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<Chapter Three

Safety without police: an abolitionist provocation

Throughout this book, we have offered a rather bleak reading of how the UK government responded to the COVID-19 crisis by policing people as a virus. Thinking beyond the current moment, we also traced the social and political history of British policing – as an order maintenance institution that protects and serves the interests of the state – and challenged common distinctions between 'public health' and 'public order'. Insisting that expanded police powers under lockdown conditions are not an aberration, we argued instead that they signal an intensification of policing practices that target 'suspect populations' – and Black people in particular – for infractions of 'public order' that treat such groups as a threat to the 'health' of the state, if not 'the nation' too.

Without abandoning such a critique of the state and its coercive institutions, we end this book in a more positive and reconstructive note with what we see as a visionary world-making worldview that helps us to see a way out of this impasse. This life-giving possibility for radical change has a name: abolition(ism). But it is often given a bad name by those who offhandedly dismiss it as naive, utopian, fanciful, idealistic and unrealistic. In our effort to salvage abolitionism's reputation from naysayers, we will briefly pit it against competing views of progress and social change – while also clarifying what the term means to us, as an intellectual resource for thinking and acting differently to design public safety beyond and without policing.

Clinging to conventional wisdom or obeying the mainstream criminological hive mind makes envisaging a world without police sound foolhardy at best and sacrilegious at worst. Yet, as Kristian Williams (2015 363–4) puts it, 'it is interesting to note the things that scholars will not admit [and] the possibilities that they leave unexamined'; operating under the 'nearly universal' assumption that 'the police are a necessary feature of society' (Williams, 2015 364). Arguing against such a taken-for-granted view of policing, therefore, amounts to violating a taboo so deeply engraved on our civic conscience that it is not just

indecent, but offensive too. As sociologist Rodney Stark (1972: 1) wrote in the very first page of his book on police riots: '[i]t is vulgar nonsense to be anti-police. Our society would not exist without them.'

The same sentiment was expressed with a touch of irony – yet with no less puritanical fervour – by eminent police scholar Carl Klockars (1988: 240), who similarly noted that 'no one whom it would be safe to have home to dinner argues that modern society could be police'. A few pages later, however, Klockars (1988: 257) cautions against the 'creation of immodest and romantic aspirations [about the police] that cannot, in fact, be realized in anything but ersatz terms', thereby revealing a chink in the armour of any pro-police stance – when it has no firm basis in (f)actual reality.

Naturally, we couldn't agree more. We argue that *defending* policing sounds as unthinkable to us, as abolishing it sounds to police-friendly scholars. The reason should be obvious enough. We argue for truthful accounts, community and mutual aid, justice and public safety against mythology, deceit, injustice and a sense of false security that favourable portrayals of policing provide. Instead of pretending that policing is a force for good, or being complicit in, and complacent about, the conditions of violence and harm that such pretence cultivates – we posit instead that it would be unethical to *not* make policing obsolete.

<2>Abolish or reform?

With this provocation in mind, we break ranks with orthodox policing scholarship, in order to introduce abolitionism as a vibrant, sophisticated, holistic and radical mode of scholarship and public participation, without putting scare quotes around it or creating scarecrows out of it. Many have presented recent calls to defund and abolish police as an ideological takeover by foolishly idealistic millennial snowflakes, symbolic of a dangerous abolitionist trend that signals the end of civil(ised) debate on and off campus. Yet, abolitionism remains marginal(ised) in mainstream criminological discourse, textbooks, conferences and curricula; UK academics, in particular, 'dare not speak its name' (Ryan

and Ward, 2015). Such reluctance partly reflects the reality that uttering the word results in having the ivory tower locked and bolted for fear of letting in rebellious heretics. But abolitionism is also cast out because it resides off campus as a philosophy of community organising, so it *ought* to remain outside the impregnable walls of the real estate conglomerates where (overpriced) teaching is 'delivered' like takeaway food and (undervalued) research is star-rated like hotel chains.

In challenging this defensive posture of the academic mainstream towards abolitionism, we are *not* arguing for taming or institutionalising it. We simply interrogate why naming it is considered such a terrible *faux pas*. This is an important point to insist on, because it reveals a set of assumptions about what counts as 'respectable' scholarship and what does not, even when what is 'respectable' may be disrespectful to the reality of institutions that are defended as indispensable – regardless of whether they might be founded on violence, injustice and oppression. If we were to make a sharp conceptual distinction between abolitionism and its adversaries, the battle is waged between a reformist ideology, which contends that policing may be flawed but irreplaceable, and an abolitionist framework, which argues that since policing is irredeemable given its historical and contemporary violence(s), it must be replaced by socially just alternatives.

While reformist perspectives claim that 'managing' injustice by making it more bearable should suffice, abolitionist perspectives see this logic as the very embodiment of injustice. Being the shameless abolitionists that we are, we would go as far as to liken reformist agendas to a 'Lord Denningism' of sorts; a dogma expressed by Lord Denning, a former Court of Appeal judge and Master of the Rolls, who argued – in no uncertain terms – that: '[i]t is better that some innocent men remain in jail than the integrity of the English judicial system should be impugned' (Robins, 2016). Thus spoke judge Lord Denning following the wrongful conviction of six innocent men (the 'Birmingham Six') over the bombing of a Birmingham pub in one of Britain's gravest miscarriages of justice. Lord Denning nevertheless insisted that:

> If they won [the trial] it would mean that the police were guilty of perjury; that they were guilty of violence and threat; that confessions were involuntary and improperly admitted in evidence; and that the convictions were erroneous, That was such an *appalling vista* that every *sensible* person would say: 'It cannot be right that these actions should go any further'. (Woffinden, 1987: 299, emphasis added)

While reformists – following in Lord Denning's footsteps — may think it 'sensible' to justify wrongful convictions on the grounds that holding the police to account would open up 'an appalling vista', abolitionists do not content themselves with tweaking Armageddon. We wish to prevent the dramatic destruction it brings, by putting an end to it. To illustrate this divide, beyond ideological skirmishes along the reformist versus abolitionist battle line, it is worth contrasting the two perspectives in terms of the fundamental difference between them. This is no other than the crucial distinction between the means and the ends of policing. As Williams (2015 363) points out, reformist scholarship limits itself with the '*means* of policing—strategies of patrol, crowd control, interrogation techniques, use-of-force policies, organizational schemes, accountability mechanisms, morale boosters, affirmative action—while taking for granted (but rarely identifying) the *ends* of policing'. By contrast, abolitionist thinking counters that problems with policing do not arise out of a *deficit in policing procedure* but as a result of a *surplus of police power(s)*.

As Vitale (2017: 7–33) painstakingly argues, the problem with policing cannot be reduced to more or better training, more workforce diversity, more procedural justice or more accountability. The problem 'with' policing is *policing* itself – its institutional and political *role*, identity, mission and function as the state's primary instrument of coercion. To (re)turn to an (over)used metaphor in policing literature, this is not a case of 'a few bad apples'. It is the tree that is poisoned and needs uprooting. Similarly, reform not only allows the underlying malaise to fester uncontrollably, but it does so by painting a veneer of action guided by 'respectability' – providing a spectacle of disinfection while leaving the infrastructure intact.

Where reformist police scholarship calls for more training, education and representation through reform, the problem becomes one of what individuals do and what reform can do to reform such individuals; essentially calling for more justice inside unjust institutions,

by cautioning them to behave better while retaining all their power. A series of questions, however, remain unanswered: Who would suggest those reforms (the police, the government, or the communities that are disproportionately targeted by the police)? Who benefits from such reforms (the police, the government, or Black and other minority ethnic and other marginalised or vulnerable social groups)? What is the aim of such reforms? Do they aim to increase legitimacy and accountability of the police, by expanding their power and maintaining a favourable public image of the police? Or do they target racial and social justice?

On the opposite side of the spectrum, abolitionist thinking launches its critique at the heart of the system – not its peripheral organs – by focusing on social and racial injustice as a *default setting*, rather than a *system error*. Where reformists look to the individual for solutions to institutional problems, abolitionists aim at overthrowing the very institutions that create the problem. Where reformists devise solutions based on gathering evidence of 'best practice' and 'fairer outcomes', abolitionists ask what the institutions in question are, what they do, who do they do it to and who do they do it for; claiming that the way institutions are designed determines their function. Unless their very logic and purpose of institutions changes, superficial solutions that ignore institutional architectures can only deliver cosmetic changes that bring no real change. Where reformists work within a law enforcement approach to social problems, abolitionists prioritise social solutions to social problems through *social* rather than criminal justice. Where reformists call for better policing, abolitionists work towards disbanding, disempowering and disarming the police (McDowell and Fernandez, 2018), by replacing state regulation and social control with designing public safety anew; in ways that reflect and correspond to the needs and demands of local communities, not the interest of state agencies. Where reformism pours its energies into adding layers of procedures to unequal social structures, abolitionism aspires to make such structures redundant. Where reformists see police misconduct or miscarriage of justice as a procedural anomaly that can be ironed out with appropriate sanctions, abolitionists see policing as a fundamentally political issue that has everything to do with (state) power, rather than administrative policy. Where reformists scratch their heads to design 'just

deserts' for those who offend, abolitionists ask who decides what an offence is. Where reformists see policing as neutral and apolitical, abolitionists raise questions about the role of the state thinking about how violence can and should be responded to and accountability apportioned in ways that are not dictated by the state but by local, direct, co-operative decision making, as opposed to centralised decision-making processes. Where reformists remain convinced that reform signals progress, abolitionists maintain that reform progresses in the wrong direction by working with – rather than doing away with – the institutions that are identified as needing reform. Where reformists see themselves as 'critical friends' of police (Murji, 2011), abolitionists see the police as 'our enemies in blue' (Williams, 2015. Where what Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Craig Gilmore (2008: 145) call 'reformist' reforms bolster and strengthen policing, abolitionist or 'non-reformist' reforms point to 'systemic changes that do not extend the life or breadth of deadly forces' (Gilmore and Gilmore, 2008: 145).

Such a comparison of and contrast between reformist and abolitionist approaches to policing clearly shows that the two approaches do not share a common language. Yet, paradoxically, both speak with one voice in our commitment to address and respond to violence and harm – however differently we might think about where such violence and harm comes from. Contrary to our critics, abolitionists do not advocate a free-for-all where all hell breaks loose. We, too, want to hold individuals accountable for their actions. We just don't think that calling the cops to put people in cages is an ethically justifiable or socially transformative way of doing so. We, too, want to live in safe, clean places and go about our lives without fear. We just oppose ready-made, state or criminal justice definitions of what such life might, or should, look like. We, too, want justice. We just do not confuse or conflate it with vengeance – hinting at the fact that there are equally powerful emotions that create safer, restorative social environments where social relationships are based on altruism, not punishment (see, for example, Braithwaite, 1989). We argue that holding individuals accountable for their actions does not resemble policing and prisons.

Understandably, abolitionist critiques of policing and state violence may sound like airy-fairy romanticism, but so is the fantastical belief in a benevolent, caring police. However

far-fetched the arguments of abolitionists may sound, is it fair to judge them against perspectives that fail to even ask the question of how we know what we know about the institutions we have? How do we know that they are just, or only occasionally violent and oppressive? Could it be that we are socialised into a logic that fails to question what we have and dare not explore what we *could* have, want or need instead? Could it be that the discomfort one feels when others suggest that familiar institutions need to be abolished comes from a fear of the unknown, preferring the devil we know to the devil we don't? Could it be that what appears so outlandish in abolitionist thinking actually betrays our opponents' lack of imagination? Could it even be that in defending the institutions that abolitionists condemn, our opponents might be pursuing their own self-interest, wilfully or unwilfully?

To answer some of those questions, it is worth spending a minute to reflect on the fact that abolitionism only calls for the abolition of unjust, violent and oppressive institutions – as it always has done in its century-old history. To put it differently, abolitionists today stand for the same principles and values that abolitionists stood for when they campaigned for the abolition of the slave trade and the institution of slavery too. There is nothing romantic or Pollyanna-ish about trying to end injustice. Would it be too extreme or uncompromisingly forthright to suggest that those who opposed abolitionism in the era of colonial slavery and those who oppose it today might be drawing on the same logic and the same moral justification for their thinking? While the question hangs in the air, it is worth remembering that – much as it is celebrated now, if at all – abolitionism 'back then' was rejected with the same force and arguments that are used to reject it now. Peter Fryer (1984: 64) reminds us that '[w]hen the Commons rejected Wilberforce's first motion to bring in a Bill abolishing the slave trade, in 1791, Bristol's church bells were rung, workmen and sailors were given a half-holiday, canon[s] were fired on Brandon Hill, a bonfire was lit, and there was a fireworks display'.[1] Or as a 1790 election squib had it:

[1] To avoid any misunderstanding, our reference to Wilberforce here does not aim to glorify him as the main or sole protagonist in the British abolitionist movement, as the story usually goes. In keeping with a similar clarification made in Chapter One – with reference to Olaudau Equiano's role in leading the way in the abolition of slavery – we should stress the roles of other Black and mixed-race abolitionists such as the 'Black Chartist' William Cuffay, William Davidson and Robert Wedderburn, to mention but a few Black anti-slavery advocates who were politically active in London.

‘[i]f our slave trade had gone, there’s an end to our lives, beggars all we must be, our children and wives’ (Fryer, 1984: 57–8). Worse still, as William Cowper’s (1825: 13) disturbing poem *Pity for Poor Africans* goes:

> ‘I own I am shock’d at the purchase of slaves […]
> I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
> For how could we do without sugar and rum?
> Especially sugar, so needful we see;
> What! Give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea?’

Comparisons between abolitionism’s opponents then and now will undoubtedly sound offensive to many, yet the use of the term ‘abolitionism’ is not accidental. It emerged as a movement against colonial slavery, and it continues today as a movement against the anti-Black carceral state, the prison industrial complex and the criminal legal system. The substance of abolitionism’s logic has not changed, nor have the targets of its critique; be it colonial statecraft or postcolonial state power. Abolitionists today challenge those who oppose abolition by asking simple questions about those institutions, their purpose, their function and who they harm as a result. In so doing, they draw attention to the ‘deaths at the hands of state institutions such as police and their global practices such as prisons and refugee and immigration detention camps which produce Black life as a lesser life or as nonlife’ (Walcott, 2021b: 12).

In this we are not suggesting that there is a precise, uncomplicated or straightforward equivalence between slavery and policing. We do, however, stress – as we did in Chapter One – that both institutions have the same historical roots and are structured by anti-Black violence. The police, like the colonial militias out of which they emerged, still reassure and protect ‘respectable’, ‘law-abiding’ and documented citizens, property owners, the ‘general public’, ‘deserving’ victims and the state, just like they ignore the crimes of the powerful (for example, corporate or ‘white-collar’ crime) and they suspect minoritised groups, political activists and the ‘undeserving’ poor.[2] A case in point is

[2] This analysis owes much intellectual debt to a conference paper by Waqas Tufail – presented on 22 October 2014 at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies. Tufail’s presentation, preceded by Tim Hope’s own

Britain's 'hostile environment' immigration policy, defended in British courts despite its discriminatory nature on the grounds that 'such discriminatory laws' – discriminatory though they may be – are nevertheless 'in the public interest'; thereby making it clear that 'the public' is conceived of implicitly or otherwise as predominantly white' (Bain, 2021: 37).

Apart from revealing how notions of belonging are 'thrown against a sharp white background' (Hurston, 1928) to define the master category of humanity, what this example also shows is whom the state polices for and who it polices against. But it also demonstrates that those who count as deserving of protection by the state belong to the assumed and unexamined default category of the white, 'respectable', 'law-abiding', documented citizen. The rest are seen as, classified and policed as 'criminal Others' that do not belong 'here'; as well as giving rise to the term 'crimmigration' (Bhatia, 2020).

What we see here is a perfect example of criminalisation; as the logic and process by which the state classifies people according to a social hierarchy which is policed – in order to maintain the order that this hierarchy rests on. Who counts as 'decent', and who is seen as a 'threat', has less to do with what people do and more to do with the (selective) criminalisation of what people do. As much as people who dissent from this view – call them 'reformists' – might make sense of all this as immaterial (given that 'the law is the law and it ought to be respected', or at best reformed), they are at risk of forgetting how the law is made, by whom and indeed with whom in mind as needing either protection or policing. In short, the police do not just 'police'. They police *for* certain groups and *against* others, with the latter being recruited from the (lower) ranks of the marginalised and disadvantaged; be they 'raced', classed or gendered into categories of exclusion and classified as 'police property'.

<2>Abolitionist thinking

contribution, are available at: https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/alternatives%20to%20policing%20slides.pdf

Having raised the heat by staging an imaginary, yet no less real, confrontation between reformist and abolitionist perspectives on policing – in order to provoke some thinking about why abolitionism might not be so naive or 'dangerous' as some make out – our discussion now moves beyond mere scholarly conflict or ideological tit for tat. What follows is an attempt to present abolitionism as something bigger than a simple or single recipe that offers ready-made, off-the-shelf solutions to 'crime' and criminalisation. We want to introduce abolitionism instead as a worldview, with a rich intellectual history that embraces politics, culture, activism and community organising; thereby moving beyond and outside the sacred precincts of state administration, criminal justice policy and academia. In doing so, we intend to offer a political argument and to make an intellectual contribution, not design policy interventions – preferring to concentrate on changing intellectual gears and shifting our language and thinking on how to rethink public safety and the conditions that enable it.

The remainder of this chapter therefore offers our perspective on abolitionism, by situating it as an intellectual and political movement that emerged as a response to the transatlantic slave trade and the system of slavery, before it evolved into an attitude towards, and a framework for, analysing contemporary forms of social injustice, violence and oppression. Anchored in such history, abolitionist thinking and practice grew, by applying its insights into the present and calling for a radical reorganisation of our thinking and responses to violence away from state institutions that are themselves violent. In bringing together the intellectual history and the contemporary practice of abolitionism, we close this chapter by illustrating what abolitionism has to offer – as an invitation to create the conditions for public safety – by drawing on relevant campaigns from the US and the UK.

Unlike conventional political philosophies, abolitionism does not have a single origin story or one holy version that all abolitionists ascribe to, abide by or bow to. It does not have a symbol, a badge, a single identity or a strictly defined ideology based on a central dogma, a sacrosanct text or scripture – nor does it have an organised priesthood, divine leaders, bureaucracies or headquarters. As such, it is not even an '-ism', strictly speaking. It is a living archive of thinking, that is imbued with a radical attitude towards social change by

cultivating a sensibility of making community – in ways that are not hierarchical, coercive or imposed, but negotiated and collectively arrived at. As such, it is not a far cry from anarchist thinking and organising. Yet, although both see themselves as realistic by demanding the impossible (Marshall, 1993), it would be too simplistic to argue that they are one and the same; the main difference between them being that, unlike anarchism, abolitionism emerged from the Black radical tradition (Robinson, 2020), therefore foregrounding issues of racial justice in its analysis.

This is not to suggest that anarchism is not antiracist, but to stress that not *all* streams of anarchist thought and practice *are* antiracist – as they are not all against heteronormative patriarchy. Abolitionism on the contrary, has almost always been shaped by Black radical feminist thought as an 'intellectual and political tradition' and an 'ethical intervention' (Nash, 2019: 57) that sees 'the forces of sexism and (trans)misogyny, classism and racism' as 'inextricably linked in a mutually constitutive web of oppressions and domination' (Samudzi and Anderson, 2018: 69–70; see also Lee and Rover, 2017, and Bey, 2020). Indeed, our vision for, and version of, abolitionism is wedded to the intellectual work and organising activity of Black women. These range from 19th-century figures such as Angeline Grimké, Ida B. Wells, Mary Prince, Sarah Parker Remond, Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman to 20th- and 21st-century protagonists such as Assata Shakur, Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Mariame Kaba and many other individuals – like Pauline Hopkins, June Jordan and Toni Cade Bambara – and groups like the Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent and the Brixton Black Women's Group. Their writing and organising may not assume the mantle of abolitionism, but their thinking betrays an abolitionist imagination. Central to such an abolitionist imagination and the radical Black feminist spirit that runs through it, is an approach to thinking and activism that sees both as connected and cross-pollinating; as vital ingredients in transformative change.

Another key element of what we might call 'the abolitionist imagination' is the focus on disentangling complex, overlapping networks of oppression and on undoing social structures that create violence and harm. Contrary to conventional thinking, abolitionists see the criminal justice system as one such harm-generating institutional network, on the grounds that it arranges intersecting institutions like policing, the courts, borders, prisons

and other non-criminal legal institutions to control, punish and exclude.[3] Armed with the belief that this is a task that requires thinking and acting across scholarly, institutional, political and national borders to create change, abolitionism reflects that belief in its attitude and its approach to social change – by fusing 'vigor of thought' and 'thoughtful deed' (Du Bois, 2007: 178) and by drawing on literature, academic research, community organising and campaigning to *tear down* as well as to *build up*. Although the word 'abolitionism' itself inevitably connotes undoing, the intellectual programme of abolitionism is actually focused on *doing*; by emphasising that to abolish, the preconditions that produce what we want to abolish must be created too. As Ruth Wilson Gilmore puts it:

> Abolition is not *absence*, it is *presence*. What the world will become already exists in fragments and pieces, experiments and possibilities. So those who feel in their gut deep anxiety that abolition means knock it all down, scorch the earth and start something new, let that go. Abolition is building the future from the present, in all of the ways we can. (Gilmore and Lambert, 2019)

This view of abolitionism owes considerable intellectual debt to Black radical intellectual and activist W.E.B. Du Bois, whose magisterial work *Black Reconstruction* pointed out that although slavery may have been abolished, this was only done in the *negative* sense – by passing laws against it – not in the *positive* sense, by radically reorganising society in a way that makes processes of racial discrimination, dehumanisation, criminalisation and racial violence impossible. Seizing on this insight, modern-day abolitionists argue that abolition today needs to move away from 'emancipation' and towards 'freedom' (Walcott, 2021b); thereby calling for the uprooting of logics, and social and physical structures that create the conditions that produce social and racial injustice. In that sense, abolitionists work towards abolishing what African-American playwright Lorraine Hansberry described as 'the state of the civilization which produced that photograph of

[3] For a brilliant illustration of the connections between such institutions, see Davis and Dent (2001) and the website of, and relevant resources produced by, abolitionist campaigning group Critical Resistance: http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/ and http://criticalresistance.org/resources/

the white cop standing on that Negro woman's neck in Birmingham' (Perry, 2018). Hansberry was referring to a famous incident of racist police violence in Birmingham, Alabama, during an equally famous meeting with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy in 1963, where Hansberry along with James Baldwin were asked to share their thoughts on civil rights. Five decades later, Harney and Moten would echo the same sentiment, by asking:

> What is, so to speak, the object of abolition? Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society. (Harney and Moten, 2013: 42)

As these quotes make clear, the objective of abolition is not just to abolish the police or prisons or the criminal legal system as a whole, but to abolish the carceral, penal mindset that justifies responding to social problems with criminal legal solutions. As such, abolitionist energies are not directed solely at a list of proposed changes, but call for a change of outlook on how public safety is thought about and how public safety might be designed, through a different language and thinking that is committed to *social* justice, not criminal justice. Instead of separating thinking and action, abolitionists draw on radical thought as a resource with which to act; as a tool that can be – and is being – picked up and used by the young, Black, Queer and Indigenous people we have seen on the streets since the summer of 2020.

Moving from abolitionist theory to abolitionist practice – or rather moving closer to the crossroads where the two meet – it is worth stressing that while abolitionists share central concerns like the ones described earlier in this chapter, we don't all think alike or draw the same conclusions or roadmaps for change. Different strands of abolitionist thought make different demands, yet most agree on the need to restructure the entire institutional infrastructure of society, so that policing can be abolished – but not without addressing what makes people vulnerable and what are the social (pre)conditions that create harm. Some argue for the need to create an altogether different infrastructure of

care, welfare and community support through crisis intervention teams and specialist units trained in de-escalation and conflict resolution to respond to drunken, disorderly or violent behaviour, domestic violence cases and mental health crises. Similarly, there are groups that organise around the need to recognise the social origin of most incidents of challenging, threatening and violent behaviour or trauma and respond to such incidents with social or community-oriented institutions, instead of armed and coercive ones. And, finally, there are approaches to abolitionism – like the one espoused here – which altogether reject replacing the police with another kind or form of police or policing. For example, the idea that mental health teams should either be present in policing or replace them, ignores the fact that mental health care often involves forms of carcerality and punitiveness that any project of abolitionism otherwise seeks to transform. What are sought instead are community solutions that are embedded in a 'black feminist ethic[s] of care' (Nash, 2019: 76) rather than punitive, carceral solutions focused on punishment. Such Black feminist ethics of care articulate a politics where 'states of mind, health, body and social relationships' (Noble, 2005: 135) combine to bring about freedom and justice as a result of knowing, being and doing.

The abolitionist position that we advance and work from here, therefore, is committed to an intellectual attitude, radical politics and community action that 'read[s]' and moves 'across disciplines, across continents and across communities of engagement' (Hancock, 2016: 201) to bring about social change. It is therefore approached here as a worldview and a world-making vision (which it is), rather than as a narrow doctrinaire or single-issue ideology (which it is not). As such, the version of abolitionism that we embrace is as unapologetically utopian, as it is practical and realistic. It imagines and crafts expansive 'somewheres' out of 'nowheres' – to paraphrase jazz vocalist and poet Jayne Cortez (1996) – but also works hard to disrupt, upset and show the limitations of existing ways of being in the social world that persist only 'in the absence of a precondition for [their] abandonment' (Robinson, 2016: 5).

By working towards creating such preconditions for the abandonment of the world *as it is*; involves recognising that the world is currently configured is patterned by inequality and social injustice that cannot be wished or legislated away. What is required instead –

and abolitionism offers it – is a programme of radical change that is 'deliberately everything-ist; it's about the entirety of human environmental relations', as Ruth Wilson Gilmore put it to Rachel Kushner (Kushner, 2019). The remainder of this chapter therefore grapples with that complexity – not by offering a blueprint for global change, but by suggesting ways out of policing, criminalisation, incarceration, militarisation and institutions of state violence; as a way of thinking *out* of and *away* from them.

Doing abolitionist work, however, also requires a reckoning with the strong feelings and emotions that the police and policing evoke. Dipping into the emotional terrain that intellectual and political debates around the police bring to the surface, we discuss in turn how what the police say they *feel* during an encounter, can act as a shield against legal accountability. This leads on to discussions of feelings of sympathy or support for the police, feelings of antipathy towards the police, and thoughts on building emotional literacy for police abolition. Written as a provocation to 'circle [our] brain, fire [our] blood [and] tingle [our abolitionist] imagination', before moving 'into the arena of strife or agitation' (Moses, 1989: 246), the following section concludes the whole book by urging an encounter with what we feel about the police – and why.

<2>Police feelings

Discussions about police are invariably emotive. The heightened calls to defund and abolish that we saw in summer 2020 were met with violent and vocal pushbacks from different corners of state and society. From moderates claiming that yes, there might be a problem but abolishing 'goes too far', to the far right 'Blue Lives Matter' crowd, protestors and activists have been harassed, belittled and attacked by many people who don a wide array of political stripes.

While the realm of politics has always been configured as a scene of antagonism – entangled with principles, ethics and worldviews that can be seen as needing to be 'fought for' or defended, both inside and outside formal political institutions – the law, we are told, is a different creature. Enlightenment, scientistic and legal thought tends to exclude

emotions, seeing them as external to the requirements of rigour, rationality and rule of law calculus, which insists on an *impersonal* mode of governing. Liberal philosophies of state and law have elevated the idea of the 'rule of law': that when it comes to the law, everyone stands equal before it and the corollary that 'justice is blind'. These ideas stand at the forefront of modern liberal democratic states, and claim it as *the* sign of modern, progressive, fair and democratic government. As one of the exemplars and forefathers of liberalism, John Locke puts it:

> And therefore, whatever form the commonwealth is under, the ruling power ought to govern by declared and received laws, and not by extemporary dictates and undetermined resolutions; for then mankind will be in a far worse condition than in the state of nature, if they shall have armed one or a few men with the joint power of a multitude, to force them to obey at pleasure the exorbitant and unlimited degrees of their sudden thoughts, or unrestrained, and till that moment unknown wills, without having any measures set down which may guide and justify their actions: for all the power the government has being only for the good of the society, as it ought not to be arbitrary and at pleasure, so it ought to be exercised by established and promulgated laws; that both the people may know their duty, and be safe and secure within the limits of the law; and the rulers too kept within their bounds, and not be tempted, by the power they have in their hands, to employ it to such purposes, and by such measures, as they would not have known, and own not willingly. (Locke, 2003: 161)

For Locke, in order to escape the state of nature where you may be subject to the whims of 'sudden' or 'unrestrained' thoughts, we must all contract to government and the 'rule of law'. This, we are told, acts as a restraint on government as well as a condition of safety and security, where only those who break the law can be punished by agents of the law, and only within strict bounds set by lawmakers that are then written into law.

We encounter this way of thinking today where the only people who have the power to curtail or take away our 'freedom', as such, are officials of the state. These could be medical officials – with the power to section; or the police and courts – who are supposedly detecting infractions of the law and detaining those who break it; or those policing borders – the state-sanctioned organisations who have the power to detain and

deport people deemed to be residing somewhere without proper authorisation. The idea that our freedom could be subject to the whims and emotions of an individual is frightening, and one that has supposedly been left behind in a distant past without government, or in far-off undemocratic or 'failed' states, where 'extrajudicial' violence by para-state organisations runs amok and where one can be arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned on the flimsiest of charges. Our freedom, by contrast, is supposedly guaranteed, lest we break the law. In this case, a judge or jury who, by excluding their personal feelings, by looking solely at the *facts of the case*, and only if there is evidence *beyond reasonable doubt* that you committed a crime, only then can your freedom be taken away.

The reality, however, is much different. Importantly, when it comes to killings by police, it is the *feelings* of the police – their feeling of threat and danger, posed by the person they fatally attacked – that are heard in the courtroom and that take centre-stage as retroactive justification for the violence meted out by the officer(s). For example, when looking at the testimony of Darren Wilson, the police officer in the US who shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed black man in 2014, this theatre of emotions acting as a protective shield over the officer's actions is on full display: "And when I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a 5-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan". Wilson goes on to state that Brown "had the most intense aggressive face. The only way I can describe it, it looks like a demon, that's how angry he looked" (NPR, 2014). It has been well documented that Wilson was, in fact, bigger than Brown in all respects. The jury declined to charge Darren Wilson.

In 2011, Met Police Officer V53 shot and killed Mark Duggan in Tottenham, London. The officer told investigators that 'he saw a gun in Duggan's hand and felt his life to be in danger' (Forensic Architecture, 2021). It was later found that Duggan was not holding a gun while shot. An inquest jury found that the killing of Mark Duggan was a 'lawful' one because, despite Duggan not holding a gun at the time he was shot, Officer V53 *felt* that he had one, and believed he, his colleagues and 'the public' were in danger. The barrister representing the Duggan family said that the coroner had "directed the jury that the lawfulness of the lethal force, and the question of whether V53 was acting in self-defence,

should be judged solely by reference to V53's honest belief as to the threat posed" (Kirk, 2017). Following the shooting, a slew of muddled and conflicting reports ensued, with the (then) Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) initially announcing that Mark Duggan had shot at officers: something that turned out to be *entirely untrue*. A gun mysteriously appears 20 feet away across a fence (none of the officers saw Duggan throw the gun here and none know how it got there)[4] and an eyewitness account stated that they believed Duggan was 'executed', while holding a phone when he was killed (Casciani, 2014). It was, therefore, a matter of the officer's 'honestly held belief' that was enough to return a verdict of lawful killing. Neither example given here, of Darren Wilson nor Officer V53, is exceptional.

Phones that turn into guns. Guns that disappear and reappear in different places. Hands held up that turn into hands reaching forward. Suffocation that turns into resisting arrest. Police power as the power of transubstantiation. We are now placed to see that merely the feeling that a police officer has of threat and danger is then used as a retroactive justification for the violence then inflicted, regardless of what was actually going on. White paranoia is embodied in the figure of the police, who are ready to strike violently at anyone who is deemed threatening by virtue of their relationship to the white imaginary. Legal recognition is de facto denied to those who are presumed to be always already criminal. In response to the filmed attack on another unarmed black man in the US, Rodney King in 1991, Judith Butler writes:

> The police are structurally placed to protect whiteness against violence, where violence is the imminent action of the black male body. And because within this schema, the police protect whiteness, their own violence cannot be read as violence; because the black male body is the site and source of danger, a threat, the police effort to subdue this body, even if in advance, is justified regardless of the circumstances. Or rather, the conviction of that justification rearranges and orders the circumstances to fit that conclusion … He is hit in exchange for the blows

4 An investigation by Forensic Architecture has shown that the police and the IPCC's version of events is 'not consistent with the available spatial and biomechanical evidence' (Forensic Architecture, 2021).

> he never delivered, but which he is, by virtue of his blackness, always about to deliver. (Butler, 1993: 18–19)

Just as the police occupy a significant place with regard to 'the public', as discussed in the previous chapter, this is intimately connected to the particular place they occupy in relation to the law. The fact that they can shield their actions via an invocation of their 'beliefs' or 'feelings', together with their power to project 'the public' as the source of their legitimacy, becomes a potent mixture that breeds impunity. With special powers to arrest, detain and use violence against individuals, the significance and extent of police power is enormous. As discussed earlier in the context of the pandemic, borders, order and 'health' are subject to police power in ways that are not entirely new, but rather are being intensified and expanded in a renewed manner.

It is worth dwelling on the numerous ways in which police power works to continually renew its expansion – whether in the context of 'crisis' or not. As Christina Sharpe has discussed, the NYPD stop-and-frisk programme, known as 'Operation Clean Halls', gives police permission to 'roam the halls of private buildings' and describes how this has effectively placed 'hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, mostly black and Latino, under siege in their own homes' (Sharpe, 2016: 87). The violent language of cleanliness is once again used under a pretext of 'crime-fighting'.

Seldom is it that policies are made to restrict or withdraw powers already granted to the police. Even in the face of overwhelming evidence, a police power does not 'work' in the sense of detecting or preventing crime – such as stop and search in the UK. This power saw an *increase* in use under lockdown, with Section 60 stops (that do not require 'reasonable suspicion') *doubling* compared with the same time the previous year (Marsh, 2020). The American Civil Liberties Union has gathered data and reported that the rate of police killings in the US was not slowed by the pandemic, with fatal shootings occurring 'at the same rate during the first six months of 2020 as they did over the same period from 2015 to 2019' (American Civil Liberties Union, 2020) and with the same Black, Native American/Indigenous and Latinx still at much higher rates than white people.

<2>Feelings about police

If abolishing the police sounds frightening or worrisome to you, it is worth dwelling on the conditions that allow this feeling to take root. The idea that our health and safety *require* the police is not one that 'naturally' emerged, but was violently inculcated through centuries of political thought and statecraft that cannot be disentangled from the colonial and imperial logics that formed its crucible.

As Robert Reiner has shown, the people who feel most positively about the police are those who have the least contact with them: 'one of the most robust findings of research on public legitimation of the police is that it is much higher among those who have no direct experience of the police than those who do, whether this be as suspects, victims, witnesses, or recipients of services' (Reiner, 2010: 70). In short, if you have a positive view of the police, then it is likely that you have had very little to no contact with them. The flip-side of this is that those people who are targeted by the police, who are subject to policing and police violence on a daily basis, are not only de facto excluded from any notion of 'policing by consent', but that 'consent' to police is in itself formed on the basis of that exclusionary process. This is made clear by James Trafford who, drawing on Stuart Hall et al (1982), discusses the moral panic around mugging in the 1970s that was assigned a 'black crime':

> the press and the courts orchestrated the link between mugging and Black youth by dramatizing deterrent sentences that were passed on specific cases. Subsequently the Metropolitan Police reconstructed their statistics backwards several years, conflated crimes that didn't belong together and *recorded data on victims' perceptions of race of their assailant.* In the mid-1970s, these statistics were released to evidence an exponential rise in mugging, principally carried out by Black young people. (Trafford, 2021: 60; emphasis added)

The double structure of this process – whereby the (white) public are invoked as being in need of protection by the police *through* anti-black violence – is mainly ignored by said

(white) public, for whom the daily toll of police violence is not felt. As Martinot and Sexton (2003: 172) note: 'for those who are not racially profiled or tortured when arrested, who are not tried and sentenced with the presumption of guilt, who are not shot reaching for their identification, all of this is imminently ignorable'. This 'ignorability' along with the *feeling* of security and safety that the police present for some, is a lethal combination. The (mostly) white public, of whom public opinion and police consent names as a source of legitimacy, is thus a public assenting to an institution with which they have very little contact and very little idea about what it is they really do.

Somewhat punctured though these illusions may have been recently, the outrage from white publics has proved short-lived and toothless: a horrible and predictable cycle, which sees high-profile police killings being followed by high-profile court cases and the resumption of 'business as usual'. As Vargas and James write:

> what happens when, instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a black person is killed in the United States, we recognize black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy? What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice – indeed the gamut of political and cognitive elements that constitute formal, multiracial democratic practices and institutions – produces or requires black exclusion and death as normative? (Vargas and James, 2012: 193)

Thus 'ignorability' cannot be countered simply by paying attention. It requires more than a cycle of outrage when a high-profile case comes to the fore. The acknowledgement of black exclusion and death as normative requires an abolitionist response, because that normativity is part of the fabric of the criminal justice system.

<2>Feeling for abolition(isms)

> In the civil stately condition all citizens are secure in their physical existence; there reign peace, security and order. This is a familiar definition of police. Modern state and modern police came into being

> simultaneously and the most vital institution of the security state is the police. (Schmitt, 1996: 31)

Abolitionist thinkers have made a distinction between safety and security. This is paramount, when interrogating the default reaction to the prospect of abolition – which is to invoke security and safety, and the chaos to follow and the dangerous people that would roam free, were we to abolish the police. In an interview discussing this very distinction, Mariame Kaba responds directly to those who would invoke the 'dangerous few' as the Achilles heel of abolitionism:

> 'how are we going to deal with the rapists and the murderers?' This is the question that always gets thrown at anybody who identifies as abolitionist—and my question back is 'what are you doing right now about the rapists and the murderers?' That's the first thing: Is what's happening right now working for you? Are you feeling safer? Has the current approach ended rape and murder? The vast majority of rapists never see the inside of a courtroom, let alone get convicted and end up in prison. In fact, they end up becoming President. So the system you feel so attached to and that you seem invested in preserving is not delivering what you say you want, which is presumably safety and an end to violence. Worse than that it is causing inordinate additional harm. (Kaba and Duda, 2017)

This question of the *feeling* of safety is key. Police do not make us safe; they offer a spectacle of *security* (to those not being policed) presented as the presence of safety. As abolitionists so frequently accused of naive utopianism, we retort that the idea that we are made *safer* by warehousing people in appalling conditions and expecting them to be released (if they ever are) miraculously in a better position – be that rehabilitated, 'clean', less violent, less angry, more able to cope with life in this world – then it is *you*, not us, who are utopian.

In reality, prison is a violent, terrible place, where people are subject to more harm than anything else. Locking people away doesn't make us safe, it doesn't deter crime and it sure as hell doesn't help the people who go there. That these people are rendered out of

sight and out of mind means that when we turn to the carceral state to 'solve' problems of violence, we are falling prey to an illusion – and a really harmful one at that.

Lawmakers and the criminal justice system as a whole create the illusion that they are carefully thinking about criminals: what should be done in response to their crimes, how it should be done and for how long. Jurisprudence and theories of punishment have been written about and pontificated on for centuries; whole libraries of thought, university departments and law firms and courts and policymakers are dedicated to thinking, writing and enacting punishment. What is the just punishment for a crime? What prison sentences do different kinds of crime *deserve*? Yet what we argue here is that doing what we do, is in fact the antithesis of any kind of thought. It is thought*less* – it couldn't be more devoid of thinking, in the sense that we, as a society, by putting people in prison, are simply turning our heads and backs, and presuming that it's fine because there *are* people who have done the thinking and acting for us, therefore we don't need to think or worry about it as a result. It is simply an 'out of sight, out of mind' approach that does absolutely nothing to solve any of the manifold problems the criminal justice system is supposedly dealing with.

At the beginning of the pandemic, reports that COVID-19 could live for days on plastic spurred a flurry of ideas about sanitising everything, from surfaces to things bought from the supermarket. Surface spread was a concern, and so businesses that were to remain open, and those that closed only to open again, reassured customers that they were doing everything they could to use antibacterial and sanitising agents on everything the customers had contact with. Shops now proudly display hand-sanitiser as you enter, and ask that you use it before entering. This has continued, despite the WHO and other health organisations stating that surface transmission, although possible, is not thought to be an issue, with one scientist saying: 'surface transmission of COVID-19 is not justified at all by the science' (Goldman in Thompson, 2020). What Derek Thompson argues in a piece for *The Atlantic* is that this is 'Hygiene Theatre'. In his words: 'this logic is warped. It completely misrepresents the nature of an *airborne* threat' (Thompson, 2020). What hygiene theatre offers, then, is the *feeling* that an establishment, or mode of transport is COVID-19 secure – it provides an enticing spectacle of cleanliness that offers people a way

to feel safe when they move around the city, go out shopping or eat in a restaurant. In reality, this form of hygiene theatre is just that: theatre. It's an illusion, and one that distracts from the need for things like proper ventilation, which can be, of course, much more costly.

Staying with the theatrical for a moment, then, we can see how this logic is also at play not only with the policing of the pandemic, but also with policing in general. While originally coined to describe the vast increases in border and airport security post 9/11, the term 'security theatre' nevertheless points to a more capacious usage that is useful when we talk about the police. The idea that police keep us safe is as nonsensical as the idea that police can keep us healthy during a pandemic. As Robert Reiner has shown, 'the police are marginal to the control of crime', and further 'only a tiny fraction of crimes ever come to their attention or are recorded by them, and the overwhelming majority of these are not cleared up' (Reiner, 2010: 19), with some studies suggesting that less than a third of time on duty is spent on crime.

Police presence is thus conjured to present an illusion of safety, security and order that the state wishes to project. Or, as Rinaldo Walcott puts it, 'Policing's ultimate force and legitimacy, then, lies in its ability to make us feel secure in our everyday lives as we internalize the belief that it functions to prevent our endangerment' (Walcott, 2021a). On the other hand, it is also worth remembering that the biggest riots in recent history have occurred not as a result of an absence or withdrawal of police but the opposite – it is overpolicing, daily police violence and harassment of Black communities, and police killings that have sparked riots: Watts riots, 1965; Brixton, 1981; Los Angeles, 1992; Paris, 2005; London, 2011. *All* of these began in response to police violence. Anarchy is defined as both a condition without government and a 'state of disorder' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2006: 47). This definition defies history. Those who are really concerned about violence and 'disorder' and the 'chaos' that might ensue were we to abolish the police, would do well to look at these histories and note that police are a *source* of – and not a solution to – disorder and civil unrest.

In the wake of the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and the uprisings that occurred in response, talk of abolition and defunding the police was thick in the air. The third precinct building of the police department was set on fire and, in June 2020, the idea of disbanding the Minneapolis Police Department was made into a serious proposition. As Charmaine Chua has written, however, a counterinsurgent wave followed, with defunding turning into 'reform' and, furthermore, with 'a sudden absence of the MPD from the streets, social workers, emergency responders, and even some community defenders have become quickly enfolded into policing work, issuing evictions, disciplining the unruly and reinforcing existing class interests' (Chua, 2020: 129).

This perhaps confirms that the problem of police goes far beyond the institution itself. There needs to be attention paid to the problem, as Frank Wilderson sees it, that 'white people are not simply "protected" by the police, they *are – in their very corporeality* – the police' (Wilderson, 2003: 20). Abolishing the police requires much more than just ridding society of the institution known as 'the police'; it requires tearing down white supremacy, and the tearing down of white supremacy requires the abolition of the police in turn.

While we have shown that the pandemic does not affect all equally, it is nevertheless highlighting the convergence between multiple crises, as well as helping to form linkages and connections locally and globally, as deathly dots are being increasingly connected. As Chua writes of the US: 'In the face of the pandemic, facing historic levels of eviction nation-wide, organizers have increasingly linked the BLM movement and the abolition of the police to the right to housing and the cancellation of rent' (Chua, 2020: 135).

The knots that tie together white supremacy, climate change, state violence, border control, poverty, ill-health and more, find themselves under a starker light, where it is increasingly being recognised that low wages, no sick pay, overwork, profit margins, homelessness and housing overcrowding, poor internet access, lack of access to public and green space – all of these undermine people's health as individuals, and also undermine the health of the collective. In the words of Fred Moten: 'the coalition emerges out of your recognition that it's fucked up for you, in the same way that we've already recognized that it's fucked up for us. I don't need your help. I just need you to recognize

that this shit is killing you, too, however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?' (Moten, 2013: 140).

<2>The abolitionist life we are already living

Political theorist James Martel argues that anarchism, far from being an embattled and precarious practice is, in fact, 'far more robust' and 'more anchored in materiality' than anything lived in, through or by the state (Martel, 2015: 188). Rather than seeing anarchism as a utopian political project, one constantly under attack and in retreat, Martel implores us to recognise where and how anarchist practices have always been around us – 'in materiality, in habit and in life patterns that are rarely deemed political' (Martel, 2015: 199). In a similar vein, we argue that the *practice* of abolitionism is not a far-flung fantastical ideal far removed from the world as we know it, but is in fact being practised in many different spaces, whether we are aware of it or not.

In recent times, and particularly since the first wave of #BlackLivesMatter uprisings in 2014, there has been an increased focus on spreading awareness about *not calling the police*. It is important to note that if your daily life is lived without impending threats of violence, this has very little, if anything, to do with the police. The corollary of this is that for many people life is, for the most part, lived without the police anyway. Economic class, race, gender, sexuality – these all render you more or less likely to encounter, or to be subject to, violence, be that material, physical, verbal, institutional or otherwise. These are also the vectors by which one is more likely to be subject to policing. These two facts are intimately connected.

Policing and prisons do nothing to address the problems of structural violence, but actually do a lot to reproduce and perpetuate them. This is why websites such as dontcallthepolice.com and rosecitycopwatch.wordpress.com are such important resources. They list housing, LBGTQ+, mental health, substances, domestic violence, among others, navigating users to organisations they can call for help with these issues in

their local area, explaining why calling the police to deal with issues such as these is more damaging than helpful, and demonstrating that alternatives to police already exist.

The concept of 'mutual aid' and its organisations long pre-exists the pandemic, but a swell of groups arising in the context of COVID-19 ensured that the term was thrust into popular discourse in a way that had not been seen before. The state is extremely wary of mutual aid. Its very existence, the fact that it is needed in so many areas, highlights that the state, far from providing people with what they need and ensuring their 'protection', safety and security, is in fact engaged in a massive operation of what Ruth Wilson Gilmore calls 'organized abandonment' (Gilmore, 2011: 257). (Remember from the previous chapter that the very *raison d'être* of the state has been construed as being the safety and wellbeing of its population.)

The case of the Black Panthers, who famously organised collectively to provide 'Survival Programs' that 'included everything from free breakfasts for school children to free sickle cell testing' (People's Kitchen Collective, 2021) is particularly illustrative. Former FBI director J. Edgar Hoover described the Black Panther Party (BPP) as: 'the greatest threat to internal security of the country'. Speaking of the free breakfasts, he said: 'The [Program] represents the best and most influential activity going for the BPP and, as such, is potentially the greatest threat to efforts by authorities to neutralize the BPP and destroy what it stands for' (in Gebreyesus, 2019).

One of the first things the BPP did when they formed was to patrol the police, in recognition of the fact that the people responsible for overseeing and holding the police accountable, are also police: 'we recognized that it was ridiculous to report the police to the police, but we hoped that by raising encounters to a higher level, by patrolling the police with arms, we would see a change in their behavior' (Newton, 2009: 127).

There was thus a visible connection between organising against police violence and the providing of goods and services through mutual aid. This connection has never disappeared. It was once again highlighted during the summer of 2020, in the midst of the pandemic and amid the protests and uprisings against the police and police violence. As Dean Spade notes:

> the mutual aid projects that began mobilizing during the first months of the pandemic became vectors of participation in the growing protests. Millions of people participated in new ways in this moment – providing food, masks, hand sanitizer, medical support and protection to each other while fighting cops and white supremacists in the streets, organizing and supporting funds for criminalised people. (Spade, 2020: 209)

What this brings to light is that people are making the connections between COVID-19, racism, housing, incarceration, climate change and more in the midst of crisis. We see in these moments that multiple and converging crises need to be thought of and dealt with together, not apart. Anti-blackness is a problem that traverses and transcends national borders, and what Saidiya Hartman (1997) calls the 'afterlives of slavery' find themselves manifesting across different temporal and geographical points – the effects of COVID-19 and the policing of it are but the latest iteration.

This is all to say that the project of abolition is expansive, and necessarily global. It is necessarily tied to working towards a world in which people have what they need, have the care that they require and don't have to fight tooth and nail simply to survive. It is radical acts and deeds that simultaneously point to the vulnerabilities and abandonment produced by the state, seek to remedy them, and by simply existing point to something *beyond* the state.

This chapter argues that moving in an abolitionist direction requires us to 'undo' policing intellectually, culturally and politically, by killing that proverbial cop inside our heads. Defunding, disarming, disbanding and disempowering the police should become a priority. Although such calls have come closer to the mainstream in the aftermath of the most recent wave of #BlackLivesMatter protests, the language of reform still dominates discussion. As Robyn Maynard argues: 'With no empirical or ethical leg to stand on, calls for *more* police reforms at this historical juncture are morally untenable: body cameras, racial diversity in hiring and implicit bias, are, after all, the conditions that nevertheless allowed for the public execution of George Floyd' (Maynard, 2020: 74).

We therefore end with five brief suggestions on how to enrich our abolitionist imagination as a practical goal – but one that cannot be achieved without a process of close reading, deep (re)thinking and reckoning with the emotional dimension of discussions about policing. The list that follows is far from exhaustive, but merely some of the things we can start doing now to move towards abolitionist practices and ways of thinking:

1. Read extensively about policing and police racism, to gain a deeper and more critical insight into both (see, for example, Hall et al, 1982; Williams, 2015; Vitale, 2017; Correia and Wall, 2018; Elliott-Cooper, 2021; Duff, 2021).
2. Don't vote for political parties that promise more powers and more money to the police – or at least do challenge them about it.
3. Learn about, join, support and organise with organisations against state and police violence such as: Netpol, Inquest, London Campaign Against Police and State Violence, Sisters Uncut, the Northern Police Monitoring Project and the United Families & Friends Campaign in the UK. Also explore global abolitionist campaign groups, such as Critical Resistance (US), Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression (US), Abolitionist Futures (UK), #8toAbolition (US), Building the World We Want (Canada), or Taller Salud (Puerto Rico), to mention but a few.
4. Think about what we can do to be safe without the police (see, for example, Hope, 2014; Critical Resistance, 2021) and don't call the police, if possible. (The Coalition Against Police Crimes and Repression website offers a useful flowchart that lists alternatives to calling the police).[5]
5. If you are scholars, do research *on* not *for* the police. Teach policing and the history of policing differently, to illustrate how the legacies and afterlives of colonialism and slavery still structure the criminal justice system today.

The list could go on, yet the message is simple: defunding, disarming, disbanding and disempowering the police should become a priority. Once we see that what has been presented as a remedy to the chaos and anarchy that would reign without the state and without the police is, in actuality, a characteristic of police power itself, then the notion

[5] https://44fce5f3-a0b1-4eb0-af1d-a3d9af647cae.usrfiles.com/ugd/44fce5_f73d98f68f8846abbcef6cc2ad4e0fcf.pdf

that they uphold order, prevent crime or protect the common good can be firmly extinguished. It is then – and only then – that the work of imagining a world without police can begin.