enhance their rehabilitation and re-entry prospects. In short, desires for the progressive humanization of punishment (Schept, 2015; also see Piché, 2014) were readily present in most statements supportive of the facility's placement in given neighbourhoods.

Despite differences between most arguments made by opponents and proponents concerning the placement of the WHYDC in given neighbourhoods, there is a shared political and affective economy of imprisonment that sees criminalized youth as threats to community safety, which necessitates their exclusion via incarceration. Where they disagreed was generally around where to cage youth.

For those who have been involved in campaigning against prison construction and/or studying it, our findings will not come as a surprise. Yet, what these findings – which are generally consistent with previous studies examining prison siting (for a summary see Piché, 2014, para. 7-10) and the criminalization of youth (e.g. Schissel,

2006) – also reveal are potential fissures that can be tapped into to try to generate opposition to carceral expansion premised on solidarity rather than difference. This builds bridges of unity between residents of prospective prison communities and residents from areas targeted by the punitive injustice system, as was the case when rural and urban California residents joined forces to try to stop the construction of a new mega-prison dubbed “Delano II” (Braz & Gilmore, 2005). Opposition to carceral expansion can also be premised on inclusion rather than exclusion by demanding that funds earmarked for expanding human caging be invested in community supports instead to stem the flow of bodies into proposed carceral spaces, as was done during the #NOPE / No Ottawa Prison Expansion campaign that had supporters demanding #YES / Yes to Equity and Supports (Doyle et al., 2021). In conclusion, opposition to carceral expansion can be based in the rejection rather than entrenchment of incarceration and associated justifications, ones that try to meet people where they are – even if they initially express NIMBY sentiments – to try to shift them toward a political and affective economy that rejects imprisonment, making Not In Any Backyard their ultimate demand.

Taking this and other lessons gleaned from past struggles to stop carceral expansion, CPEP joined forces with the Coalition Against the Proposed Prison shortly after Ontario’s provincial government announced their Eastern Region Strategy in August 2020, which includes the construction of a new 235-bed prison in the rural community of Kemptville situated 45 minutes south of Ottawa where we are based. Through activities behind closed doors (e.g. weekly campaign meetings from September to June, along with monthly meetings in July and August) and in public (e.g. participation in rallies), CPEP has been able to shift many opponents of the project to adopt our NI-ABY position and to demand a prison construction moratorium. Our public facing efforts began with CAPP’s first webinar in February 2021, where the kinds of NIMBY concerns documented in this article were debunked, to more recent events such as the *Joining Forces* concert held in November 2023, which was headlined by Mohawk singer-songwriter Logan Staats, who advanced reasons for opposition prison construction altogether (e.g. the need to end the mass incarceration of Indigenous peoples and preserve traditional lands that would be destroyed should the Kemptville prison get built).

As the struggle enters its fourth year, CAPP and CPEP continue to work together to foster a political and affective economy against human caging that aims to build bridges based on shared concerns ranging from our collective need to save the farmland with floodplain in a context of food insecurity and climate catastrophe to building communities of care rather than cages to enhance community well-being and safety (see Ottenhoff, 2023). Time will tell which affective and political economies driving this struggle will ultimately prevail.

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