

On Abolition Ecologies and Making “Freedom as a Place”

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Abstract: This introduction calls for political ecology to systematically engage with the ways that white supremacy shapes human relationships with land through entangled processes of settler colonialism, empire and racial capitalism. To develop the analytic of abolition ecology, we begin with the articulation of W.E.B. Du Bois’ abolition democracy together with Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s spatially attuned analytic of abolition geography. Rather than define communities by the violence they suffer, abolition ecologies call for attention to radical place-making and the land, air and water based environments within which places are made. To that end, we suggest that an abolition ecology demands attention to the ways that coalitional land-based politics dismantle oppressive institutions and to the promise of abolition, which Gilmore describes as making “freedom as a place”.

Resumen: Esta introducción hace una llamada a la ecología-política para que critique sistemáticamente las formas en que la supremacía blanca orienta a las relaciones entre los seres humanos y la tierra a través de los procesos de colonialismo, imperialismo y capitalismo racial. Para desarrollar el concepto de la ecología abolicionista, comenzamos articulando la propuesta de democracia de la abolición de W.E.B. Du Bois de con el concepto de Ruth Wilson Gilmore de la geografía de abolición con su analítica atinada a lo espacial. En vez de definir a comunidades por la violencia que sufren, la ecología abolicionista requiere atención a hacer-lugares radicales y sobre los entornos basados en tierra, aire, y agua en que se hacen los lugares. Con ese fin, sugerimos que una ecología abolicionista exige análisis de las formas en que una política coalicional basada en la tierra desmantela las instituciones opresivas y la promesa de la abolición, que Gilmore relata como hacer “la libertad como un lugar”.

Keywords: abolition geography, coalitional politics, place-making, political ecology, racial capitalism, settler colonialism

Introduction

From its inception, political ecology has taken a critical stance toward property relations and the scientific knowledge of human/non-human relations. This deep attention to peasant politics and political structures has often come at the expense of accounting for white supremacy. While some political ecological work takes seriously the ways that human relationships with land are racialised and gendered (Braun 2002; Carroll 2015; Kosek 2006; Middleton 2015; Mollett 2016;

Mollett and Faria 2013; Sundberg 2004; Ybarra 2017), there are far more deep histories of nature that are produced through settler colonialism and racial capitalism than the field has grappled with. Relative to human geography more broadly, Katherine McKittrick (2006:10) suggests that “race is not completely absent from geographic investigations”, but that “race is not integrated into wide-ranging understandings of spatial power and geographers’ commitment to social justice” (see also Peake and Kobayashi 2002). This resonates with the ways that race is increasingly incorporated into political ecological scholarship as empirical context, but has been less central in generating analytical logics that drive political ecological scholarship. The 2014 symposium in *Antipode* titled “Race, Space, and Nature” (Brahinsky et al. 2014:1135) usefully argued that “intersections with space and nature offer important lessons about the (de)construction of race”. Even so, Laura Pulido’s (2015, 2016) trenchant remarks about the discipline’s failure to grapple with the true violence of white supremacy present an unmet challenge for political ecology.

In this symposium, we signal opportunities for the political ecology literature to grapple with white supremacy, building from abolition democracy (Du Bois 2013) together with a spatially attuned intervention as abolition geography (Gilmore 2007). Abolition ecologies seek to enrich, expand and extend the logics (and thus possibilities) of the political ecology and environmental justice literatures with a capacious understanding of abolition geography and its commitment as defined by Ruth Wilson Gilmore, the scholar and activist who originated the field of abolition geography through her work, to show how “radical consciousness in action resolves into liberated life-ways” (Gilmore 2017:227–228). In general terms, abolitionists seek liberated life-ways through a commitment to radical place-making. We suggest that a commitment to theorising place-making means facilitating dialog across difference, particularly where differential identities shape the politics of possibility in place-making. In terms of a political ecology approach which initially emerged as a way to explain the structurally constrained choices of the rural, Third World “peasant”, this means learning from the environmental justice literature as it moves from localised neighbourhood struggles against toxics towards a structural critique of the ways that exposures to environmental harms and access to environmental goods are unequally distributed by race, class and empire.

In an abolition ecology, we build on the environmental justice movement’s definitive call to liberate the environment as places we live, places we work and places we play, in line with Gilmore’s (2017:227) invocation of “freedom as a place”. In so doing, we set our sights on the ways that carceral geographies of detention, incarceration, policing and deportation are *not* exceptional, but everyday spaces where people of colour¹ struggle to live, work and play. In writing an abolition ecology, we insist that struggles for land as resource and identity are shared across urban and rural areas, Indigenous and settlers (including settlers of colour),² and those who are free and unfree. Abolition ecology seeks to build intuitions and processes that are explicitly focused on the political ecological imperatives of access to fresh air, clean water, sufficient land, amelioration of toxic chemicals, and beyond. We trace these historical threads with the goal of

pointing towards how communities of colour mobilise around environmental injustices to seek justice and make place.

Here, we draw on the Black radical tradition to argue for the ways that abolition ecologies signal freedom dreams (Kelley 2002) shared across difference in order to build out conversations with Latinx and Indigenous geographies. While these conversations are not easy, the alternative is to define communities by the shared violence they suffer—racism, capitalism, and settler colonialism—rather than the places they have made for themselves. Together with a more robust structural analysis that addresses the intersection of racism and settler colonialism, political ecologists can learn from Indigenous worldviews that write affect back into scholarship (Million 2013; TallBear 2014). Indigenous knowledges comprehend the human/non-human divide in ways that incorporate land, water and animals into conservation and property relations (Coulthard and Simpson 2016; Daigle 2016; Simpson 2017). In particular, Indigenous studies understands land as “an animate being, a relative, a food provider, and a teacher of law and governance to whom we are accountable” (Daigle 2016:266). From Latinx geographies, we are reminded that rather than a singular identity (*latinidad*), Latinidades are an expansive inclusivity where a single person can carry identities of Black *and* Indigenous *and* Latinx. This speaks to the need to engage with complexity as we theorise what liberation looks like for humans and non-humans alike. As we think through how to realise Gilmore’s invocation of freedom as a place, we begin with a discussion of how political ecology can learn from foundational thought in abolition democracy and abolition geography.

Abolition Democracy

We now discuss the central roles abolition democracy and abolition geography play in the development of abolition ecology. Much of contemporary struggle for liberation can be read through W.E.B. Du Bois’ (2013) history of abolition democracy. This foundational work sets the tone that moves beyond “40 acres and a mule”, and towards the transformation of institutions from racial capitalism towards liberation. In developing the theory of “abolition democracy”, Du Bois draws on the history of the US Civil War and Reconstruction for charting revolutionary change—more than the *inclusion* of free Blacks into existing social structures, revolution demands a *transformation* of social structures. *Black Reconstruction in America* walks us through a sequence and logic of revolution that helps show the power of abolitionist politics, but also the unrealised promise of these politics. Du Bois argued there could be no freedom until the ethos of white supremacy that produced US chattel slavery’s brutality and sustained it in the first place was eradicated. He argued that white supremacy was poison, corrupted democratic institutions and needed to be abolished.

In his longer history of the promise of Reconstruction, Du Bois tells the story of a Black body politic that seeks not only to tear down slavery, but also to build up societies founded on liberation, education and democracy. Du Bois’ in-depth storytelling of the Freedmen’s Bureau showed the radical possibilities of democracy. Rather than corruption or Black inferiority, it was white violence that limited

postbellum institutions. He called this political vision abolition democracy as it is only within the complete reconstitution of democracy that freedom was possible. Joel Olson (2004:135–136) expanded upon Du Bois by suggesting that “there are three elements of abolitionist praxis that are particularly relevant for today: their model of the political actor as agitator, their emphasis on freedom, and their willingness to follow the radical implications of their demands”. As Robinson (2000) highlights, Du Bois’ history was not only radical because it showed the promise of Black power in postbellum democracy, but also because it emphasised how poor Black and white workers cooperated. Indeed, the radical implications of their demands led to solidarity across racial identities, which in turn threatened the foundations of racial capitalism and pointed towards liberation.

Abolitionist politics can cultivate greater solidarity through continued investments in working across interlocking oppressions with gender, sexuality, and immigration status, which Crenshaw (1991) coined as intersectionality. Here we make a call to reselect our ancestors in solidarity with those who bring together the insurgent goals of liberation with a feminist anti-colonial ethic. A reselection of our ancestors would include the re-reading of those histories that have been withheld and under-read but are experiencing a revival—especially the Combahee River Collective Statement (Taylor 2017) and *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). These and many other works have only been possible because of the radical decisions like those of the founders of Kitchen Table Press to publish “all women of color”, because “we had experiences and work to do in common” despite their significant differences (Smith 1989:11). The kitchen table represents the ways that poor and working-class women of colour take the intersections of their oppression and transform these into places of creativity and solidarity (see Crenshaw 1991; Eaves 2019). Political ecology can learn from grassroots movements and abolitionist thought to make freedom as a place. Much like the kitchen table, it is the everyday experiences of teaching each other about native plants (Carroll 2015), making shared dinners as a community (Mei-Singh 2020), and singing freedom songs (Ranganathan and Bratman 2019) that make structural transformations possible.

One of the powerful logics for reclaiming abolitionist politics is to relearn many of the lessons that have been lost or erased from histories of building solidarity toward liberation. To this end, Aptheker (1989:77) reminds us that one of the revolutionary aspects of the abolitionist movement to end US chattel slavery was the centrality of women. He suggests this was the “first great social movement in US history in which women fully participated in every capacity: as organisers, propagandists, petitioners, lecturers, authors, editors, executives, and especially rank-and-filers”. We both celebrate Aptheker’s claim while pointing to Indigenous feminisms that pre-date the patriarchy of the US settler state, and whose visions for feminism exceed his claims to this as the “first” great social movement (Arvin et al. 2013; Goeman and Denetdale 2009). The ways in which intuitions driven by patriarchy and white supremacy shaped the political landscape demanded this sort of solidarity to achieve the ultimate successes, even if still not fully realised, of racial and gender justice.

These works remind us of Du Bois’ (2013) “army of the wronged” working in solidarity to address structural harms and build up coalitions. Abolitionist histories of sites of solidarity across the Américas demonstrate the promise of liberation. In studies of place-making in Detroit (Miles 2017) and Los Angeles (Hernández 2017), historians of colour have demonstrated the importance of understanding the production of cities through the conjunctural politics of capitalism, chattel slavery and settler colonialism. Rather than single out the work of exceptional individuals, their scholarship emphasises a plurality of histories of oppressed peoples who refused the fates offered to them in structures of settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Lipsitz (2004:274) amplifies what we can take from abolitionist histories when he explains abolition democracy as “the idea of collective and linked struggles for change without aiming for control over any one state expresses the uniquely generative stance within transnational social movements and transnational scholarship”. Through this robust theorisation of abolition democracy, we can also foster greater solidarities against white supremacy. Each of these histories has a story to teach us in the production of place.

Abolition Geography

Our discussion of abolition ecology is guided by Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s powerful conceptualisation of abolition geography. Gilmore (2002:22) prefigures the expansiveness of what she named “abolition geography” in redefining racism for geographers: “By centering attention on those most vulnerable to the fatal couplings of power and difference signified by *racism*, we will develop richer analyses of how it is that radical activism might most productively exploit crisis for liberatory ends”. The latter half of Gilmore’s insight is particularly crucial. As McKittrick (2016) reminds us, we need analyses that do not simply employ the *Black body* in our analysis of racial capitalism in ways that neglect *Black people*, lest our scholarship dehumanises people as it critiques racialised violence. In rethinking embodied knowledge as a site for radical activism, we seek to live up to McKittrick’s call to “rethink our collective political epistemological grounds”. In so doing, political ecology can learn from insights of Indigenous studies scholars like Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson (2016), who point to the ways that Indigenous peoples’ relationships to land itself generate the practices and knowledges that make possible the practice of solidarity. Rather than oppose the Black radical tradition with Indigenous self-determination, Coulthard and Simpson seek to demonstrate the ways that solidarity between the human and non-human affords lessons about why we must learn from each other.

Scholars employing a political ecology approach can learn from both Indigenous studies and the Black radical tradition that Aleut scholar Eve Tuck (2009) summarises as refusing damage-based narratives, focusing instead on research that upholds and builds on the desires of oppressed peoples. In laying out our current milieu, Gilmore (2017:227) explains that “abolition geography starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place”. She goes on to suggest that “the radical tradition from which abolition geography draws meaning and method goes back in time-space not in order to abolish history, but rather to find

alternatives to the despairing sense that so much change, in retrospect, seems only ever to have been displacement and redistribution of human sacrifice" (Gilmore 2017:228). Instead, it is through rethinking deep histories that we can come to new theories. We can see coherence in the core notion of abolition across Du Bois' democracy and Gilmore's geography, when Gilmore suggests (in Petitjean 2018), "since slavery ending one day doesn't tell you anything about the next day—Du Bois set out to show what the next day, and days thereafter, looked like during the revolutionary period of radical reconstruction. So abolition is a theory of change, it's a theory of social life. It's about making things". Likewise, Estes' (2019) *Our History is the Future* posits a theory of change and a way of understanding Indigenous life and politics that is shaped by settler colonialism rife with environmental destruction (including the Dakota Access Pipeline) without being defined by it. We suggest here that geographers can read Gilmore and Estes in conversation to think through the importance of the place-making as we think about prefiguring liberation. As adrienne maree brown (2017:53) succinctly points out, "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system".

Gilmore's abolition geography works across spatial terrains, meanings and praxis. It is a hallmark of abolition geography to reach broadly toward traditions and conceptualisations of territory to foster greater solidarity through deeper spatial understanding. Gilmore (2008:35) went on to suggest that in resisting narrow conceptualisations of space and bringing together "political, economic, territorial, and ideological valences that distinguish and might unite disparate places shaped by external control or located outside particular developmental pathways" is one of the most important contributions of geography to abolitionist thought. To this, we would add the importance of attending to Indigenous studies' framework of grounded normativity that insist that practices of solidarity across difference still depend on specific, Indigenous place-based practices and forms of knowledge (Carroll 2015; Coulthard and Simpson 2016; Simpson 2017; Tuck and McKenzie 2016).

Abolition is not just about a vision, it is about our everyday practice. When asked about different forms of organising (Loyd 2012), Gilmore said that "if abolitionists are, first and foremost, committed to the possibility of full and rich lives for everybody, then that would mean that all kinds of distinctions and categorisations that divide us—innocent/guilty; documented/not; Black, white, Brown; citizen/not-citizen—would have to yield in favor of other things, like the right to water, the right to air, the right to the countryside, the right to the city, whatever these rights are". This powerful imagining of what many folks are organising for opens up new ways of seeing the world and also at the same time puts new pressures and opportunities on articulating and expanding historically more narrowly defined socio-natural relations. An abolition ecology not only thinks through the priorities of difference, but also *whose* right to land and water should shape our discussions—including our non-human relations. In working toward an abolition ecology in the Western hemisphere, scholars working in political ecology must acknowledge that Indigenous territorial rights fundamentally shape the limits and possibilities of abolition for uninvited guests across race, class, and immigration

status. In other words, a geographic notion of abolition must centre an understanding of territory as an Indigenous nation’s homeland. As Gilmore (2017:238) reminds us, abolition geography challenges the general notion that territory is alienable and exclusive; an Indigenous studies framework demands that we also attend to the reciprocal relations between Indigenous peoples and their lands (Mei-Singh 2020; Middleton 2015; Ybarra 2020).

Abolition Ecology

While a political ecology approach has been crucial to bringing Marxist and materialist perspectives to the literature on nature and human society relations, it has yet to adequately grapple with key questions around the role of white supremacy in uneven social power relations. In response, there have recently been efforts to build bridges through the notion of “abolition ecology” (see Heynen 2016a, 2016b, 2020). According to Heynen (2016a), the goal of abolition ecology is “to push forward through well-informed and deliberate organising and continued theorising against and about the continued existence of white supremacist logics that continue to produce uneven racial development within land and property relations”. This call continues to breach what at times feels like the gap between agrarian political ecology and urban environmental justice by highlighting the key role that white supremacy plays in shaping nature–society relations. While this symposium in *Antipode* is the first collective effort to build upon this idea of abolition ecology, the notion has already received other commentary, expansion and refinement, working to establish more attention to the logics of racialisation shaping nature–society relations and political ecology literatures, as opposed to contextual backdrop (Conroy 2019; Davies 2019; Derickson 2018; Goodling 2019; Loftus 2019; McCreary and Milligan 2018; Pulido and De Lara 2018; Ramírez 2020; Roy 2019; Simpson and Bagelman 2018; Wright 2019).

In part, our call to explicitly bring abolitionist politics into political ecology is about recognising the deeper racialised ways that nature has always been unevenly socially produced through relations of empire, settler colonialism and racial capitalism. Specifically, bringing abolitionist politics into political ecology means understanding the ways that reciprocal land relations are often synonymous with liberation struggles. This work demands moving beyond a Black/white binary and developing a nuanced critique of white supremacy through land struggles amidst abolition and decolonisation. Given this, we define abolition ecology in the same logical parameters as DuBois’ democracy and Gilmore’s geography to say that abolition ecology seeks to build intuitions and processes that are explicitly focused on the political ecological imperatives of access to fresh air, clean water, sufficient land, amelioration of toxic chemicals, and beyond.

Taking stock of historical narratives of struggle too often left for other disciplinary logics to mobilise we see value in going directly to some source insights from the struggle for abolition to strengthen our argument. Frederick Douglass, for instance, described nature in his *Narrative* (1849) offers an intriguing point of departure. Douglass discusses relations to land and nature as imitable, inspiring dread and horror when he suggests that “we saw grim death, assuming the most

horrible shapes. Now it was starvation, causing us to eat our own flesh; now we were contending with the waves, and were drowned; now we were overtaken, and torn to pieces by the fangs of the terrible bloodhound" (1849:85). He goes on to say: "We were stung by poisonous creatures, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot, after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness ..." (ibid.). Across these narratives we can see the material relations of escaping slavery, for some, rival the material conditions they were escaping from and yet the struggle for freedom was worth the difficulties nature seemed to pose. A self-emancipated slave, Tom Wilson, explained this drive for freedom simply: "I felt safer among the alligators than among White men" (Diouf 2016:96). The urgency of this struggle, with attention to everyday detail, is powerful and invokes wonder and inspires determination in a way that offers depth and history to ongoing struggles against white supremacy and connections to land. While Frederick Douglass, Tom Wilson and many other unnamed slaves who emancipated themselves through difficult journeys experienced terror in the landscape, these human/non-human relations take on a different quality when viewed through the lens of liberation.

After self-emancipation, people hid in the "wilds", "Indian country"³ and other spaces inaccessible to white settler states to protect their lives and experience autonomy (Bledsoe 2017; Diouf 2016; Stowe 2006; Wright 2019). Having made the treacherous journey through an untamed violent set of material experiences in *The Heroic Slave* (2015), his only novella, Douglass presents a different expression of relations to land and property; one where hardened individuals seize the freedom possible in the "the wilderness that sheltered me" (2015:17), as refuge from the oppression they experienced before the journey through it. Of course, the "wilds" were not wild, nor were they empty—they were Indigenous homelands. The key insight here is to understand that many communities were made through the solidarities of Indigenous peoples accepting self-emancipated slaves into their homelands, becoming peoples known today as Seminole, Garífuna, and others.

In its most basic reading, abolition brings with it calls to "40 acres and a mule" as reparations for emancipated chattel slaves in recognition of their mixing their forced labour with the land. In its most basic reading, decolonisation brings with it calls to restore Indigenous homelands that threaten to evict all settlers and undo existing property relations as Indigenous peoples (re)invent nation-states. In bringing abolition and decolonisation together, then, the Black/white binary that dominated early ethnic studies simply becomes a triad—white, Black and Indigenous—that continues to reproduce Asians and Latinxs in the US as nothing but recently arrived, temporary, seasonal migratory workers. Neither abolition nor decolonisation is a totalising theory—indeed, both demand that we attend to daily practices of people and land, rather than generalisable abstractions.

If place-based solidarity is a goal, this cannot stand. We know that Asian and Latinx communities have long histories throughout the Americas—from Tejanos like Gloria Anzaldúa who trace their time in the US to when it was Mexico (Anzaldúa 2012), to Chinese workers brought in as "temporary" labour to build

up railroads and cut down cane across the Américas (Jung 2006). This is urgent for analysis as people in the US increasingly identify as mixed race/ethnicity. Scholars have begun to bring through the nuance in settler colonialism that does not privilege Anglo governances as settler colonialism throughout the Américas (Jackson 2012; Stasiulis and Yuval-Davis 1995). This is particularly important as immigrants to the US from Mexico and Central America increasingly identify as Indigenous, often more so than “Guatemalan” or the nation-state that we ethnify in the US.⁴ Our analyses can better account for the reality of a transnational Indigenous migrant who both suffers wage theft in the United States and dreams of decolonisation of Q’eqchi’ territory from the Guatemalan settler state.

Many “high john tales” celebrate the importance of Indigenous solidarity in achieving Black liberation. For example, Newman (2009) discusses representations of land and property as an agent of abolition through invoking a genre of writing sometimes associated with a genre of Black folk tales connected to High John the Conqueror, where Black folks embrace their strength and power in their freedom struggles. One example of this includes Martin Delany’s novel *Blake; or the Huts of America* (1859). The novel recounts the story of an escaped slave named Henry Blake who travels throughout the US South to foment a massive slave uprising. Delany wrote the novel partially in protest to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and the US Supreme Court’s decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857). Part of the novel that is so provocative for thinking upon the notion of abolition ecology is how Delany’s protagonist, Blake, takes refuge on Choctaw Indian homelands. A Choctaw Chief plays a central role in convincing Blake to return to the plantation to lead a slave uprising. While written out of mainstream histories, the memory of Black and Indigenous solidarities lives on in music, dance, culture and story. In *Going to the Territory* (1995), Ralph Ellison says that high john tales and blues songs are rooted in the territory of freedom, where the territory of freedom was a sanctuary of the Five Great Indian Nations. In reading Clyde Woods’ (2017) blues epistemology together with those of her people, the Southeastern Indians, Jodi Byrd suggests that there are lessons that “might teach us in order to transform the participatory democracy that Woods evokes into a radical reimagining of how peoples exist relationally within the place-worlds located in the stories we tell and the songs we sing” (Byrd 2011:122). The stories we tell and the songs we sing reflect a long history of solidarities to realise abolition.

These abolitionist narratives signal the articulation of the everyday and high theory in their emphasis on solidarities expressed in land relations. Geographers have the analytical tools to explain spatial logics that connect the ghetto to the suburbs, the plantation to the colonial port, the reservation to the wilderness, in thinking through the production of unequal environments. Because control over land has always been so deeply institutionalised through everyday white supremacist practice, focusing efforts to name, and dismantle the existing institutions that have upheld this oppressive tradition is necessary. But also, transforming some existing institutions and building up new institutions to help instil more land-based justice is also necessary if we are to follow Gilmore’s call to make freedom as a place. Abolition did not end the day chattel slavery ceased in the US, nor have calls for relations of repair (sometimes glossed as reparations) ceased.

Likewise, the violence of environmental racism does not stop with each individual site fight that stops the building of a prison that will harm people and the land (Pellow 2019; Ybarra 2020). The violence of settler colonialism, which privileges the lives and livelihoods of non-Indigenous peoples at the expense of Indigenous self-determination, likewise points to the urgent need for decolonisation. Geographers also have the analytical tools to rethink the politics of the possible. The work of abolition ecology invites us to think about how to build freedom across relations of land and people.

Papers in this Symposium

There are five papers in this symposium that apply the insights of abolition geography as has been outlined by Gilmore into the sphere of political ecology. In so doing, they help steer broader discussions of abolition geography more specifically toward ecological and environmental questions.

Megan Ybarra's (2020) paper, "Site fight! Toward the abolition of immigrant detention on Tacoma's tar pits (and everywhere else)", brings the insights of abolition geography to bear by explaining the "spatialisation of white supremacy" through the siting of one of the largest immigrant detention centres in the United States. In so doing, she asks what these geographies tell us about the toxic connections between land and its captive residents, showing how the spatialisation of white supremacy was deployed to site devalued immigrant bodies on a devalued Superfund environmental clean-up site. Her work highlights the importance of solidarities between people inside cages and outside cages to push an abolitionist agenda on the street, in newspapers and in City Hall to the stark truth: "If you build cages, you will fill them; if you close cages, you will detain fewer people". In challenging federal government politics of immigrant detention and deportation in local governments as sites of struggle, she traces how abolitionist organisers rethink the politics of the possible.

In "Struggles for environmental justice in US prisons and jails", David Pellow (2019) argues environmental injustice should be seen as a form of criminalisation. Because environmental injustice is so often a product of state-sanctioned violence against communities of colour, Pellow explores how reframing EJ as a practice of treating those populations as criminally suspect and as deserving of state punishment. His discussion shows how struggles inside and outside of carceral spaces represent urgent and timely opportunities to rethink the possibilities of environmental justice theory and politics by linking them to practices and visions of abolition ecology. For Pellow, abolition ecology helps efforts focused on environmental justice "to build and maintain radical democracy". He argues that "if we seek radical democracy, then we must work to confront major systems of domination, with particular attention to the histories, legacies, and continuing practices of plantation logics, settler colonialism, enslavement, and conquest associated with racial capitalism and the ways in which unequal land and property relations produce violent and uneven geographies".

Laurel Mei-Singh's (2020) contribution draws from ethnographic fieldwork on the Wai'anae Coast of O'ahu, Hawai'i. Her article mobilises "ea"—a Kanaka Maoli

(Native Hawaiian) concept meaning life, breath, and sovereignty as a way to offer abolition ecologies a deeper geographical grounding. She argues “ea” helps demonstrate how abolition ecologies require worldmaking that is based on the interdependence of all life forces. Mei-Singh shows how Kanaka Maoli’s conception of abolition ecologies by invoking ea offers a worldmaking system that anchors human–environment relationality. Akin to breathing, ea rests on “experiences of people on the land, relationships forged through the process of remembering and caring for wahi pana, storied places” and the restoration of particular sites. She shows the liberatory possibilities of people situate “themselves as part of the interconnected web of plants and animals, soil, streams, ocean, sea, sky, heavens, and human life”.

In his essay, “‘A plantation can be a commons’: Re-earthing Sapelo Island through abolition ecology”, Nik Heynen (2020) works through the plantation past/futures of Sapelo Island, a Sea Island off the coast of Georgia to better understand abolitionist efforts of the Saltwater Geechee residents who have lived there since at least 1803. His essay shows how emancipatory politics of land and property can produce agricultural commons that work to repair and heal the violence done through enslavement and ongoing displacement. Connecting historical ideas of abolition democracy and abolition geography, Heynen extends the notion of abolition ecology as a strategic notion to better connect Eurocentric based political ecologies with the radical tradition of Black geographies.

Malini Ranganathan and Eve Bratman’s (2019) paper, “From urban resilience to abolitionist climate justice in Washington, DC”, asks “what would abolitionism mean for climate justice?” In asking this, they focus on majority Black neighbourhoods in Washington, DC often described as the most vulnerable to extreme weather events within the city. They argue that abolitionist climate justice necessitates focusing on environmental and housing-related racisms and an ethics of care and healing practiced by those deemed most at risk to climate change. They provide a robust framework of abolitionist climate justice that draws upon Black radical, feminist, and antiracist readings of the environment and of political practice to show how actually existing climate justice praxis informs abolitionist thought.

Together, the contributions to this symposium demonstrate a potential trajectory for political ecology in learning from abolition geography. In our present conjuncture, abolition ecologies rely on the work of solidarities amongst communities, rural and urban, Indigenous and settler, across peoples of colour and white co-conspirators to come together. In seeking abolition ecologies, communities of colour can reclaim their freedom dreams where they live, work and play—through radical acts of place-making in the face of white supremacist violence that assumes their dispossession.

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Endnotes

¹ According to Loretta Ross (SisterSong), Black women coined the term “women of colour” as a “solidarity definition, a commitment to work with other oppressed women of colour who have been minoritised”. In deference to their leadership and solidarity, we use “people of colour” instead of “Black, Indigenous and People of Colour”.

² We use “involuntary settler”, “settler of colour” and “arrivant”, drawing on the insights of H.K. Trask (2000), Jodi Byrd (2011:xix) and Kamau Brathwaite, who use arrivant “to signify those people forced into the Americas through the violence of European and Anglo-American colonialism and imperialism around the globe”.

³ In the United States, “Indian country” refers to any territories governed by autonomous Indigenous nations; the term dates back to British settler colonialism.

⁴ This ethnicisation based on nation-state origin has the pernicious effect of allowing settlers/non-indigenous people to speak as though they represent the same people they are known to oppress in their countries of origin.

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