Foreword

Abolition is new to my vocabulary. In less than a year, I went from hearing about prison abolition for the first time to believing staunchly and whole-heartedly that it is the most urgent and necessary path to liberation from white supremacy. Being new to this idea does not make me unqualified to write about it. A lot of other things make me unqualified to write about it. I belong to all the identity categories considered the default by our white supremacist society: white, cisgender, straight, abled, middle class, settler. I have never been othered. I have never been incarcerated. I have never personally known anyone who has been incarcerated or is currently incarcerated. I have never had a violent or negative interaction with the police. I will not attempt to explain away my privileges or justify why I feel I can write on this subject with an ounce of authority. Instead, I am attempting to place myself in the vast world of abolitionism and liberatory work with a belief that these projects are worth pursuing and that these fights are worth fighting.

We all have a vested interest in liberation from oppression. I have been tasked to design an abolition society for Black people who move to Nova Scotia. A future society that does away with white supremacist logics and systems through the abolition of the prison industrial complex and all of its accomplices. I am creating a blueprint for a society, without fully knowing what the final product will look like. In creating something that is not intended for me, naturally, I am limited by my own experiences and imagination. I am also limited, as are my peers, by the confines of our classroom. By the unprecedented nature of this assignment and the short time frame we have to work within. A truly abolitionist community would not be created by undergraduate students in

the ivory tower. The free world will not be designed on a white girl's MacBook air. We know what happens when borders are drawn, and laws are created by a room of powerful people. Thankfully, we do not hold that kind of power. I am taking this educational opportunity to explore that other world we are told is possible. This is my disclaimer.

Imagination, Meet Abolition

When I was a baby and my sister was a toddler, she climbed onto our kitchen counter and accidentally called 911 while playing with our home phone, unbeknownst to our parents. Two police officers arrived at our front door shortly after inquiring about why 911 was called. My parents, confused, explained what must have happened and the four of them had a laugh before wishing each other a good day. Growing up, this was retold at family events among other stories of children being silly and parents being oblivious. This is my only childhood story involving the police. I do not even have to use my imagination to envision what that incident would have looked like if it was the toddler of a Black family making that accidental call. On March 24th, 2021, Ottawa police entered the home of Nadia Ngoto, her four children and her 70-year-old roommate, doing a suicide wellness check at the wrong address (Trinh, 2021). Armed and unannounced, police officers told the children not to move and barged into the bedroom of the family friend living upstairs. The family was traumatized by the experience, and so are many other families after police escalate mental health crises, ending with the very outcome they were called to avoid. The names Ejaz Choudry, Chantel Moore, and

Regis Korchinski-Paquet come to mind as tragic examples of what happens when police respond to wellness checks for Black, Indigenous, or otherwise racialized people in crisis. Police, a dominant outpost of the prison industrial complex, neither serve nor protect and they make the case for their own abolition every day. If you are learning about abolition for the first time, your initial reaction may be shock, confusion, or anger. When I was first exposed to the idea of abolishing prisons and police, I thought it was an impossible project. As a society, we are so invested in the prison, not just in the physical architecture of the penitentiary, but the idea of prison. This idea that people who have caused harm (or are merely branded as criminals) deserve punishment rather than healing. Depending on our level of privilege, the idea of prison can make us feel safe or even confident in our society's ability to deliver justice however, the prison is a façade in this way because its existence guarantees no one's safety.

It is nearly impossible to be raised in our world today without encountering the prison and police in some form. Some of us have been or are currently incarcerated[1] and have been exposed to the violence of the institution from within. Some of us have family, friends, and community members who experience or have experienced the isolation that accompanies the branding of "criminal" or "prisoner." The most privileged of us have only seen the prison and police represented on television, in movies or on the news. These experiences and representations vary wildly. Those who have been personally touched by the prison industrial complex may be familiar with its lack of humanity and the inherent violence and indignity it thrusts upon those unlucky enough

[1] Imprisoned, confined to prison.

to be in its confines. Those who have only learned about the prison industrial complex[2] through the media may be more inclined to believe in the righteousness of these systems and what they attempt to uphold. Though these experiences vary greatly, it is very possible that both groups believe that the prison industrial complex is inevitable. This is untrue. The prison is human made and can be human destroyed. What I am exploring and proposing here in this chapter is a destruction of sorts, but just as we need to burn down the prisons and the precincts so something else can be built in its place, we need to burn down the oppressive logics that capture our imaginations and put radical compassion, love, joy, and empathy in its place.

Responding to Charles Blow

Charles Blow's manifesto *The Devil You Know: A Black Power Manifesto* is the foundation for this journal. This chapter is a reflection, response, and critique of Blow's work and his plan for a Black return to the Southern United States as an attempt to flee the constraints of white supremacy and concentrate Black political and economic power. My exploration of an abolition society is seemingly at odds with Blow's vision for Black Americans. Blow advocates for Black regionalism rather than Black nationalism; his goal is not to build a distinct Black nation but, create a majority Black population that would control the systems of power that have been levied to the detriment of Black

[2] In *Are Prisons Obsolete?*, Angela Davis describes the prison industrial complex as the exploitive relationships that link "corporations, government, correctional communities, and media." (2003). The term was coined to demonstrate that prison populations were increasing in the United States due to "ideologies of racism and the pursuit of profit", not rising crime rates (Davis, 2003).

people since their inception. Whereas I am interested in abolishing the prevailing structures and building something new in their place, Blow is focused on changing who is in control of these structures. Will white supremacist structures be rid of their white supremacy if Black people are at the helm? Blow seems to believe so, but I am less convinced. White supremacy is an ideology, not an identity, meaning anyone can subscribe to it. A majority Black community, run by majority Black leaders may lessen the visibility of power imbalances, but it is not guaranteed to be extremely progressive or inherently liberatory. Black capitalism, elitism, and settler colonialism are likely to emerge if Black people are working in structures that were never designed for their success. I believe, like Blow, that dramatic transformation is necessary, but will we get there through concentrating power within existing systems or abolishing those systems and beginning anew?

I cannot blame Blow for wanting to use white supremacist structures to Black people's advantage. Black people have waited long enough, and a reverse great migration, as Blow outlines in his manifesto, seems so tangible and logical. I do not believe Black people can wait for white deference as it will likely never come. The burden of racism only continues to get heavier and for many, abolition seems like a near impossibility. Perhaps my optimism is a virtue of my privilege, my distance from the seemingly endless violence of racialized oppression. However, I still believe it is unproductive to clamour to be a part of a rotten system. Inclusion and representation are limited measures of political success, particularly in powerful institutions. We do not need more Black chiefs of police. We do not need more Black prosecutors. We do not need more Black correctional officers. We need to do away with these systems entirely.

But can abolition exist in isolation? Abolitionist thinkers like Angela Davis and Mariame Kaba do not talk about resettlement because abolition is a comprehensive effort that involves all structures within a society. So, with the Black settlement in Nova Scotia, are we proposing abandonment or abolition? Leaving white society behind to create a world with alternative solutions may either be a revolutionary feat significant enough to change the world or it may be a failed experiment that other regions decide not to parallel. Abolition after all is not somewhere else; it is exactly where you are. The way toward abolition may be less clear and compelling than taking over the dominant structures that are familiar, but I believe it is necessary for liberation from oppression.

Exploring the Past

Histories of Abolition: This Has Been Done Before

History is long, but it is not linear. Though this project is unique, it is still grounded in historical precedents as the fight for liberation is as old as the means of oppression. The push for abolition is not new, nor is it unique to the context of the prison industrial complex. Abolition has been a rallying cry for Black people since they were first stolen from the continent of Africa and it has carried through the building and destruction of many white supremacist structures from enslavement to the convict lease system, to the prison. In a white supremacist society, every prominent structure or industry has roots in white supremacy, you merely have to search for and be willing to learn about those legacies. Of course, these legacies are not merely remnants of the past as white supremacy continues to inform how the prevailing structures operate. From social

services to healthcare to education, no system is untouched by white supremacist ideologies. This chapter does not contain the capacity to discuss all these histories and current realities so my focus will be on the systems that the prison evolved from, namely enslavement and the convict lease system in American and Canadian contexts.

History of Enslavement & Resistance in the Maritimes

Owing to the myth of Canada as a country of genial attitudes and conciliatory temperaments, is the story of Canada as a refuge for enslaved people escaping from bondage in the U.S. This narrative, commonly retorted to anyone new to the history of the state, often fails to mention the 200 years of enslavement that occurred in Canada (Maynard, 2017). Despite the state's unique brand of exceptionalism, Canada is not and has never been exempt from the atrocities of white supremacy. Canada, specifically the Maritimes, was not an idealistic refuge from the brutality of enslavement rather, the area served as another outpost of enslavement where emancipated Black people were forced or tricked by white loyalists into relinquishing their newly won freedom by unknowingly signing away their rights in exploitative contracts (Whitfield, 2016). The same white supremacy that was rampant in the U.S. was a cornerstone to life in Canada as Black people were viewed as human property under the law in the Maritimes and recent conservative estimates say that 2000 Black people were enslaved throughout mainland Nova Scotia and New Brunswick (Whitfield, 2016). Enslavement in the Maritimes lasted until the early 1820s and would have lasted longer if it were up to the virulent slave owners (Whitfield, 2016). Nova Scotia and the surrounding area was

anything but a safe haven from violent racism and enslavement, contrary to what revisionist historical accounts would have us believe.

After arriving in the Maritimes, on the shore of their anticipated freedom, Black people were often re-enslaved by white loyalists who attempted, many times succeeding, in selling them to the West Indies or keeping them as indentured servants by deceiving them into signing away their freedom (Whitfield, 2016). Part of why it is so difficult to pin down the exact number of enslaved people in the Maritimes is because white loyalists often recorded them as servants (with no mention of their race) and it is likely that these records really indicate Black people working against their will (Whitfield, 2016). In fact, kidnapping Freedom Seekers became such a prominent activity in the area that a bill called An Act for the Regulation and Relief of the Free Negroes within the Province of Nova Scotia was drafted by legislators, but ultimately failed to be passed in parliament (Whitfield, 2016). When their expectations of freedom were dashed, Black people resisted through any means available to them, many unsuccessfully going through the court system only to be told they lacked appropriate documentation (Whitfield, 2016). As systemic oppression continued in Canada through economic, legal and social means, Black people continued to resist the suffering conditions inflicted upon them.

As long as the endeavour of enslavement has existed so has the goal of abolition. Thomas Peters was a Black community leader who served for the British army in the Revolutionary war. In 1790, he wrote two petitions to the British secretary of state outlining the abhorrent conditions that Black people were facing in the Maritimes, he then went on to strongly promote the cause of Black people's return to Africa,

specifically Sierra Leone (Whitfield, 2016). Peters was a proponent of the Back to Africa movement long before it was officially coined, and he recognized the significance of returning home as a route to escape the violence of white supremacy in the Maritime colonies. One of Peters' petitions says that free Black people in the Maritimes "have already been reduced to Slavery without being able to attain any Redress from the King's courts" (Whitfield, 2016). In the Maritimes, Black people did not find the refuge they were hoping for, instead being met with yet another reiteration of systemic oppression. The abolition of enslavement did not bring about boundless freedom and justice for Black people. White supremacy merely shifted gears and loopholes were exploited to preserve severe oppression against Black people in the name of servitude and for the pleasure of white loyalists in Nova Scotia. Charles Blow is not a lone figure in history to advocate for Black resettlement and Thomas Peters had a clear vision of returning home. Though I am partial to the project of abolition, cultivating a Black majority or going where Black people already are the majority is a logical response in the face of incessant racism.

The Violence of the Convict Lease System

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,
Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?
Or what is it ye buy so dear
With your pain and with your fear?
The seed ye sow, another reaps;
The wealth ye find, another keeps;
The robes ye weave, another wears;
The arms ye forge, another bears.
- *Percy Bysshe Shelley*

Enslavement in the United States is often relegated to the dark corners of history, an unimaginable series of events that were luckily abolished. Something to move on from or simply get over. Of course, we know this to not be so simple. Enslavement was one frontier of white supremacy, an entire economy created on the backs of kidnapped Africans. When this system collapsed, it was not replaced by systemic or civil freedoms for Black people. As the ideology that informed enslavement did not go anywhere, the systems themselves merely morphed into new structures of oppression. One such structure was the convict lease system, considered by many to be a reincarnation of enslavement (Davis, 2003). After emancipation, incarcerated became the new enslaved. Prison regulations replaced slave codes and deprived those imprisoned of all rights and freedoms (Davis, 2003). Before emancipation in Alabama, 99% of prisoners were white, but the majority quickly shifted to Black people after enslavement was outlawed (Davis, 2003). The prisons were full of white people during enslavement because rich whites did not want to lose their free labour, and as enslaved people were considered their property, they could inflict violence on Black people from the comfort of their own home and did not need the construct of the prison to do it for them. Despite the modern political hyper focus on “law and order”, prisons and the structures they enable have never actually been about addressing crime or reducing crime.

As prisons replaced enslavement as the new structure contrived for the purposes of controlling and surveilling Black communities, the convict lease system (also known as county chain gangs) cropped up. A vestige of enslavement, this system emerged due to racist ideas about Black people and labour, white people believing that Black people could only labour in groups that were constantly supervised and threatened with

violence (Davis, 2003). Though the system of enslavement was abolished, the idea of the slave did not go anywhere, as Black people involved in the convict lease system, rented out for labour in groups, were treated as if enslaved, sometimes with an even greater air of disposability. In the late 1880s, Mississippi plantation records from the Yazoo Delta document that prisoners “...were punished for "slow hoeing" (ten lashes), "sorry planting" (five lashes), and "being light with cotton" (five lashes). Some who attempted to escape were whipped" till the blood ran down their legs"; others had a metal spur riveted to their feet. Convicts dropped from exhaustion, pneumonia, malaria, frostbite, consumption, sunstroke, dysentery, gunshot wounds, and "shackle poisoning" (the constant rubbing of chains and leg irons against bare flesh” (Davis, 2003). The violence of enslavement shifted to the convict lease system, both results of white supremacist ideologies and capitalistic interests that viewed Black people as dispensable means to white people’s success in society. Today, the idea of the slave persists. Incarcerated people labor in prisons and are viewed by prison staff and much of society as expendable and deserving of violent oppression.

The Urgent Relevance of Abolition Democracy

History tells us that destruction is not enough, we must rebuild. If we destroy a white supremacist institution (like enslavement) without destroying white supremacy itself, another racist institution will crop up its place. This pattern has shown itself to be true in an American context with the transition from enslavement to the convict lease system to the prison industrial complex. Abolition democracy, an idea incited by W.E.B. Du Bois in

Black Reconstruction and later referenced by Angela Davis and a number of other abolitionist thinkers, sees the harm in one-note abolition "success" stories that end only in destruction (1935). Without "new institutions...created to incorporate black people into the social order", abolition merely clears the way for the latest institutional innovation of white supremacist and carceral logics (Davis, 2005). This historical pattern of transition from one oppressive system to the next is exactly why Charles Blow is suggesting a return to the South. Blow observes the transient nature of white supremacy and believes that developing a Black majority will shield Black people from the ever-innovating iterations of racism in America. As Du Bois himself put it in Black Reconstruction[3], "The slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery" (1935). In historical hindsight, white supremacy seems inevitable and Black people should not merely wait and see what its next violent iteration will look like.

Perhaps the project of abolition is largely missing from Charles Blow's analysis because it is not a future he sees as feasible or tangible. I cannot blame Blow for his lack of faith in abolition, but I can propose an alternative idea that meets him halfway. For Blow, perhaps transformation will emerge through majority inclusion rather than abolition. I fear that a society designed by white people will never fully work for Black people's benefit, even if they are in positions of power. To permanently break the chains of oppressive white supremacist structures, I believe it is necessary to recognize that abolition is only the first step in liberation and creating alternative systems is crucial for securing freedom in the long term. As we explore the idea of a Black settlement in Nova

[3] Period after the American Civil War that constituted the rebuilding of the South as Black people became emancipated from enslavement.

Scotia, I see an urgent importance in making this society one that adheres to the principles of abolition democracy, a transformative society that builds as much as it destroys and embraces as much as it rejects.

Rooting in the Present

Why reform is not the answer

"Liberation by oppression is unthinkable by design" - Linda Meiner

In *Are Prisons Obsolete?,* Angela Davis initiates her book by reminding us that prison and reform have always gone hand in hand. In fact, the prison itself was born out of reform, as a seemingly less violent alternative to killing and torturing people in the streets (2003). The prison, as we have grown to understand it, was not less violent, it was merely better at shielding the public from its violence. Reform does not fix the prison industrial complex, it merely serves to reinforce the prison industrial complex. This is why I am not suggesting that the Black settlement in Nova Scotia attempt to mirror society as we know it while installing Black authority figures. Inclusion and representation are not synonymous with liberation. When imagining a Black settlement in Nova Scotia, the goal is not to invent new modes of punishment. The goal is to cultivate the necessary societal conditions so that as a whole we redefine how we think about "crime" and as individuals we engage in less violent behaviour. As Angela Davis and many other abolitionists have noted, the system is not broken, it is functioning

exactly as designed. So, how can we design a system that functions much better, based in liberatory values?

Situating My Analysis in the Nova Scotia Prison System

Many of the prominent critiques of the prison industrial complex are situated in an American context. I hope to apply the central tenets of abolitionism to specific instances within the Nova Scotian prison landscape, specifically two reports issued by the Nova Scotia Department of Justice in response to the respective escape of an incarcerated person and the death of a mentally ill man at the hands of corrections officers. There are currently five adult so-called correctional facilities in Nova Scotia, holding a maximum of 452 incarcerated people and employing 391 staff members (Dept. of Justice, 2008). In 2008, an incarcerated person escaped a Nova Scotia prison while being escorted to receive medical attention. After this escape, Deloitte, a billion-dollar conglomerate, was called in to conduct a review of the “errors and inefficiencies” that led to this “unfortunate event” and provide recommendations (Dept. of Justice, 2008). Deloitte consulted all parties they considered relevant, which failed to include any incarcerated people. The report concluded with 51 recommendations that revolved around avoiding the escape of another incarcerated person rather than making prison a place people do not need to escape from or disestablishing the apparatus altogether. This is certainly another case of the heavy restraints white supremacy and carceral logics put on the imagination and how those in dominant positions in prevailing power structures from correctional officers to consultants at Deloitte fail to accept the humanity

of incarcerated people. The authors of the report boiled the issue of the incarcerated person escaping down to a failure of merely bureaucratic proportions, a result of confusing paperwork, inconsistent employee schedules, and disorganized information technology systems. The report failed to consider that an incarcerated person wanting or needing to escape the prison is not an anomalous behaviour, but rather symptomatic of the unbearable conditions that make prison, prison. Solving “errors and inefficiencies” may make it more difficult for incarcerated people to escape prison, but it does not dull the desire to leave the prison and its violence behind.

Violence and the prison industrial complex go hand in hand, they are and have always been deeply and inextricably entangled. Violence is a function of the prison and a tool of the police. In 2007, a white Nova Scotia man with schizophrenia named Howard Hyde was killed by correctional officers. Hyde was only in contact with the prison system for two days before it ended his life. Halifax Regional Police officers arrested him on November 21, 2007, and he died the very next day after being violently assaulted by correctional officers in the name of “restraint” (Dept. of Justice & Court Services, 2010). Opinions on the cause of death varied as law enforcement attempted to blame his mental illness, while a 462-page report on the incident claimed otherwise, saying that Hyde’s ability to breath was impeded by the restraint techniques used by the guards (Dept. of Justice & Court Services, 2010). The violence of the prison is amplified by a range of vulnerabilities. Though Howard was not oppressed because of his race, his mental illness made him a target for the correctional officers, whose biased incompetence led to them ending Howard’s life in a violent restraint hold. When

imagining a future Black Nova Scotia, we have to consider the multi-faceted nature of oppression and the importance of intersectional analysis.

Dreaming About the Futures

The Queering of Prison Abolition

Rooting out white supremacy will not automatically negate other forms of oppression. We all exist in the intersection of a multitude of factors that make up our identities. As Audra Lorde said, “There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (2012). Black people living in Canada do not live single issue lives and achieving an overwhelming Black majority population will not automatically or necessarily do away with other oppressive forces. Black people experience violence on every axis of their identity and oppressive violence of any kind will always be compounded by race. Centralizing the marginalized should be a key feature of this project because just like I cannot speak for any Black people, cis, straight, rich, abled Black men cannot speak for all Black people. When designing this society, we need to centre the experiences of Black trans people, Black people with disabilities, and Black women. This can be done, in part, by queering prison abolition. Queer theory’s presence in academic spaces was born of a conference organized by Teresa de Lauretis in 1990 (Barker & Scheele, 2016). To queer something means to critically disrupt its normative interpretation, in the case of the prison industrial complex and the potentiality of a Black settlement in Nova Scotia, it means to refuse to neoliberalize the struggle to survive and focus on liberation as a primary goal.

The authors of *Queering Prison Abolition, Now?,* Eric A. Stanley, Dean Spade, Andrea J. Ritchie, Joey L. Mogul, and Kay Whitlock believe that “the only prison that would be responsive to gender is one that ceases to exist” (2012). The goal is not gender-neutral, trans inclusive prisons. The goal is developing the societal conditions that drive poverty, hopelessness, and oppression into obsolescence, along with the prison itself. Would a prison that is “safe” for women or trans people even be a prison? As Eric A. Stanley describes, “...prisons function precisely through being overcrowded, violent places with deadly health care, insufficient food, and widespread physical and sexual assault” (2012). If prisons do not employ violence and tactics of unbearable discomfort and oppression, can they still call themselves a prison? Clambering to make structures like the prison more inclusive does not free anyone, if anything reform-based movements merely reinforce the logic that prisons are necessary. By queering prison abolition, we recognize that destruction is the aim and transformation is the goal as liberation cannot be bought with diverse inclusion or representation in inherently oppression structures.

Disability Justice and Decarceration

Prison abolition discourse often forgets about people with disabilities. Not only are many disabled people familiar with incarceration and the logics that accompany prison, but prison in and of itself is a disabling force (Ben-Moshe, 2020). Disability is not a problem in need of solving, it is an additional level of nuance and an analytical framework that intensifies the call for decarceration (Ben-Moshe, 2020). Roderick Ferguson offers a

method of framing criminalization and state violence called the queer of color critique that can be usefully applied to instances of incarceration and institutionalization (Ben-Moshe, 2020). Ferguson's queer of colour critique was created in response to the failures of white liberals to adequately address social issues. Small-mindedness is not a trait reserved for right-wing conservatives, as Charles Blow explains, "…hate is not a requirement of white supremacy. Just because one abhors violence and cruelty doesn't mean that one truly believes that all people are equal—culturally, intellectually, creatively, morally" (2021). Carceral logics do not just exist in politically conservative spaces, they deeply inform how white liberals see solutions to social problems. Transformative solutions do not yearn for more legislation or privatization, for band-aid solutions that disappear poor, disabled, racialized, queer people from view, rather these solutions call for a transformation of conditions. Jina Kim, a feminist disability scholar who was inspired by Ferguson's ideas, defines her crip of colour critique "as a critical methodology, it would ask us to consider the ableist reasoning and language underpinning the racialized distribution of violence" (Ben-Moshe, 2020). Approaching prison abolition from a radical, intersectional lens urges us to integrate queer theory and disability justice in conjunction with understandings of white supremacy to comprehend how the state is implicated in marginalizing and oppression people along every axis of their identities.

What about the rapists and murderers?

What about the rapists and murderers? This is a question abolitionists are eminently aware of, as it is often the first one they hear from people brand new to abolition, as if it is the ultimate gotcha. This is not to say that sexual violence and murder do not exist as societal issues. It is to simultaneously recognize that these problems exist and understand that the systems we currently have in place clearly are not solving them. Why do we not ask, “What about the rapists and murderers?” to proponents of the prison system and police forces? Abolitions want better solutions. When a man is jailed for intimate partner violence, their incarceration does not solve intimate partner violence. Our culture is obsessed with vindication and revenge. Every other popular TV show, movie, or podcast is about either true crime stories, police, or prisons. We smile when they catch the bad guy and lock him up. We feel, somehow, like justice was served. In reality, few survivors ever report incidents of sexual violence to the police. In 2014, only 5% of sexual assaults were reported to the police in Canada (Canadian Women’s Foundation, 2021). As well, people are still being violated and a majority of incarcerated women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lives, representing an abuse to prison pipeline (Kaba, 2021). The threat of prison clearly does not deter people from sexual violence. An uprooting of systemic patriarchy and misogyny would better limit future violence and provide survivors of violence as well as perpetrators the resources they need to heal.

Transforming Justice with Transformative Justice

"Somehow we survive and tenderness, frustrated, does not wither" – Denis Brutus

So, how do *we* create an abolition society? Maybe we can start by not referring to it as an abolition society, but a transformative society. As we learned from W.E.B. Du Bois' abolition democracy, destruction is only the beginning, and the real work is building alternatives to prevalent structures of oppression. To create something that we have never seen is no small feat; it is a generations long project that will not appear in thin air overnight but will be intentionally worked on for as long as people have the willingness to sustain it. There is no exact destination, there is only growth. Mariame Kaba, abolitionist author, organizer, and educator, often states that hope is not a feeling, it is a discipline (2021). I believe the discipline of hope must be centralized in any community or society aiming to abolish these institutions and create something else in its place. We can gather endless evidence to fuel pessimism, but hope is what we really need to continue breathing life into the long project of abolition and transformation. Hope is a practice that requires a commitment to both destroying structures of oppression and creating the conditions to enable liberation. The absence of oppression does not necessarily guarantee the existence of liberation. As Mariame Kaba explains "we have all so thoroughly internalized these logics of oppression that if oppression were to end tomorrow, we would be likely to reproduce previous structures" (2021). A Black settlement that abandons white society will not necessarily abandon white supremacy. White supremacy was created by white people, but anyone can subscribe to its

ideological objectives, even if it goes against their own political welfare. Will this settlement just become a Black capitalist colony? Is that Charles Blow's vision? Will this project merely uproot and replant the work of white supremacy? How can this not only be avoided, but transformed into an opportunity for a better society?

There are currently many people thinking about these very questions, one of them being Mia Mingus, an American disability justice organizer who sees abolition as an end goal. Mingus educates on the topic of transformative justice responses and interventions and helps us see solutions that are tangible, practical, and necessary. In Mingus' blog "Leaving Evidence", in an entry titled "Transformative Justice: A Brief Description" she writes that the focus must be on communities rather that the state as the state is a site of violence reproduction, and the community offers opportunities for genuine healing (n.d.). Transformative justice is about preventing violence as much as it is about responding to it. Without prisons and police, the Black people in Nova Scotia will have the opportunity to rethink personal and wider relationships to harm and healing. Justice can be achieved through healing and accountability practices as well as creating a just community where the conditions that enable violence are transformed. I want to devise a community where survivors are taken care of and so are the people who have caused harm. As Mingus puts it, "We must work to respond to current violence and its impacts in a way that does not undermine our long-term visions for preventing violence, responding to violence, and ultimately ending violence. What would it take to not only respond to rape, but to end rape?" (Mingus, n.d.). While the prison may offer a small amount of survivor's reprieve from harm or fear, it does not ultimately end violence, but in fact reproduce it. When our focus is limited to the present, prison

may seem like the best choice for preventing violence however after reflecting on history and dreaming about potential futures we can see that investing in prison and the logics that accompany it is a futile venture.

What's in a 'criminal'?

White supremacy has infected our imaginations. From birth, our brains are trained to become agents of the state, our thought processes tuned and geared into seeing the world through a singular lens. We are socialized relentlessly to understand prison and police as enduring rather than new, natural rather than prescribed and inevitable rather than fallible. The prison and the structures that reinforce it have not always existed and we have to believe, will not always exist. Why would anyone want to live in a world where prisons exist when we could live in a world without them? The most likely answer to this question involves the spectre of crime and our conceptions of the "criminal". Harm is unavoidable; however, crime is not. Harm is a human reality; as long as humans have the capacity to love each other, we will have the capacity to hurt each other. Crime, however, is merely an idea. What is "crime"? Who is considered a "criminal"? From a legalistic understanding, a crime is a break of the law, a breach of the social contract. The Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School defines a criminal as "a person who has committed a crime or has been legally convicted of a crime", while crime is defined as "behavior that the law makes punishable as a public offense" (n.d.). In the course of an average person's life, they will have committed a handful of "crimes". The world is full of so-called criminals but only the prisons are full of

racialized, poor, and disabled so-called criminals. In an ideal world, why should a person have to suffer for the rest of their life because they did drugs? Why should we offer violence and punishment to rapists rather than justice and accountability? If our goal is a world with less violence, our goal needs to be a world without prison, an incubator of violence, a world with the conditions necessary to promote the healing and growth of all people. We need to expand the collective imagination to include abolition and transformation as not only a possibility, but an achievable goal that is worthy of working towards.

Tools of Restoration and Transformation

"Everyone is familiar with the slogan "The personal is political"—not only that what we experience on a personal level has profound political implications, but that our interior lives, our emotional lives are very much informed by ideology. We ourselves often do the work of the state in and through our interior lives. What we often assume belongs most intimately to ourselves and to our emotional life has been produced elsewhere and has been recruited to do the work of racism and repression." – Angela Davis

Though this project is inherently systemic, it is also deeply personal. As abolition is also an internal project, it is necessary for people to root out their own white supremacy and the oppressive logics that make us ardently oppose or even hesitate to strive for a transformative society. Black people have long been victimized by carceral structures and logics that paint them with inherent criminality. These logics have often been internalized and growing out of them will take skill sets that many of us do not yet have. That is where transformative justice becomes a necessary tool. We do not need punishment; we need accountability and healing. Without the state, people must keep

each other accountable. We need to build the tools to ensure conflict is not met with carceral solutions or mindsets. Locking someone up solves nothing. These tools will be an ongoing learning process and will involve developing radical compassion and empathy.

Imagination, Meet Transformation

When I close my eyes and try to imagine what a transformative society of Black people living in Nova Scotia looks like, I picture a few things. I see entire communities where everyone is housed and fed. Where everyone can access the mental and physical health services, they need to live a life of health, safety, and fulfillment. I see children being raised in community, learning from their elders, and given safe spaces to express themselves, make mistakes, and grow. Black families will reminisce with prescient disdain about the era of prisons and police and how grateful they are to have escaped the violence of white supremacy and created something that is new and old at once and beautiful all the same. Where violence is minimal and when it does occur, it is met with the full force of community support and healing for all involved. People would not be competing for seats at the table and instead pulling up more chairs for anyone who wants to listen, participate, eat, or be in company with others. In many ways and in many communities, this already exists. Without the help of the state, Black people have already innovatively and resourcefully created the conditions that generate their ability to not only survive in a white supremacist state, but to thrive.

A Work in Progress

I (clearly) do not have all the answers. No one person does. The answers are out there, and they are not neatly written in academic journals or policy papers. The answers are in communities, in prisons, in detention centres, in tent cities, in sex worker networks. As long as there has been oppression, there has been resistance. Abolition is a centuries old project that is already being practiced in communities and still has yet to realize its full potential in our world. A Black settlement in Nova Scotia has the power to practice transformative tools and work towards a transformed society. Abolition is not a single goal post or an achievable trophy, but rather a never-ending process. As a white person, it is strange for me to be making grand plans and designing a transformed, Black society. I feel grateful for the many Black abolitionists whose work has inspired this chapter and my writing on the subject.

This is a theoretical, educational environment, but in settings with real world implications, white people should not dictate how Black people live their lives. It is however important for white people to image alternative structures and transformed futures and do what is in our power to get society closer to that vision. In many ways, white people are architects of oppression. All of the prominent systems and structures in our society were created by white people working within the confines of their own white supremacy. These systems have proved to be nothing but oppressive and marginalizing. What kind of society will Black people create in Nova Scotia? Does Charles Blow's vision enable Black people to be the architects of their own liberation? In Charles blow's image of a reverse great migration, would Black majority communities in

the south really be able to transform society beyond oppression? Or would they just learn to use the systems to their own benefit, creating new hierarchies of power and subjugation? For me, writing this chapter has been a fruitful exploration of the project of abolition and the goal of transformation. I hope together we can all shake our imaginations loose and poke holes in the prison industrial complex until it deflates. Another world is indeed possible, and, in many ways, it already exists.

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