

Genders, crime and criminal justice: Power, victimization and institutional harm

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Across sociological, criminological and socio-legal scholarship, gender has long been recognized not merely as a variable shaping experience of crime and victimization, but as a foundational axis through which deviance is defined, governed, and sanctioned. From early interactionist accounts to feminist and critical criminology, the production of deviance has been understood as a relational and institutional process, embedded in power relations rather than in individual transgression. Classic contributions by Becker (1963) and Lemert (1951) already showed how deviance emerges through processes of social reaction and labeling, while feminist legal scholarship later exposed how these reactions are deeply gendered, relying on normative assumptions about morality, respectability, and proper conduct (Smart, 1989).

Within this tradition, criminal law and criminal justice institutions do not simply respond to harm but actively participate in the construction of intelligible subjects of control and protection. Gender operates as a key classificatory principle in this process; it shapes who can be recognized as a legitimate victim, whose agency is read as autonomy or deviance, and which forms of violence are rendered visible or remain institutionally invisible. As victimological scholarship has emphasized, harm is often reproduced through legal procedures, evidentiary standards, and institutional routines that impose gendered expectations on credibility, emotional performance, and deservingness (Christie, 1986; Walklate, 2007; Pemberton, 2019). In this sense, criminalization

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and victimization appear not as opposite outcomes, but as interconnected effects of the same normative and epistemic frameworks.

A socio-juridical perspective further highlights how contemporary systems of criminal justice function as regimes of knowledge that selectively recognize certain forms of suffering while pathologizing, neutralizing, or silencing others. Feminist, intersectional, and queer theories have shown how law's claim to neutrality often conceals its reliance on binary conceptions of gender, sexuality, autonomy, and responsibility, producing systematic "blind spots" in the recognition of harm (Crenshaw, 1989; Smart, 1989). These dynamics are particularly visible at the intersections of gender with race, migration status, sexuality, and class, where subjects are alternately rendered invisible as victims or hyper-visible as threats. Rather than correcting these inequalities, criminal justice institutions frequently stabilize them through procedural routines, penal classifications, and carceral logics that transform structural violence into individualized fault (Farmer, 2004; Fraser, 2000).

Against this backdrop, the contributions gathered in this special issue approach gender, crime, and criminal justice not as isolated domains, but as mutually constitutive fields in which power, deviance, and recognition are continuously negotiated. By situating victimization, criminalization, and punishment within broader social and institutional processes, the issue advances a critical understanding of justice as a site where harm can be either interrupted or reproduced. This theoretical framing provides the common ground upon which the diverse empirical and analytical contributions of the issue are articulated, allowing to move beyond descriptive accounts toward a relational and transformative critique of contemporary justice systems.

It is within this critical socio-criminological framework — where gender, deviance, and criminalization are understood as relational and institutionally mediated processes — that the 20 contributions collected in this special issue situate their analyses. By moving beyond traditional legal positivism, these works utilize intersectional, decolonial, queer and abolitionist frameworks to expose the "blind spots" of contemporary justice. Taken together, these perspectives foreground the institutional production of harm, opening the space for a victimological reading of crime and justice.

From a victimological perspective, the contributions gathered in this issue highlight that harm does not end with the violent act itself, but is often reproduced, amplified, or denied through institutional responses. Legal frameworks, judicial practices, media narratives, and welfare and penal systems play an active role in shaping who is recognized as a "legitimate" victim and whose suffering remains invisible, contested, or pathologized. Rather than treating victimhood as a fixed legal status, this special issue conceptualizes victimization as a dynamic and relational process, unfolding across multiple levels of interaction and producing forms of secondary and tertiary

victimization that deeply affect access to justice, protection, and recognition (Christie, 1986; Condry, 2010; Pemberton, 2019).

To articulate this victimological lens and render visible the multiple sites in which harm is produced, negotiated, and contested, the issue is structured into five thematic sections, each addressing a distinct yet interconnected dimension of institutional victimization across legal, media, penal, and socio-cultural contexts.

What follows it's an interpretation of the various articles within semantic cores that can reflect the complexity and constitutive effects of gender analysis within socio-criminological and socio-legal reflection.

Judicial narratives and the “Ideal Victim”: stereotypes, secondary victimization, and media framing

This first group brings together a set of contributions that examine how victimization is constructed, negotiated, and often denied within judicial and media arenas. Collectively, the papers show that the recognition of harm is not a neutral response to violence but the outcome of gendered institutional processes in which courts and the press actively participate in defining who can be acknowledged as a legitimate victim. Across different legal systems and communicative contexts, justice emerges as frequently contingent upon victims' conformity to normative expectations concerning femininity, morality, emotional expression, and social positioning.

The different articles develop along four interrelated analytical levels: the historical genealogy of the “ideal victim” (Christie, 1986), contemporary judicial cultures and credibility assessments, media framing of gender-based violence, and the micro-interactional production of victimhood in courtroom exchanges.

The historical roots of contemporary victim typologies are explored in Ana Paula Zappellini Sassi's contribution, *Virgin or not, and dishonest? The treatment of female victims of sexual violence within the Brazilian criminal justice system (1890-1930)*. Focusing on the Brazilian criminal justice system between 1890 and 1930, the article reconstructs how female sexual “honesty” operated as a formal criterion for legal protection. Criminal law in this period was less concerned with women's physical or psychological integrity than with safeguarding the patriarchal family order and broader projects of social regulation. By legally distinguishing between “honest” and “dishonest” women, the system established a hierarchy of victims based on moral reputation rather than on the occurrence of violence, systematically excluding poor and racialized women

from recognition and protection. This historical analysis reveals the foundational role of honor-based norms in shaping enduring typologies of victimization.

Building on this genealogy, the contemporary operation of victim stereotypes within judicial decision-making is examined in Madalena Duarte's article, *Judicial narratives and the ideal victim: Gender stereotypes and credibility in the Portuguese criminal justice system*. Drawing on interviews with magistrates and prosecutors, Duarte shows how a persistent "legal imaginary" continues to influence credibility assessments despite legislative reforms and international instruments such as the Istanbul Convention. Victims are implicitly filtered through archetypal categories that privilege passivity, emotional compliance, and dependence, while autonomy or resistance is read as a sign of unreliability. These informal evaluative criteria contribute to systematic forms of secondary victimization and obscure the structural dynamics of power and control underlying intimate partner violence.

The role of the news media in reinforcing and amplifying these processes is addressed in Flaminia Saccà and Maddalena Carbonari's contribution, *Whose responsibility is it? Secondary victimization in the Italian press representation of intimate partner violence*. Through an extensive analysis of Italian press coverage, the authors show how media narratives frequently redirect empathy from victims to perpetrators, framing violence as the outcome of jealousy, emotional breakdown, or family disputes. Drawing on the concept of "himpathy," the article illustrates how such representations minimize male responsibility, normalize violence, and implicitly blame women for exercising autonomy. Media framing thus emerges as a key mechanism of secondary and tertiary victimization, shaping public discourse and potentially influencing judicial interpretation.

The interdependence of legal and media narratives is further examined in Pina Lalli and Maria Virgilio's article, *Femicide as an extreme crime: Judicial framing narratives*. Analyzing emblematic Italian femicide rulings, the authors identify two dominant interpretative frames: the perpetrator as an exceptional monster deserving extreme punishment, or as a pathological subject whose violence is explained through mental impairment or "delusional jealousy". While seemingly opposed, both frames individualize violence and obscure its structural and gendered roots, narrowing the scope of legal recognition and protection for victims.

Finally, the group of articles turns to the micro-level of courtroom interaction in Enrico Caniglia and Selena Mariano's contribution, *Surviving the blame: Resisting secondary victimization in trials for male violence against women*. Using Conversation Analysis, the authors show how victimhood is not granted but must be continuously performed and recognized through linguistic interaction. Cross-examination practices such as detailed probing and resumptive repetition function to test victims' conformity to commonsense expectations of innocence and vulnerability. At the same

time, the article highlights moments of resistance in which victims deploy ordinary interactional resources to counter delegitimizing narratives and reclaim epistemic authority.

These contributions illustrate how victimization operates as a multi-layered institutional process extending beyond the violent act itself. Through historical legacies, judicial cultures, media narratives, and everyday interactional practices, victims are subjected to forms of secondary and tertiary harm that condition their credibility, recognition, and access to justice. By foregrounding the persistence of the “ideal victim” model, these articles call for a critical rethinking of judicial reasoning and media ethics, emphasizing the need to move beyond normative performances of femininity toward a structural understanding of gender-based violence (Christie, 1986; Greer, McLaughlin 2017; Walklate, 2007).

Marginalized identities and “legal blind spots”: LGBTQIA+, trafficking, and radicalization

This second section addresses the processes through which subjects located at the intersection of multiple marginalized identities, such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and legal status, are systematically misrecognized by legal systems. From a victimological perspective, the contributions gathered here show that justice frequently oscillates between two complementary failures: the invisibilization of certain forms of harm and the hyper-pathologization of others (Walklate, 2011). In both cases, the law operates through normative filters (Smart, 1989), that prevent intersectional subjects from being fully recognized either as legitimate victims or as rights-bearing citizens (Crenshaw, 1989).

The section is structured around three interconnected analytical axes: the legal invisibility of marginalized victims, the pathologization of agency in securitarian and criminal frameworks, and the gendered attribution of responsibility in cases of trafficking and forced criminality. Together, these dimensions reveal how legal systems reproduce symbolic and material violence by relying on rigid conceptions of autonomy, responsibility and deservingness.

The problem of legal invisibility is centrally addressed in Elisa Begnis, Simone Tuzza and Martina Lo Cascio’s contribution, *Legal blind spots: the challenges of recognizing and addressing IPV in LGBT Communities within the legal system*. The authors show how institutional responses to intimate partner violence remain anchored in heteronormative and cisgender assumptions that frame abuse primarily as male violence against women. As a result, violence within LGBTQIA+ relationships is frequently misclassified as mutual conflict or rendered invisible altogether. The lack of specific training among legal and welfare professionals, combined with fears of outing and

institutional mistrust, produces fragmented and ineffective responses that expose survivors to secondary victimization and chronic under-reporting. This analysis highlights how formally neutral legal frameworks generate differential protection, systematically excluding non-normative victims from access to justice.

A complementary form of invisibility emerges in the context of hate crimes. In Arianna Bertan and Giulia Galesso's article, *Sewing the Tear. An analysis of the application of the Restorative Justice model to hate crimes against the LGBTQIA+ community in Italy*, the absence of specific criminal provisions addressing violence motivated by sexual orientation or gender identity is identified as a structural blind spot within the Italian legal system. The authors argue that prosecuting such acts as "ordinary crimes" erases their discriminatory motive, reinforcing institutional denial and symbolic harm. In this context, Restorative Justice is proposed not as an alternative to legal recognition, but as a relational framework capable of restoring victims' subjectivity and naming identity-based harm, provided that it is supported by adequate safeguards and institutional awareness.

While some subjects are rendered invisible as victims, others are rendered hyper-visible as threats. This mechanism is examined in Giorgia Baldi's contribution, *Constructing radicalisation, gender, and free will: An analysis of SIAC decision in the Shamima Begum case*. Focusing on the revocation of citizenship in the UK, Baldi shows how the law isolates individual conduct from its structural and developmental context, particularly when dealing with racialized Muslim women. By framing Shamima Begum as an autonomous and dangerous subject, legal reasoning relied on orientalist binaries that erased her status as a minor and potential victim of grooming or trafficking. National security discourse thus transformed citizenship from a fundamental right into a conditional privilege, producing a form of hyper-pathologization that excluded the subject from both victimhood and political belonging.

A similar logic of misrecognition is explored in Ilaria Boiano's article, *Women victims of trafficking: Forced criminality and the criminal justice system's failure to recognize agency, victimization and exploitation*. Through the analysis of Italian case law, Boiano demonstrates how women trafficked into criminal activities are routinely treated as autonomous offenders rather than as victims acting under coercion. Judicial reliance on formalist notions of free choice obscures the continuum of coercion that characterizes trafficking, leading to the criminalization of victims and the denial of international obligations such as the non-punishment principle established by the Palermo Protocol and EU law. This failure illustrates how the absence of an intersectional and relational understanding of agency results in profound forms of secondary victimization.

The gendered attribution of responsibility within trafficking prosecutions is further examined in Ruth Sapelza's contribution, *Gendered justice and symbolic power: A qualitative analysis of criminal law assessment practice of human trafficking in German criminal proceedings*. Analyzing

judicial decisions involving female co-offenders, Sapelza shows how women are frequently judged through moralized lenses that penalize deviations from normative gender roles. Contrary to assumptions of judicial chivalry, women involved in trafficking-related crimes are often punished more harshly than men, particularly when they are perceived as having violated expectations of caregiving or sexual respectability. Victim-blaming narratives, informed by rape myths and just-world assumptions, further contribute to the erosion of their credibility and the denial of their victimization.

In this section, the articles demonstrate that legal systems do not merely fail to protect intersectional subjects but actively participate in their silencing or pathologization, operating as a regime of knowledge that selectively authorizes certain experiences while disqualifying others (Smart, 1989). Whether through invisibility or hyper-visibility, marginalized identities are filtered through normative conceptions of autonomy, citizenship and morality that shape legal intelligibility and undermine access to justice and recognition, particularly for subjects positioned at the intersection of multiple axes of inequality (Crenshaw, 1989; Walklate, 2011). By foregrounding these dynamics, the section calls for a paradigmatic shift toward intersectional and relational approaches capable of recognizing constrained agency and minority stress as structurally produced conditions rather than individual deficits (Meyer, 2003) and of situating victimization within broader regimes of structural violence and misrecognition (Farmer, 2004; Fraser, 2000). Such a shift is necessary to restore centrality to the lived experiences of those most systematically excluded from the promise of equality before the law and from full recognition as rights-bearing citizens.

The carceral experience: control, health, and non-normative subjectivities

This third section shifts the lens from courts and public discourse to the prison itself, treating the carceral space as an institutional environment that can generate distinctive forms of harm and misrecognition. From a victimological perspective, the contributions gathered here foreground how incarceration produces layered vulnerabilities, somatic, psychological, and relational, particularly for subjects who are already positioned outside the cis-male norm around which penitentiary systems have historically been designed. Rather than viewing prison as a neutral site of punishment, the section conceptualizes it as a gendered and cis-normative architecture that reconfigures identity, care, and agency, often producing forms of secondary victimization through administrative routines, healthcare provision, and everyday practices of control.

The section is organized around three interconnected focal points: first, the prison as a gendered institution in which healthcare becomes a key site of power and inequality; second, the

emotional and narrative landscapes through which transgender subjectivities are negotiated under conditions of segregation and surveillance; and third, the role of intersecting social positions, gender, class, ethnicity, and criminalized affiliation, in shaping women's exposure to violence and control within specific socio-criminal contexts.

The gendered nature of imprisonment, and its direct implications for health and dignity, is examined in Chiara Morganti's contribution, *Health care in correctional settings: The health needs of women prisoners*. Morganti shows how women in Italian prisons experience incarceration within institutional settings that implicitly assume male bodies and male routines as the default. This "gender-blind" default becomes particularly visible in the domain of healthcare, where medical attention is not merely a service but a terrain in which power is exercised, through access, waiting, assessment of deservingness, and the disciplinary framing of needs. By highlighting the cumulative effects of overcrowding, stress, and limited autonomy, the article underscores how health vulnerabilities in prison cannot be separated from institutional governance: care is frequently experienced as conditional, bureaucratized, and entangled with surveillance. In victimological terms, this makes prison healthcare a key mechanism through which harm may be reproduced rather than alleviated, especially for those with prior histories of trauma, poverty, or social exclusion.

The emotional and identity-specific dimensions of incarceration are brought into sharper focus in Samuele Briatore's article, *Emozioni e identità di genere in carcere. Un'analisi performativa dell'esperienza delle donne transgender a Rebibbia Nuovo Complesso*. Through a performative and interpretive approach, including the use of symbolic tools such as tarot cards, Briatore explores how transgender women detained in Rebibbia negotiate a carceral setting that simultaneously controls and redefines them. The prison emerges here as a "binary trap": an institution whose order depends on rigid gender classification and whose routines can deny or distort transgender subjectivity. At the same time, the article illuminates how detainees construct meaning within constraint, producing narratives that are not only expressions of suffering but also attempts at self-recognition and continuity. This emphasis on emotional cartographies and symbolic mediation is crucial for a victimological reading of detention, because it reveals how identity denial, isolation, and administrative exceptionality can operate as forms of epistemic and symbolic harm while also documenting practices of resilience and narrative agency (Fricker, 2007). In this sense, the contribution also resonates with critical victimological debates that challenge the notion of the victim as a fixed and passive subject, emphasizing instead survival, agency, and meaning making under conditions of constraint. Rather than positioning incarcerated transgender women solely as objects of harm, the article foregrounds their capacity to endure, reinterpret, and symbolically rework the carceral experience, aligning with perspectives that conceptualize victimization as a process compatible with resilience and narrative agency (Kelly, 1988; Walklate, 2011).

A third contribution widens the section's intersectional scope by examining women's positioning within a specific criminal-ethnic context. In Garofalo-Meli's article, *Women, criminal power, and violence: The Case of the Casamonica clan*, women's experiences are analyzed at the crossroads of gender, kinship, and organized criminal affiliation. The paper shows how agency and victimization are not easily separable within this setting: women navigate coercion, loyalty, exposure to violence, and forms of negotiated power that are shaped by both patriarchal control and the internal logics of the clan. This contribution is particularly important for the section's overall argument because it complicates simplified binaries – victim/offender, coerced/voluntary – by situating women's choices within constrained environments marked by structural inequality and localized regimes of domination.

These three papers reframe the carceral experience as a site in which institutional structures can amplify vulnerability and reshape subjectivity, confirming that imprisonment produces forms of harm that exceed the deprivation of liberty itself (Sykes, 1958; Crewe, 2011). The section demonstrates that prison, especially when organized around cis-male assumptions and rigid binaries, may generate gender-specific “pains of imprisonment” that are inseparable from health outcomes, emotional life, and identity recognition.

In doing so, it invites a victimological rethinking of incarceration not only as punishment but also as a domain of institutional responsibility, where the provision of care, the recognition of personhood, and the management of difference can either mitigate harm or become themselves mechanisms of further victimization.

Structural violence and new legal challenges: femicide, hate speech, and risk

This fourth section focuses on what might be described as the “extreme” manifestations of gendered violence, while deliberately resisting the idea that these phenomena are exceptional in a sociological sense. From a victimological perspective, the contributions gathered here show that lethal violence, digital hate, risk perception, and institutional exclusion are best understood as interconnected expressions of structural violence: different points along a continuum through which gendered power disciplines autonomy, punishes deviation, and shapes unequal access to safety and recognition (Kelly, 1988; Farmer, 2004). The section also highlights how legal frameworks are being pushed to evolve, often unevenly, in order to name, classify, and prevent harms that move across domestic, digital, and professional spaces.

The section develops along four complementary trajectories: first, the empirical mapping and categorization of femicide as the lethal endpoint of intimate control; second, the legal challenge

of addressing sexist hate speech in the digital arena without collapsing into either impunity or overreach; third, the social distribution of perceived risk as a key indicator of unequal exposure to violence and insecurity; and fourth, the “institutional” dimension of gendered harm, explored through women’s professional trajectories in high-risk legal sectors. Together, these papers make a shared argument: contemporary responses to gendered violence must move beyond gender-blind categories toward structural and transformative approaches capable of recognizing relational dynamics, cumulative vulnerabilities, and the institutional production of harm.

The lethal extremity of gender-based violence is addressed in Sciarrino and Todesco’s contribution, *When gender kills: Russell’s conceptualization of femicide and its empirical analysis in Italy*. By providing a comprehensive empirical dataset, the article foregrounds two crucial victimological dimensions. First, femicide is overwhelmingly an “intimate” crime: it is embedded in relational histories, proximity, and forms of possessive control that often precede the killing. Second, the frequent post-crime suicide of perpetrators complicates legal and social narratives of accountability, shifting attention toward the ways in which lethal violence can function as an ultimate act of domination and erasure, one that removes the possibility of judicial truth-finding and public recognition. The dataset thus contributes not only to descriptive knowledge, but to the conceptualization of femicide as an institutional and preventive challenge: a form of violence whose dynamics are legible only when framed as the culmination of prior coercive trajectories.

The symbolic and communicative dimension of “extreme” gendered violence is explored in Beatriz Souto Galván’s article, *Criminal law approaches to combatting sexist hate speech in Spain*. Here, the focus shifts to the difficulty of legally categorizing misogynistic speech online, where anonymity, virality, and platform logics amplify harm. The article examines how Spanish criminal law has attempted to address sexist hate speech while navigating constitutional protections of expression and the evidentiary thresholds required for punishment. From a victimological standpoint, this contribution is significant because it frames hate speech not as mere offense but as a mechanism of silencing, humiliation, and exclusion that can restrict women’s participation in public life and normalize hostility as a precursor to physical aggression. In this sense, the paper illuminates the law’s struggle to recognize symbolic violence as a real harm with cumulative social effects.

While the first two contributions focus on violence as event and discourse, the third turns to the experiential and anticipatory dimension of insecurity. In Ferritti, Cucci, and Mandrone’s contribution, *La percezione dei rischi e gli strumenti di contrasto alla violenza sulle donne*, perceived risk is analyzed as a socially patterned phenomenon rather than a purely individual psychological state. Using experimental data, the authors identify how feelings of exposure to violence correlate with social conditions and structural precarity, highlighting which

populations experience greater vulnerability. This approach is particularly relevant to victimology because risk perception often shapes reporting behavior, help-seeking, and everyday mobility. It is a form of lived constraint that can mirror unequal distributions of actual violence. The article also implicitly challenges narrowly securitarian responses by showing how insecurity is produced through intersecting factors, like gender, socioeconomic position, life course, and cannot be addressed through punitive measures alone.

Finally, the section widens the lens to consider gendered harm within the institutions tasked with enforcing justice. Ombretta Ingrasci's contribution, *Women public prosecutors working in the antimafia sector*. Challenges within a high demand context, examines how gender inequality persists within high-prestige and high-risk legal professions. By focusing on women prosecutors in antimafia contexts, the paper shows how structural barriers operate through career pathways, organizational cultures, and the unequal burden of "availability" and sacrifice. Although not centered on victimhood in the narrow sense, this contribution expands the victimological frame toward institutional vulnerability: it reveals how gendered power can manifest as constrained agency, exclusion, and cumulative strain within the very field where legality and protection are produced. In this way, the section links external violence to internal institutional orders, emphasizing that the struggle against gendered harm also involves the transformation of professional cultures and structures.

Taken together, the papers in this section demonstrate that so-called "extreme" manifestations of gendered violence are not anomalies but concentrated expressions of structural inequality that challenge legal categories and institutional responses. By combining empirical mapping, doctrinal analysis, risk research, and institutional sociology, the section argues for a shift from reactive and gender-blind approaches toward frameworks that are preventive, relational, and transformative, capable of recognizing the continuum that connects intimate control to lethal outcomes, online hostility to civic exclusion, insecurity to social vulnerability, and public protection to the gendered organization of justice itself.

Reimagining Justice: abolitionism, decoloniality and alternative sociologies

The final section offers the most explicit departure from conventional penal rationalities, bringing together contributions that question the legitimacy and effectiveness of punishment-centered justice and propose alternative ways of responding to harm. From a victimological perspective, the shared premise is not simply that current systems "fail", but that they can actively reproduce harm, through institutional violence, re-traumatizing procedures, and the marginalization of the

very subjects they claim to protect. The papers gathered here therefore shift the focus from offender-centered logics and state monopolies over conflict toward frameworks that prioritize survivor safety, relational accountability, and structural transformation.

The section is organized around two converging moves: on the one hand, abolitionist and transformative justice approaches that relocate responses to violence within communities and everyday spaces; on the other, a set of methodological and analytical innovations that make institutional “blindness” empirically visible by mapping the gap between procedural texts, legal categories, and the lived experience of those involved. Together, these contributions reframe justice as a practical and epistemic project, something that must be built through listening, accountability, and the reorganization of social conditions, rather than simply delivered through carceral escalation.

A spatial and practice-oriented articulation of transformative justice is developed in Burchietti’s contribution, *Unpacking feminist understandings of abolitionism in responding to gender-based violence: theoretical insights towards a new framework*. Bridging feminist geography with abolitionist thought, Burchietti shifts the analytical terrain from courtrooms and prisons to public space, treating the city as a site where gendered violence is produced, normalized, and contested. The article argues that safety cannot be reduced to policing or surveillance, and that non-violent public spaces require forms of collective responsibility and support infrastructures capable of intervening without reproducing state violence. In victimological terms, this perspective foregrounds prevention and survivability: it asks what social arrangements make harm less likely, and what community practices can respond to violence without generating new layers of institutional victimization.

The section’s most direct conceptual intervention into the victim/offender binary is offered by Ludovica Cherubini Scarafoni in *A needed encounter: relational justice as an intersection between abolitionism and gender*. Cherubini Scarafoni introduces “relational justice” as a framework that insists on abolitionist critique and gender-based violence response must meet, precisely because survivor needs are often poorly served by systems designed to extract “procedural truth”, assign legal labels, and prioritize the state’s interest in punishment. The article argues for moving beyond offender-centered paradigms toward responses that recognize harm as a rupture in social relations and locate accountability within collective processes. Crucially, this is not presented as minimizing violence, but as refusing a model in which the survivor’s safety is made conditional on punitive escalation and on institutional pathways that frequently re-expose survivors to disbelief, delay, or coercive procedural demands.

The methodological pivot of the section is articulated in Morena Tartari’s contribution, *Practicing Dorothy Smith’s feminist alternative sociology in the criminal justice system: A case study*. Drawing on Dorothy Smith’s institutional ethnography, Tartari

demonstrates how institutional power is coordinated through texts (complaints, reports, standardized forms, and procedural scripts) that travel across offices and translate lived experience into administrable categories. The article focuses on the “disjunctures” between what institutions claim to do and what survivors actually need, showing how procedural pathways can inadvertently produce harm: delays, misrecognition, shifting burdens of proof, and requirements that force survivors to adapt to institutional expectations in order to be believed or protected. This approach offers a rigorous empirical tool for victimological critique because it makes institutional violence observable, traceable, and therefore contestable.

Taken together, the contributions in this final section propose that reimagining justice requires more than reforming penal codes or expanding punitive tools. They advance a transformative horizon in which justice is conceived as relational, situated, and materially grounded. It depends on infrastructures of support, on epistemic practices that listen rather than silence, and on methods capable of exposing how institutional routines reproduce inequality (Fricker, 2007). In this sense, abolitionism is presented not as an abstract ideal, but as a practical paradigm for minimizing harm, strengthening survivor autonomy, and building accountability without relying on systems that too often generate the very violence they promise to prevent (Davis, 2003).

Across different empirical contexts and analytical levels, the contributions converge on a shared diagnosis: punitive, state-centered systems of justice not only fail to prevent violence, but often reproduce it by obscuring structural inequalities, silencing marginalized voices, and transforming harm into an object of bureaucratic management. By combining theoretical perspectives that challenge carceral feminism and retributive penal rationalities with methodological innovations such as Institutional Ethnography, this special issue offers a cohesive and intellectually rigorous basis for rethinking contemporary justice practices (Smith, 2005).

While often grounded in a (critical) victimological perspective, the contributions collected in this special issue also engage more broadly with socio-legal scholarship that conceptualizes law as a set of social practices, interpretive frameworks, and institutional routines rather than a neutral system of rules. In this sense, the volume resonates with socio-legal analyses that examine how legal classifications, procedural logics, and epistemic standards actively shape subjectivities, distribute credibility, and reproduce inequality (Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Sarat & Kearns, 1993; Garland, 2001). Victimization thus emerges not only as a criminological concern, but as a privileged lens through which to interrogate the everyday operation of law, justice, and institutional power.

From a victimological perspective, the collective contribution of the special issue lies in its reconceptualization of justice as a set of institutional practices that can either reproduce or interrupt processes of victimization. Rather than approaching victimization as a discrete event linked to a single criminal act, the contributions foreground the cumulative and relational dynamics through which harm is shaped, intensified or rendered invisible by legal categorizations, procedural

routines and epistemic standards, in line with victimological scholarship that emphasizes the socially negotiated and institutionally mediated nature of victimhood (Walklate, 2011).

Within this framework, abolitionist perspectives are mobilized not as abstract normative horizons, nor as the rejection of law per se, but as analytical and practical tools for examining how contemporary justice systems actively participate in the production of secondary and tertiary harm. Across the cases examined, these perspectives illuminate how institutional responses operate as sites where credibility, recognition, and access to protection are unevenly distributed, often along lines of gender, race, sexuality, class, and migration status.

Rather than framing this shift in aspirational terms, the contributions document how alternative approaches to justice are already emerging through situated practices that privilege relational accountability over symbolic punishment, expose the disjuncture between procedural texts and lived experience and prioritize harm reduction over retrospective management. These practices reveal justice as a plural and situated process, whose capacity to protect depends on its ability to attend to vulnerability without pathologizing it.

Read through this lens, victimhood emerges as a negotiated and continually reconfigured status, while harm appears not as an isolated event but as a cumulative condition sustained through the ordinary functioning of institutions that classify, normalize, defer or silence suffering. Taken together, the contributions suggest that contemporary victimology must confront not only violence itself, but the conditions under which justice becomes either a source of further victimization or a site of meaningful recognition and protection.

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