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Rioting as legitimate abolitionist practice: Counterinsurgency versus radical place-making in the George Floyd rebellion

Hannah Kass
University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

Alexander Dunlap
Visiting Research Fellow University of Helsinki, Finland

Abstract

Nearly 5 years ago, nationwide uprisings erupted in response to the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. The result was the country's largest uprisings since the 1970s and a revival of abolitionist discourse(s) in ways unseen previously. Federal and local government agencies continue efforts at co-optation and pacification to subdue riotous and political discontent. Relying on Joy James's trifold framework of 'abolitionisms', this article confronts the procedural abolitionism that dominates abolitionist writings, discourses, and practices during and after uprisings across the United States. Drawing on accounts from the 2020 George Floyd rebellion, we show how procedural abolitionism contributed to the state's counterinsurgent efforts to suppress and undermine the insurrectionary and autonomous positions. This psychological operation assists to pacify and funnel abolition into a procedural strategy of police defunding campaigns. From these same accounts, we demonstrate how the radical place-making of abolition geography occurred on the ground across the United States in 2020 through insurrectionary and autonomous tactics of struggle, forming what we call *ungovernable abolition geographies*.

Keywords

Abolition, anarchism, counterinsurgency, protest, radical geography

Introduction

The hatred and rage instilled by the police in the United States and its flagrant racist executions have propelled a great diversity of people into action (Detritus, 2020; Hinton, 2021; Osterweil, 2019; Tahir, 2019; The Counted, 2017; Williams, 2015 [2007]). As the square where George Floyd was murdered was temporarily transformed into an autonomous zone to organize struggle, create community, and memorialize George Floyd's police

Corresponding author:
Hannah Kass, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Geography and the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies, USA.
Email: hkass@wisc.edu

murder (Vortex Group, 2023), anti-police struggles and uprisings spread across the United States in ways unseen since the 1970s. This riotous, insurrectionary outburst breathed new life into the ideas of police and prison abolition in unprecedented ways. 'Abolition' became a new 'buzzword' in the mass media, meanwhile spreading across academic, civil society, and other non-governmental sectors rapidly. The police had, once again, triggered and engulfed a good part of the urban United States into an insurrectionary struggle, which has turned abolition into a popular conversation as the police regain the streets and the prison-industrial complex (PIC) continues.

Hamlin (2023) has recently reviewed the diversity of perspectives and practices present in the abolitionist thought and praxis animating contemporary geographic scholarship. Identifying tensions with the state apparatus within abolitionist thought, Hamlin (2023: 761) explains: 'While some see the state as an important object of study and site from which to make demands, others advocate alternative avenues for social change that exceed the state and its institutions'. This article works through and further illuminates these tensions, by building upon Lang (2022), who identifies three strains, tensions or factions, within abolitionist thought and praxis in the wake of the George Floyd rebellion. These three strains mirror what James (2005) identifies as *procedural*, *autonomous*, and *insurrectionary* abolitionist positions. *Procedural abolition* is the 'advocacy/academic abolitionism', or 'the non-incarcerated academic/advocate' (Lang, 2022: n.p.), who seeks to interpret abolition as something that can – at least to some extent – be delivered by the state. This form of abolition approaches prison abolition through a series of 'non-reformist reforms' (Gilmore, 2023: 165): reforms and policy changes which ostensibly abolish the PIC through a gradual redistribution of state funding and welfare services by defunding the carceral state, among other de-carceration initiatives. Insurrectionary and autonomous abolitions, on the contrary, believe abolition must be done without or against the state.

Procedural abolition makes demands that are legible to the state by working within its infrastructure and bureaucracy, with the aim of working against it. As Charmaine Chua (2024: 1472) puts it, 'procedural abolition entails demanding and winning non-reformist reforms that seek not to "fix" policing but to reduce and eliminate police power … procedural abolition jostles for power within and against the state'. Thinking with Maher (2022) book 'A World Without Police', and the tensions between statist and anti-statist abolitions, Chua (2024: 1471) acknowledges the depth of the dilemma: '[A]bolitionist movements cannot escape the state, and even struggles for abolition democracy can entrench state power in more subtle forms'. Chua (2024: 1471) further points out what initially motivated this article – that procedural abolition risks the 'disaggregation of struggle', making it 'easier for the state to co-opt various movements through a divide and conquer strategy'. The 'abolitionist campaigns that aim to shift state policy', Chua (2024: 1472) continues, '[are] more likely to re-legitimate dominant systems than ones focused on building autonomous self-reliance'. Chua's concerns foreground this article, which demonstrates how procedural abolition can ultimately displace and distract from the social and political possibilities of autonomous and insurrectionary abolition. We argue that procedural abolition positions risk serving to pacify legitimate political, economic and racial grievances. While these three abolitionist positions overlap at times, we draw on accounts of the George Floyd rebellion to animate the counter-insurrectionary propensity of procedural abolition.

The article proceeds by explaining our grounded theory methodology. Following the methods section, we revisit debates about the role of the state in in abolitionist struggle within the United States. Our analysis proceeds by showing how several rebels across the United States observed state legitimation occurring through the use of 'outside agitator' narratives and police defunding campaigns. The accounts of the George Floyd rebels reveal significant sentiment for the abolition of police as the direct abolition of the United States as an illegitimate state territory. We then explore how the destruction of property and the proliferation of networks of care helped achieve temporary spaces of abolition, in contrast to the counterinsurgent role played by 'outside agitators'

alongside 'defund the police' as procedural abolitionist praxis. From these rebels' accounts, we construct a theory of *ungovernable abolition geographies* as a critical theoretical framework for understanding not only this uprising, but the dynamics of abolitionist struggles of the future.

Method and methodology: Grounded theory from insurgent knowledges

Examining the George Floyd rebellion of 2020, this article employs a grounded theory methodology that seeks to theorize *with* radical social movements by pulling theory out of the documents created by and for them. This approach responds to anarchist geographer Joshua Mullenite's (2021: 208) push for human geographers to 'include the marginalized voices who for a variety of reasons are kept from participating in traditional academic debate and discussion over the issues of their everyday lives'. A grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis offers an epistemologically resonant approach to honoring the 'insurgent knowledges' contained within anarchist and abolitionist media and documentation of struggle (Mullenite, 2021: 208). Grounded theory centers the empirical data itself by building a theoretical framework directly from the data source (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This approach is opposed to a more traditional scientific methodological approach, which imposes a theoretical framework from the top down in order to glean a hypothesis from the data wherein the researcher is assumed to know the best way to interpret the data. A grounded theory approach, like anarchism and abolition, offers a more bottom-up, directly democratic, autonomous form of knowledge production that centers the ideas that emerge from testimonies. This, moreover, seeks to challenge the selective liberal political bias within academic research that – for whatever reasons – tends to ignore, minimize and discredit autonomous and insurrectionary tensions.

Drawing on movement literature 'offers the opportunity to push the boundaries of our understanding', contends Mullenite (2021: 210), 'creating … new scholarly insights in conversations with comrades and interlocutors typically left out of such discussions'. We collected a series of documents from the George Floyd rebellion, and spent significant time reading and re-reading them, using inductive coding to locate central themes within them. We then organized the themes into categories, creating a foundation for building theories and concepts from the data itself (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). This article draws on movement and individual accounts obtained from online archives of anarchist and abolitionist zines, documentary films, and interviews. The archives are housed by popular autonomist and anarchist media websites, including but not limited to CrimethInc., Ill Will, and Unicorn Riot. Some documents were later compiled and published as books (i.e. Nevada, 2022; Vortex Group, 2023). This article draws on 20 pamphlets/zines, five videos containing interviews with a reporter, and two documentary films. We also include two participatory accounts written by an academic and a popular author, Chua (2020) and Gelderloos (2020).

These particular sources were chosen based on the stories told by these accounts about the uprisings as they unfolded across the United States. Our encounters with these accounts inspired us to initiate further discussion on their contents in the subfield of abolition geography. The trends we saw pointed to an engagement with space in an abolitionist struggle that was simultaneously insurrectionary and autonomous in character. We also noticed a troubling resonance with accounts and how they experienced procedural abolition as an accomplice in state counterinsurgency initiatives. Despite the fact that these accounts are not representative of all participants' experiences of this heavily documented uprising, the rebellious abolition and its hostility to procedural abolition deserve attention. The geographic dimensions of this uprising should be of interest to abolition geographers committed to 'radical placemaking' (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.; Ince, 2012) and what that entails. The sources chosen, moreover, represent a range of locations within the United States, as the dynamics we noticed were present across the country. We do not provide a case study for any one location within the United States; rather, we are highlighting trends constituted by accounts of the uprisings in many locations

across the country. Based on these testimonies, we advance a theory of *ungovernable abolition geography*.

To do so, we are theorizing with participants in struggle across the United States in 2020. An internationalist or diasporic connection was not a significant theme we saw represented in these accounts, and thus such an analysis is not the focus of this article or within its scope. Still, we hope that a global-scale analysis is explored in future studies of the 2020 uprisings. We acknowledge that our contribution may or may not apply to different contexts – in terms of place, scale, and subject. We are not necessarily seeking to theorize abolition geographies in all its forms. Rather, we draw from the evidence produced by participants in the 2020 anti-police uprisings across the United States to suggest that a combination of *autonomous abolitionism* and *insurrectionary abolitionism* were interdependently occurring in the streets, and *procedural abolitionist* tendencies were insufficient and sometimes at odds with the abolition which occurred across the United States in 2020. How might participants in these uprisings inform the subfield of abolition geography in its attempt(s) to further police abolition across the United States? This contribution seeks to begin to answer this question.

Defunding, abolition, and the state

We find that several rebel accounts during the George Floyd uprisings have observed a counter-insurrectionary function within the procedural abolitionist strategy. Statist objectives tend to merge and find common ground with procedural abolitionist strategy, working together to discredit and pacify insurrectionary and autonomous tendencies to prevent 'new life-worlds' without police (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.). Focusing on rebel observations of how the 'outside agitator' narrative worked alongside and coalesced with 'defund the police' campaigns, this article highlights the present danger for procedural abolition to merge with the aims of police counterinsurgency, betraying police abolition and re-legitimizing the state through protecting property (Blomley, 2016). This article seeks to contribute to abolitionist praxis and advance political clarity within abolition geographies.

Abolition as a popular concept has the potential to perform a political sleight of hand. 'Now, to abolish means to ablate, i.e., eliminate, an essential component from society', says Alfredo M. Bonanno (2008 [1997]: 11–12) from Rebibbia prison in Italy. 'Leaving things as they are, this abolition would be impossible'. Abolition, Bonanno contends, does not encompass the whole of the state and capital, but specific institutions, such as the police and prisons. 'Separation is the essence of politics', says Jean Weir (Bonanno, 2008 [1997]: 4), 'and by isolating prison [and police] from the State and capital as a whole, the harbingers of social surgery can find allies across the whole societal spectrum from priests to social workers, university professors to ex-cons'. While Weir's words can be flipped on themselves to indicate the potential for political unity in the opposite political direction, this unity must not threaten the destructive and transformational political content potentially absorbed and recuperated by a counterinsurgent, reformist deployment of abolition.

The abolitionist movement in the United States has always been a broad and diverse movement of anti-slavery activists and insurgents, centered upon the abolition of anti-Blackness as a whole. It has contained liberal reformist, revolutionary, and insurrectionary factions, and has remained multiracial in composition (James, 2005). Its character and tactics ranged from the 'free states' which failed to evade pro-slavery interventions like the Fugitive Slave Act; the militant multiracial Anti-Man-Hunting League of Boston, which kidnapped and fought slave catchers with clubs; uprisings and treason to whiteness;[1] chasing sugarcane planters into cane fields and setting them on fire; among many other groups and actions (Ignatiev, 1994; James, 1989 [1938]; Since, 2016). The diversity of the history of abolition continues into the present.

The movement for the abolition of slavery, however, gave way to state institutions defined by racial capitalism. Many early abolitionists mentioned above sought to resist, if not destroy, this political trajectory. The link between the system of slavery and the PIC became undeniably apparent

with prison expansionism in the United States and the mass incarceration of Black and brown people in the 1980s (Gilmore, 2007; Roberts, 2019). The prison abolitionists, such as Davis (2011), drew inspiration from W.E.B. Du Bois's (1998) discussion of abolition as not only the negation of slavery, but the construction of an 'abolition democracy'. This refers to an egalitarian democratic society, or as abolition geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore (Gilmore, cited by Brown, 2020: 1) puts it, 'life-affirming institutions' built on democratic principles. Prison abolitionist thought is also rooted in Black Marxism (Robinson, 2000 [1983]), Black anarchism (Anderson, 2021), Black autonomism (Various, 2024), classical anarchist writings (Bonanno, 2008 [1997]; Goldman, 2017 [1911]), and anarchist criminology (Nocella II et al., 2020). In 1971, the upstate New York Attica prison uprising attempted prison abolition (Davis and Rodríguez, 2000), alongside numerous urban guerrilla groups from the Black Panther Party, the Black Liberation Army (Churchill, 2002) and the George Jackson Brigade (Burton-Rose, 2010) seeking to actively free their friends from prison or directly attacking carceral institutions themselves.

In contemporary abolitionist thought and praxis, there is a focus on refunding the welfare state and defunding the carceral state as a kind of incremental stepping stone to abolition. At the same time, there is a growing faction of abolition geographers and advocates who observe how defunding campaigns perhaps play a pacifying role in neutralizing on-the-ground struggles for police abolition (see Anderson, 2021; Chua et al., 2024; James, 2005; Lang, 2022). Instead, they emphasize the importance of grassroots approaches to abolition, such as direct action against property and the state to reclaim space from these institutions, reappropriating and reclaiming spaces by practicing mutual aid (Hamlin, 2023). This article's analysis of uprising accounts finds resonance with the latter view.

The schism between procedural and autonomous/insurrectionary abolitions relates to old political debates around the state. Indeed, abolitionist positions regarding the state echo nearly two-century-old debates between anarchists, Marx and his followers. Marx, we must remember, was also anti-state – the difference was that Marx thought that 'once classes had been abolished the state would die a natural death, as if through lack of nourishment' (Fabbri, 2017 [1922]: 20). Anarchists, to the contrary, believed the state had to be consciously and actively dismantled. Anarchists never believed in Marx's 'creation of the peoples' state', 'the proletariat raised to the level of the ruling class,' and, consequently, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (Bakunin, 1990 [1873]: 177). Seizing the state apparatus, Bakunin (178–179) exclaimed, would reproduce 'despotism of a ruling minority' of '*former* workers' – no longer the working class – with a 'highly despotic government of the masses by a new very small aristocracy of real or pretend scholars' (emphasis added). Recounting Bakunin, Lucien Van de Walt (2017: 535) explains: 'The sincerity of the revolutionaries was not at issue; rather, the very use of the state machine imposed an "iron logic" that made state managers enemies of the people. *Activists do not change the state; the state changes them*' (emphasis added). This understanding of the state as an apparatus of conditioning, if not psycho-social occupation designed to consume all 'resources' – human and nonhuman (Dunlap & Jakobsen, 2020) – for its own life and capitalist political economy remains an enduring issue within abolitionist discussion.

Indeed, the split between Marx and Bakunin regarding the role of the state in liberation struggles was mirrored by influential abolitionist thinkers W.E.B. Du Bois and Angela Davis (Lester, 2021). Many contemporary abolitionists refer to Du Bois's (1998) *Black Reconstruction* and its concept of 'abolition democracy' to describe and define their own abolitionist politics: the idea that Black people must be incorporated into American democracy and its institutions in order to fully abolish slavery in the United States. Davis (2005) builds on this concept by critiquing the social relations of slavery embedded in American democracy itself. Rather than defining abolition democracy in relation to a fundamentally undemocratic state, Davis proposes an abolition democracy that transcends the United States: not only the 'negative

process of tearing down, but it is also about building up, about creating new institutions' (Davis, 2005: 73). Mirroring Marx's followers at the First International, '[f]or Du Bois', explains political theorist Quinn Lester (2021: 3083): 'this transformation was only possible if this abolition democracy was paired with dictatorship as federal control'. This 'dictatorship as federal control', for Du Bois (1998: 581), meant that 'the next step [toward abolition democracy] would have been, under law and order, gradually to have replaced the wrong leaders by a better and better sort' and was crucially tied to seizing the state's monopolization of force. Contrary to an abolition democracy which critically engages the state and its power to wield carceral state violence, Du Bois held a more Marxist-Leninist view of abolition, wherein a Black proletariat would seize the means of force monopolized by the state to create a new one. 'In Du Bois's repeated references to dictatorship, his use means that competent and visionary leadership needed to be paired with the force necessary to carry it out', explains Lester (2021: 3083). In contrast, Davis represents an effort to extend abolition democracy toward anti-authoritarian means and ends by addressing the social relations and political institutions giving rise to slavery and the PIC: particularly, the abolition of racial capitalist institutions such as property and the state.

Liberal-left and Marxist critiques of the carceral state tend to echo Du Bois's 'abolition democracy' in its focus on the direction of state funding rather than the state's existential reliance on the carceral state. With regard to police abolition, Chua et al. (2024) discuss how procedural campaigns to defund the police have tended to shift abolitionist energy and tendencies toward 'non-reformist reforms' (Gilmore, 2007: 245), which, as Bonanno and Weir identified (Bonanno, 2008 [1997]: 4, 11–12), do not fundamentally abolish the police or prisons as institutions. In an analysis of 109 cities where defund campaigns were demanded and promised, 83% of those cities increased their police budgets by at least 2% between 2019 and 2022, according to Manthey et al. (2022). In Austin, Texas, a 30% police funding decrease occurred in 2021 followed by a 50% increase in 2022. While this increase in funding is unsurprising, it raises larger strategic, tactical and discursive issues. The defund campaigns are contextually situated within the broader proceduralist approach to 'abolition democracy' as a 'non-reformist reform' (Gilmore, 2007: 245), which has generated questionable results.

The first advocate for 'non-reformist reforms' was André Gorz (1967: 102), who proposed this phrasing as a kind of middle ground between the classic dichotomization of reform and revolution. While 'reformist reforms' are thought to keep the existing system intact, 'non-reformist reforms' are procedural efforts to reduce the system in question incrementally with targeted reformist efforts. Abolitionists have taken up Gorz's 'non-reformist reforms' to defund police and enact de-carceration campaigns, among other applications (Critical Resistance, 2021; Kaba, 2021). The most prominent of these reforms during the 2020 uprisings was the demand to defund the police. 'What are the possibilities of non-reformist reform – of changes that, at the end of the day, unravel rather than widen the net of social control through criminalization?' Asks Gilmore (2007: 245), aiming to answer this question 'with the premise that social wages in the shape of tax dollars belong to all of us, inasmuch as we produced them, people can organize at some political-geographic levels to take charge of resources and turn them to life-enhancing use'.

While it is understandable to assert that 'tax dollars belong to all of us' for 'life-enhancing use', it leaves the interconnected necropolitics of the state and racial capitalism unquestioned – prisons, police, war, borders, and their utility from and toward racialized exploitation. Tax dollars 'inasmuch as we produced them' (Gilmore, 2007: 245) also belong to our employers, before they belong to the state. Tax dollars come from racial capital, and any funneling of tax dollars into social programs cannot be disassociated from their concurrent funneling into the carceral state. Taxation is a legal regime like any other, defined and maintained by the criminalization of its evasion. At the same time, the state relies on taxation in order to maintain its monopoly on legitimate force. All parts of the state are connected by this fundamental

characteristic of modern states – the expansion of the carceral state's aim of violence monopolization is inherent to modern statism (Seigel, 2018; Tilly, 1992; 1985; Weber, 1965). As Black anarchist writer William C. Anderson (2021: 157) reminds us: 'The answer to state violence is not a new reformed state, it's operating beyond and surpassing the expired relevance of such a destructive formation'.

Following Chua (2024: 1475), this article affirms how autonomous and insurrectionary abolitionisms tend to work together in moments of rupture. While these abolitionist approaches can and must work together, procedural abolition deserves further critical attention. We argue that procedural approaches to police abolition can implicitly support state counterinsurgency strategies by assisting in transforming police abolition into defunding the police, and defunding the police into vague police reforms that increase police budgets nationally (Manthey et al., 2022). The uprising and movement were unable to withstand police expansion by other means (Ba et al., 2023; Bernd, 2020; CoC, 2024). Too much focus on procedural tactics and strategy within abolitionist struggles runs the risk of neutralizing them, rendering struggles compatible with the state's larger counterinsurgency strategy. We define counterinsurgency as a type of war –'low-intensity' or 'asymmetrical' combat – and style of warfare that, backed by violent force, emphasizes intelligence networks, psychological operations, media manipulation, security provision and social development to maintain governmental legitimacy (Dunlap, 2018; FM3-24, 2014; Williams, 2011). Counterinsurgency is not solely centered on coercive force, but initiating economic and social activities related to social programs (e.g. welfare), youth programs, media campaigns, community development, and NGO initiatives, among others (Moe and Müller, 2017; Williams, 2011, 2022), which seek to develop intelligence and 'strategic communication' between authorities and target populations to undermine rebellion and political challenge (Munger, 2013; 122). Counterinsurgency, said simply, is a doctrine of governance and population management that seeks to maintain political stability.

Insurrectionary and autonomous abolitionisms include '[organizing] at some political-geographic levels to take charge of resources and turn them to life-enhancing use' (Gilmore, 2007: 245). Rather than in the form of proceduralist non-reformist reforms, insurrectionary and autonomous abolitionisms organize political geographies which evoke the abolition democracy of Davis (2005), who 'alongside other abolitionists today does not view the state as an appropriate or even useful actor in this process' (Lester, 2021: 3083). In her view of abolition, according to Lester (2021: 3083), 'Davis relies on the self-organizing capacity of the people themselves to both destroy carceral power and build new liberatory institutions'. During the George Floyd rebellion, this took the confrontational form of destroying the institutions and infrastructure of capitalism, property, and the state; looting commodities for grassroots wealth redistribution; and building autonomous relational-spatial commons. Freedom is a great number of places (Gilmore, 2017: 227; Heynen and Ybarra, 2021), which can also extend to torched precincts; to the shell of a burnt-down Wendy's; to the looted AutoZone, Target, and liquor store; to the cops cleared from city streets. The possibility for uprisings to reclaim and transform spaces is significant. We now turn to accounts recognizing procedural abolition crafting, at times, fertile ground for neutralizing insurrectionary and autonomous tendencies on the ground.

Counterinsurgency of a property regime versus the abolition of the (United) State(s)

Counterinsurgency is a military doctrine and a practice of domestic warfare that incorporates populations through policing, civil administrative, and social development initiatives (Dunlap, 2020; Fair and Ganguly, 2014; Schrader, 2019; Williams, 2011; 2015). The deployment of policing and civil administrations (e.g. governmental and media channels) was repeatedly observed in accounts of the 2020 uprisings. Its primary manifestations included reformist campaigns of state legitimation by the Democratic Party, local activists, and nonprofit

organizations who attempted to delegitimize and brand autonomous actions as emanating from 'outside agitators' (see Gelderloos, 2020). While the examples are countless, Reuters (2020), reposted by *Yahoo!News*, exclaims:

> But officials from Minnesota on Saturday said the protests have taken on a more destructive tone due to an infiltration by extremists and outside agitators … according to that state's governor Tim Walz, who says there are forces looking to use the protests as a cover for violence.

In another press conference, Tim Walz continues:

> Because our communities of color, our Indigenous communities, were out front fighting hand-in-hand to save businesses that took generations to build. Infrastructure, and nonprofits designed to serve a struggling community were torn down and burned by people who took no regard about what went into that. So, let's be clear, the situation in Minneapolis is no longer, in anyway, about the murder of George Floyd, it is about attacking civil society—instilling fear and disrupting our great cities (Herb et al., 2020).

'The outside agitator' trope claiming that it is not Black people themselves who are rising up against anti-Black conditions, but rather 'extremists' and white people provoking chaos from a mythical 'outside' of an ill-defined yet implied 'inside', has been used to undermine uprisings since the emergence of slave revolts, resurfacing repeatedly in Black rebellions ever since (Gelderloos, 2013; Hinton, 2021; Nevada, 2022; Osterweil, 2019). The political logic of the 'outside agitator', intentionally or not, worked simultaneously with police defunding campaigns to compete with the rebels for legitimacy in 2020, and served to (re)legitimize the state and its violence in the face of the uprisings' oppositional challenge (e.g. 'white reconstruction', Rodrguez, 2020). The so-called 'outside', which was trying to prefigure the social relations and material conditions of mutual aid and solidarity within autonomous zones to manifest alternatives to policing, was systematically stifled by various governmental and non-governmental forces. Expressing modernized state and para-state strategies outlined by Brigadier General Kitson (2010 [1971]) in Northern Ireland (see also Schrader, 2019; Willams, 2014), the defunding campaigns sought to mitigate conflict, directing rebellious energy toward affirming the institution of police, and consequently, the legitimacy of the state.

The 'outside agitator' and reformism in state-property legitimation

We find that the coalescence of reformism and the outside agitator narrative helped solidify a 'territory of property' (Blomley, 2016) – a sociospatial relation of policing which served to repair the legitimacy of state power through its protection of property. While 'disrespecting property [is] a long-standing practice of abolition' (Dawson, 2022: 319), implementing and enforcing private property regimes onto commonly held and communal land remains an essential strategy of counterinsurgency in the past and present (Dunlap, 2018), to enact settler colonial takeover of territory. Unsurprisingly, any challenge to private property is declared by governmental and media forces to be the work of 'outside agitators'. The trope of the 'outside agitator' is employed by state and media institutions against property transgressors to delegitimize dissent against white supremacist institutions in the past and present, including slave revolts and the civil rights movement (Hinton, 2021; Osterweil, 2019). Counterinsurgency and property continuously emerge in moments of political upheaval to reinforce and legitimize colonial institutions.

Minneapolis-based participant Nevada (2022: 66; Living and Fighting, 2022: 15) discusses how the reoccurring use of the 'outside agitator' trope was wielded to protect property (and the overall function of capitalist institutions steeped in white supremacy) that people were fighting by calling rebels 'white supremacist outside agitators' specifically for destroying property. This political sleight of hand sought to geographically displace riotous discontent, 'Other' direct action, displace rioters from

a sense of place and delegitimize their grievances. Just as counterinsurgency doctrine seeks to isolate 'insurgents', in this case, the state's goal was to isolate those resisting police rule and destroying property by attempting to undermine their political grievances and convince the rest of the population that the property transgressor belongs 'outside' of the population, ultimately re-solidifying state power and legitimacy (Kilcullen, 2012). Counterinsurgency and other military manuals are explicit when conceptualizing non-violent protest as (proto-)insurgency (Dunlap, 2018; Dunlap, 2020). The 'white supremacist outside agitator' narrative of the counterinsurgency sought to recapture the 'hearts' and 'minds' of a population aggrieved by a white supremacist property regime and redirect its expression of those grievances toward reinforcing the property regime that justifies police murders and triggers riots. The state's implication here is that it is not property or its policing that is irredeemably white supremacist, but those who rebel against it.

Minneapolis participant and anarchist writer Peter Gelderloos (2020: 4) notes how the rebels themselves were cast as the police: 'agent provocateurs', and thus also the proclaimed source of the rebellion's grievances. Counterinsurgents seek to understand and address the grievances of their target populations (with the least amount of cost and/or political adjustments) in order to distance populations from the rebellion the state seeks to destroy. By appropriating the population's anger-turned-rebellion at the white supremacist property regime and its police, counterinsurgency deflects and gaslights its target population.

From Minneapolis (Gelderloos, 2020; Living and Fighting, 2022; Nevada, 2022) to Oakland (Some Abolitionists, 2023) to Lincoln (Irruptions, 2021), the psychological operation of the 'outside agitator' was wielded by political actors 'across the political spectrum' (Gelderloos, 2020: 3). 'Everyone given a bullhorn by the mainstream media', explains Minneapolis participant and writer Peter Gelderloos (2020: 3), 'has been warning about outside agitators. Trump does it, most police chiefs do it, Democratic mayors do it, even the progressive wing of the Democratic Party like Ilhan Omar and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez do it'. In the streets of Lincoln and Oakland, for example, participants note that the emergence of activist leadership in the streets aiding the spread of the outside agitator narrative as activists with megaphones would encourage crowds to work with the police and denounce protestors who chose to destroy property (Irruptions, 2021; Some Abolitionists, 2023). The Minnesota Freedom Fighters, a group of protestors who took it upon themselves to admonish property disruptors and advocate instead for 'peace', emerged in the streets of Minneapolis using the language of abolition to 'peace-police' protestors. 'This same tendency [of peace-policing] emerged in George Floyd Square with the Agape Movement', explains Nevada (2022: 108–9), culminating in their repeated acknowledgement in a 'Justice Resolution' written by activists in August 2020 for 'their role in "providing safety" in MPD's absence'. Particularly, 'demand 18 (of 24 [demands]), which calls for them to receive a permanent space within the [George Floyd] Square [from the city] to continue to operate [as a vigilante peace-police force]'.

Yet according to Minneapolis participant Nevada (2022: 63), the uprisings 'directly abolish[ed] property relations', which substantially threatened the status quo enough to warrant a counterinsurgency campaign. This practice of counterinsurgency wielded against the uprisings within the United States, Blomley (2016: 596) recognizes, is a form of '[t]erritorialization' which 'helps to define, inscribe, and stabilize a set of [property] relations' that ultimately demarcate who is included and who is excluded – who is 'outside' a political regime in which property is sacrosanct. Successful counterinsurgency operations aim to pacify a population's grievances by exhausting them militarily, meanwhile providing state concession and the integration of those grievances, such as through offering reforms (which never actually materialize in any meaningful way). The outside agitator narrative, said simply, seeks to divide, conquer and confuse people into affirming the status quo. That, in practice, serves to steer the rebellion toward a reformist, and indeed a procedural abolitionist, trajectory. Most prominently in the accounts we analyzed, the

defund campaign in 2020 served the function of, in the words of participant Adrian Wohlleben (2023: 236), 'canalizing the rebellion itself into the framework of leftist politics (Black Lives Matter™)'. This participant identifies a neutralizing pattern, lamenting that '[t]he operation is always the same: jam the rebellion into a watered-down and sanctioned form of dialogue between recognized constituents and marginalize and criminalize any grammar of action or form of communication that doesn't fit within it'. Participants in the uprisings are documenting a counterinsurgency campaign that abolitionists must contend with, and take care not to perpetuate.

'Defund the police'

The coalescence of the 'outside agitator' narrative with the 'defund the police' movement during the George Floyd rebellion are recognized by many participants as types of 'soft counterinsurgency' (Dunlap, 2018; 2020). The benefit of these efforts for the state and policing (even if not necessarily the purpose or intention of procedural abolitionists themselves) is to maintain the existing political economy and keep the carceral state intact. 'Defund the police' is an inadequate proposal, and it is ultimately a fundamentally different demand than 'abolish the police', which benefits the state and policing by preventing fundamental sociopolitical transformation. Reforms of all kinds, be they reformist reforms or non-reformist reforms, have been shown to play a crucial role in the re-stabilization of anti-Black society, or what abolitionist scholar Rodríguez (2020) calls 'white reconstruction'. According to one uprising participant, the '[d]efund [demand] became nothing. It was easily co-opted. #DefundThePolice was used to distract from the power of the insurrection' (Anonymous, 2022: 8). Shemon (2023: 190), another participant, sees the defund demand as 'reformist abolition' enacting a type of 'Black counterinsurgency' led by a coalition of 'professional activists, NGOs, lawyers, and politicians' seeking to stabilize the existing system with a defund campaign. These efforts, we must remember, sit in direct contrast to the 'revolutionary abolition' which took place in the streets. According to an interview by ABC News with sociologist Rayshawn Ray (Manthey et al., 2022): 'Part of the reason why the "defund the police" narrative has stayed around is because police officers say it and elected officials say it'. Drawing on her participant observation within the Minneapolis uprising, Chua (2020: 131) points to how a reversal of defunding campaigns occurred in Minneapolis in the wake of the George Floyd uprising:

> thousands cheered as the Minneapolis city council made a historic public pledge to defund and dismantle the MPD. Yet less than two months after the city council's pledge, an unelected and unrepresentative City Charter Commission voted to prevent a ballot measure to lower the number of police in Minneapolis. For many, this reversal was taken as a betrayal…. Procedural strategies for abolition are thus potentially limited because they seek concessions from a state whose material interest is ultimately to protect the racial capitalist order and private property, which is policing's foundational function.

Chua demonstrates the danger of proceduralism's concessions, which came at the expense of the life-threatening insurrectionary and autonomous struggle and its revolutionary potential.

The liberal-left state, in this view, can achieve abolition via gradualist defunding and redistribution. 'Proposals to "defund" amount to little more than a monetary displacement from one section of the state to another', explains Shemon (2023: 190) the uprising participant, 'the police cannot be abolished by legislation … it has always and only ever been actual or feared revolutionary wars that abolished slavery. The shortest path to dismantling police and prisons is and has always been through revolt'. Speaking to a crowd in the midst of the Seattle uprising, Idris Robinson (2023: 63–64) explains how a range of political actors enacted a counterinsurgency strategy by downplaying the rebellion's revolutionary character and funneling its energy into reform:

> From the Biden democrats to virtually all of the mainstream media not affiliated with Fox News, to the Black Lives Matter™ people, the agenda

> pushed by all these groups is the claim that the insurrection did not take place…. What is at issue is more than just a momentary lapse of sanity: it is a strategy of denial, a counter-insurgent strategy of reform *par excellence*…. As with all democratic liberal reformists, what they're trying to do is exploit the outburst in order to make it so that things change, but only just *a little*—which is to say, not at all … the rebellion shows the liberals what it means to defund the police *halfway,* instead of abolishing and outright destroying them.

Denying that an insurrection took place allowed reformists to co-opt the demands of the uprisings, rather than abolishing law and order completely. While the police, military, and paramilitary forces were attempting to contain and crush the uprising physically, other institutions remained committed to confusing and pacifying the discontent, deflecting and re-channeling rebellion into institutional, economic, and political forms designed to re-affirm political legitimacy. The state sought to co-opt the rebellion's rage, for which, according to accounts, liberal reformists were instrumental. As two rebels in New York put it:

> Centrists are spreading the most superficial version of our arguments, talking about defunding the police without addressing any of the deep disparities in wealth and power that the police exist to maintain. We will have to continue spelling out why we oppose policing itself alongside other aspects of capitalism and the state—liberals appropriate our talking points and rhetoric (Shemon & Arturo, 2020).

Calls to abolish the police were turned into calls to defund the police.

Several rebels who share their accounts of the George Floyd rebellion not only do not see reform as a viable form of abolition but also see abolition as the destruction of the United States itself. 'The United States does not *have* problems, the United States *is* the problem', contends Anderson (2021: 4). Shemon and Arturo (2020) further explain:

> Reforms are a commendable goal in a racial capitalist system that clearly prioritizes policing over life. However, we must keep in mind that bourgeois society wants to keep this rebellion as narrow as possible: making it only about George Floyd, about slashing police budgets and redistributing the budget to other areas of society. But this rebellion is about something much more. It is about the deep injustice felt by a people which no amount of reform can extinguish.

The George Floyd rebellion speaks to deeper, structural, political, economic, and, one could argue, ecological issues (Dunlap, 2022). The historical role of the police in the United States has been to maintain the plantation economy – enforcing slave labor, capturing runaway slaves and protecting the plantation system predicated on the regime of private property and its subsumption of Black humanity (Dawson, 2022; Williams, 2014). One rebel interviewed by Unicorn Riot (2020a) in the streets of Minneapolis says, 'if it wasn't for us, there wouldn't be an America … this country was built on the back of slavery … the police were meant to capture slaves on the plantation … you can't even live without them putting you on a plantation for the rest of your life'. Other rebels frequently pointed to the plantation as something moving through time, through the hundreds of years of racial inequality, originating in slavery on plantations, and kept in place by police and their historical purpose: the suppression of Black revolt (Nevada, 2022). These connections were made in reference to revolting against 'this country' – 'America' (Unicorn Riot, 2020a) – as a whole.

The life-affirming institutions borne from the autonomous abolition of social infrastructure-building during the uprising means we cannot 'make the burning cop cars disappear … [or] extinguish from memory the police stations on fire, as if it didn't happen' (Robinson, 2023: 63) – the George Floyd rebellion shows how destructive direct action is central to how people define what abolition looks like on the ground.

The 'care and revolt dialectic': autonomous and insurrectionary abolitionisms in the streets

Autonomous abolitionism played a significant role in the George Floyd rebellion, as it has in the

theory and practice of abolitionist scholars and activists. Chua (2020) focuses their 'Five Lessons from Minneapolis' primarily on lessons learned from the proliferation of mutual aid infrastructures in Minneapolis in the wake of George Floyd uprisings. Beyond the George Floyd rebellion, Gilmore (2007) work with Mothers Reclaiming Our Children focuses on supportive grassroots organizing efforts among the mothers of incarcerated people. The recent forum, 'Making Space for Abolition in Geography', is devoted to *communing,* and developing examples 'toward building up life-affirming institutions where we provide each other with food, shelter and safety' (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.). Chavez-Norgaard et al. (2022) continue that 'the point of experiments in abolition geography is to remake ourselves, create community through collective care, and in so doing make new life-worlds possible' (n.p.). This emphasis on a prefigurative society – building the world we want to see and live in – remains welcomed.

The George Floyd rebellion, however, shows us that in order to build alternatives to policing grounded in community care and genuine safety, the material destruction of the places and institutions we wish to abolish is also paramount. Abolition is a verb; as abolition geographer Keith Miyake (2021: 595) writes, '[a]bolition is not a metaphor, but rather, a framework and concrete process of freedom making through the dialectic negation of unfreedom'. In addition to autonomous prefiguration as opposed to procedural abolition, the accounts we analyzed emphasized the destructive elements which preempt autonomous prefiguration – the 'demolition/abolition' (Wohlleben, 2023: 231) that clears space for building 'new life-worlds' (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.). Alongside accounts from the uprising, we see abolitionist destruction and construction as interdependencies that cannot be separated – a 'care and revolt dialectic', as one participant described their experience of the uprisings (Anonymous, 2022: 8). By highlighting *both the autonomous and insurrectionary abolitionist* tensions which propelled the George Floyd rebellion, we foreground the 'radical place-making' of abolition geographies (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.). We call this multi-headed hydra of abolitionist place-making, defined by co-constitutive care and revolt in cities and autonomous zones throughout the country, *ungovernable abolition geographies*.

Rebellion and self-organization are not mutually exclusive. Socio-natural disasters frequently *initiate* the building of new infrastructures, from Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana to Hurricane Sandy in New York and beyond (Crow, 2011; Firth, 2022). This, we must recognize, extends to uprisings that initiate autonomous zones based on mutual aid, mourning, and affirming Black life. The George Floyd rebellion exemplifies this type of uprising, where many voices on the frontlines are fighting for both destructive and constructive abolitionist praxis – the two cannot be separated.

The destruction of property in response to police murder was understood by participants as a spatial, social, and political prerequisite for radical place-making to occur:

> This is what happens when you murder n*****. This is what happens when n***** want their city back. This is it. The site of revolution's right here. This is government property, and we need to burn all of it. All of it needs to be burned. System ain't right, it ain't working. We need a new one, this is how you get a new one. This is how n***** revolt. This is angry, we been angry for a real long time. So, this is it. Let n***** burn the rest of this city down, until justice comes, and it ain't gonna come easy. We didn't burn enough of this city, this country. Let's go, burn, burn all of it (Unicorn Riot, 2020b).

In the process of radical place-making which transformed cities, streets, state institutions, and business establishments into abolition geographies, 'the site of revolution's right here', where marches splintered into riots, employing vandalism, arson, looting and self-defense against police to expropriate goods, cause disruption, and establish temporary autonomous zones.[2] The fires intentionally burned down property and what it represents, and splintered the spatial and logistical capacity of the cops – distracting their attention in more directions than they could handle (Anonymous, 2020a; Nevada, 2022).

The crowd, in Minneapolis and beyond, adopted the tactic of 'being water' – flowing from place to place, indiscriminately dismantling local manifestations of the racial capitalist order, never taking one consistent shape, and adopting no name, organization, or singular activist identity.

The crowd's spatial spontaneity and flexibility facilitated the (temporary) defeat of the police in a range of cities where uprisings occurred. In Richmond, Virginia, the tactic of being water was used to contest the territorialization of property by police (Blomley, 2016), and take back the streets:

> For hours, we played cat and mouse with the police, overwhelming their attempts to direct us and moving more quickly than they could in their efforts to shut us down. Again, we returned to Broad and Belvidere, meeting lines of riot cops and armored vehicles in front of us. They attempted to gain ground, spreading from their besieged headquarters blocks away, only to be confronted with a crowd unintimidated by force. Tear gas grenades, rubber bullets, and marker rounds were countered by rocks, bricks, blinding lasers, blazing barricades, and whatever we could hurl toward the enemy to keep them at bay (Anonymous, 2020b).

This quote demonstrates how the illegibility of 'being water' and police confrontation required by insurrectionary tactics helped confuse, disorient, and eventually chase police out of the streets, transforming them into spaces temporarily freed from them. Arson played a distinct role in 'depleting police resources, since the firefighters who were forced to continually extinguish fires all over town required heavy police escorts' (Anonymous, 2020b: n.p.) The police were chased out or distracted by property destruction and confrontation, and rebels were able to obtain material to build mutual aid infrastructures informed by the spatial relations of the streets:

> Looters at the Aldi liberated immense quantities of bottled water, sports drinks, milk, protein bars and other snacks and distributed these items on street corners throughout the vicinity … the Third Precinct was conveniently situated adjacent to the Target, a Cub Foods, a shoe store, a dollar store, an AutoZone, a Wendy's, and various other businesses…. Once the looting began, it immediately became a part of the logistics of the crowd's siege on the precinct … looting contributed to keeping the situation ungovernable. As looting spread throughout the city, police forces everywhere were spread thin. Their attempts to secure key targets only gave looters free rein over other areas of the city … the police found themselves frustrated by an opponent that expanded exponentially (Anonymous, 2020b: n.p.)

All over the country, accounts describe how these mutual aid infrastructures emerged from the ashes of outrage. The long tradition of looting and other methods of expropriation and wealth redistribution in riots are an example of abolitionist practices which were commonplace throughout the George Floyd uprisings (Nevada, 2023; Osterweil, 2019). In Minneapolis, accounts affirm this interpretation of looting as wealth redistribution and 'DIY [do-it-yourself] Reparations'. Looting stores dismantled the invisible cage of law that arbitrarily demarcates theft from consumption, and redistributed wealth directly. Looted former commodities were given freely to people. As one participant recounts:

> [S]pontaneous crowds began looting stores midday in Saint Paul (Minneapolis's twin city) and, later in the night, as the police were forced to retreat from their precinct, other groups were looting across town … we saw people walking out of the banks with a safe and bags of cash. There's also stories of teenagers in fast cars looting multiple diamond stores in Union Square in San Francisco on Friday night, with the police chasing them but failing to catch them…. *What we are witnessing is the largest downward re-distribution of wealth in modern US history* (Anonymous, 2020a; emphasis added).

Looting as the redistribution of wealth and corporate property, while limited and illegal, does accomplish political goals and complements the limited gains made institutionally to redistribute wealth. 'As a result of widespread rioting', contends

two participants (Shemon and Arturo, 2020: n.p.), 'more has happened in a week to discredit and limit police power than has occurred in many decades of activism'. In Minneapolis, 'people [were] setting up mutual aid tents all over the streets for redistributing looted water and snacks to people', explains a participant (Anonymous, 2020a). Milk and water looted from grocery stores was used to help flush tear gas out of eyes. Medics offered their help with injuries. In the City Hall Autonomous Zone in New York City, 'people were sharing food, clothes, personal protective gear, bedding, and other essentials'. Parties and moments of joy broke out in autonomous zones all over the country. 'We saw people watching each other's backs, sharing food and looted beer with strangers, having dance parties, passing out spray-paint and hand sanitizer, hugging even though they shouldn't', one participant describes (Anonymous, 2020b: n.p.). This extends to smaller gestures of care, such as in Austin, Texas, where '[o]ne teenager brought his girlfriend a giant bag of Takis'. These moments were part of the aftermath of destructive direct action, growing out of the spaces rebels had cleared by burning, looting, and pushing the cops out. The process of forging an autonomous zone in George Floyd Square in Minneapolis, while coming from a place of anger and mourning, a participant described emerged afterwards as, 'a very joyful and festive atmosphere' (Anonymous, 2020a: n.p.). According to a rebel in Richmond, Virginia, their local uprising opened up spaces of 'joy unhindered by fear' (Anonymous, 2020b: n.p.). Riots, in all their imperfections (and failures), represent an important anti-capitalist practice of expropriation and communalism.

Discussion: Riot, place-making and mutual aid

Accounts from the uprisings across the United States affirm that the defund demand, combined with the 'outside agitator' narrative, played a re-stabilization role, deflecting the abolitionist desires fueling the uprisings. The seemingly practical shift from abolishing the police to defunding them emerged as a pacification tactic rather than generating meaningful reform. Even as 20 major cities succeeded in defunding their police departments (Levin, 2021), it was short-lived, and financial investment continued to fund policing and surveillance firms (Ba et al., 2023). Businesses and governments alike continue to invest millions into private security industries (Bernd, 2020). Police militarization and expansion continues apace in the construction of 'Cop City' urban warfare police training facilities across the United States (CoC, 2024; Valenzuela, 2024), largely funded by private police foundations immune to defund demands.

During the George Floyd uprising, there was a distinct atmosphere of sharing and cooperation forged from fighting the police, reinforced by support for people subjected to police repression. A dissolution of 'capitalist social relations' (Anonymous, 2020b: n.p.) occurred after segments of the city were burned and police were run off from the Minneapolis Third Precinct, forging places wherein property and commodities ceased to retain the same values or functions. We agree with abolition geographer Keith Miyake's (2021: 595) definition of abolition geographies as 'inscribing freedom into landscapes through the proliferation of new structures and infrastructures; social relations and cultural practices; dreams and experiments; ontologies and practices, rooted in collective ways of being'. Even if uprisings, riots and self-organization might be far from ideal, the social and material process of prefiguration they offer remains essential to what abolition geographers call 'radical place-making' (Chavez-Norgaard et al., 2022: n.p.; Heynen and Ybarra, 2021: 1). The George Floyd uprisings show how destruction and transformation of property remains essential to creating new social relationships and institutions. The George Floyd uprisings continue this tradition of property transgression as property transformation, transforming spaces generally mediated by property relations into abolitionist places.

Alongside abolition geographer Mia Dawson (2022: 321), we affirm that 'disruptions to property are practices of abolition', exemplifying the radical

place-making which defines how abolition geographies are made – through the radical presence of police opposition via direct action against propertied places and the police themselves. The autonomous zones of the uprising were not large-scale overthrows of racial capitalism or the police. Rather, the zones made multiple spaces to begin creating a series of cop-free places. The zones' autonomy came from building infrastructures of care, support, and safety (even if temporary, limited and suffering direct and indirect police repression, e.g. informants and undercover cops). They were, according to a pamphlet summarizing accounts from autonomous zones around the United States, '[a]bove all' about creating 'a space in which to remember and mourn' (Anonymous, 2020c: n.p.). From the mourning, the anger, and the destruction, mutual aid networks, joyful parties – and in Seattle, a community guerilla garden – emerged (Weinberger, 2020). Rebels in Atlanta describe their autonomous zone at a burnt down Wendy's restaurant 'not [as] a property of a defined physical space, but rather a quality of a network of relations … the first line of defense of the cop-free zone is not the violent force with which it is defended, but the ways that the participants turn care into a transformative force' (Anonymous, 2020c). Resonating with anarchist geographer Ince (2012), the territory of property was contested into a commons, forging new relations embodying post-property possibilities. As rebels cleared carceral and racial capitalist space through their insurrectionary tactics, they prefigured spaces of collective care. Said simply, riots, and the process of revolt, are central to abolitionist practice.

Conclusion

Abolitionist praxis is, and must be, more than procedural abolition. The George Floyd uprisings demonstrate the need to reconsider the legitimacy of institutional processes and lend greater recognition to destructive practices within abolitionist practice. The abolition enacted in the summer of 2020 was not an incremental process of demands and concessions from the powerful. Indeed, according to many rebels on the ground, this process only served to pacify the actually occurring abolition, which involved autonomous insurrection *against* the state and its steadfast regime of property protection. Abolition was practiced through direct attacks against the police, the state, property, and capital; through the confusion and evasion of the police until they were forced out of their own precinct; through the material and social replacement of property and commodification with autonomous relationships and infrastructures of care.

While we highlight recent studies recognizing insurrectionary practice (i.e. Chua et al., 2024; Dawson, 2022; Hamlin, 2023; Lang, 2022), we believe autonomist and anarchist theories of prefiguration and attack remain essential for expanding an ungovernable abolition geography and practice. There is an important difference between a procedural abolition that is solely demanding concessions from state institutions, and an insurrectionary-autonomous abolition that attempts to destroy the old *and* builds new socio-political possibilities (Bonnano, 2008 [1997]). The abolition which occurred during the George Floyd uprisings embodied insurrectionary and autonomous abolition, yet between the exhaustion from state violence, media recuperation of events and institutional maneuvering, procedural abolition took center stage. Procedural forms of abolition should not, and cannot, become complicit with state counterinsurgency campaigns aimed at movement pacification. If procedural tactics and strategies have any role and relevance within the struggle for abolition, it remains to support and 'hold ground' created from uprisings – not ceding, eroding, co-opting, or losing that space gained from struggle.

Procedural abolitionists must critically reflect on their strategic outcomes: are procedural strategies draining, funneling, or condemning insurrectionary-autonomous energy from the larger abolitionist struggle? Are they ultimately stabilizing a larger system of racial capitalism, including property and the state? How might procedural abolition work in tandem with insurrectionary and autonomous tactics and strategies, and support rather than pacify them? Insurrectionary strategy, likewise, deserves continuous critical reflection and/or praxis in matters of societal transformation. The social, political and material conflict by which this conversation and struggles take place remains exceedingly diverse, complex and riddled with fears, privileges,

conflicting ideologies, and opportunisms that all serve as points for institutional control and intervention.

While acknowledging and including combative practices within abolition geographies, we must also recognize their shortcomings and weak points. The record of procedural, insurrectionary, and autonomous abolitionism could be better and, for us, the first step is to not actively divide and exclude them from each other. This relates to differences in political visions and goals, which might return us to political disputes between Marx and Bakunin echoing through history, between different authoritarian and anti-authoritarian challenges to or embraces of statism. The question, unfortunately, remains open. How can people better hold and sustain the space liberated from police during an uprising? How will practices of community care be supported and expanded to sustain abolitionist praxis? This will require enormous efforts from a diverse range of people. The demands and visions for abolition are not easy to achieve under the present circumstances – people are subsumed by state institutions, bureaucratic procedures and their corporate partners. Fascism and repression against liberation movements has run rampant in the post-2020 United States – since the uprisings, abolitionist rebels have been murdered and assaulted by police, charged with terrorism and racketeering, and raided by SWAT teams, among other escalations. This reality, however, does not mean that abolitionists should compromise their imaginations and vision or allow their praxis to be dulled by violent and banal life experiences and, in a word, institutionalization. Wherever people stand, we should learn to push for police and prison abolition, unravel capitalist relationships, and create safer and healthier environments based on transformative justice.

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ORCID iD

Hannah Kass https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3262-6326
Alexander Dunlap https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8852-9309

Notes

1. This refers to the notion of white people voluntarily relinquishing their inherited white privileges in an effort to abolish whiteness and white supremacy.
2. If confused or curious about looting as political practice, consider Osterweil (2019) for a sustained historical exploration and analysis.

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