Can a Coffee Shop be Abolitionist?

Business–Police Relations in Halifax's North End Neighbourhood

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ABSTRACT

Can a Coffee Shop be Abolitionist? Business–Police Relations in Halifax's North End Neighbourhood

Alia Hazineh

As profit-seeking consumption spaces, sustained by wage labor, local businesses generally embrace neighbourhood police practices. Yet, whether business-police relationships differ across business spaces, has been largely undocumented and unexplored within the academic literature. This research uses North End, Halifax as a case study to investigate how businesses influence policing practices both within their own space and within the neighborhood more broadly. Using abolition as my geographical method, I study business spaces as potential commons: sites for prefigurative politics, or abolitionist geographies in the making, while remaining attentive to the ways business spaces resist these framings, and instead map on to carceral geographies. I carry out this analysis in the form of a three-part audio documentary series, included here as three written scripts. Interviews with business owners, business association board members, and long-term residents, living and working in the North End between the 1960s and today, populate these scripts, showing how diverse actors have mediated and understood safety, and policing, across time and space. Altogether, this research situates neighbourhood businesses within the complex Canadian landscapes of carcerality, while also aiming to document how these same businesses might, and have been, sites of radical placemaking and abolitionist futures to come.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In May of 2020, the second wave of the Black Lives Matter movement rapidly brought a new abolitionist future into the mainstream. Calls to defund and abolish the police flooded the streets and social media platforms, illuminating the lifesaving capacities of an abolitionist perspective to mainstream audiences. In the midst of this historic movement, I found myself working at a busy downtown coffee shop. While working, I was regularly overhearing discussions surrounding abolition. The shop's overwhelmingly leftist clientele and staff were, for the most part, eager to embrace this emerging movement. At the same time, I became disconcertingly aware of the shop's informal, but evident, partnership with the local police force. As an employee, I found myself interacting with the police on numerous occasions. Officers frequented the space as customers, came by looking for tips about neighbourhood ongoings, and on rare occasions turned up in response to distress calls. Reflecting on the context in which I found myself, I began to wonder, could a coffee shop be abolitionist?

My research, informed by abolitionist geography, seeks to explore this question. Informed by the work of Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007, 2017, 2022) abolitionist geography works to disrupt current and historical social relations bound up with the carceral state by exploring new practices of freedom; it strives to unmake carceral institutions and practices, by creating more liberatory institutions and practices in their place. While policing and prisons are its central concern, abolitionist geography extends to other processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion as well. For instance, recent scholarship by abolitionist geographers has drawn attention to the links between gentrification and policing practices. The businesses located within these gentrifying landscapes are, likewise, meaningfully linked to policing networks. Police

officers regularly frequent local businesses throughout their shifts, oftentimes developing relationships with staff members and business owners; their very presence in these business spaces is a form of official state surveillance. This surveillance has led to the closure of business spaces perceived to be participating in illegal activities and/or radical politics. Perhaps more importantly, Business Improvement Areas (BIAs), key structure that mediates businesses' relationship to public institutions, tend to advocate for, and strengthen, business-police relations (Kudla, 2019). In these cases, businesses appear as strong partners in policing, either formal or informal ones.

And yet, how business-police partnerships differ across diverse businesses environments has been largely undocumented and unexplored with academic literature. While it might seem obvious that profit seeking businesses have a lot to gain from both gentrification and police presence, businesses might also resist these partnerships.[1] This might be especially true for businesses that market themselves as progressive and/or cater to more marginalized communities. Hoping to examine this possibility, my research is interested in how perspectives on, and involvement with, policing varies amongst diverse business establishments across time and space. Specifically, I ask: How do businesses understand their relationship to neighbourhood policing? In what contexts, and under what conditions, do abolitionist geographies emerge in business spaces? How do BIAs boards influence neighbourhood security and policing practices? How does policing (as an institution) and gentrification (as a process) impact the kind of business spaces that are possible within a neighbourhood? Exploring these questions in the

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[1] Local businesses–especially cafés, bars, and clubs–have also been theorised as safe spaces for marginalised communities which allow patrons to mediate racial segregation and sexual segregation (see Anderson, 1978; May, 2001; Hunter, 2010 on Black spaces and Meyerowitz, 2002; Sides, 2009 on Queer spaces).

context of a gentrifying neighbourhood of Halifax (the North End) is an effort to inform abolitionist struggle in Halifax and inspire reflections in other cities.

This thesis unfolds in six parts. In the first section, I use the literature review to situate businesses within the border context of gentrification and policing in North American cities. This section examines how business factors into gentrifying landscapes and examines the specific spaces they bring about, outlines how histories of spatial inequality in North American urban cities relate to policing practices ("broken windows" policing, and explores the role Business Improvement Areas play in mediating both gentrification and policing practices. The second section lays out the theoretical framings and methodology of the thesis, grounding the work in the abolitionist tradition and specific currents within that tradition, in particular. The third section provides some background on the Halifax North End, while the fourth lays out the methods of the thesis. The fifth section is the empirical and analytical core of the thesis: three scripts for podcast episodes I have created. The final section is a brief conclusion in which I connect the analysis of the podcast episodes to the literatures I have engaged with.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Unmaking Neighbourhoods: Gentrification and Business Spaces

Today, gentrification is the ubiquitous process shaping capital investment in cities around the world (Smith, 1979; Harvey, 1982; Zukin, 1989; Stein, 2019). Ruth Glass's initial use of the term *gentrification* in 1964 was imbued with social justice concerns. With the term, Glass provided a critical framework to analyze how free market capitalism was transforming inner city neighbourhoods to serve the "financially fittest" (p. xx). Since then, social science researchers have broadly considered gentrification as "the process by which capital is reinvested into urban

neighbourhoods, and poorer residents and their culture are displaced and replaced by richer people and their preferred aesthetics and amenities" (Stein, 2019, p. 41).

As a process that unfolds gradually over time, gentrification necessarily speaks to spatial change. It is often described with words like revitalization, economic development, and beautification all of which gesture towards unrealized futures, or the making of new and improved places. These acts of making new places are equally acts of unmaking that erase histories of violence and neglect (Burns & Berbary, 2020). Seen in this way, the gentrification process is equally a process of destruction and dispossession. As numerous gentrification critiques have worked to highlight, places being gentrified are always already meaningful places, even if they are not seen in this way within racist, capitalist, and colonial structures (Smith 2010; Blomley, 2014; Coulthard, 2015; Wright 2014; Dantzler, 2021). Notably, in the context of settler colonial cities, gentrification unfolds on stolen land. Accordingly, gentrification has been theorized as an extension of the colonial state's initial dispossession of indigenous land (Blomley, 2014). It functions to both progress the settler colonial city and exerts discipline on poor and Indigenous bodies (Jackson, 2017).

Initially, most scholarly work on gentrification focused on residential displacement (Deener, 2007). Other changes associated with gentrification, such as the emergence of high-end commercial spaces, like art galleries, restaurants and boutiques, were not considered a social problem, and were for the most part left unexamined (Zukin et al., 2009). New store openings were largely greeted with approval since many low-income communities had historically suffered from retail disinvestment (p. 49). Contesting this assumption, Mark Davidson (2007) argued that disrupting patterns of gentrification-driven displacement required a reconceptualization of what neighbourhood places mattered. He proposed that gentrification was

not only about residential displacement from places of dwelling, but it was also about residents' displacement from the social spaces they frequented and gathered (p. 223). This work helped to expand understanding of displacement and brought the diverse lived and constructed space of neighbourhood life into the forefront.

By the mid 2000s scholars began to explore how public spaces such as parks, streets, and squares, as well as quasi-public consumption spaces such as shops, restaurants and cafés, factored into the broader dynamics of gentrification (Deener, 2007; Slater, 2009). Immediately, the arrival of these spaces increased the economic value of the neighbourhood, increasing nearby property values and thus decreasing neighbourhood affordability (Stein, 2019). Additionally, these shared sites of neighbourhood life revealed themselves to be politically and socially significant. Beyond their practical utility, these spaces were central to locals' sense of identity, belonging, and community (Meltzer & Capperis, 2017; Felder & Pignolo 2018). They generated distinct atmospheres which affected the overall atmosphere of the neighbourhood, eagerly attracting certain demographics, while alienating others (Twigge-Molecey, 2014). In other words, these public and quasi-public neighbourhood spaces were bound up with social, symbolic, and affective dynamics, which functioned to both facilitate and expose unequal neighbourhood power relations (Mazer & Rankin, 2011, p. 824).

Quasi-public consumption spaces such as shops, restaurants, and cafés, in particular, have been criticized for facilitating displacement of local communities, both through cost-based exclusion, as well as through symbolic exclusion from 'shared' community space and a sense of belonging (Mazer & Rankin, 2011; Twigge-Molecey, 2014). New business spaces may initiate new neighbourhood identities, which tend to reflect the interests and cultural practices of newer, wealthier, and predominantly white residents (Zukin, 2016; Tuttle, 2020; Sarmiento, 2021).

While the luxury of a high-end condo might not 'spill out' onto the street, the luxury of a new high end boutique quite literally does. As a result, these new retail spaces can facilitate feelings of unwelcomeness for long term and lower income residents in neighbourhoods they have, for many years, considered their home. In addition, the rising rental costs associated with an influence of commercial spaces, may threaten the survival of long-term, affordable business spaces, these same residents rely on (Zukin, 2016; Mazer & Rankin, 2011). In this sense, new businesses, themselves an expression of the new capital investment that brings about gentrification, can be understood to unmake previous neighbourhood identities and social spaces.

This scholarship shows that quasi-public consumption spaces such as shops, restaurants and cafés can generate exclusionary, affluent, and white coded spaces. Accordingly, businesses can be understood as establishments that both create and mediate neighbourhood social spaces, and in turn facilitate the social/cultural values of a neighbourhood. Though the character of these social/cultural values has proved to follow certain patterns of exclusion, business spaces are, of course, not all the same. These quasi-public social spaces have also been taken up as sites of solidarity and resistance to marginalized communities. For instance, cafés, clubs and bars have been documented as temporary spaces of refugee for immigrant, Black, and Queer communities (Anderson, 1978, May, 2001; Hunter, 2010; Meyerowitz 2002; Sides, 2009; Addo, 2017). However, scholarship shows that these places are influenced heavily by the gentrification process. They exist in relation to a broader constellation of socio-economic forces which tend to value and bolster colonial, capitalistic, white spaces. The extent to which it is possible for businesses to counter these forces, and construct spaces of resistance, is one I hope to explore. This inquiry first demands an exploration of the specific tools that enable and strengthen the gentrification process, namely community policing.

Securing Gentrification through Community Policing

The gentrification process–which as I have just outlined–overwhelmingly promotes the creation of exclusionary social spaces and is supported by various post-industrial urban policies and practices**.** One of these practices is community policing. Today, community policing is a loosely defined policing program that generally refers to a combination of organizational and tactical approaches. Strategically, it involves developing closer relationships between the police force and non-police institutions. Practically, it involves foot and bicycle patrols, visits to people's homes and businesses, participation in community institutions, diversity-oriented hiring and training programs, and paying greater attention to citizen defined security problems (Rutland, 2020, p. 180). It also corresponds with a shift away from a reactive approach to crime, towards a proactive and preventive policing strategy (Laniyoni, 2018, p. 901). Partially reactive to social and political uprisings of the 60's and 70's, police departments that formerly responded only to calls*,* began activity surveilling certain neighbourhoods, policing petty crime, and surveilling neighbourhood "disorder" (Laniyoni, 2018; Barlow & Hickman, 1991). This shift towards community policing resulted in more intimate relationships between the police and the communities they surveilled. This was particularly true for inner city neighbourhoods where disorder was felt to be more common.

Community policing has a close but complex relationship with Wilson and Kelling's (1982) broken windows crime theory. First disseminated in a 1982 article published in *The Atlantic*, this crime theory proposes that broken windows and other forms of 'disorder' signal a weak social control that signals to criminals that crime can ensue unchecked (Kelling & Wilson, 1982). In other words, broken windows crime theory argues that community 'disorder' and urban decay actually cause serious crime. Accordingly, Wilson and Kelling conclude the best way to

prevent major crime is to eliminate signs of community disorder by aggressively and proactively policing petty offenses like public intoxication, graffiti, loitering, and other disturbances of the peace. The influence of this crime theory on policing cannot be understated. While some scholars seek to dissociate broken windows policing (Herbert, 2001) and community policing, it is usually recognized as a central part of the latter (Muñiz, 2015; Schrader, 2016; Rutland, 2020). These scholars argue broken windows theory inspired, and later justified, the community policing approach which remains central to contemporary policing practices.

While community policing's attempt to generate a common and proactive police presence has been marketed as a reform that could provide solutions to police injustice, violence, and racism, its actual effects have been highly damaging (Rutland, 2021). On an empirical level, the assumption that a) disorder causes crime and b) targeting 'disorder' effectively reduces crime, has been challenged (Skogan, 1992; Harcourt & Ludwig, 2006). As Rutland (forthcoming) articulates, to affirm a broken window policing approach is to accept both the police's definition of the problem (disorder) and the police's definition of the solution (increased policing) with no consideration of the harms caused by policing or alternative solutions. Indeed, what is constituted as 'disorder' has been scrutinized as justification for policing poor and racialized communities (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; Vitale, 2008). As Christina Heatherton (2018) puts it, "what constitutes 'order' for whom [within a broken windows policing approach] is presumed to need no explanation" (p. 170). Being that there is no clear demarcation between *order and disorder*, broken windows policing has been criticized for controlling and organizing spaces in ways that map onto evolving socio-political hierarchies.

The violent impact of broken windows programs on poor and racialized communities has been well documented (Rousell & Dunbar, 2016; Heatherton, 2018; Bonds, 2019). Under this

strategy, arresting, detaining or brutalizing anyone who is perceived to be transgressing normative order–commonly queer folks, homeless communities, and people of colour–is authorized as a official restoration of order (Heatherton, 2018). Additionally, the broken windows mentality has also facilitated a general increase in public hostility towards the 'disorderly' conduct of certain communities. In 1990's New York public sympathy for the growing number of homeless populations was largely abandoned, just as the facilities and services homeless people relied on were being drastically cut (Vitale, 2008; Smith, 1998). Similarly, Michael Javen Fortner (2015) shows how the desire to eliminate disorder eroded the sympathy Black residents in Harlem once expressed for drug addicts, while harboring support for aggressive policing. Over time, the targeted displacement of marginalized communities from selective areas of the urban core via community policing has conveniently cleared up space for redevelopment and gentrification.

This geographical impact has led researchers to examine the relationship between broken windows and patterns of spalitized inequality within urban environments. Scholars like Neil Smith have examined the geographical relationship between shifting, post war era, policing practices, and increased spatialized inequality within inner cities. Specifically, Smith's (1998) work shows that throughout the 1990's Rudy Giuliani's political regime enacted new policing strategies that explicitly sought to reclaim the public spaces for the white middle class New Yorkers (p. 23). Shortly after being elected as mayor in 1994, Giuliani launched an anti-crime campaign with the issuance of *Police Strategy No. 5*. A clear organizational and tactical iteration of community policing, *Police Strategy No. 5* was a proactive policing approach that instructed officers to arrest all "petty criminals" whose actions "threatened the quality of life" with zero tolerance (p. 4). This strategy was part of a larger political campaign by Giuliani that sought to

cast "homeless people, panhandlers, prostitutes, squeegee cleaners, squatters, graffiti artists, reckless bicyclists, and unruly youth" as central culprits of urban decline generating widespread fear (p. 9). As Smith puts it Giuliani "made no secret of the fact that his policies are explicitly designed to rid New York of homeless and other poor people" (p. 9). His campaign, in many ways successful, convinced New Yorkers that the city's urban future was "centrally, even primarily, a question of police strategy"; an idea that would subsequently be adopted by municipalities across North America (p. 4).

Informed by Smith's work, scholars are now examining the instrumental role of broken windows and other policing practices in generating ideal conditions for the proliferation of gentrification in cities (Sharp, 2014; Heatherton, 2018; Beck, 2020; Smith et al.,2021). This coordination between policing and gentrification is sometimes taken up as the post-industrial policing theory: the idea that the more a city's economy reflects post-industrial neoliberal revitalization strategies, the more that the police will emphasize broken windows policing (Sharp, 2014, p. 340). This theory contextualizes broken windows policing within a broader set of post-industrial neoliberal urban policies that bolster gentrification. Christina Heatherton (2018), aligning herself with this theory, argues that community policing is a regulatory social mechanism deployed by the state "to discipline bodies, refashion public spaces, and render cities sustainable for regimes of neoliberal capital accumulation" (p. 168). As Collins (2022) notes, diverse urban strategies function as a collaborative mechanism that strives to attract mobile capital and wealthier creative class residents to developing urban neighborhoods.

This scholarship has encouraged a continued examination into the relationship between community policing and post-industrial neoliberal urban strategies that bolster gentrification.

Several empirical studies have found that aggressive policing is more prominent on the gentrification frontier–within previously disinvested, gentrified adjacent neighbourhoods (Laniyoni, 2018; Beck, 2020; Smith et al., 2021). This geographical trend exposes how policing spatially fuels dispossession and displacement, generating financial opportunity for investors. This scholarship articulates a direct relationship between policing and gentrification, where contemporary policing practices function to widen the geographic scale of gentrification (Smith et al., 2021). That is to say, policing is not reactive to gentrification, but rather that gentrification is bolstered through policing. However, it is important to recognize the diverse actors involved in these policing practices. Broken windows policing, after all, is part of a broader community policing strategy prevised on building relationships with municipal organizations and businesses.

As private, profit seeking entities, businesses populating urban landscapes, no doubt, have a lot to gain from neoliberal urban policies and practices. Not only do businesses frequently fuel gentrification by increasing the profitability of a neighbourhood, they also stand to gain from gentrification. Notably, the presence of homeless, precariously housed, and other low-income residents can present obstacles for businesses, whose primary goal, generally speaking, is to accumulate capital. A key structure that mediates businesses' relationship to these neoliberal urban strategies are Business Improvement Areas (BIAs). To better understand how businesses factor into broader strategies of neoliberal urbanization, I will now examine BIAs.

Creating Profitable Spaces: Business Improvement Areas (BIAs)

BIAs, also known as Business Improvement Areas, are a Canadian business intervention, first established in Toronto's Bloor West Village. In the late 1960's, the West Village was in economic decline. New shopping centers and the expansion of the subway line threatened the area vitality and businesses were struggling (Charenko, 2015, p. 4). In response, a few business

owners proposed a new regional model whereby businesses would pay an increment, on top of their regular business taxes, to fund the revitalization of the area through physical improvements and promotional activities (p. 5). On May 14th, 1970, with the permission of the province, and the creation of a new City of Toronto by-law, this proposal officially gave rise to Bloor West Village BIA (p. 6). By the 1980s BIAs were increasingly founded throughout North American cities (Symes & Steel, 2003). Today, this small-scale, business-led, revitalization strategy has become a central economic development tool across North America, Australia, Western Europe, and South Africa (Briffault, 1999).

Practically, BIAs continue to closely resemble the original Bloor West Village BIA. They are public-private partnerships where business owners, within a delineated area, are required to pay a tax/fee to fund supplementary services which aim to enhance the economic viability of the area (Guimarães, 2021). These supplementary services typically include security, sanitation, infrastructure improvements, and social events (D'Souza, 2020). Additionally, businesses typically contribute to BIA policy and practices vis-a-vis board meetings. As officially recognized municipal associations, BIAs can play a key role in urban decision-making processes. Despite their status as privately funded organizations, BIAs have the legal right to make changes to public spaces within their boundary, so long as these changes are approved by the municipality (Kudla, 2019, p. 3). With this in mind, BIAs are frequently described as a form of neoliberal urban governance that bolsters gentrification by organizing and managing urban spaces to intensify capital accumulation (Ward, 2007). That is to say, BIAs can be understood themselves, as a neoliberal urban strategy.

The practices and objectives of BIAs are largely motivated by a *clean and safe* mandate; BIAs generally advocate for services, policies, and practices that will facilitate a *clean and safe*

urban experience that will attract consumers to the area (Lippert & Sleiman, 2012). This mandate has been criticized for encouraging the hyper regulation of undesirable groups and behaviors, which threaten the clean and safe urban experience of middle-class consumers (Kudla, 2019, p.44). This profit-oriented spatial rationality "cast[s] those who are unable to consume as obstacles to consumption that must be removed in some way" (Sanscartier & Gacek, 2016, p. 74).

If this spatial rationality sounds familiar, that is because it is. The *clean and safe* mandate borrows heavily from broken windows crime theory. According to Randy Lippert (2012) the popularity of Broken Window Theory–disseminated to BIAs via the US-based International Downtown Association–gave rise to a new security-oriented BIA rationality (p. 169). BIA have largely accepted the assumption that activities like graffiti, public intoxication, panhandling, advertise that a region is open for crime (Bookman & Woolford, 2013). Additionally, this had led BIAs to advocate for, and fund, increased public and private police force interventions, on the basis that unpleasant behaviors like panhandling, loitering, littering, solicitation, and street vending are threatening BIA promotional objectives (p. 303).

Though these security objectives were absent from the original Bloor West Village BIA, today they are a central component of BIAs activities. Recent critical studies show that BIAs increase both the official presence of policing as well as non-state modes of surveillance and security (Lippert, 2012; Bookman & Woolford, 2013; Sanscartier, 2016; Kudla, 2019). These policing and surveillance practices play out in several ways. Most directly, BIAs can lobby municipalities to invest in policing and security services (Ranasinghe, 2010). However, BIAs also promote non-state modes of security including, but not limited to, private security guards, CCTV surveillance, and hospitality ambassadors (Bookman & Woolford, 2013; Lippert, 2010;

Walby & Hier, 2013; D'Souza, 2020). Collectively, these security strategies address signs of urban disorder and work to accomplish neoliberal order maintenance objectives. Based on this literature, BIA emerged as strong partners in, and advocates for, community policing. Indeed, they might even expand the reach of community policing by providing additional avenues–such as private security guard and CCTV surveillance–through which community policing logics can operate.

Yet, the extent to which these security objectives are promoted and enacted is contingent on local and regional contexts. While general operational structures remain relatively consistent across BIAs, spending decisions and security perspectives vary to some degree (Guimarães, 2021). For instance, while the installation of CCTV has been openly accepted by some Canadian BIAs, other BIAs are reluctant about, or even outright resist, this surveillance intervention (Walby & Hier, 2013). Therefore, although this literature gives us a general sense about how BIAs partner with and perform policing, it doesn't tell us how particular businesses, or even particular BIAs, might differ in their perspectives on policing. In other words, although BIAs, as collective private interest groups, seem to widely support and extend community policing practices, it remains unclear to what extent there is consensus amongst particular businesses.

My research will seek to fill this research gap by exploring how particular businesses influence, and are influenced by, policing practices within Canadian gentrifying neighbourhoods. So far, I have established (1) how gentrification as a *process* promotes the creation of specific affluent, exclusionary, and white business spaces, (2) how community policing as a *practice* spatially fuels urban displacement and intern bolsters gentrification, and (3) how BIAs as *organizations* advocate for and expand the reach of community policing. The *process* of gentrification, the *practice* of community policing, and BIAs as *organizations* all substantially

impact how businesses are geographically positioned within urban neighborhoods. Yet, how individual business, as distinct actors, engage with, and influences policing has been largely undocumented within academic literature. In examining how businesses understand and mediate neighbourhood police presence, I hope to understand how business-policing partnership, are embraced and/or resisted materially and logistically, on a local level. Directly, my research asks, how do local businesses influence policing practices, within their own business spaces, and with neighborhood spaces more broadly?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMINGS AND METHODOLOGY

Abolitionist Geographies and Futures

In her essay "Abolitionist Geography and the Problem of Innocence," Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2020) asserts that "placemaking is a normal human activity" (p. 474). Our realities are constituted by the ways people, land, and resources come together in both violent and liberatory ways. Abolitionist geography, then, seeks liberation through a commitment to radical place making. In Gilmore's words: "abolition geography starts from the homely premise that freedom is a place" (p. 474). Calls to defund and abolish the police are abolitionist geographies in the making; they seek to dismantle carceral place-making in favour of abolitionist place-making. I have spent most of my adult life working at, and frequenting, neighbourhood business spaces and participating in their placemaking. As a geographer, I want to know how these spaces factor into broader geographies of gentrification and carcerality. As an abolitionist, I want to know how these spaces might enact abolitionist placemaking while undoing carceral placemaking. This research is my attempt to investigate both these inquiries, an attempt which involves bringing the project of abolition into unfamiliar spaces. In doing so, I hope to document how business spaces

have been, and might become, sites of radical placemaking and abolitionist futures to come. However, this requires a robust engagement with abolition as a political project.

Abolition, Communism, and Racial Capitalism

The meaning of abolition as a political project is a long-standing debate, and it is addressed differently within the different political and scholarly traditions in which it is taken up. In an email correspondence with Robin D. G. Kelley, Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2023) wrote: "I think really hard about defining abolition. To me, it's an elaboration (not novel but distinctive) of small-c communism, without a party [...] it's [about] groupings wherever they struggle fighting to redistribute material and symbolic resources" (p. 383). In other words, it is a distributed political project that requires grassroots mobilization around place-based struggle. Gilmore's body of work is rigorously attentive to how we define the political project of abolition today. I want to review, here, some of the ways that abolition has been conceived, while finally standing with Gilmore's position.

Historically, the project of abolition has frequently been theorized in relation to communism. In his lecture "Abolition Philosophy," Alberto Toscano (2020) proposes that the question for both radical abolitionism and communism has always been analogous. Both, he argues, seek to address the question: "how capitalism is to be undone and what indeed is the character of this undoing?" (13:07). Many Marxist scholars, and indeed Marx himself, have theorized abolition as the major name for the undoing of the capital relation (Marx 1972; Bordiga 1976; Theuret 2016; Sève 2023; Toscano 2022). But these early thinkers had little to say about the prison industrial complex (PIC) or else implied that it would be abolished with the overthrow of capitalism. Unlike these scholars, I am not convinced that overthrowing the capital relation will necessarily make prisons disappear with it. The importance of abolition, to me, is

that it directly addresses the prison industrial complex and its role in capitalist society. So, while Gilmore *does* describe the contemporary anti-PIC project of abolition as an elaboration of small-c communism, her abolition project involves a departure from conventional Marxism and communism, a departure which has evolved out of the Black Radical Tradition and the post-1960s prison abolition movement.

To make more sense of the relationship between abolition and communism, let us turn to the history of the contemporary prison abolition movement, from which Gilmore's work emerges. Perhaps obviously, the primary concern of the prison abolition movement has been the abolition of the prison, or more broadly the prison industrial complex: the overlapping systems of government and industry that use and reinforce surveillance, policing, and imprisonment as a solution to economic, social, and political problems (Critical Resistance, 2023). Though the contemporary prison abolition movement has no definite beginning, it is often traced back to the 1960s, when American imprisonment began to expand and its role in the repression of the Black freedom movement became clearer (Gilmore, 2007; Berger 2014). Although significant thought and mobilization emerged from this moment onwards (Berger 2014)*,* the movement took a significant intellectual and material step forward in 1997 when Angela Davis, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, and others formed the organization Critical Resistance. This group, whose work continues into the present moment, brought together activists, the formerly incarcerated, and academics to build "international movements to end the prisons industrial complex" by "challenging the idea that imprisonment and policing are a solution for social, political, and economic problems" (Critical Resistance, 2023).

The post-1960s abolition movement was attentive to the intersection of racism and capitalism and has tended to situate its theoretical reflections in the Black Radical Tradition. This

commitment to the interconnectedness of race and capital is best summarized through the concept of racial capitalism. Although the term racial capitalism was first used to describe the economy of apartheid South Africa, the term's current prevalence originates from Cedric Robinson (Kundnani, 2020). In *Black Marxism,* Robinson (1983) argues, in opposition to orthodox Marxist theories, that capitalism does not mark a sharp break from the old orders of slavery, imperialism, and colonialism but rather evolves from, and reproduces these old orders. In other words, capitalism depended on racial practice and hierarchy (racism) to emerge and continues to require it to reproduce itself. We need not look hard to see evidence of this codependency in the contemporary political economic landscape. Mass incarceration in the United States exacerbates the economic and racial inequality, warehousing and killing surplus populations (disproportionately Black and Brown), suppressing insurgency, and serving the neoliberal market order. In other words, mass incarceration functions as an infrastructure of racial capitalism, where capitalism is always racial.

A cornerstone of the prison abolition movement has been its insistence on the intersection of race and capitalism and the political corollary: that we can't undo racism without undoing capitalism. However, the complexity of this claim is often oversimplified. Racial capitalism as a concept seeks to expose how race serves as the means through which capitalism or its current neoliberal form organizes the complex boundaries between the exploitable and unexploitable or the deserving and the undeserving (Kundnani, 2020). There is a key distinction here vis-à-vis conventional Marxism: capitalism does not, as it was originally theorized, serve simply to homogenize wage labor but also to differentiate it (via racism). Race here is theorized, not as a transhistorical cultural force that acts uniformly and mechanically but rather, as "the modality in which the global structure of class relations are lived" and "the medium through which class

relations are experienced" (Hall, S, p. 314; Kundnani, 2020, para 35). If we understand racial oppression in this way, as a system of exploitation directly produced and reproduced through economic processes, the work is not to prove racial relations of exploitation exist (they do!), but to analyze and transform "the institutions that produce social, physical, and spiritual death" (Gilmore, 2020, p. 220). Combatting racism is thus a necessary part of the struggle against capitalism, and combatting capitalism is a necessary part of the struggle against racism.

It might be useful to think about intersectionality, or its formulation as identity politics, to understand this racial sensibility. As the Combahee River Collective (1977) argues in its original statement, an intersectional analysis mobilizes the overcoming of "racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression" by understanding that "the major systems of oppression are interlocking" and create the social, material, and spiritual conditions of our lives (p. 1). The Collective emphasizes the intersections of race, sexuality, and class, not to reinforce a hyper specific immutable political positionality, but as a radical means of opening out to collective struggles, without obscuring the specificity of a given group's particular struggle. They write, "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (p. 7). To radicalize class struggle is to recognize how intersecting systems of oppression must be undone collectively. Identity politics, for the Collective, was not an abandonment of class struggle, but a refinement of it. It was, for them, a necessary part of the struggle for small-c communism, or at least socialism. As Gilmore (2022) writes, "at bottom what is to be abolished isn't the past or its present ghost, but rather the process of hierarchy, dispossession, and the exclusion that congeal in and [congeal] as group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (p. 475).

As this history suggests, the prison abolition movement might be framed as an extension of the original communist project, but with some major and significant adaptations. First, it needs to attack the prison industrial complex directly, rather than assume its dissolution is self-evident in the transition to communism. Second, it must insist that the undoing of the capital relation requires a simultaneous undoing of the racial relation. Racism, as it has been elaborated above, is not a super-structural effect of capitalism, but an integral component. Only with these claims in mind can there be a meaningful movement to redistribute material and symbolic freedom and move toward small-c communism. This framework is central to my analysis. First, it is impossible to discuss gentrification without analyzing how capital accumulation contributes to it. This also means that policing, when it serves gentrification, is serving the capital relation. But second, gentrification and policing in the Halifax North End is necessarily shaped by racism as well. As I discuss below, the neighbourhood has long been the urban centre of the African Nova Scotian community. Racial capitalism, then, provides a framework for examining how both capital and racism are implicated in the processes I examine in this thesis.

Abolition Geography, Specifically

There is a geographical dimension to all of this. That is, the prison industrial complex, racial capitalism, and abolition are all entwined with the production, management, and experience of space. In 2020, Gilmore published *Abolition Geography: Essays Towards Liberation,* a collection of over thirty years of essays and interviews which articulate contemporary prison abolition as an expansive project of social transformations (or as an elaboration of small c-communism). A phrase frequently used to describe Gilmore's particular iteration of abolition is *abolition geography.* I move through my own research from the standpoint of abolition

geography. More explicitly, I consider abolition geography as my methodology: it is how I think about what counts as knowledge in the tradition of radical geography, and what counts as useful knowledge in the struggle for liberation. As Gilmore explains in her book, to draw from an abolition geography methodology necessitates several precise research commitments.

First, abolition geography is geographically oriented, or spatial in nature. Space for Gilmore is nothing less or more than a set of relations. Space is constituted by the relationships between land, people, and resources that come together at any particular time, in both violent and liberatory ways. Which is to say, our object of analysis, as abolition geographers, is always a set of relations that is sometimes referred to as a *form*. Second, this analysis of form is always oriented towards transformation. Gilmore (2020) proposes we can only come to understand "what a particular *form,* old or new, is made of, by trying to make it into something else " (p. 229). This mode of analysis insists on abolition as presence – the "something else" we are trying to make. Abolition, then, involves "figuring out how to work with people to make something rather than figuring out how to erase something" (p. 51).

While the word abolition suggests merely negation (the elimination of the prison industrial complex), Gilmore insists that negation occurs through the act of creating. In Gilmore's words, "making something into something else–is what negation is" (p. 229). Here negation, or abolition, is theorized, not as wholesale destruction, but as a generative and gradual act of overcoming; this generative act of making something into something else is necessarily geographical—it is a making of place. Abolition is place-making: the practice of making a set of more liberated socio-spatial relations, which is always simultaneously an unmaking. So, abolition geography, as a methodology and organizing practice, seeks liberation through a

commitment to radical place making. Thus, to do abolition geography is to envision, tend to, and enact novel practices of placemaking that reimagine the terms of collective social life.

Yet how we labor to envision, tend to, and enact more liberated places is not simple. In the tradition of Stuart Hall (1978), Gilmore's work deploys a conjunctural analysis. This approach emphasizes paying attention to a form's constitutive patterns or how something like the prison industrial complex both internally and externally performs within a definite period (Gilmore, 2022). In other words, we must examine both the daily operations and impacts of a *form*, as well as how it operates within broader social, political, and ideological struggles within a given period. A conjunctural approach is particularly attentive to crises as moments imbued with innovation potential, moments that ultimately bracket different conjunctures. For it is in these moments of crisis that "the weakening of old social, political, and cultural forms opens the way to a wide variety of new alliances, institutions, movements, all of which are coaxed, but not directed, by already existing practices" (Gilmore, 2007, p. 55). Our analysis must be attentive to how crises—social, political, institutional—are moments of articulation and disarticulation of ideas, practices, and arrangements in the social formation. So, while we must pay attention to the historical ground from which forms emerge, we must equally pay attention to the social movements that might shift and transform these forms. This is a crucial part of an abolition methodology.

Moreover, a conjunctural analysis requires what Alberto Toscano (2020) describes as a dialectical rather than emotional sensibility to form and its negation. This means analyzing forms "without being beguiled or distracted by the social ancestors we perceive, reasonably or emotionally, in the forms' features" (Gilmore, 2020, p. 220). An emotional sensibility would consider social ancestors, for example the legacies of slavery and settler colonialism, as present

within current forms in a way that is fully continuous with their historical unfolding. However, Gilmore rejects this uncritical extension of partial legacies as a means of explaining a different present. Do not be beguiled, she warns. Instead, she insists that historical forms are contiguous, not continuous, with current forms. With this in mind, a conjectural analysis requires an initial focus on a form's constitutive patterns within a given conjuncture: "the social forces and the contradictions accumulating it within it" and only from there should we consider "the wider historical context in which it occurs" (Gilmore, 2020, p. 229). For example, while it is often argued that the American judicial system is a form of slavery, one must reject the idea that it is a straightforward *continuation* of slavery. To struggle in and against the present, we need to understand the role the prison industrial complex plays within a conjuncture, ours, that is qualitatively different in terms of the arrangement of social forces than that of transatlantic slavery.

While this distinction between contiguous and continuous might seem semantic, it is not. It is concerned with a critical question: how is the weight of the past mediated and manifested in the present and how do we work out this relationship effectively in service of a more liberated form? Gilmore's insistence on a dialectical sensibility is a rejection of a teleological understanding of abolition and communism. For Gilmore, abolition is never given—it is only possible through the constant labor of making a more liberated someplace else, out of crisis, out of struggle, and out of rupture. As Alison Rose Reed (2022) points out in a review of Gilmore's work, abolition is not "a messianic rupture but a pragmatic approach to dismantling the constitutive unfreedoms of racial capitalism and building a world premised on the principle of social life as opposed to differential death" (p. 4). It is the fleshy material presence of life lived

differently. Freedom, for Gilmore, is not a singular event, but a process; it must be made, and abolition geography is the making.

The Propositional Commons of The North End

Thus, to use abolition as a geographical method is to study space (a set of relations) through the act of trying to it a more liberated someplace else. For me this space of study is businesses in Halifax's North End neighbourhood. I treat business spaces as my object of analysis and consider them as a form: a set of relations. I am interested in the form businesses take on broadly, as a network of spaces within the North End, but also in individual businesses as distinct forms with uniquely constituted patterns. To make sense of these forms, I study business spaces and seek to understand them by envisioning them as *potential* commons: as sites that might become liberated spaces used by everyone for collective sustenance and celebration (Kaba, 2022, p. 203). I draw on Lauren Berlant's understanding of the commons as an *experimental* scene of practical life imbued with the *potential* for radical place-making. This framing resists what I consider reductive liberal theorizations of the commons as cosmopolitan utopia, instead proposing the commons as a prescriptive solution to the "problems of physic or structural antagonism, [...] a visionary motive for toppling the state and capital, [...] a synonym for belonging better and social healing" (p. 77). The commons are not a utopia (no place) but a real space that is "always being worked out" (p. 77). With Berlant, I consider the commons not as an "incontestably positive aim," but as a tool, and perhaps even a weapon "for unlearning the world, which is key to not reproducing it" (p. 80). The commons are a potential site for prefigurative politics, a possible path through struggle, an abolitionist geography in the making.

Equally, I undertake this analysis while paying particular attention to the ways business spaces resist becoming commons, and by paying attention to the presence of abolition's counter geography: carceral geography. I examine how social relationships within business spaces are bound up with the carceral state: policing, prisons, processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion. The businesses located within gentrifying landscapes are meaningfully linked to diffuse state policing and surveillance networks as are most urban spaces. My analysis is, on the one hand, attentive to how business spaces both produce and are produced by the violent processes of the carceral state, while one the other, attentive to the moments when these violent normative forms are tested in order to make them into something else. I ask, *when do businesses become disruptive political spaces? Or experimental spaces when new, liberational social forms are tested out? When are these moments possible? What are their limitations?* In other words, I look to how business spaces might be sites of radical place making: how they unmake carceral geographies by emerging as places where relations are reimagined in emancipatory ways, even if only momentarily. Doing so is an attempt to both make visible and enhance the presence of abolitionist geographies within the North End.

This is in a sense is what conjectural analysis is: to pay attention to what comes out of crisis and struggle, both small and large. To pay attention to when forms are weakened, opening way for new alliances, institutions, and movements. To be attentive to the historical ground from which the current North End neighborhood emerges, without drawing uncritical connections between the region's histories of racist dispossession and police violence, and its gentrified form. This involves studying the current forms that produce and maintain business spaces in the North End. I ask, *how do local business spaces perform internally and externally? How do the daily operations of business spaces impact the types of relationships that constitute the*

neighbourhood? It involves an orientation towards how space has, and continues to transform, within the North End. I ask, *has the function of business spaces changed as the neighborhood has gentrified? If so, how have these transformations mediated broader social, political, and ideological struggles that face the North End?* In exploring these questions, I investigate historical legacies, both liberatory and oppressive, in a way that is geared toward the neighborhood's current transformation, as well as in ways that expand our capacity to envision, tend to, and enact novel practices of placemaking, and reimagine the terms of collective social life.

4. THE NORTH END: A CASE STUDY

As I have mentioned above, I use Halifax's North End neighbourhood as my case study for this research. Halifax was founded as a military settlement by the British in 1749 on the traditional and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq. Today, it is a mid-sized city on the east coast of Canada. In 2021, Halifax had a CMAs of 439,703, and a population increase of 9.1% since 2016 (Statistics Canada, 2021). The North End was established as a working-class neighbourhood north of the original city in the early nineteenth-century. Initially, most of its residents were English and German. However, throughout the second half of the ninetieth century, as the urban economy expanded, Black residents, from outlying rural area, began to settle in the neighbourhood. Throughout the 20th century, this influx of Black residents, established the neighbourhood as the geographical centre of the urban Black community, even though they never constituted a majority of its residents (Rutland, 2024, forthcoming). In the 1960s, the city expropriated and destroyed the 400-person Black community of Africville, located at the

northern edge of the Halifax peninsula. Many of the forcibly displaced residents were relocated to a newly built public housing complex in the North End, Uniacke Square (Silver, 2008, p. 10). Before gentrification, then, the North End was a working-class neighbourhood with a white majority, and a significant Black minority population.

The gentrification of the neighbourhood began slowly in the 1970s and accelerated in the 1980s and 90s. The gentrification process, like most, was facilitated by numerous conjoining actors and forces, most notably the state (primarily the municipal and federal governments), capital, and the organized business community. In terms of the latter, the North End established a municipally recognized Business Improvements Area in 2010, The North End Business Association (NEBA). Since its conception, it has had a major impact on the way the neighbourhood has gentrified (Baker, 2014, p. 114). In many regards, the neighbourhood has undergone a familiar trajectory from "a site of commercial prowess until the 1960s, to a poor and stigmatized neighbourhood through the 1990s, to a gentrifying district in the 2000s" (Grant & Roth, 2015, p. 39). While its current influx of new residents and new businesses brings optimism for some, there has recently been criticism and grassroots mobilization against the gentrification taking place. This criticism is heightened by the area's racist historical past of displacing Black people and Black spaces. With this in mind, the accelerated gentrification process in the North End is viewed as another process threatening to push out poorer Black and white residents and repeat historical cycles of violence.

5. METHODS, MEDIUM, AND PROCESS

Research Outline

My research focuses on business establishments within the North End through the past 60 years. In examining urban landscapes, the geographical literature tends to seek out and display similarities and patterns across space and time. My literature review, which has defined gentrification, policing, and business presence along spatial trends, is indicative of this tendency. As a result, geographic analysis often overlooks and under examines local nuances. Structurally, this type of analysis discounts situated moments of resistance that challenge the norms of gentrification and broken windows policing. Contrastingly, my research embraces local divergences.

In particular, my research focuses on how businesses-policing relations diverge within one spatial context, and the political implications of these divergences. This does not mean this study is only locally relevant. Rather, looking at particular business-police relations offers a grounded perspective on how neighborhood policing practices are mediated at the local scale. By looking at how specific businesses endorse, or perhaps oppose, neighbourhood policing practices, I hope to showcase the ways individual businesses can, and have historically, enacted political power within neighbourhood communities.

Striving towards these research goals, I will ground the case study in the following four research questions:

- How do businesses understand their relationship to neighbourhood policing?
- In what contexts, and under what conditions, do abolitionist geographies emerge in business spaces?
- How do BIAs boards influence neighbourhood security and policing practices?

- How does policing (as an institution) and gentrification (as a process) impact the kind of business spaces that are possible within a neighbourhood?

Methods

This research has two main components. First, a discourse analysis used to grasp how public discourses around policing, gentrification, and businesses establishments have been framed from 2010-2022. This analysis examines three sources. One, I reviewed local newspaper articles by *The Chronicle Herald*, *City News*, *The Coast,* and *The Halifax Examiner*. Two, I reviewed planning documents as they pertain to these specific downtown areas. In this context, municipal plans, as well as BIA reports, and documents, were considered. Three, I reviewed annual reports written by the Halifax Regional Police on recommendations for community policing strategies as well as the 200-page report, *Defunding the Police: Defending the way forward for the HRM*, published in 2022. These archives all help explain how these processes, practices, and establishments have been created, and understood, in Halifax's recent memory.

Secondly, I conducted in-person semi-structured interviews. I interviewed three distinct groups: business owners or managers from different business (I interviewed five business owners and managers in total), board members from the North End Business Association (I interviewed the previous chair of the association), and neighbourhood residents (I interviewed 7 residents, all who had lived in, or around the North End for upwards of 30 years). All my interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and were conducted and recorded in person. These interviews offer a multifaceted impression of how neighbourhoods' business-police relationships have been and continue to be understood.

Audio Documentary as Research Creation

My research analysis takes the forms of an audio-documentary. This means I use a storytelling format to structure my analysis. An audio documentary is a non-fiction narrative that uses the spoken word format to investigate a topic in depth from one, or multiple perspectives. It often makes use of interviews, commentary, and digital archives to create an engaging and accessible content. Unlike conventional academic writing, the form is structured around narrative conventions (character building and plot). So, theory is generally subordinate to narrative, an inverse of the normative academic writing structure.

I chose to this format for several reasons. One, in line with the tradition of radical geography I want the knowledge I produce to be accessible to the people I produced it with (my interviewees but also the various people who supported and informed my research along the way). Most Masters theses are not accessible to those who have not been educated within the academy and require long and tedious engagement. An audio documentary, on the other hand, is a public facing format. It is generally assumed that your audience has little to no prior knowledge of the topic of study. I believe this does not make it a less rigorous format, but rather encourages a mode of communication that uses an everyday vernacular to deconstruct complex ideas. This mode of communication is one I personally find takes more thoughtfulness, and rigor then academic writing. Two, I wanted my interviews to be the backbone of my research and analysis. Producing an audio documentary is fundamentally about sitting with your tape (interview recordings) and letting the story develop from it. Let me give you a brief sense of what this process looks like.

Process

I began by transcribing my interviews. I would then read through the transcripts, making notes and annotations, and highlighting the sections that seems the most compelling and significant to my research. I would ask myself: *What does this interview tell me about my research questions?* But also: *What is interesting, compelling, and novel about what this person is saying? What story are they telling?* From there I would try and develop a general trajectory for the script by making a scene outline. For each scene I would gather all the tape I want to include as well as the theory, and secondary sources that would be included in the narration. This often included doing secondary research on events or questions that were brought up throughout interviews, that had not been addressed in prior research. Then, I would use the scene outlines to develop a script draft. This was by far the most time-consuming component of the process. Creating an engaging and critical narrative throughline for each script took endless reworking and reconsideration. By the end, I produced the three connected scripts you find below.

6. SCRIPTS

Below are my three audio scripts, the fruits of the process I have outlined above. My first script zooms in on how relationships between businesses and the police are playing out in the North End today. I mainly use tape from my interview with Elly, a café owner, to understand the nuance of current businesses spaces, although I interviewed many other business owners. Throughout out this episode, I introduce abolition as political project, and investigate the triumphs and tensions businesses encounter as they think about community safety within their spaces.

My second script zooms out onto the structural forces that influence business space and their capacity to envision and bring about community safety practices within their spaces. I focus

here on the influence of Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in mediating the relationship between safety, profits, and community. I mainly use tape from my interview with Matt Neville, the previous chair of the North End Business Association. Throughout the episode, I tease out the structural limitations neo-liberal organizations (such as BIAs) face when attempting to push forward a progress agenda either for, or on behalf of, businesses.

My third script travels back in time to examine historical business spaces and their relationships to both the police and neighbourhood safety. I do this by focusing in on several key moments between 1960 and 2000. Throughout the episode, I explore the influence that both gentrification (as a process) and policing (as an institution) have on business spaces and their capacity to be sites of radical placemaking. Unlike the other two scripts, this episode incorporates multi-interviews with North End residents from the time-period. Altogether, this series situate neighbourhood businesses within the complex Canadian landscapes of carcerality, but it also aims to document how these same businesses might and have been sites of radical placemaking and abolitionist futures to come.

Only the first script has been produced into audio. This process additionally involved recording the narration, cutting the interview clips together, retrieving secondary sound sources, and mixing these all together on a digital audio workspace (DAW). I also sound designed the episode: edited in the music, and incorporated sound effects for dramatic effects and to signal scene breaks. Finally, I mastered the episode, ensuring the sound levels for all the different audio sources were leveled and flowed together. Listening to this episode, I hope will give you a sense of what a written script sounds like when translated into a fully produced sound piece.

SCRIPTS LEGEND

Script One:

Can a coffee shop be abolitionist? The possibility of abolitionist place-making in Halifax's North End Neighbourhood.

SCENE ONE

Global News Reporter [0:00-0:17] Well we're learning more tonight about the final details of a mentally ill man in Ottawa, Abdirahman Abdi, who had reportedly been causing a disturbance at a café, the police arrived, he was pepper sprayed, and witnesses say a bloody altercation ensued.[2]

Narration: In July of 2016, Abdirahman Abdi, died after a violent altercation with the Ottawa Police.

Global News Reporter [0:57-1:06] Throughout the day a steady stream of mourners lays flowers at the scene. People struggling to understand the loss of a mentally ill man neighbors described as non-verbal and harmless.

Resident [1:06-1:11] It's the unexpected violence of what happened during this take down. **[1:15-1:18]** I'm very upset. I mean you'd think we were in the states here. [3]

Narration: The fatal confrontation that led to Abdirahman's death, began with a 911 call.

Ottawa Citizen [1:28-1:37] At some point around 9:30 Abdi entered the Bridgehead Café on Wellington Street West where several witnesses called 911 after they said they saw Abdi sexually assaulting at least one woman inside.[4]

Narration: In 2020, George Floyd was murdered by the police after a store clerk called the cops to the scene. Following Floyd's death, Bridgehead Café issued a statement on Instagram.

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[2] Global News. (2016, July 27). *Video shows aftermath of Abdirahman Abdi police confrontation* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DKyDObpgVwM&t=95s

[3] See Footnote 1

[4] Ottawa Citizen. (2019, May 2). *27 minutes: Retracing the last steps of Abdirahman Abdi* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fcuzQIeoguM&t=94s

AI Voice: "We recognize we can never fully become an ally without addressing what took place 4 years ago to Mr. Abdirahman Abdi. A regular customer of ours who was killed by police. We should have been an ally then and we weren't. We are truly sorry."

Narration: The summer this apology was issued, Black Lives Matter protests erupted as calls to defund and abolish the police confronted the world. That same summer, I was working at a downtown café. And as I served coffee some questions preoccupied me. What role did businesses play in these police killings? How often were scenarios like this playing out? Could a coffee shop be abolitionist?

My name is Alia, and in this series, I will try to answer a simple question: Can a coffee shop be abolitionist? In this episode, I explore how relationships between neighbourhood businesses and the police are playing out. I also explain what abolition means and draw on abolitionists' perspectives to investigate how businesses are thinking about community safety within their spaces.

SCENE TWO

[Coffee machine grinding beans]

Elly [10:34] Are you making coffee?

Adam: I could.

Alia: Sure, I won't say no.

Adam: What kind of coffee would you like?

Elly: I'm just going to have an Americano.

Narration: It's a summer day in Halifax's North End neighbourhood. I'm with Elly and Adam. We're sitting on the street level patio of the café they co-own but the shop is closed today.

Elly [4:53] Hey.

Passerby: What time do they open?

Elly: Oh, we're closed on Tuesday!

Passerby: Oh ,you guys are closed on Tuesdays?

Elly: Yeah, sorry about that!

Narration: Elly and Adam opened up Ramblers coffee at the end of 2021 but they've both been living and working around the neighbourhood for many years.

Elly [00:00:00] So I moved to the North Street area when I was four, and I've lived within a four-block radius and worked, lived, and worked, within a four-block of North and Agricola.

Narration: This is actually pretty uncommon today. Most business owners in the North End did not grow up here.

Elly: There have been a lot of changes in the last like 50 years, but I would say most since the time when I moved here as a child. A lot of the ramp-up of these developments and changes has happened right like before our eyes in the last five years. And it's been actually really emotional, really intense. It's something that I think about a lot, but it's hard to put into words sometimes I think.

Narration: Like many historically working-class neighbourhoods in Canadian cities, the North End is gentrifying, and it has been for the last 20 years. New developments, new businesses, and new residents have been popping up at an alarming rate and the neighbourhood feels changed. And Elly feels conflicted about these changes.

Elly: I feel a bit like all the things that I am concerned about or complaining about. Started like a snowball as a child. Like, this maybe this was for me. Like maybe all the things that I'm criticizing about the changes in the neighborhood have come about for me.

Narration: As new money, and new people, flow into the neighbourhood, the city is facing a housing crisis and an overdose crisis. This means the North End is a place where a lot of diverse communities share space. Sometimes, these shared spaces are local businesses.

[street sounds]

Adam: Milk or cream?

Elly: Cream please.

Alia: I'll have mine black.

Elly: Anyway, those are thoughts but I guess I struggle because I don't know . I guess your email prompted me to… I don't know… to reflect on our business thus far, and I realized we just haven't had a ton of… we haven't done a tone of community engagement in general. But I'm like very familiar with what it means to be on this street and I guess I was hoping maybe be… I was hoping I might hear from you a little more about if…

[Adam gives us coffee, interrupting Elly]

Elly: There was something…. something we could be doing.

Narration: What could Ramblers be doing? What could Elly by doing? Was there something else?

SCENE THREE

[coffee beans falling on the floor]

Narration: Before she opened Ramblers, Elly worked at a few nearby neighbourhood businesses. One of these businesses was the Tare Shop, a small zero waste, grocery store and café.

Elly [00:37:40] So my police interactions were a lot higher when I worked across the street.
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Narration: And these interactions didn't seem to be serving Elly or the businesses where she worked.

Elly: Yeah, it was not helpful. Like I think two circumstances ended in arrest. I think for a person being in and out of the Tare Shop and then kind of intoxicatingly roaming the streets and getting multiple complaints and then finding them at the Tare Shop and arresting them for being disorderly. Very unhelpful. Very bad for the vibes. That person seemed very upset about it did not want to be arrested, obviously. Um yeah, generally bad.

Narration: In an interview, abolitionist scholar and activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore reflects on the phone call that led to George Floyd's murder.

Gilmore [0:32-1:35] The thing that set-in motion the events that resulted in Mr. Floyd's brutal murder was that an employee at a convenient store thought that they had been handed a counterfeit bill. This young person, who's probably making minimum wage, who works for someone I understand to be a very decent human being, who hires people in the community, a Palestinian-American convenience store owner. Did their job to keep their job. But we have to ask ourselves why couldn't it be they take this suspect looking bill, complete the transaction and then deal with it afterwards. Right? They had been deputized. Why is someone working at a convenient store a deputy cop?[5]

Narration: Why is a young convenience store worker a deputy cop? Elly has similar questions. Why is she being told to act as a deputy cop?

[Musical Interlude]

Elly: The interesting thing with the Tare Shop scenario was we were having a lot of interactions because the person who was running the place had been taught to call the cops and had a real trust of the police.

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[5] Kumanyika, C. (Host). (2020, June 3). *Intercepted* (Ruth Wilson Gilmore Makes a Case For Abolition Part 1) [Audio podcast episode]. In *First Look Media and The Intercept.* https://theintercept.com/2020/06/10/ruth-wilson-gilmore-makes-the-case-for-abolition/

Narration: This trust isn't really surprising. A central role of the police has always been to protect private property.

[Musical Interlude]

Narration: The term policing emerges in the fifteenth century at the same time that capitalism was emerging in Europe. At the time, the word "police" was used to describe the policy enacted to promote new economic arrangements, arrangements mediated by wage relations and private property. Later, the word police came to name an institution that was created to protect these arrangements.[6] So why wouldn't a business owner trust the police? Local businesses are, at their core, profit seeking consumption spaces, sustained by wage labor. Protecting their profits are what cops are made for. But here's the thing, the Tare Shop actually started to question the trust they had placed in the police.

Elly: Increasingly, as they diversified their hiring, folks were complaining that like they did not feel the same way. They do not trust the police. They don't want them around. And so there was a real reckoning. And they now have a much more radical and much more sensitive plan in place for if they have conflict in their space and like straight up, it's like the last thing, is call the police.

Narration: So, the Tare Shop starts to hire a more diverse staff. These staff members, wage laborers, are less invested in protecting the profits of the business, and some of these staff members are people of colour who have a very different relation to the police. And they initiate a reckoning.

Elly [00:25:30] […] The Tare Shop went through a long process to try and figure out how they wanted to be in their context, how they wanted to keep everyone safe and support the folks who were coming in and having difficult experiences in that environment. And they've made changes because they had an emotional process, inward looking, that led them to understand that they were like not helping in the way they thought they were.

Narration: So, through this process the business starts to take responsibility for creating safety within their own space, instead of outsourcing this responsibility to the police. They stop, or at least they try to stop, acting like deputy cops.

SCENE FOUR

[coffee grinder sounds]

Narration: Sometimes when people talk about "alternatives" to the police there is this assumption that we need another—nicer—number to call. Someone who is not the police to respond to noise complaints and get unhoused people off the streets and

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[6] Kaba, M., & J., R. A. (2022). *No More Police A Case for Abolition*. The New Press, 139.

subways. Someone else who will, like the police, remove the person we call about and put them somewhere else. But that's not what Elly's talking about here.

Elly: [00:30:24] You have to learn about safety so that you know when someone's okay and when someone's not okay. And so we worked with Mainline to do a couple of workshops. We got naloxone training for everyone. Two years in a row I hosted in our space like an anti-oppression workshop that was like mediumly successful.

Narration: She's talking about meeting people's safety needs within the business space. She's learning about how to know when people around her are safe through workshops and training and observing and asking. And this is really at the heart of what abolition is all about. While abolition is sometimes constructed as a negative political project oriented toward the destruction of police and prisons, it's really about creating new forms of safety and a better society.

Gilmore: Abolition geography is always a presence, everywhere. And when I say ah we're gonna abolish prisons and they get frightened. We have to think why are we so frightened and it has to do with all these things we haven't been talking about.[7]

Narration: That's Gilmore again, describing abolition as a presence. Which means an abolitionist café isn't primarily concerned with the absence of the police but rather with what is created in their absence, in real time, in real space. Gilmore published a collection of essays and interviews in 2022 that explores the generative process of abolition.

Gilmore [02:08] Well, you know, the title of my book isn't *The Geography of Abolition*. It's *Abolition Geography*. And I put the words together in that order to make a peculiar kind of point and the peculiar kind of point I'm trying to make is that we create the conditions for our everyday lives by organizing ourselves and materials and environmental resources. And, in putting those things together […] what we're doing is we're creating a place. Whether that place is small or big makes no difference. And those places can become abolitionist geographies.[8]

Narration: So, like anywhere, a local business had the potential to be a site of abolition geography. It's a space where people, land, and material come together to create a place. A place where people like Elly were trying to re-imagine the conditions for community safety and care within everyday life. A coffee shop could be abolitionist. But there were things to be done, conditions to be changed.

SCENE FOUR

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[7] antipodeonline. (2020, June 1). *Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI.

[8] Kolhatkar, S. (2023, February 7). Envisoning a World Through Abolition Geography. *Yes!.* https://www.yesmagazine.org/social-justice/2023/02/07/ruthie-wilson-gilmore-abolition-geography%EF%BF%BC.

Narration: A few summers ago, I worked at a café business a block and half away from the Tare Shop. At the time, the business had just started a new program where you could buy a token that would provide a free coffee or lunch for another customer. Kind of like a pay it forward model for making the space more accessible. And it did function to invite a much broader range of community members into the space. And as an employee I served people I otherwise wouldn't. But it was also difficult. Sometimes I found myself in situations I wasn't equipped to handle. And I didn't receive any training. And so, we weren't really equipped to react to conflict. And we didn't always know the best way to keep everyone safe.

Elly: [00:28:50] That echoes my experience at the Tare Shop where I was managing it and didn't own it and wasn't one hundred percent married to all of its ideas. […] But we got to a point where the Tare Shop got to have a free coffee program and it was on my own to distribute in the wee hours of the morning alone in the space and so I equipped myself with resources and my staff with resources because I had a sit down with a dude from the Nook and I was like, How is this going for you? Like, you know what? How is this going for people? Is this working for everybody? And he was like, Oh, I'm just filled with regret. Basically, I wish they had just handed people money. Like, if we wanted to do something for the community.

Narration: The guys at the Nook, yeah that was my boss saying he wished he had just handed people money…. instead of inviting the diverse neighbourhood community into his business space. An invitation that actually required a radical reimagining of what a business space should do. An invitation that disrupted the idea of a business as a profit seeking space of consumption. Handing out money was easier; it didn't require any change.

[Musical Interlude]

Narrative Interlude: In No More Police, Mariame Kaba and Andrea J. Ritchie's talk about the "abolition of policing as a political project centered around building of the commons: [land] that is owned by no one but used by everyone for collective sustenance and celebration. [9] If this sounds vaguely communist, well it's supposed to. Abolition has long been theorized with communism as a political project oriented towards the undoing of capitalism. But it's a very general idea of communism, a political commitment rather than a pre-established project.[10] Today, Gilmore describes the contemporary project of abolition as an elaboration of small-c communism, as the fight to redistribute material and symbolic resources.[11] And again this isn't theoretical, it means literally trying to redistribute material and symbolic resources for everyone, in real places, like local business spaces – making them more open. But local businesses aren't exactly commons, even if they sometimes like to advertise themselves this way. And when I expressed enthusiasm around the Tare Shop's reckoning Elly was sure to point this out.

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[9] Kaba, M., & J., R. A. (2022). *No More Police A Case for Abolition*. The New Press, 203.
[10] FUC. (2020, November 7). *Alberto Toscano — Abolition Philosophy* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYDKHG7OmrE&t=1511s [27:00].
[11] Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography : essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso. p. 383.

Elly [00:31:00] But it was still fucked up because I still just worked at the Tare shop and it was still like, yeah, it was still really limited in what it could be. And with the ideas on paper that it was a grocery store. But it's not a grocery store for everyone. And like, I don't mean to vouch that their shop, but this is an example of, of many, many businesses who come to the north end and then they write down that they're a community hub. Or they're a grocery store or somewhere that you can hang out for free or somewhere you can come get water or a free bathroom. Yeah, but those all have limitations and they also have a target audience and they are well aware that they're not a comfortable space for a lot of people to be in. And so businesses are pretty limited in what they can do, I think.

Narration: Many business spaces like to present themselves as community hubs but most businesses as Elly points out are not spaces for collective sustenance and celebration, they're not commons. They're not inviting spaces for a lot of people to be, because they're not supposed to be. Usually, they're simply capitalist consumption spaces structured around making-profit. And inviting people into your space who are experiencing extreme poverty can be bad for business.

Elly [00:31:15] Also like it depends on the business because there are certain environments that feel different.

SCENE FIVE:

[Milk Frothing Sounds]

Narration: Eventually - Elly leaves the Tare Shop, some time passes, Covid hits, George Floyd is murdered, people all around the world organize to defund and abolish the police and then Elly opens up Ramblers.

Elly: [00:26:37] I felt pretty uncomfortable when we first opened about our position within the neighborhood and we were having more experiences of having a lot of experiences of people coming in and using our bathroom, drugs in the bathroom, coming out changed. Yeah, but also we had two experiences of folks overdosing in the bathroom and learning how to compassionately and appropriately and effectively care for those people was a real, really unique and first experience for me.

Narration: At her new café Elly is in the process of… I guess you could say abolitionist place-making. At Ramblers she says they're not calling the police.

Elly: No one's calling them because no one's calling them. Yeah, we would never call them. Yeah, I think we have a sign that says don't call them.

Narration: Instead, they're trying novel approaches to addressing conflict and showing up for their neighbors. They're working to create safety within their own space.

 Elly: And when we have had, like, conflicts within the space with, um, people who are coming in and not people like, not within the space, but folks coming in who've had

conflict with staff. I think we as a group have kind of an ethos or like a mindset that we're like on the side of that person. Yeah. And like, it's generally understood that as long as you, like, look out for your own safety for sure. And that's why we have like buddy systems and things. Yeah, but if you can get that person, if you can non-violently resolve that and ask that person to leave the space with. It's always possible. Yeah. Or seemingly always possible. There's no need to involve anyone.

Narration: A lot of criminalized behaviors like using drugs, drinking, hanging out or sleeping outside or being loud aren't inherently dangerous or harmful and often require no alternatives beyond ensuring everyone's needs are met. These behaviours are defined as crimes, but they're not harmful. Abolitionism isn't concerned with crime, it's concerned with harm, and trying to address and transform it.[12] That's what Elly's staff is trying to do in their space. They're not responding to people who are exhibiting these behaviors as criminals, they're on their side, they're trying to keep them and themselves safe. And usually, it's possible.

Elly: And I don't know, we have a lot of staff. We have a lot of people around. We've got some big burly dudes on staff, too. And, like, it's just been fine. The other day, like, during our hours, two people came in and spent about 40 minutes in the bathroom. And at some point, I was like, Oh, man, they're still in the mouth. They're like, Yeah, we're in the middle of a busy lunch service. Like, this is not the best place to do drugs right now. [...] So we did little knock checks. Yeah. That was like, our solution was like everybody came here and they were just like, yeah, it was like, okay, like, probably timed it probably time to head on. Yeah. And like, after about 5 minutes, they came out and they left open. [...] There was no conflict because nobody yelled at them when they came home. Yeah, yeah. Nobody said, you can't do that here. Like, don't come back.

Narration: It's something like an abolitionist geography in the making. They're exploring different possibilities of what grounded collective care and learning can look like in their space. And accepting this involves discomfort and challenge at times. But this isn't what most businesses do. Most business spaces in the North End are invested in a conventional and harmful approach to safety, one that makes them deputy cops. And some business environments are different! Like Elly trying to make her business different, and there's other places like Alteregos in the North End where you feel an abolitionist underpinning commanding the space. But what holds these businesses apart? Why do abolitionist geographies emerge in some businesses while others are absorbing policing functions and acting as deputy cops? In the next episode, we're going answer these questions by exploring the broader structures that influence how business spaces are organized. We'll explore the politics of Business Improvement Areas, third place theory, community policing logics, and look at how coalitions of neighborhood spaces are working to realize abolitionist visions of care and safety.

OUTRO SCENE:

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[12] Kaba, M., & J., R. A. (2022). *No More Police A Case for Abolition*. The New Press, 52.

Narration: This episode was produced by me! Special thanks to Elly for speaking with me. Before we go, a short tale about Tim Hortons and abolition from my friend Ben.

Ben [00:13:12] Me and my partner were traveling through northern Quebec. Through all of these old kind of mining towns. I say old mining towns, but they're not that old. And the mines are still very much in operation. We were involved with a network of poor and working class people who are organizing and they're gathering place where they all meet up together is at the Tim Hortons. And when they come, they come in a big group of like 8 to 10 people, they all order, maybe one thing. And if they're ordering something, they're ordering something that's like not explicitly on the menu, like, can I have an iced cappuccino? But can you make it with hot chocolate? (laughter) So they're like, okay, but you know what you want? And that's awesome. And the people working that joint are like fed up and irritated but also are going to do it. And then we get into the get into the Tim Hortons and they're like moving the tables around, like pushing tables against another. And one of the employees comes up and says, actually you can move the tables. And they just sort of look at this person and they continue to move the tables and they sit down and they start having a conversation. The employee, I guess, is just not paid enough to want to surveil at that level and just walks away. And then we have this fruitful conversation where, you know, some of them are sharing stories with us, like Southern, because in this context Montreal is very south like city folks you don't know, lick about squat and like where they're from the mines, the gold mines in Malartic are so toxic that when it rains, the rain is so acidic that it started to peel the paint on their cars. And so they talked about how a few years ago they all had a lot of them got together and brought this concern up to the company that was operating the mine. And then everybody in Malartic, the company paid for them to have their cars repainted. Which, you know, clearly does not solve the problem of acid rain. But just and, you know, they tell this, they tell us this story in Tim Hortons. Then, you know, we all get up, we leave. No one puts the chairs back. No one moves the tables, and we're just bummed out. And I think that that was an example. I think that that was an example of one of care for each other. We pushed the tables up so that the person who was in the wheelchair could get in. It was an example of failed policing on the part of the employees. And there were a couple of other people there at the time, and they looked over at us. I certainly, I remember noticing that other people were looking at us when the employee came in at confrontation mode. But then when the employee walked away, they just went back to their regular their time.. Yeah. It made me see the double double in a different light.

Episode Two:

Can a business association be abolitionist? The structural antagonism of BIAs**.**

SCENE ONE

Narration: In early January, a few months after I speak with Elly, she forwards me an email from the North End Business Association.

AI Voice: The North End Business Association is hosting a meeting with HRM Staff, Councillors, the Halifax Regional Police, and Chief Dan Kinsella on Monday, January 9th, 2023 to discuss ongoing concerns around panhandling, theft, aggressive behaviors, security, and safety within our community.[13]

Narration: Above this forwarded email Elly writes:

AI Voice 2: Hi Alia! I'm anticipating that this meeting's vibes are going to be straight-up evil. I was wondering if you have any thoughts that could help me contribute something constructive in this kind of open forum setting. My general thought is "this thing that you're trying to get our blessing to aggressively police isn't actually a problem" and "this is a consequence of the thing we're benefitting from (gentrification)" and "be nice to your neighbours, these are your goddamn neighbours" but, like, more eloquent?[14]

Narration: In the last episode, I spoke with Elly, the co-owner of Ramblers café, about the relationships unfolding between businesses and the police in Halifax's North End neighbourhood.

 Elly: Yeah, I think we have a sign that says don't call the police. Yeah, we don't need them. […] When we have had, like, conflicts within the space […] I think we as a group have kind of an ethos or like a mindset that we're like on the side of that person.

Narration: And while some businesses, like Ramblers, were attempting to re-imagine the conditions of collective safety and care in their space, most businesses in the neighbourhood were not. The invitation from the neighbourhood business association made it clear that businesses were, in fact, being encouraged to depend on the police and work with the police to create community safety. So, I wanted to know more about the North End Business Association: What led up to this meeting being called? What did it reveal about the way businesses relate to the police? And how was the association impacting the ways safety and security were being addressed and understood in the North End?

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[13] E. Hannon, personal communication, January 5, 2023.
[14] See Footnote 12.

My name is Alia and, in this series, I will try to answer a simple question: Can a coffee shop be abolitionist? In this episode, I take a closer look at the North End Business Association and the broader structures that impact neighbourhood business spaces.

SCENE TWO *What is the NEBA?*

Narration: Finding out more about the North End Business Association proves difficult. I call the association's executive director, and the communication representative but no one agrees to do an interview with me. And I can't attend the meeting because even though they're discussing neighbourhood safety and security, it's not open to the public. Eventually, I track down Matt Neville, who used to be the chair of NEBA's board. And he agrees to meet with me.

[Soundscape from the Narrows Pub]

Bartender: How's it going guys? Can I grab you something to drink?

Alia: Yeah.

Matt: I'll get the IPA.

Narration: I meet Matt at the Narrows, a new pub in the North End.

Matt [1:40] My name's Matt Neville. I'm a professional city planner and I'm the past chair of the North End Business Association.

Narration: The North End Business Association is one of eight Business Improvement Districts or Associations (BIAs) in Halifax and one of hundreds across North America. Bear with me here, explaining municipal governing structures can get a little technical. Basically, BIAs are public-private partnerships where commercial property owners and businesses, within an area, are required to pay a fee to fund activities that collectively benefit them.[15] But how this plays out can vary quite a lot.

Matt [5:40] I mean I think they can be a lot of different things. I think there's a lot of business associations that function purely from an events and programming perspective and beautification, so they do street cleaning and other types of things.

Narration: Think of flower beds and public art. Think of street festivals. These are some of the things BIAs do to promote and improve a neighbourhood so more people visit and businesses can make more money.

Matt: But there's also a whole side that does advocacy work and takes stronger stances. I would say the North End Business Association in general has played more of a role with advocacy. And I would say that's mainly just because of the direction of its members who are not big box chains, they're not large businesses, they're mostly small

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[15] Guimarães, Pedro. "Business Improvement Districts: A Systematic Review of an Urban Governance Model towards City Center Revitalization." *Land* 10, no. 9 (September 1, 2021): 922.

independent businesses that have a direct link to the neighbourhoods and are often owner operated. [...] I mean it really focused on this commercial, residential, stronger together. It's not business's separate. We put a lot of emphasis on that.

Narration: Matt mentions things like this a lot during our talk. The NEBA is different. While BIAs are often criticized for governing and managing neighbourhood spaces in ways that intensify capital accumulation, and accelerate processes like gentrification, Matt suggests the NEBA is different; its advocacy extends beyond commercial needs.

Matt: I mean there's so many social service providers in the neighbourhood. And I would say generally there's a very strong support from the membership to support those and always ensuring there's room on the board for them.

Narration: The NEBA has an elected board of directors who meet monthly. Matt was the chair of this board which included some social service providers who are not official members of the BIAs since they function as not-for-profit organizations.

Matt: I think if that wasn't there, I think it would be much easier for the board to take a much harder line on some of those issues.

Narration: Having social service providers sit on the board is a clear way to resist decision making that is solely commercial or profit oriented. Social service providers are much more likely to advocate for people who don't benefit from the neighbourhood's increased profitability, people who might suffer from a process like gentrification. But for this same reason, they also create tensions and disagreements on the board.

SCENE THREE *Sources of tension on the board.*

Alia [26:00] You were talking about there being conversation, and potentially disagreements about money or what decisions were being made. I wonder if you can think of [...] specific tensions, general tensions that existed and what different stakeholders wanted?

[pause]

Matt [26:50] I would say... I mean the tension I would say is always around policing for the most part.

[pause]

Narration: You can hear Matt's hesitation. We're entering sensitive territory. The association is supposed to represent the neighbourhood businesses in an attractive light – "stronger together" – not in a politically divided one.

Matt [26:50] There was some around the overdose prevention site. Not as much as was pushed in the media. They were looking to create a divide in the North End that wasn't there at all. It was generally amongst the membership, amongst the board there was really strong support for the expansion of services that existed in the neighbourhood, especially around use.

Narration: Services like safe injection sites increase the safety of many community members. They are increasingly common and a reflect a harm reduction approach to drug use. But these services don't tend to make an area more desirable for tourism or big investment. And they don't align with the core BIA mandate to facilitate a clean and safe urban experience that will attract middle-and upper-class consumers to the area. So unsurprisingly, supportive services like safe injection sites expose tensions on BIA boards, tensions around whose comfort and safety should be considered and prioritized.

Matt [26:50] In the media it was portrayed as businesses coming up against it. And there was definitely some (laugh). But the position of the board at the time was not that at all.

Narration: But in this case the board was–mostly–supportive of the safe injection site even if some of the businesses were not. And this was a relatively radical position to take. BIAs are commonly criticized for encouraging the policing and surveillance of "undesirable groups" like drug users and unhoused people.[16] But in this case, they're refusing to prioritize the comfort of some consumers over the safety of drug users. And, as an association, they have more political clout than most individual businesses.

[sounds interlude]

Alia [33:55] Okay you said one of the main tensions was around policing. Is that? Or I guess what were those conversation like?

[pause]

Matt [33:55] I think that there's just some members who wanted… this is a tough one. There was one social service provider, has a shelter, who's in conflict with a number of businesses, one business in particular. And I would say all the discussion revolved around that. And it's just a real conflict. And you know there is a safety issue. There's a number of issues late at night: robbery and assault.

Narration: This is the first time Matt mentions safety explicitly. A conflict about safety between a service provider and a group of businesses that see the service *users* as a source of danger.

Matt [33:55] And I mean I think at the time they were kind of looking for a dialogue with them. And it just didn't happen. And so, everyone gets angry and calls for more policing. […] I think what people probably wanted was a public position to be taken for more patrols in the street.

Narration: Street patrols harken back to the early days of urban police forces. They were eliminated in the early twentieth century, as patrol cars and CB radios allowed

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[16] Kudla, D. (2019). *Business Improvement Areas and the Justification of Urban Revitalization: Using the Pragmatic Sociology of Critique to Understand Neoliberal Urban Governance* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Guelph).

police officers to cover greater territory, but they made a comeback in the 1970s with the turn to so-called community policing.[17] Community policing, and street patrols in particular, attempt to establish more intimate relationships between the police and the communities they surveil.[18] But since their emergence in the 70's, research has shown that street patrols are mostly effective at policing petty crime like public intoxication, graffiti, loitering, and panhandling.[19] Behaviors that are defined as crimes but are generally not a safety issue. As a result, street patrols largely empower the police to aggressively surveil and police poor and racialized communities within urban neighbourhoods.[20] And Matt seems to know this. And so do other members of the board.

Matt: There was probably many more who didn't want that. And then there was many more for whom that was even a bigger issue for so many different reasons. I mean policing isn't that simple. I mean there's so many more things. The answer just isn't police on site because that brings so many other issues with it. And we were completely aware of that. So, I mean not the position at the time. I think at least when I was involved, I mean the business association would just stay out of it.

Narration: There's a tension playing out here. On one hand there's support for social services providers, for things like safe injection sites. There's a collective will to invest in an economy of care in some cases. This is part of an abolition project. But then, when certain issues arise, there's a turn to the police and an inability to work with the service provider to develop another approach. So, the group chooses to do nothing. They take no stance regarding an increased police presence. And they don't figure out how to address and create safety collectively. But maybe as a BIA, they were never in the position to do this in the first place.

SCENE FOUR *NEBA origin story.*

[back in time sound effects]

Narration: Over the 70s and the 80s, the North End faces drastic disinvestment and neglect and Gottingen Street sees this slow emptying out. By the 90's the Gottingen Street landscape is pretty bleak. And it's in this context that a new business association is formed.

Matt [22:00] It started as the Gottingen Street Merchants Association. I mean it was coming out of a period where the vacancy rate in the late 1990s was very very high. I mean there was the police strike in the 1990s. There were a number of events that

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[19] Sampson, R. J., & Raudenbush, S. W. (2004). Seeing disorder: Neighborhood stigma and the social construction of "broken windows". Social psychology quarterly, 67(4), 319-342.
[20] Vitale, A. S. (2008). *City of disorder: How the quality of life campaign transformed New York politics*. NYU Press.

ended in quite a lot of damage. A lot was happening at that point and time and there was a very small number of operators that came together to really just help each other.

Narration: The first business improvement association came into being, under similar circumstances, in the Toronto neighbourhood known as the Bloor West Village. Like in the North End, the Bloor West business operators were struggling; the neighbourhood was impacted by construction of a new subway-line and several new shopping malls and the neighbourhood wasn't bustling as it once was. In the hopes of bringing back business to area, operators came together to propose a new regional model which officially gave rise to Bloor West Village BID.[21]

Matt [22:00] You know it was really a kind of simple thing. And it's really just evolved from that. At least in this case, not in all cases, it was really just filling a gap. The area had long been overlooked by the city. There really hadn't been any type of investment at all on the street.

Narration: So like, the original BIA in Toronto, these Merchants are organizing, as Matt puts it, to fill a gap. The city is overlooking the street, and together these businesses invest in the neighbourhood. And it works. Slowly, over time the neighbourhood sees small scale economic revitalization.

Matt [44:10] It was like a very incremental growth on Gottingen and I mean there was definitely change happening but at lease commercially it wasn't displacement. It was really just filling in vacant store fronts. **[45:00]** We kind of maintain this funny little narrow frontage, small lot commercial form on the street for a really long time.

Narration: Until the growth suddenly isn't so incremental. In 2019, the city changes the zoning laws.

Matt [43:50] So the rules changed and they took the 50 feet height cap off. So, they gave an incentive for people to buy multiple properties, tear them down, build more.

Narration: After they take off the height cap, developers start to look at Gottingen Street, and the North End in general, as lucrative real estate. And then larger format commercial space begins to emerge who are doing different kinds of business, bigger business.

Matt [45:00] And this will really change everything. […] These new businesses will then sit on the board of the business association and have very different views. They will also feel, I think, more entitled on the levy they're paying. You respond directly to my special interest because I'm now paying a much bigger price on the space. So, it will naturally change very quickly. And a lot of it relates to the lot size of the building and making it more attractive to speculative development. The rules before it didn't prevent this, but it really slowed it down.

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[21] Charenko, M. (2015). A Historical Assessment of the World's First Business Improvement Area (BIA) The Case of Toronto's Bloor West Village. *Canadian Journal of Urban Research*, 24(2), 1-19.

Narration: Matt speaks of this moment, when the height cap changes, as a break from the NEBA's modest origins. But we might think of it more as an inevitable progression. In the formation of NEBA, local businesses recognized their shared economic interests, and formed a coalition dedicated to improving their collective profitability. At first, this primarily meant investing in the shared neighbourhood spaces the city had neglected. They planted flowers and installed benches on Gottingen Street and organized a weekly craft market in the summer. While these actions benefited more than just the businesses owners, and might seem benevolent, the motivation for improvement was fundamentally one of financial gain.

Matt [42:00] I think it would be naive to think the strategic direction of the NEBA won't change. It's been pretty progressive up to now. But it might be a different story soon. As new businesses come in who are less and less connected to the history of the neighbourhood, I do think there will be more and more pressure over time to change.

Narration: But the strategic direction of the NEBA isn't really changing, there's just more capital at stake now. As the neighbourhood gentrifies, the scale of the businesses and the capital invested grows, the profits expected grow accordingly, and new strategies are required to achieve this. The new strategies, unlike flower gardens, don't benefit everyone and often harm some members of the neighbourhood. However, this isn't a rupture from the NEBA origins. It's the sharpening of a contradiction that existed from the beginning. The NEBA like the original Bloor West Village BIA, and like BIAs in general, has always been a profit-oriented association. Today, it functions as designed: as an association invested in protecting economic arrangements, mediated by relations and private property, arrangements that are inherently at odds with building a neighbourhood where people's collective needs and safety are met. Yet the NEBA repeatedly conceals this contradiction.

SCENE FIVE

Narration: After my conversation with Matt, I look over some of the NEBA documents on their website. I find a five-year strategic plan Matt helped draft in 2020. The document opens with a message from Matt, the chair, and Patricia Cuttell, the executive director.

AI Voice: On behalf of the Board, we are pleased to present a new Strategic Plan for the North End Business Association. The North End has faced extreme pressures related to real estate development, high costs of housing, and uncertainty and potential loss of key public and community spaces. While much of the commercial development along Gottingen and Agricola Streets has been on vacant lands, the issue of displacement and affordability throughout the area is real and needs real solutions.[22]

Narration: The opening message is frank about the contradictory process facing the neighbourhood. The pressure of real estate development is making the neighbourhood less livable and valuable spaces are being lost. The north end needs real solutions.

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[22] North End Business Association. (2020). *5 Year Strategic Plan.* https://www.gonorthhalifax.ca/_files/ugd/84afdd_8359648cab344aa7b1ca211c1aa7ddc7.pdf

AI Voice: For NEBA, this means doing what we can to continue to strengthen the relationships between businesses and community while continuing our efforts around core marketing and events programming. […] While we work to plant flowers and keep streets beautiful, we continue to advocate for long-term funding for our street outreach Navigator program to support the work of our many social services providers. In this way, NEBA believes that economic development and social justice are not mutually exclusive; we recognize that any business improvement or economic development work is political.[23]

Narration: Economic development and social justice are not mutually exclusive! The association commits to economic development tactics: marketing, events, programming, street beautification, at the same time as it commits to supporting the work of its many social service providers.

[transition music]

Narration: We often hear promise that everyone can benefit from an area's economic development. But development is a euphemism for more capital and more profit, and these come with a social cost. People are losing their housing and businesses cater to an ever-richer clientele. Social services don't stop this process, but operate alongside it and, at best, lessen some of the suffering.

Matt: I mean it's so complicated because as long as you have commodified land, it's inevitable that this is the direction it will go. [...] You can put all these programs in place to prevent it and counteract it but they are just kind of band aids. Unless you have bigger changes to tax structure or membership.

Narration: And as Matt points out it's not that the NEBA never supports useful programs and initiatives, but that it ultimately is part of a economic development project that makes these supportive services more and more necessary. Often this contradiction is managed and masked through the language of safety. For example, the strategic plans lay out five central goals for the association.

AI Voice: GOAL 2 : The North End is a welcoming and attractive place that is healthy, safe, and livable. OBJECTIVE 2.1 Strengthen the "sense of place" in the district by enhancing the visual and physical experience on the streets.
TACTICS 1. Develop and initiate a new 5-year investment strategy for streetscaping and beautification projects, including things like custom bike racks, murals, public art, pole banners, planters, cleaning. 2. Work with HRM on improving street standards for accessibility, attractiveness, activation, cleanliness, environment, and pedestrian safety. 3. Cultivate neighbourhood pride by engaging members in cleanliness, safety, and neighbourhood improvement initiatives.[24]

Narration: The language used to define and realize this goal is a straightforward articulation of the clean and safe mandate promoted by BIAs around North America. BIAs generally advocate for services, practices, and policies that will facilitate a clean

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[23] See Footnote 22.

[24] See Footnote 22.

and safe urban experience that will attract consumer to the area.[25] Clean and safe are abstract terms. We might assume they mean the same thing to everyone. But the abstraction conceals their effect on the ground – that certain people will be defined as threats to cleanliness and safety. And it sanitizes the broader process, as the people most threatened by gentrification are redefined as threats themselves, threats to cleanliness and safety. This discursive move, the translation of threatened into threat, is precisely the discourse that frames the meeting Elly emails me about.

SCENE FIVE

Narration: The meeting takes place on January 9th. It begins with an open forum discussion around panhandling, theft, and aggressive behavior.

Side Note: Elly tells me about this meeting a few months after I interview her. I listen and take notes, but I don't record her so this my summary of what she told me about the meeting.

Narration: People express their grievances: business owners feel threatened, uncomfortable, unsafe AND that their ability to run their business spaces is being impacted. As the meeting unfolds, Elly says it becomes obvious that there is one group implicitly being addressed through these concerns: the North End's unhoused community. And as the meeting goes on, this group is increasingly framed, not simply as a financial hindrance, but as a direct threat to the personal safety of business owners, employees, and patrons.

[Play meeting sounds, add in voice overs of things people might have said to add effect.]

Narration: After, 30 minutes of discussion, Elly hesitantly interjects. She takes a deep breath before she tries to make clear to a room of fellow business owners that unhoused people and people experiencing extreme poverty aren't outside the north end community and they aren't outside the consideration and care of a business association. Nobody looks at Elly, and the rooms goes silent.

[musical interlude]

Narration: In his essay, "The Annihilation of Space by Law", Don Mitchell argues anti-homelessness laws function to annihilate the homeless from public spaces by legally controlling certain behaviors so that "homeless people simply cannot do what they must do in order to survive without breaking laws" [26] Basically, he argues that anti-homelessness laws make existing without access to private property a legal impossibility. And much like anti-homelessness laws, a crackdown on petty crime within the North

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[25] Lippert, R., & Sleiman, M. (2012). *Ambassadors, business improvement district governance and knowledge of the urban.* Urban Studies, 49(1), 61-76.

[26] Mitchell, Don. "The Annihilation of Space by Law: The Roots and Implications of Anti-Homeless Laws in the United States." *Antipode* 29, no. 3 (July 1997): 307.

End is an attempt to expel, through law enforcement and state violence, neighbourhood public spaces from poor and unhoused people, people who depend on public space to survive under the guise of safety. Elly attempts to expose this logic. Whether intentionally or not, only the needs of community members who are perceived to, aesthetically and/or materially, contribute to economic development of the area matter for the NEBA.

[musical to signal change]

Narration: After Elly's comment, people change their language. Sanitize it a little. That's not what we meant some people chime in. And maybe Elly's comment genuinely reaches some people but it doesn't matter much. The outcome of the meeting is predetermined. The police will be the primary group that intervenes and address the NEBA's concerns, this was presumed by the very fact of the meeting being called.

[musical interlude]

Narration: In the last episode, I spoke about how abolition often has been envisioned as a project centred around the building of a commons: collective spaces that are owned by no one and used by everyone for collective sustenance and celebration. Public space is the closest thing we have to the commons. Instead of trying to turn business spaces into something that's more like public space, more like a commons, businesses are coming together through the NEBA to unmake the little common space that is left in the North End. This is an iteration of abolition's opposite: a carceral geography of exclusion and sanitization, bound up with, and dependent on policing, processes of hierarchy, dispossession, and exclusion, A landscape where people, land, and material come together to maximize capital accumulation. A geography where the police are business owner's allies and where safety is an exclusionary ideal, that only applies to some members of the community.

SCENE SIX

Narration: Terms like capital accumulation and dispossession might seem distant from the NEBA. We tend to think of local business organizations like the NEBA quite favorably, because they stand in contrast to big corporate businesses. We hear this when Matt speaks about the NEBA. While the NEBA might be framed as a localized, grassroots, decision making body at the end of the day it's a capitalist coalition that brings local actors together with the explicit aim of increasing their own access to economic profit.

Matt [22:00] I do think there should be more decision-making power at the local level. A business association isn't it.

Narration: The NEBA might include social service providers on its board, and it might pander to a collective community agenda where social justice and economic development can flourish together, but its structure makes these promises secondary at best, and performative at worst. The NEBA can't be abolitionist in the same way it can't be anti-capitalist. Whatever good intentions its members might have, their interests matter. They're not situated to take a stance against the police, they're situated to partner with the police. If abolitionist place-making is ever going to be possible in the

North End, we need a different local decision-making body. We need a different coalition, one that might include local businesses but does not foreground their needs in isolation. How did we get here? How has the history of the North End impacted what coalitions have been possible and amplified? What business spaces used to exist? And how did safety play out within them? In the next episode we're going to go back in time and explore these questions.

Outro

Narration: This episode was produced by me. Special thanks to Matt for speaking with me. Before we go, a short tale about coffee shops and abolition from my friend Ben.

Ben [00:25:43] Like the way that I call the apartment that I'm now living in is I went to a nearby cafe and there was a guy sitting there and he was clearly a neighbor. He lived in the area for a long time. He was also unhoused. He was in this big tunic and he was smelly. But who gives a crap? And he's having his coffee and he's like, We had a great conversation about God. Now, I'm not religious, but it was it was a wonderful conversation. And that made me feel at home in the neighborhood. And then I came to the cafe the next day and the cafe owner said, actually he won't be coming here anymore. And I said, Oh my God. Like, did something happen? And the owner just said, Well, he's not a good fit for this space. And we had a conversation about that. And it makes, it just really upset me because, yeah, there's not that because of the competition, the fact that there's all of these different spaces. I guess it's kind of like you can as, as ownership, you can say, Oh, there's somewhere else that you can go to….and that's what I hate about living in this city, which is a binary way of thinking, but it's like we don't take care of all of our neighbors.

Script Three:

Was that shop abolitionist? A brief history of the North End.

SCENE ONE:

Narration: When I ask people about the North End's history, they always talk about Gottingen Street: what it used to be like….

[sounds of a bustling streetscape]

Jacky [00:25:58]: Gottingen street was unbelievably vibrant. So, it's unbelievably vibrant now, but all with no disrespect, young hipsters.

Narration: That's Jacky. She moved to Halifax in 1970.

Jacky [00:29:16]: Well the street was just… there were three taverns. There was the Met […] The Met was a terrific little, little, department store. So the department store, the restaurants, taverns, there were two banks. […] You know, you meet people in taverns, you drop in here, you'd go in there like, like Gottingen Street was just a vibrant, vibrant hub of what the community was at that time, which was a poor, White, working class and black community.

Narration: At the time, the North End was the only neighbourhood in the city where Black and White communities were living integrated lives.[27]

Michael [24:50]: When I left Trinidad, I didn't find a community, anything resembling what I left. I remember coming from the airport in Nova Scotia. [..] I was on the bus. I came down Gottingen Street for the first time. Wow. It was in the summer and everyone was on sidewalk and stuff and there was a lot going on, community feeling. […] Once I saw Gottingen Street. I wanted to be connected to it […].

Narration: That's Michael. He'll move to Saulter Street in the North End in the 70s.

Michael [25:40] And then I'm living in Halifax and I never saw it again. Never saw it in the stores, never saw it because I was always living on the other side. More towards the south. […] Even downtown you didn't see any Black faces really. They stopped right here.

Narration: Although this period is regularly described as a period of decline in the neighbourhood, it's clear from talking to the people living in the North End, that for many residents this was a period of vibrancy, especially for the Black community.[28]

Raymond [00:06:46]: When I first came up, North End was thriving […] There was the famous Derby Tavern, where after becoming an adult, I would go on the weekend to party. I never drank in my life but to see friends and, to go there with friends and so on and to dance. They used to have karaoke and I used to sing.

Narration: That's Raymond. He moved to the North End in 1975 from Antigonish. He has many fond memories of his time living in the North End, especially at the Derby Tavern.

Jacky [00:26:32]: The Derby Tavern probably held at least 100 people and was packed. Ever packed.

Raymond [00:06:55]: It was a wonderful time, and it was a growing time, and it was a learning atmosphere as well. Yeah. You had your disgruntled person now and then, but it was a learning environment where you'd have meetings like we are here today and so on.

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[27] It's estimated that around this about 66% of Black people in Nova Scotia lived in Halifax, and of that a majority lived in the central North End (Melles, 2003, p. 5).

[28] Roth, N., & Grant, J. L. (2015). The Story of a Commercial Street: Growth, Decline, and Gentrification on Gottingen Street, Halifax. *Urban History Review / Revue d'Histoire Urbaine*, *43*(2), 38–53.

Narration: And it wasn't just the Derby. There were many thriving Black gathering spaces in the neighbourhood.

Raymond: *[00:23:28] There was* I'll say an Asian restaurant, a Chinese restaurant on Goddess Street. That after, the Derby or the Tap, which was another, dwelling, if you will. After we went through in the evening, we would go to this Asian restaurant and, you know, you come in and you sit down and so on, and, and, it was wonderful. And, you know, you were treated with respect and all that stuff. *[00:24:07][38.4]*

Narration: Today, there are hardly any Black-owned establishments on Gottingen Steet. So how does Gottingen Street transform from this site of Black vibrancy and inter-racial sociality to the gentrified hip neighbourhood we encounter today? How does race factor into these broader neighbourhood transformations? How are ideas about safety implicated in these transformations? And what do these histories tell us about the possibility of abolition place-making in the North End today?

My name is Alia and, in this series, I try to answer a simple question: Can a coffee shop be abolitionist? In this episode, I examine a few key historical moments in the North End to try to make sense of how the relationship between safety, commerce, and communities has been negotiated over time.

SCENE TWO:

[music: Baby My Love, The In Crowd]

Narration: One vibrant North End establishment of the late 1960s was Kwatcha House. Named after the Zambian word for freedom, Kwatcha House was both a business space (club and café) and a political organizing space. And it was upfront about straddling the line between two types of spaces.

Encounter at Kwacha House NFB film [1:24–1:39] I mean most of you might have known from the established policies of these business places that it is segregation out there. There's no doubt about it. [29]

Encounter at Kwacha House NFB film [00:25]: If they want to know how I feel, let them come to me from now on. And let them come down here and see what's wrong and try and do something.

Narration: That's a clip from an NFB film titled, Encounter at Kwacha House, from 1967. The film documents Black and white youth sitting around Kwatcha House discussing the urban landscape of racial discrimination in North End.

Encounter at Kwacha House NFB film [4:05-4:20] We spent more money in the Vogue restaurant than any single group in the neighbouhood. I bet you a dollar today or

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[29] Rex, T. (Director). (1967). *Encounters at Kwatcha House – Halifax* [Film]. National Film Board.

tomorrow they'll never be a Black working there. **[2:30– 2:35]** The policy in this neighbouhood as was stated before was you know let's hire Whites.

Narration: That's Rocky Jones speaking. He was a young Black activist and the founder of Kwatha House, and he went on to become a legendary Black organizer. In Rocky's memoir, published in 2016, he talks about how the White merchants in the neighbourhood had a deal among one another to not hire Black employees.

Encounter at Kwacha House NFB film [7:58- 8:18] They won't give you a job to sell in front of the counters but they want your money. And until you can make them realize that you have the numbers. That if you stop buying there they're gonna lose x dollars. That's the only way. An economic boycott is a very sensible thing.

Narration: These young people hanging around Kwatcha place, they recognize business spaces as important sites of political and economic power and they want to be part of them. They're fighting for more places like Kwatcha house where they feel included and liberated. They're fighting for better conditions for their everyday lives within business spaces and the neighbourhod more broadly.

[music: Change is Gonna Come by Sam Cook]

Narration: A big idea of the Black Power movement of the 60s, a big influence for Rocky and Kwatcha is self-determination.

Rocky [from memoir]: We were coming up with a philosophy of participatory democracy, of self-determination.[30]

Narration: People are recognizing that formal systems and institutions at their best, do not keep Black people safe, and at their worst make them radically unsafe. In response, there's a big emphasis on building strong communities and collectives as a way of resisting the state and capital and supporting each other.

Rocky [from memoir]: We had to connect with the internal leadership, and we had to confront the establishment. This included some of the major black institutions, and it clearly included the government.[31]

Narration: This Black Power movement has a lot of influence on the post-1960s abolition movement. On one hand, abolition as a political movement is very attentive to the intersection of racism and capitalism and has often situated its theoretical reflections within the Black Radical Tradition. On a more practical level abolition movement tend to emphasize strong community ties as the most effective means of achieving collective safety. So, while they're not calling it abolition, Kwatcha house, as a space, has an abolitionist politic. It's a place where people are coming together to create a basis of Black self-determination, to support each other, and to resist the state and capital. And just like today, the police are antagonists to this project.

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[30] Jones, B., & Walker, J. W. S. G. (2016). *Burnley "Rocky" Jones : revolutionary : an autobiography*. Roseway Publishing, an imprint of Fernwood Publishing. p. 94.
[31] See footnote 29.

Rocky [from memoir]: The police were always visiting Kwatcha's house, especially when we were having dances on the weekend. I would meet them at the door and there would almost always be a confrontation because we took the stance that this is our club and you've got no business coming in unless there's a complaint. […] The police officers resented the fact that we dared to tell the police that you couldn't come into our place, and it set up a lot of tension. [32]

Narration: The mobilizing happening at Kwatcha House for inclusion and vibrancy is perceived by the greater Halifax community as a threat. In other words, what I'm retrospectively framing as Black abolitionist place-making, is perceived by the state as a threat. And it's not just Kwatcha house. The police in general are antagonistic to Black gathering in general.

Rocky [from memoir]: The police were getting into the neighbourhood and ordering people around, telling them they couldn't stand there, that they were loitering, and you could be standing in front of your own house. On Creighton and Maynard the houses come right to the street. So in order to be standing anywhere you have to be on the sidewalk. So two cops on the beat would come by, and they'd say you gotta move, you're loitering and people were getting incensed about it. [33]

Narration: Raymond remembers this too.

Raymond: [01:11:26]: It's just my job. What do you mean? Your job is to harass three people who are standing off on the sidewalk talking. It's not your land. We're not doing anything obstructing sidewalk traffic or anything. It's just your job. *[01:11:45][19.2]*

Narration: Black gathering is perceived as a threat. It's like the state doesn't want the Black community to thrive on their terms so they try to control where Black people can gather and the Black community understands this.

Rocky [from memoir]: We said you've got no right to do this, they're like an occupying force. The role of the police is to protect the community but they're not protecting the community, they're occupying the community and they're using tactics of an occupying force. [34]

Narration: And what we see in the decades to come is that the police and the state collaborate to sustain this type of control: state neglect (disinvestment and dispossession) and state violence (policing) regulate where Black people can gather and how safe they feel doing so.

Raymond: *[00:05:49]* We were dispersed like, you got to move along, got to move along or whatever, that whole crap. Way back in the 70s and beyond. It was a concerted effort, if you will, and continues to dislocate relocate individuals from the African Nova Scotia community out of North End.

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[32] See footnote 30. p. 84.
[33] See footnote 30. p. 87.
[34] See footnote 30. p. 87.

Narration: These coordinating forms of state violence go on to have devasting effects on the North End Black community.

SCENE THREE

Narration: By the end of the 1970s, there was a serious decline within the neighbourhood.

Jacky: *[00:30:34]* So what starts to happen very slowly, it was something that you could watch the deterioration of right. Like Sobeys closed down the grocery store. So Sobey's could have cleaned up the grocery store service, but Sobey's didn't; they closed down the grocery store. [00:31:11] And so now people didn't have a grocery store in the neighborhood. Then the two banks left, right. […] So the banks have now left to move and the grocery store has left, and then the liquor store left, and then the department community services office left. So all through the '70s and the '80s was this slow emptying out.

Narration: In 1961 there were 138 businesses on Gottingen Street and a 75% rate of employment. By 1981 there were only 70 businesses, half as many, and there was a 58% employment rate.

Jacky: [00:33:10] It's like this tipping point. It's like you see it happening and you feel it happening, and then it's like, oh, look, this has happened, right?

Narration: In 1981, there was a violent police strike where the police, to prove they were needed, smashed some storefront windows on Gottingen Street, which were then boarded up and people started calling Gottingen "plywood alley." This incident is remembered by many as a catalyst for the street's decline as more stores closed and vacant storefronts became boarded up.[35]

Jacky: [00:33:50] And then after that, there's no, there's no there's no Jo let's just go for beer. Come on. I'll meet you down at the right. Like that dynamic isn't happening anymore. And that's when the taverns started to close. And it it just like, literally died.

Narration: Businesses provide life-sustaining resources: material resources like food, liquor, banking, and clothing, and social (keep symbolic if you like!) resources like spaces for a community to gather within a neighbourhood. So, when they close down, neighbourhood life can radically change.

Jacky: [00:31:44] I think progressive people are left-wing-leaning people. We have so much mistrust of commerce. But the reality is that commerce is a part of a community. Right. So when certain businesses leave, even if they are only there, as in the case of

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[35] Baker, K. (2014). *" We don't need another Africville": Historical Imaginings of Gentrification and Development in Halifax's North End.* [Doctoral dissertation, Western University] p. 63.

the banks and Sobeys, even if they're only there to exploit or whatever the community, they are still a necessary part of the cohesion as a community.

Narration: Under capitalism, commerce is essential to community sustenance, even if simultaneously exploitative. Businesses exercise exclusionary practices to maximize profits, like only hiring White people, but they also extend beyond these exploitative structures, as places that imperfectly keep communities materially and socially nourished.

Jacky: So, when your banks leave your grocery store leaves and the welfare office leaves and your liquor store leaves, right? Those are not boutique places. Those are essential things that people need to have. […] And then you've got all of these empty buildings everywhere that are falling apart and have broken windows, or they're empty lots. It's just it's it's really kind of ugly and unloving. It's just horrible. Right.

Narration: But this economic decline isn't understood as one of structural neglect. Instead, it comes to be associated with social and moral decay. By the 80s, the North End develops a reputation as an undesirable low-income, crime-ridden, Black neighbourhood. In other words, the Black population living in the North End is seen as being responsible for the neighbourhood's decline.

Jacky: [00:35:08] So, so that emptying is happening on Gottingen Street and in the communities in the North End, especially in this particular area, this would have been considered very bad housing.

Narration: This decline, and ghettoization, paves the way for the first wave of gentrification.

Jacky [00:35:08] So first you have a thriving working-class community. Then two things start to happen. As some families' economic circumstances improve, they're looking they move to the suburbs because they're looking for better conditions for their families. And I'm, I'm certainly not putting that forward as a critique, but as the slum housing is deteriorating and deteriorating, people are just emptying out.

Jacky: [00:36:27] And so who's willing to move back into dumps? Artists, young people, and people moving back in for political purposes.

Narration: Mostly White people with more money than most North End residents at the time.

Jacky [00:36:55] So in the 80s, in the 70s and 80s, I can probably name ten families just in this area of some of my, peers who moved back in because there were big old houses, like big old houses, but they were cheaper, right? They were way cheaper than living out in the suburbs and socially and culturally there was like an attraction. So that's why I'm calling us the first gentrifiers. *[00:37:23][39.6]*

Narration: Jacky moves to the neighbourhood in 1988. She moves to the house that we're sitting in as we talk.

Alia: [00:37:29] Here here?

Jacky: To this house right? But some of my friends and neighbours had been here as much as 10 years earlier. So, 78, 79, 80s. [...] Like there were still lots of Black families that lived in this neighbourhood. But I would say it was already 70/30 60/40.

Narration: So there's this predominately White population moving into the North End, with either higher incomes or more cultural capital than existing residents. And the city would have seen this as a great thing, as a means of revitalizing the North End and making the neighbourhood safer. A process that we might understand today as state-facilitated gentrification. A "process by which capital is reinvested into urban neighbourhoods, and poorer residents and their culture are displaced and replaced by richer people and their preferred aesthetics and amenities." [36]

Jacky [00:40:30] So this period that I'm referring to is sort of the White, then hipster lefties who moved into this neighborhood. What's happening at that time is there's not yet an infrastructure to take care of us. There are no shi-shi restaurants. There's no, you know, nurtured store. The liquor store was like a hole in the wall. There was not the infrastructure that now exists to support this neighborhood and to support who's now in this neighborhood *[00:41:09][38.8]*

Narration: But as Jacky points out, gentrification is just taking hold. The richer residents don't have the preferred aesthetics and amenities yet, or their "shi shi" restaurants, as Jacky calls them. At this point the businesses in the North that haven't closed down, they're not bougie or hip like we see today, they're a bit run down, like all the neighbourhood infrastructure, and they're catering to the people who've been living in the community, people who are mostly lower income, working class. Places like the Derby.

Jacky: [00:41:28] So while we lived here if we wanted to go to cool hip places it was not in this neighbouhood.

Narration: So, these new places, that always pop up in the gentrified neighbourhood, places that transform the symbolic meaning of the neighbourhood, don't exist yet. The neighbourhood is not ready to facilitate these types of places. First, it needs to deal with the problem of unsafety, crime, and disorder. And that's a job for the police.

SCENE FIVE

Narration: By the late 80s, the neighbourhood faced real urban safety issues. Increasing poverty created the conditions for a more violent drug economy.

Jacky: There was a lot of drug dealing going on. I'm sitting here with my son's grandmother and we're looking at the yellow house over there and the police are surrounding it. And the police are wearing long coats with rifles and who knows what the hell is going on.

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[36] Stein, S. (2019) *Capital City*. Verso Books. 41.

Narration: Of course, different demographics are experiencing this unsafety in different ways and responding in different ways.

Jacky: Of course, we would have tried to get rid of the bad stuff. It's kind of shut down that crack house because now it's our neighborhood and what's happened. And I'm not romanticizing the crack houses, don't get me wrong, but we're, like, more than happy to call the cops and say, look what fuck's going on at the end of the street here? I'm trying to walk my kid to the corner store. Right. So it's, like, socially complex. [00:42:33] [34.7]

Narration: The problems that underlie these urban safety issues, they're big and complex, and Jacky and her peer want a safer neighbourhood, like now, so they call the police.
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Narration: In 1989, in response to concerns around crime and feelings of insecurity, the Halifax police launched several community-based policing initiatives in the North End (Clairmont, 8). These initiatives include a new storefront office on Gottingen Street, foot patrols, new problem-oriented community constables, and various other programs. The idea on paper behind these initiatives is to improve relationships with North End residents and to address crime. But more police presence in a Black neighbourhood, kind of just results in the use of more state violence against the Black community.

Jacky: *[00:45:50]* My son was arrested two blocks from […] this area. And he's 12 years old and he gets arrested, Black and 12 years old, and gets arrested for not having his bicycle helmet on right? ! I was sick with rage, like, you're fucking arresting my 12-year-old, and you're not arresting the guys who were selling crack to12-year-olds on the street corner. Like, you're kidding me, right? [00:46:22] [32.3]

Narration: Lamar who is around the same age as Jacky's son never lived in the North End but he used to hang out there a lot as a kid and got pretty used to getting hassled by the police.

Lamar: *[00:21:59]* They roughed me, and I wasn't even the person they were looking for.

Narration: One time they accuse him of robbing someone.

Lamar: *[00:22:10]* And they brought those two people that were, like, robbed or something to point me out. And they said that's not him. But after I was, like, bruised up and when I was 14. They didn't call any parents. They just let me out the back door. Have a good night. *[00:22:20][20.8] [00:21:30]* They paid me money 500 hundred dollars to not speak about it.

Narration: In an in-depth report that analyses these new policing initiatives, Don Clairmont points to their ineffectiveness in the absence of significant social change for North End residents. An ineffectiveness that is also reflected in the recommendations put forth by the Nova Scotia Advisory Group on Race Relations. The group was established around the same time as these initiatives, to form a blue print to change and combat racism and racial discrimination. The report they put forward made ninety-

four recommendations, only three pertained to police practices and policies.[37] Yet, similar policing initiatives continued to populate the North End neighbourhood through the 90s and 2000s.

Raymond: I think that's a deliberate effort to harass people. You become upset, annoyed, and whatever, you might say something or act out in a specific way. You are railroaded in the criminal justice system.

Narration: So, while these initiatives do little in regard to increasing the safety of the North End community, they do accelerate the gentrification process by displacing and dispossessing the neighborhood's historic, largely Black residents.

Raymond: And as a result of that, you know, if you have a family, your family maybe can't maintain the dwelling that they're in because you're inside. So, then gentrification takes place, and, you know, you have to sell your house and leave, and you sell your house. Of course, you don't get market value or historical value, if you will, based on what you put into it over a period of years.

Narration: So as White people are moving in, and police presence in the neighbourhood is increasing, Black residents are slowly leaving the North End. Between 2006 and 2016, the Black population of the North End is cut in half. About 700 hundred Black residents leave a neighbourhood many of them had resided in for decades.[38] Policing is essentially deploying the same tactics it did in the 60s. It's targeting Black gathering spaces and breaking Black communities apart. All Black residents in the North End are potentially guilty, just by existing, like Lamar and Jacky's son. In both cases, policing is antagonistic not just to black criminality but to black vibrancy, and the closing of Black establishments throughout this time period seems to reflect this antagonism.

SCENE SIX

Narration: Throughout this series, I have highlighted spaces that resist or present alternatives to normative racial-capitalist relations; imperfect often momentary spaces that we might think of as abolitionist. Through this investigation, I have found that neighbourhood businesses do become, even if only momentarily, disruptive political spaces, experimental spaces, where abolitionist place-making unfolds, and new social forms are tested out. Business spaces can become sites where political solidarity and resistance are built and maintained. And if you're the only Black neighbourhood in the city, these business spaces are often crucial spaces for community to connects and thrives. It's through these informal gathering spaces, like the Derby and Kwatcha house,

[37] Advisory Group on Race Relations. (1991) *Report of the Nova Scotia Advisory Group on Race Relations.* https://books.google.ca/books/about/Report_of_the_Nova_Scotia_Advisory_Group.html?id=e8fQmgEACAAJ&redir_esc=y.

[38] Rutland, T. (2020) *Planning the gentrification of the North End, an interview with Ted Rutland.* The Nova Scotia Advocate. https://nsadvocate.org/2020/05/18/planning-the-gentrification-of-the-north-end-an-interview-with-ted-rutland/

that resistance springs up, where police brutality is refused, and state disinvestment is combatted.

Narration: Famously, the first gay rights protest broke out from Stonewall Inn, an illegal gay bar in Greenwich Village, New York City.[39] While there is an ongoing debate about what precisely aligned that night to spark the historic protest, it's impossible to overlook the centrality the Stonewall Inn played. The bar provided patrons with a place to openly express sexual desires that were elsewhere criminalized.[40] Because of this, it was regularly raided by the police. Had it not been for the Stonewall, a place where people gathered, under the pretext of their shared sexual deviance, it's hard to imagine, when and if, a protest of this nature would have occurred. In other words, the Stonewall facilitated a common ground upon which queers shared struggles (manifested most explicitly and violently through constant police harassment), a place where these struggles could be recognized and acted upon.

Narration: There has been a long-acknowledged history of discrimination against Black communities, including clientele and musicians in Halifax, particularly within the downtown bar scene, and by the 70s was quite extensive. This discrimination, which regularly instigated violent police encounters with Black youth, presented itself through indirect tactics like dress code violations or failure to have an I.D. [41]

Raymond [00:29:20] In North End Halifax, basically with the exception of coming with nothing on, you could come with a T-shirt and pants, shorts for that matter, a hat if you wanted or whatever. Downtown they implemented a dress code whereby you couldn't wear t-shirts.

Narration: Lamar who you heard from earlier actually took this to the Human Rights Commission.

Raymond [00:29:40] When you come downtown we have these policies and the policies were exclusionary. And they were made up to keep you from coming there. So you leave and go back to North End where you were welcome.

Narration: Not unlike the gay village where the Stonewall protests broke out, Black bars and gathering spaces within the North End offered spaces where Black communities could gather with less fear of discrimination. As a result, these bars were also spaces where the racial injustice faced elsewhere in the city could be collectively recognized and resistance could be mobilized.

Narration: In 1991, there was a fight outside a downtown bar that concluded with the Black participants being banned from re-entry into the bar, while the White combatants

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[39] Since being gay was illegal at the time, gay establishments were likewise, illegal.

[40] Most scholars argue Stonewall was predominantly frequented by cis white gay men but still more diverse than other gay establishments in the area that might have been explicity some of which were "Whites only" establishments.

[41]Jones, E. (2016, May 7). *You have to Fight for Your Right to Party*. Halifac Examiner. https://www.halifaxexaminer.ca/uncategorized/you-have-to-fight-for-your-right-to-party/

were allowed re-entry. The following night, a crowd of at least fifty youth, led by the group involved in the previous night's fight, gathered at the Derby and erupted at its usual closing time and headed downtown. The march ended in a confrontation between riot police and 150 Black youths.

Raymond: *[00:25:24]* There was a riot at one point. I forget what year it was when people from the North End went downtown, because of the mistreatment, at places downtown, I'll say. And, the police were out, and the only ones that they seemed to have arrested were people that looked like me.

Narration: Though largely dismissed by the White mainstream population as just young drunken Black men rampaging downtown and the North End, it's clear that discriminatory bar policies and antagonistic police relations, animated this night's event, commonly referred to as a race riot. This was an event connected to a long history of street protest stretching back decades, by the North End Blacks community, resistance that always springs from North End gathering spaces and that is continuously erased from consciousness.

Narration: In her essay "You have Dislodged a Boulder," Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes, "Organizing is always constrained by recognition: How do people come to actively identify in and act through a group such that its collective end […] extends toward an evolving, purposeful social movement (e.g., class politics)?".[42] Here Gilmore emphasizes a prerequisite *recognition* that propels social movements. Recognition is the moment, or the crossroads, where a group's collective needs align, and solidarity springs. In the case of the Stonewall Uprising, the bar itself facilitated this crossroads where recognition could occur. The same could be said of the Derby, or Kwatcha house, or numerous other establishments where the Black community gathered. This isn't to say that the Stonewall Inn or the Derby itself was a site of radical organizing. Rather, these were places that facilitated a certain recognition, a shared experience of alienation and police harassment, upon which solidarity could be built. It acted, in other words, as the foundation through which collective demands could be articulated and fought for.

Narration: But by the late 90s, these types of Black gathering spaces are few and far between. The Derby closed down in 1992, after the police worked to have its liquor license withdrawn.

Alia: [00:12:38] Do you remember when it closed?

Raymond: I do, I was sad, actually, I was sad. I was walking down Guardian Street by the North End library and I forget who I ran into but it was another person of African descent. And they said, you know, the jury is closing. And I said, what? And, and I really felt a profound sadness because that was our meeting place. That was the place where you hung out, as it were, where you met friends. Where you meet girlfriends or whatever. Right? Not that I depended on the girlfriends, but at the same time, you

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[42] Gilmore, R. W. (2022). *Abolition geography : essays towards liberation* (B. Bhandar & A. Toscano, Eds.). Verso. 316.

know, you met people there, and, it was such a good, positive, added atmosphere and so on. So I was really saddened when the derby closed. [00:13:34][56.0]

Narration: What does it mean for these businesses to close? It's not just that there are fewer places to shop and gather, these closures signal a decrease in the Black community's capacity to keep themselves safe or their capacity for abolitionist place-making within the neighbourhood. At the same time, the language of safety is used to target these very spaces through a combination of policing and state-facilitated gentrification. Safety then, when deployed by the state, really means safety for white communities or safety for private property owners, and it comes at the cost of others' safety, and other people's ability to live full collective lives. What is there to learn from these histories? What patterns of violence do we see repeating themselves within the neighbourhood today?

SCENE SEVEN

Narration: If you were to walk around the North End today, there would be traces of this history, but it would be hard to notice. Today for example, the impacts of a city-wide housing crisis and drug crisis appears disconnected from the structural neglect and violence of the late 20th century.

Jacky: [00:20:16] There was no homelessness in the 70s. There were horrific housing conditions like unbelievable. But it wasn't homelessness. There weren't people living in the street.

Narration: People will often assimilate the historical struggles of the North End into the issues facing the neighbourhood today. Jacky fumes with frustration at the piece that ran in the news about the North End Community Center, that sought to draw an uncritical throughline between the organizing of the past and the organizing of today.

Jacky: The piece said that North End Community Health Center was organized, you know, for the homeless population. No, it was not organized. It was organized because there were no doctors who were willing to have a practice in the north end of Halifax. That's why it was organized.

Narration: Or people assume that most residents who live in low-income housing in the North end are Black, even though most of the historical Black communities no longer live in the neighbourhood.

Raymond: *[00:58:55]* So you guys make up the majority of these housing projects! That's not so. That is really not so because the majority of people now in Uniacke Square and what is it called? Down by the Halifax Shopping Center? The pumps, of course, called the pumps. You know what I mean? Don't look like me, but yet the stereotype is: Oh, yeah, those are those welfare people, you know, and so on, so on. *[00:59:28][33.2]*

Narration: Certainly, the issues facing the North End today, have transformed, along with the demographic make-up of the neighbourhood. Of course, this reality doesn't mean the neighbourhood's history of resistance have nothing to teach us about the struggles of today. The closure of historical businesses, and the struggles these

businesses enabled, shape the North End today. As much as residents and businesses try to develop abolitionist practices today, they're doing so upon a landscape created through the destruction and displacement of past abolitionist practices. The North End remains a landscape generates social separateness and differentiation to support a gentrified landscape of capital expropriation. The concept of racial capitalism helps makes sense of the relationships between the current moment and the past.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore [2:20] Racial capitalism, which is to say all capitalism, it's not a thing it's a relation. However, if we look back throughout the history of capitalism as it developed, we see that the understanding that those who own the means of production had of their differences from those whose labor they exploited were understanding we can understand today as racial practice.[43]

Narration: Race is continuously mobilized, and renegotiated, through capitalism to organize complex boundaries between the exploitable and the unexploitable. In the North End, capitalism's neoliberal forms, constantly create new boundaries between and amongst communities which allow for new modes of exploitation. Race and capitalism continuously coalesce in the North End, shaping what the types of relationships, or coalitions, are possible. When I talk to Raymond and Lamar, they are under no illusion that anything has changed. The same systems of police violence and labour exploitation continue to populate the neighbourhood landscape.

Raymond: *[00:15:42]* They have some buzzwords today in many circles. You know, equity, diversity and inclusion without proactivity. That means diddly squat.

Lamar: *[00:46:57]* Cause if you're hiding it, you're not fixing. It's like sweeping dirt and then putting in. It's still there. You know, it's actually building up more and more of that. You just put it on the road because you're going to keep putting it under the road with the rest of the dirt. *[00:47:14][17.0]*

Raymond: *[00:37:18]*Police are here to protect the status quo. To protect the wealthy homeowners and so on. […] Because poverty sells. Poverty is profitable. That's why it continues. […] For instance, now at Tim Hortons and across, [located in the North End] they hire people that, came out of other countries because they can pay them $9 an hour as opposed to paying them 15. That is going on right now. That's exactly what they're doing. *[01:01:25][47.2]*

Narration: In other words, white supremacy, racialized land dispossession, systemic poverty, and exploitative labor practices, are not being enacted in the same ways they were in the 20th century, but their legacies live on in new and adapted ways. The North End isn't straightforwardly antagonistic to Black gathering spaces and Black political mobilization today, but it continues to create boundaries between those who are worthy of safety, those who are authorized to take up space, and those who are not. As I have shown in the previous episodes, public spaces are becoming increasingly exclusionary. Law enforcement and state violence are being used to expel poor and unhoused people from public spaces, the people who most depend on public space

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[43] antipodeonline. (2020, June 1). *Geographies of Racial Capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore* [Video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CS627aKrJI.

to survive, all under the guise of safety. This is not dissimilar from how Black gathering spaces have historically been targeted. Today, political alliances that expand the neighbourhood's racial capitalist formations are empowered. The Business Improvements Association reveals itself to be an association invested in protecting economic arrangements, mediated by relations and private property, arrangements that are inherently at odds with building a neighbourhood where people's collective needs and safety are met. What does identifying these historical throughlines reveal about abolition place-making in the North End? Can mobilizing the neighbourhood's history help build more effective forms of resistance and solidarity today? Can it make more coffee shops abolitionist?

7. CONCLUSION

I moved to the North End eight years ago. It was the first place where I chose to make a home for myself, to place-make. I lived there for over five years. Along the way, I asked myself: *How can I be here, in good relation, in this place?* A place that is stolen land, undergoing endless cycles of exploitation and dispossession. A place where the geopolitical crisis of racial capitalism is intimately lived. A place entangled in the carceral state: systems of violence, extraction, and unfreedom. How do we be here together, in this messy, wreckage of place and time? It occurred to me that the café down the street seemed as good of a place as any to try to figure this out.

As a geographer, it's fitting to be unsettled by the *here* of one's work. Geography is a discipline in a constant dispute over the meaning of place, space, and the site we call "here." I, like Gilmore, cannot formulate a sense of here that is not foundationally relational. Freedom then, a liberated set of relations, is also a place. Gilmore offers the *Abolition Geography* as a possible way there. Using abolition as a geographical method requires always labouring toward this possible place of freedom. I am trying to do just this. Seeking out abolitionist geographies, across place and time, in an attempt to envision, tend to, and enact more of them.

Audio-Doc Analysis and Reflections on the Literature

My audio-documentary series undertakes a conjunctural analysis of North End business spaces. My first script, *Can a coffee shop be abolitionist? The possibility of abolitionist place-making in Halifax's North End Neighbourhood*, examines how business spaces internally and externally perform in the North End today. In conversation with a local business owner, I explore how businesses conceive of safety within their own spaces as well as how they influence safety more broadly within the neighbourhood. As many scholars have shown, business owners and staff act like deputy cops, performing cop-like functions within their space, and calling cops when conflict arises. In other words, business spaces generally partner with the police, encouraging repressive approaches to safety and inviting more cops into the neighbourhood.

As profit-seeking consumption spaces, sustained by wage labour, this partnership with police makes sense. Police enforce the capitalist arrangements that sustain business spaces, ensuring they can maintain their primary goal: optimal profit without obstruction. Businesses that disrupt this normative formation tend to prioritize creating an inclusive and safe community space over optimal profit. Doing so meaningfully requires a business to be committed to collaboratively creating safety within their space. Or it can mean taking safety seriously as a collective project that includes staff, owners, and patrons. In these cases, businesses become momentary *commons:* spaces used by everyone for collective sustenance and celebration. These businesses increase the safety of the neighbourhood in small ways. Their presence decreases police presence within the neighborhood by working to resolve conflicts where the cops might otherwise get involved.

This analysis largely confirms the literature on business spaces. As the key contributors to this literature explain (Mazer & Rankin, 2011; Twigge-Molecey, 2014; Zukin, 2016), they

reflect a broader constellation of socioeconomic forces that facilitate capital accumulation by

creating exclusionary space in partnership with policing practices. My thesis largely confirms

these findings, but it stakes its contribution to the literature on its examination of the anomalies:

businesses that depart from this police-centric norm. The literature either ignores these anomalies

or treats them as insignificant. In contrast, my analysis reveals that considering these divergences

seriously offers a broader understanding of what meaningful collective neighbourhood safety

requires.

My second script, *Can a business association be abolitionist? The structural antagonism

of BIAs* examines how business spaces engage with broader neighbourhood social, political, and

ideological struggles. In conversation with the BIA's previous chair, I analyze how the Business

Association reckons with the social and political crises that face the North End. Despite having a

board that represents diverse community members, alongside business interests, the association

consistently promotes practices that increase the profitability of the neighbourhood. When

members of the business association attempt to disrupt this trend by promoting supportive

services, like safe injection sites, tensions arise. To resolve these tensions the association argues

that "social justice" (supporting poor, and unhoused members of the community) and "economic

development" (more capital and more profit) can be achieved collectively.

However, as the episode shows, these two goals conflict. Promoting economic

development in the North End consistently means disinvesting from infrastructures of care. This

contradiction is reconciled and masked through a third term: safety. When the association

partners with the cops to crack down on pretty crime, panhandling, theft, and disorderly

behaviour, they do it under the guise of increasing neighbourhood security and safety. In other

words, they promote policing practices that expel poor and unhoused people from public

neighbourhood spaces, the people who depend on public space to survive. The business association engages with systems of inequality by attempting to remove those most impacted from the neighbourhood altogether. They argue this is in the name of safety but it's in the name of comfort for some residents, a comfort that serves the interests of private profit and undermines social justice. So we learned that businesses join together through this association to create exclusionary business spaces and exclusionary public spaces to facilitate capital accumulation in partnership with the police.

This too confirms the literature on Business Associations (referred to in the literature as Business Improvement Areas). As many scholars have argued (Lippert, 2012; Sanscartier, 2016; Kudla, 2019), BIAs emerge as strong partners in, and advocates for, community policing practices, and further, they expand the reach of these practices by providing additional avenues through which community policing logic can operate. Again, my thesis largely confirms these findings. However, I also show how disagreement among board members can occur and other objectives can be advanced. While the end result is the same, my thesis shows that businesses do not always understand their interests in the same way – a convergence of interests sometimes has to be produced. Paying attention to these moments of disagreement may open political possibilities, including the formation of solidarities between social justice groups and *some* business actors. It also shows how BIAs can co-opt inclusive visions of neighbourhood life and the need to confront these practices and build alternative local decision-making bodies that promote real neighbourhood safety.

My third script, *Was that shop abolitionist? A brief history of the North End,* goes back in time to examine the historical landscape of business spaces, policing, and safety in the North End. In conversation with long-term residents, I explore Black gathering spaces in particular and

analyze how race factors into broader neighbourhood transformations. In the late twentieth century, the North End was impacted by intense structural neglect (the welfare state is shrinking) and increased police presence (agencies of state violence are expanding). Still, the pre-gentrified North End was, in many ways, a site of Black cultural and political vibrancy. Influenced by the Black Power movement of the 1960s, Black communities used spaces, sometimes business spaces, to resist the state and capital as well as to support, and keep each other safe. They created what I retrospectively frame as Black abolitionist place-making: the creation of key sites of solidarity where police brutality is refused, and state disinvestment is combatted. Similar to today, the police were antagonists to this abolitionist place-making and perceived these spaces of Black resistance as a threat. Then, in the name of safety, these very spaces were targeted through a combination of policing and state-facilitated gentrification. Similar to today, the language of safety was weaponized against marginalized populations, who were already the most unsafe, to mask these structural failings within the neighbourhood. Thus, the closure of Black gathering spaces signaled a decrease in the Black community's capacity to both keep themselves safe and build solidarity and resistance.

During this period, businesses were mostly serving the local white and Black working-class populations of the North End. They were sustaining residents by providing life-sustaining resources: material resources like food, liquor, banking, and clothing, and social resources like spaces for a community to gather within a neighbourhood. They were not bougie high-end places, attracting tourists, or big capital investment. As a result, they were seemingly less involved in pushing forward repressive state agendas within the neighbourhood; those political relationships seem to come later when the North End Business Association forms, and most businesses from this period have since closed and vacated the neighbourhood.

Going back in time confirms the literature on the relationship between the gentrification processes and community policing practices. As many scholars have argued (Heatherton, 2018; Beck, 2020; Smith et al., 2021), gentrification promotes the creation of exclusionary social spaces in conjunction with various post-industrial urban policies and practices like policing. It also confirms the literature that suggests that aggressive policing is more prominent on the gentrification frontier–within previously disinvested, gentrified adjacent neighbourhoods (Laniyoni, 2018; Beck, 2020; Smith et al., 2021). The main contribution of this episode to the literature is to show certain pre-gentrification Black spaces were political and, indeed, abolitionist. What gentrification feeds on, then, are not just the disinvested residential and commercial spaces of the working-class, spaces evince a "rent gap" and the possibility of profit. It also feeds on political spaces, spaces constructed in opposition to racial capitalism and the police. Recognizing this is important for scholars seeking to understand the relationship between gentrification and policing, but also for activists and residents of gentrifying neighbourhoods. The North End did not see new police initiatives simply with the advance of gentrification in the 1990s; it was populated with numerous policing initiatives in the years before accelerated gentrification took hold.

So can a Coffee Shop Be Abolitionist?

Revisiting the historical geography of the North End reveals that radical place-making has a long and vibrant history in the neighbourhood. Business spaces, like Ramblers, that are disrupting state quo practices and creating new conditions for a safer world, have always existed. The history of Black resistance in the North End shows that marginalized communities, for whom safety is never given and so it must be made collectively, have always been radical place-

making; they've had to. So business spaces can be sites of abolition geography. However, they tend to be anomalies, set against numerous other businesses that facilitate capital accumulation, create exclusionary space, and partner with policing.

For better, and for worse, business spaces influence practices around neighbourhood safety. And as spaces where residents gather, they also influence how safety within, and outside their space is navigated and understood. If this is true then business spaces have a role to play in the abolitionist struggle. Protecting, nourishing, and building radical business spaces is part of the abolitionist project. We need to keep these spaces open and protect them so their histories can live on and continue to inform the fight toward liberation. It occurs to me that as private spaces, largely ignored by the state, business spaces could offer vital avenues for radical resistance.

Within the literature, businesses are often referred to as quasi-public spaces. This opaque boundary between public and private might be quite useful when mobilized effectively. After all, spaces of radical inclusion and resistance have often begun underground, and often require some level of anonymity. Businesses might become sites of radical liberation, albeit imperfectly, and perhaps only momentarily. Their ability to serve as both public space and private space, outside of state control, could be used to mobilize the local communities while avoiding state co-option.

Further Inquires

In trying to situate my conversation with Elly in the broader history of the North End, I've been particularly curious about how relationships, and potential solidarities, between newer and older residents have been mediated and shaped over time. I keep thinking about how rad a coffee shop could be if it were created in the lineage of Kwacha House, by people who were invested in the historical struggle of Black abolitionist place-making. But most business owners in the North

End today have little to no connection to the historical struggles of the neighbourhood. Today, more and more high-income residents and upscale businesses are moving into the neighbourhood.

But in between a significant portion of the Black population being displaced and now, many lower-income residents came and went. In the 2000s there was a large influx of queer people artists and generally lower-income white people moving in. Today, these communities are being pushed out by similar systems that historically displaced Black working-class communities, albeit with less overt racial violence. With more time, I would be interested in conducting further research about this period. In particular, I would like to explore how business spaces throughout the 2000s and 2010s have facilitated and prevented meaningful solidarity between historical communities and newer residents, through this transitional period. In my interview with Jacky, we discussed the role that white supremacy has played structurally, and intimately, in preventing these sorts of coalitions from being built across time. However, there was no room to include this.

Epigraph

I don't live in Halifax anymore but I'm working at a coffee shop again. It pays enough to live in Montreal and offers me enough time to do the projects that don't pay. It's not a leftist business with radical posters on its wall. But when I can I give free coffee and food to people who can't pay. I let anyone use the washroom. Sometimes, police officers frequent the space. On long days, the hours feel empty, and not my own. On good days, I feel so connected to the

communities that gather in this place. One night, frantically, mopping the floors, not wanting to cost my boss more than necessary for the task at hand, my coworker reminds me to take my time. Our labour is worth far more than 15.75 an hour. Why not labour loosely? Put some music on. Remember why we're here.

The café is in the Mile End. Before it was this Italian café, it was a Greek spot, called Navarino. Most of our patrons are regulars. Many of them used to be regulars at Navarino. If I didn't work here, I could live in this neighbourhood and never met Mark, or Cerine, or Pierre, or Rom, who've been living in the neighbourhood for longer than I've been alive. They tell me about their storied lives in the neighbourhood. I tell them about mine and the interview podcast I co-host on defunding the SPVM and reimagining collective safety in Montreal.

Sometimes we argue about what safety and care look like. Sometimes, they tell me who to interview next. This place is full of contradictions: hopeful and violent. There is love among strangers and conflict between friends. Sometimes, it feels like we are making a radical space, of recognition and solidarity. Sometimes, I'm sure we're not. But I'm always surprised that, despite almost everything, people keep coming back, every day, to be here. Maybe, they're also asking themselves, *how to be here in good relation—together—in this place?*

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