the revolution starts at home

CONFRONTING INTIMATE VIOLENCE WITHIN ACTIVIST COMMUNITIES

EDITED BY
Ching-In Chen
Jai Dulani
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

PREFACE BY
Andrea Smith

south end press
BROOKLYN, NY :: BOSTON, MA :: READ. WRITE. REVOLT.

Selection, compilation, and introduction © 2011 by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani, and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha
Preface © 2011 by Andrea Smith
All individual pieces © 2011 in the name of their respective authors.
All rights reserved.

First edition, 2011

Any properly footnoted quotation of up to 500 sequential words may be used without permission, as long as the total number of words quoted does not exceed 2,000. For longer quotations or for a greater number of total words, please write for permission to South End Press.

Cover art: Cristy C. Road
Cover design: Benjamin Shaykin
Page design and production: Jocelyn Burrell/South End Press collective
Printed with union labor in Canada by Transcontinental Printing

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The revolution starts at home : confronting intimate violence within activist communities / edited by Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha. —1st ed.
p. cm.
Includes index.
ISBN 978-0-89608-794-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Intimate partner violence. 2. Same-sex partner abuse. I. Chen, Ching-In, 1978– II. Dulani, Jai. III. Piepzna-Samarasinha, Leah Lakshmi, 1975–
HV6626.R485 2011
362.82'92--dc22
2010054160

South End Press gratefully acknowledges the major institutional support of Medgar Evers College of the City University of New York for providing a physical and intellectual home for the world of independent publishing.

South End Press
Medgar Evers College
1650 Bedford Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11225
www.southendpress.org

18 17 16 15 14 13 12 11 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

contents

xiii Preface
Andrea Smith

xix Introduction
Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani & Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

PART ONE

safety at the intersections of intimate, community & state violence

5 Reclaiming Queer & Trans Safety
Morgan Bassichis

25 Ending Oppression. Building Solidarity. Creating Community Solutions.
Meiver De la Cruz & Carol Gomez
MATAHARI: EYE OF THE DAY

57 It Takes Ass to Whip Ass
Understanding & Confronting Violence Against Sex Workers
a roundtable discussion with
Miss Major, Mariko Passion & Jessica Yee
INTRODUCED & EDITED BY JULIET NOVEMBER

PREFACE

Andrea Smith

The Revolution Starts at Home is an amazing book that signals how much analysis and praxis have changed within the anti-violence movement. Twenty years ago when I first became involved in the movement, even prior to the 1994 passage of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), it was almost impossible to question the movement's reliance on the criminal legal system. In fact, it was difficult to even see the anti-violence movement as a movement. Most programs were almost entirely funded by the state. We had become a network of social service providers and legal system advocates. We had become so single-issue oriented that it did not even occur to most anti-violence coalitions to organize against police brutality, anti-immigration legislation, or military violence. Instead, many anti-violence programs support the police state and militarism as solutions to gender violence. The assumption that the

criminal legal system was friend to the anti-violence movement went unquestioned. When the few critics there were would ask why we were supporting a system that was increasingly incarcerating poor communities and communities of color, we were silenced before we could even finish our sentences.

Of course there were many organized women of color anti-violence organizations and caucuses. Yet we did not question the larger logics of the anti-violence movement. We strove to provide more inclusive services, but we did not question the actual services themselves. We created bilingual hotlines, "culturally sensitive" training programs, and ethnicity-specific shelter services. But we never asked ourselves if this approach was the best way to end violence against women of color. We organized for inclusion in the anti-violence movement but did not question what we were trying to be included in.

In 1999, Critical Resistance: Beyond the Prison Industrial Complex organized its first conference. Critical Resistance helped popularize the principles of prison abolition. It provided a framework for many of us who had been involved in the anti-violence movement and were skeptical of its reliance on the criminal legal system. We could do more than simply share concerns about criminalization: we now had an analysis of why the prison industrial complex was not the solution to anything, including gender violence. This framework then provided a foundation for the development, in 2000, of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. INCITE! aspired to do more than call attention to racism in the anti-violence movement. Instead, it wanted the movement to become a movement. Rather than focus on social services delivery or court advocacy, it posited that gender violence must be understood within larger systems of capitalism, settler colonialism, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. Social services are important, but if that is all we work for we are simply enabling people to survive an unjust system. Instead, we actually wanted to change these systems. But to do so, we had to build mass movements of peoples who were no longer willing to live under structures of violence. Our focus would have to be on political mobilization and base-building.

Of course, as this book points out, one of the major contradictions in political mobilization is that we often replicate the same hierarchical systems we

claim to be dismantling. Gender violence is as prevalent within progressive movements as it is in society at large. As the editors of this volume remind us, the revolution does indeed start at home. This phrase should not be interpreted as a depoliticized call to focus on personal self-development instead of building movements to dismantle white supremacy, capitalism, and imperialism. Rather, this phrase reminds us that for our movements to be successful they must prefigure the societies we seek to build. In addition, as I have argued elsewhere, movements must dispense with the idea that we can worry about gender violence "after the revolution," because gender violence is a primary strategy for white supremacy, colonialism, and capitalism. Heteropatriarchy is the logic by which all other forms of social hierarchy become naturalized. The same logic underlying the belief that men should dominate women on the basis of biology (a logic that also presupposes a gender binary system) underlies the belief that the elites of a society naturally dominate everyone else. Those who have an interest in dismantling settler colonialism, white supremacy, and capitalism must by necessity have a stake in dismantling heteropatriarchy.

Thus, INCITE! and other organizations with similar philosophies realized that we must develop strategies that address state violence and interpersonal violence simultaneously. In doing so, we realized that we had to question our reliance on the criminal legal system as the solution to ending gender violence, and instead recognize the state as both perpetrator and beneficiary of gender violence. The question then arises: *If the criminal legal system is not the solution, what is?* Unfortunately, many of the alternatives to incarceration that are promoted under the "restorative justice model" have not developed sufficient safety mechanisms for survivors of domestic/sexual violence. "Restorative justice" is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of programs that attempt to address crime from a restorative and reconciliatory rather than punitive framework, such as that of the US criminal legal system, which focuses solely on punishing the perpetrator and removing that person from society through incarceration. Restorative justice attempts to involve all parties (perpetrators, victims, and community members) in determining the appropriate response to a crime in an effort to restore the

community to wholeness. These models are often much more successful than punitive justice models. However, the problem with these models in addressing sexual/domestic violence is that they work only when the community unites in holding perpetrators accountable. In cases of sexual and domestic violence, the community often sides with the perpetrator rather than the victim. Thus, developing community-based responses to violence cannot rely on a romanticized notion of "community" that is not sexist, homophobic, or otherwise problematic. We cannot assume that there is even an intact community to begin with. Our political task then becomes to *create* communities of accountability.

What we see in this book is the work of many groups doing precisely that. They do not seek a band-aid, quick fix approach to ending gender violence. Instead they seek to end *structures* of violence. Their models are experimentations in trying to do more than just crisis intervention, and are actually structured around creating the society we would like to live in. Such work is necessarily provisional; the strategies we come up with will have their limitations and will have to change as our social conditions change. Yet they are important because they force us out of a crisis-based reaction mode into a creative space of envisioning new possibilities.

At the same time, these writers remind us that we cannot ignore present-day emergencies as we build new futures. We cannot expect to engage in "pure" strategies untainted by the current system. Thus, it is important to remember that prison abolition as well as community accountability are positive rather than negative projects. The goal is not to tell survivors that they can never call the police or engage the criminal legal system. The question is not whether a survivor should call the police, but rather why we have given survivors no other option but to call the police.

As Native feminists in particular have noted, in creating alternatives to the criminal legal system we necessarily confront the need to create alternatives to the settler-state. If we focus only on community accountability without a larger critique of the state, we risk framing community accountability as simply an add-on to the criminal legal system. Because anti-violence work

has focused on advocacy, we have not developed strategies for "due process," leaving that to the state. When our political imaginaries are captured by the state, we can then presume that the state should be left to administer "justice" while communities serve as supplement to this regime, supporting it and the fundamental injustice of a settler state founded on slavery, genocide, and the exploitation of immigrant labor. Further, in so doing we do not allow ourselves to imagine new visions for liberatory nationhood that are not structured on logics of hierarchy, violence, and domination. Fortunately, indigenous peoples are rearticulating conceptions of nationhood and self-determination that are liberatory not only for indigenous peoples but all others as well.

In the end, the "revolution at home" that is needed is indeed a real revolution. It requires a dismantling of capitalism, white supremacy, and the settler state. Community accountability is not a "model program" that can easily be funded through the nonprofit industrial complex because it is a strategy for radical social transformation. It's a long road, but *The Revolution Starts at Home* provides an excellent starting point for developing a movement to end violence in all its forms.

INTRODUCTION

Ching-In Chen, Jai Dulani &
Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

HOW AND WHY WE CAME TO THIS PROJECT

ching-in... When I was seventeen years old, I began a relationship with a co-worker at the movie theater where I worked, and my family freaked out—he was a Brazilian immigrant without what they considered a "good job" or "good educational background." For the first time in my life, I lied to my family and snuck out of the house in the middle of the night to meet him. Eventually, my mother told me to sign a contract that I would break off my relationship with him or not be allowed out of the house to go to college, and I signed. I emerged from that experience resolved not to let anyone else control or decide for me whom I was involved with, or what kind of relationship(s) I chose to have. But I also became very protective

and stubborn about my intimate relationships. It became hard for me to open up and let others know what was going on in those spaces of my life.

Four years later, after moving to a city where I knew no one and while in another relationship I knew my family wouldn't approve of, I turned my back on my family and friends. We were stressed out about immigration status and making the rent. In the late afternoons and evenings, I canvassed for a rape crisis center with a group of women who were largely rape and sexual assault survivors, and my partner was driving a cab on the night shift.

When our relationship became volatile, I had no one to turn to and no support system. At the time, I didn't feel part of any community. Part of my relationship experience was the feeling of being isolated—no friends, no place to go to outside of our apartment, no organization where I felt I belonged or that knew me and my history.

Years later, when I started building a circle of activists who shared similar commitments to social justice, community had come to mean not having to feel alone and isolated, being hopeful that there were ways to figure out how to feel safe in whatever, whichever ways we needed to be. It meant being able to count on someone outside of myself, which was very hard for me to do. When a friend whom I had met through community work needed to escape from an abusive husband, we worked out a system that she would call me when she was ready and I would drive over and get her out of there. And it worked!

But I soon learned that not everything was that easy or simple or clear cut. A good friend confided in me about her abusive relationship, but wanted me to act to the outside world like nothing was going on, and we were all part of the same organizing collective. I entered into relationships where I didn't know what to do because we were doing this kind of work together. Sometimes my friends hadn't yet figured out what could be helpful, or didn't want to talk about it. Sometimes I felt too far away to be of much use or help, or didn't realize the impact of what I was doing until much later.

This anthology is something that I would have loved, read, found useful throughout my journeys, both in the situations I found myself in and in supporting my loved ones. I hope you find it useful as well.

jai Dulani…I come to this project
as a survivor and witness of intimate partner violence in activist communities
as someone who has gotten it all wrong; misjudged a situation and participated in someone's exile
as someone who was called out by a chosen family member for crossing a boundary while drinking
as someone who is just beginning to fully understand and take responsibility for my healing and the impact of my trauma on other people
as someone who believes in the power of sharing our stories.

Leah…In 1996, I am twenty-one. I am fucking my lover in a field outside a hippie music festival where we've both gotten in for free by staffing the Anti-Racist Action table. I am falling in love with my mixed-race, queer of color, survivor, separated-at-birth brother, totally sure that this is the amazing, transformative relationship I have been waiting for my whole life. It absolutely was. And it also became a relationship full of long fights that went nowhere, screaming matches in the street, and choke holds I couldn't talk about during the meeting of the prison justice newspaper we both attended the next day.

When this violence happened in our relationship, I didn't ever think about going to the cops as an option that would keep me safe. My partner was a queer man of color who had already done time for "resisting arrest" after being beaten by the police. He was stopped every day by a cop who wanted to make extra sure he had lights and a bell on his bike, who wanted to know where he was going, who wanted to know if he was selling weed. Organizers with a prison justice newspaper, involved in people of color anti-police brutality organizations and many other coalitions, our phone stayed connected even when we didn't pay the bill for months; once, CSIS (Canadian Security Intelligence Service) agents showed up at our door. When neighbors in our broke-ass apartment building, tired of our screaming, called the cops on us, the first thing the police did was ask about my immigration status and my

partner's probation; not what I needed to feel safe. I had no faith that any prison would lift the weight of oppression, trauma, and rage off my lover—who had, incidentally, said that if I sent him to prison, he would take me to the nearest cop shop, shoot as many cops as he could, and kill me and himself, before he let himself be locked up again.

The problem was, we didn't really know what to do instead. I believed, with my whole heart, in the power of human beings to change, in the power of self-transformation. My lover believed in it, too. After he body slammed me into the sidewalk and I ran onto the bus, I told him we would never be lovers again, but we were still, essentially, partnered. He dropped out of the batterer intervention program, saying those men were nothing like him or who he wanted to be. He went to two elders in our community for guidance. But two years later, with no change in the frightening parts of his behavior, I left. A year later, I took a job at a second wave, feminist of color–led anti-violence crisis line. The workers there believed that it was a mistake to think, or even suggest, that abusers could ever change—they just promised they would to keep their partners trapped in the cycle of violence. We knew the cops were terrible, that restraining orders didn't work, that First Nations people, immigrants, and cis and trans people of color who called us were more likely to be harmed than served by the criminal legal system. But what else could we do?

This book is an attempt to answer that question.

why this book? political context—historically & here and now

This book began with our individual stories—stories of surviving relationships that were beautiful and dangerous; of trying to move toward safety, justice, and healing without using the cops or the courts; of bushwhacking our way through alleyways, back roads, starlit fields without maps—and it is our individual stories that remain at this book's core. But our stories are so much bigger than our individual experiences—gathered together, they are the stories of everyone searching for, and finding, fresh-cut ways of keeping ourselves, our fam and our communities safe. As Alisa Bierra, cofounder of Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA) in Seattle, puts it, we go on "epic adventures and conversations into community accountability." And we don't know where or when it will all end. What we *do* know is that the criminal legal system does not help us survive. And we have a fierce commitment to surviving and thriving, to figuring out the nitty-gritty details of how we will liberate ourselves from the violence of prisons and other so-called justice systems, without abandoning anyone who has survived violence.

What we call "community accountability" (some call it transformative justice, others call it as many names as there are people) has existed for as long as we hold collective memory. A simple definition of community accountability: any strategy to address violence, abuse or harm that creates safety, justice, reparations, and healing, without relying on police, prisons, childhood protective services, or any other state systems. Instead of police and prisons, community accountability strategies depend on something both potentially more accessible and more complicated: the communities surrounding the person who was harmed and the person who caused harm.

Many people are also working with the term "transformative justice." The organization generationFIVE defines transformative justice as "an approach to respond to and prevent child sexual abuse and other forms of violence that puts transformation and liberation at the heart of the change. It is an approach that looks at the experiences of both the individuals and communities involved, and the larger social conditions at work; an approach that seeks to integrate both personal and social transformation."[1]

"Restorative justice" is a term that many people might find more familiar. In restorative justice frameworks, those who have been harmed take an active role in addressing that harm and/or violence (whether it be gender violence, petty theft, or assault), and those who have caused harm are expected to take responsibility for their actions, to repair the harm they've done—for example, by apologizing, returning stolen money, or doing community service. The focus is on restoring, as much as possible, the situation to the conditions as they were before the harm. However, critics of restorative justice argue that there are serious limits to restoring the situation to what it was before the harm—what if

the situation was shitty in the first place? And, as Native feminist and INCITE! cofounder Andrea Smith has pointed out, restorative justice has often failed women, especially women of color, facing intimate or stranger/state violence:

> For the community to hold somebody accountable they have to actually think that what happened was wrong. So therefore you can't rely on a romanticized notion of community or even assume that community actually exists. For a community-based response to be effective requires a political organizing component to it that actually creates communities that offer accountability.[2]

The Revolution Starts at Home: Confronting Intimate Violence Within Activist Communities is documentation of ongoing, dynamic movement history/ies, histories that even now are evolving and growing, of people struggling over "family business" and various forms of violence while seeking solutions that really create the kind of change that can crack everything open. Spanning past, present, and future, there has been and continues to be conversation and disagreement about what works, and what fails, when we refuse to accept intimate violence as an inevitability and reject its characterization as secondary to "the struggle." In the early stages of our work on this project, we wanted the anthology to document the lessons and stories that grew out of ten years of concentrated work on community accountability. For many of us, a key moment where we saw possibilities of how we might truly transform our communities came in 2000, when radical women of color organized "The Color of Violence: Violence Against Women of Color" conference at University of California, Santa Cruz,[3] to strategize around ending *all* forms of violence against women of color, the institutional and the interpersonal. Out of that first gathering, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence was formed, and, in 2003, they created "Community Accountability Working Document: Principles/Concerns/Strategies/Models." Offering 70 different strategies that people of color could use to intervene into violence against women and trans people of color without relying on the state, this watershed document frankly

addressed many of the concerns and questions we were dreaming on—the importance of not forgetting to center survivor safety and needs while saying "fuck the police"; the allure of, and problems with, public shaming of abusers as a tactic; and, perhaps most difficult of all, our real questions about whether community members who behaved in violent, manipulative ways could really ever transform, and ultimately end, those patterns. INCITE! followed this work, in 2004, with their report "Community Accountability Within People of Color Progressive Movements," spelling out in detail the particular ways perpetrators of harm within people of color movements find to minimize and excuse acts of abuse and violence, and to derail attempts to create justice for those acts of harm.[4] INCITE!'s work has inspired many of us working within feminist of color–led movements and communities to begin thinking through exactly how these "epic adventures" would work, and provided needed tools for the journey.

Across North America, other movement organizations, such as Critical Resistance, Northwest Network, and Sista II Sista, began fumbling steps toward the development of anti-violence projects for creating safety in our communities without using the state, cops, or courts. Early initiatives—like Sista II Sista's Sistas Liberated Ground, Critical Resistance's Harm Free Zone, and Northwest Network's Friends Are Reaching Out—asked delicious questions:[5] *What if we said a section of Bushwick, Brooklyn, was a no-go zone for rape and partner abuse? What if we sat on the stoop, talked to folks on the block where our office was, and began weaving a web of folks who agreed to try something other than calling the police when it came to violence? What if, as queer and trans folks, we reached out to our friends who were in "love jail"—fallen off the face of the earth into a new partner's arms—and made sure we kept our friend fam connections strong, so that when and if the relationship began to tilt into unhealthy/crazy/abusive land, that friend wasn't so isolated and knew their friends had their back?* All over, folks began to sign on to this work: small and big collectives (ones with names like CARA, Philly's Pissed/Philly Stands Up, Kindred, Northwest Network, Creative Interventions, Audre Lorde Project's Safe Outside the System Collective, Community United Against Violence,

and generationFIVE—many of whose efforts are documented within this book), as well as individuals and small groups of friends who cared about their loved ones facing violence.

It wasn't easy. No one knew the right answers. We have stumbled, made mistakes, learned from them, gotten back up from our failures and train wrecks. We have every imperfect, deeply needed story in between. But after ten years, some things we know for sure. We dream and breathe and whisper and shout, at a time when the dominant paradigm for dealing with violence in our communities is at a crossroads. Over a decade since INCITE! was founded, feminist of color analyses of violence and how to transform it are everywhere—in movements that were just a glint in our eye. Maybe not as ubiquitous as direct TV or cell phones, but spreading from Philadelphia to Tucson, Oakland to Detroit—study groups, big and small; an entire track of the national Allied Media Conference; the Philly Stands Up People's Movement Assembly at the 2010 United States Social Forum, which filled a huge conference room with approximately 300 people from all over North America—some were new and curious about community accountability, but a majority of the activists had already talked about, thought through, and experimented with community accountability/transformative justice frameworks. A spirit of excited exchange—and transformation—was definitely in the air.

the revolution starts at home: from resource to transformation

In 2003, we began work on a zine with a focus on partner abuse and sexual assault in activist communities that would later become the basis for this anthology. We came together after sharing conversations and strategies in community spaces, struggling with how to do work that confronted these forms of violence that were "dirty little secrets" within our progressive movements and communities.

The vast majority of feminist or self-help literature addressing partner abuse offers few stories that looked and sounded like ours. Importantly, second wave white feminism addressed cisgender men's violence against women as a system of oppression and not as a personal issue. However, paralleling the second wave feminist movement's shortcomings in addressing the realities of women of color, queer women, and gender nonconforming people, these feminist manifestos failed to embrace an intersectional analysis of power that recognizes the multiple and complex identities we each hold in relation to privilege and oppression. Their critiques of gender violence also failed to address the disturbing paradox of prevalent intimate violence within activist communities, and the degree of collusion, refusal, and/or incapacity to address this urgent issue demonstrated even by anti-violence movement "experts." Crucially, this analysis ignored a stark reality: Anyone can choose to abuse; anyone can be abused. In contrast, as feminists of color, we knew that our stories were much more complex—that race, class, gender, ability, sexuality, immigration status, and more contributed to our choices and our relationships. Although we believed in the power of breaking silence that many earlier feminists espoused, the reality of intimate violence within our activist communities was messier and much more complex. For many of us, the exit strategies and options that might be available to white, middle-class feminists usually did not work well for us. We wanted to find a way to stay within our communities and not have to leave. We hoped that the specific truth of our stories would be enough, as famously prophesied by the poet Muriel Rukeyser, to split open the world.[6]

Our original 2003 call for submissions asked for "road maps and concrete stories." We used the word *concrete* over and over again: while we had seen groundbreaking and wonderful ideas, such as the INCITE! community accountability principles, circulating in our communities, we wanted and needed to know how they worked in practice. We wanted stories of how it could be done!

Our original flyer featured two clip-art images—a group of silhouetted protesters on one side and, on the other, an image of two individuals facing each other, signs in hand but isolated from the rest. We had tasted that isolation and choked on it. We wanted to purge it, understand it, trace it back to everyone who saw it and everyone who didn't, and figure out why. So, we asked:

> Was your abusive girlfriend's best friend working on the DV hotline? Were you able to successfully kick an abuser out of your group? Were you able to find a solution where accountability didn't mean isolation for either of you? Was your abusive partner a high-profile activist? Did your anti-police brutality group fear retaliation if you went to the cops? Was the "healing circle" a bunch of bullshit? Was the trans community so small that you didn't want you or your partner to lose it? We want to hear about what worked and what didn't, what you learned, what you wish folks had done, what you never want to have happen again. We want to hear about folks' experiences confronting abusers, both by using the cops & courts and by methods outside the criminal justice system.

These were our questions. At no point during the six years that we worked on this project did the Revolution Starts at Home collective members live in the same city. Six years is a long time to communicate over email and conference calls. Each of us going through our own transitions: shifting homes, jobs, relationships; navigating loss, health challenges, and triggers. There was a lot that shook the earth beneath us. But what called us back to each other, time and time again, were our questions. Our hunger for answers, solutions. The sustenance we received from the stories. The stories our friends confessed they were too fearful to write. The stories written but retracted as boundaries and safety were negotiated and renegotiated.

Though we desired this to be a safe and supportive experience, and a useful tool for those who were confronting these situations, this was not always an easy process. We quickly realized that blasting our call for submissions out to listservs was not enough. We were asking folks to reveal truths their bodies remembered yet their communities didn't hold; to unwrap their broken hearts because we believed them and promised we were listening. We worked with writers to make their safety plans and think through "what the book could hold"—how and how much of their stories they could share without jeopardizing their safety. Some writers we love withdrew their

stories. Some ex-partners of writers came forward with their own versions of the story told.

As more and more submissions arrived, we struggled through a long distance collective submission review and editing process. We worked to be compassionate toward each other as we juggled multiple commitments, busy lives, and our own healing processes. As Cherríe Moraga writes in the foreword to the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color:*

> If we are interested in building a movement that will not constantly be subverted by internal differences, then we must build from the inside out, not the other way around. Coming to terms with the suffering of others has never meant looking away from our own.[7]

When we began this project, just getting the stories was enough for us. But by the time the zine was printed in 2008 and downloaded hundreds of times from the INCITE! website for free, distributed to hungry hands at the tenth-anniversary conference celebrating Critical Resistance (an organization working to abolish the prison industrial complex), cited on numerous websites and blogs, used as a resource for countless groups, reviewed by *Bitch* magazine and *Feminist Review,* and solicited for publication by a certain editor at South End Press, our focus had shifted a bit. We still believed that collecting and distributing the stories was powerful. Copying a huge-ass zine, however, is expensive and time-consuming. So when we received an offer to work on it as a book—with the caveat *Could you expand it, please?*—we knew we also wanted the book to document the past ten years of community accountability work, and invited many of the collectives who have been putting this work into practice to share their stories. This is not at all meant to suggest that organizations are at the end point of their growth in confronting partner abuse. On the contrary, we recognize that many organizations—both funded nonprofits and organizing collectives—have been building, studying, struggling, fucking, and getting better ever since. We wanted to

witness and capture that collective work and movement building.

In editing and expanding the original zine for release in book format, five years after our original call for submissions, we realized that a lot had changed. From isolated stories and collectives figuring out how to better put these ideas into practice, the work—and some of the formations created to do the work—had grown, ended, expanded, and been utterly transformed. By the time our zine appeared, some collectives had been working together for close to ten years, while others were just forming, building on the hard-won movement experience of that past decade. The book you hold in your hands still contains first-person stories, but it also contains movement stories—stories of groups sharing what they learned along the way as they built a fragile, yet powerfully strong network.

we are here because you were there

While the concepts "community accountability," "transformative justice," and "restorative justice" have sparked dialogue, organizing, and hope, we know that this work builds on decades of feminist activism in our communities. We realize that the struggles to make our movements for justice safe and our communities free from state violence have long been intertwined. As we study our collective memories and learn from and pass on community knowledge, we can borrow pieces of what has worked and leave behind what hasn't.

In January 2010, the Revolution Starts at Home collective joined Creative Interventions, the Safe Outside the System Collective of the Audre Lorde Project, and the Young Women's Empowerment Project to organize a national gathering of organizations using community-based strategies to address violence. This gathering brought together women of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, trans, and gender nonconforming (LGBTSTGNC) people of color from around the country. Participants created a timeline documenting key moments in our movement histories that shaped our understanding of, and commitment to, community accountability. Clearly, as we began to see, the work we had gathered to document wasn't limited to the past decade:

— One participant spoke of her elders recalling their memories of the Jim Crow South. Since African American communities could not rely on racist, murderous police, "the big guys" of the community would step up and intervene in domestic violence situations.

— We remembered too the watershed publication of *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color,* edited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa in the 1980s, which included so many of us within its pages. *This Bridge*'s courageous analysis of intersectional oppression and intramovement marginalization paved the way for this collection. It is poignant to note that the closing sentence of Anzaldúa and Moraga's introduction is, "The revolution begins at home."[8] In addition, we believe it vital that our movements remember and honor the sheer struggle and victory of publishing such fiercely sharp and radical voices. The publisher's note to the second edition (1983) of *This Bridge* states:

> When Persephone Press, Inc., a white women's press of Watertown, Massachusetts, and the original publishers of *Bridge,* ceased operation in the Spring of 1983, this book had already gone out of print. After many months of negotiations, the co-editors were finally able to retrieve control of their book, whereupon Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press of New York agreed to republish it. The following, then, is the second edition of *This Bridge Called My Back,* conceived of and produced entirely by women of color.[9]

— In 1974, the Combahee River Collective, a collective of Black feminists, released the "Combahee River Collective Statement," declaring "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives."[10]

- In Jaffna, Sri Lanka, in the late 1970s, Poorani ("the whole woman") House[11] existed as a transformative shelter for women facing abuse. It operated outside of the state and in defiance of repression by both the Sinhalese government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.
- In revolutionary organizations of color in the US associated with male-centered leadership, such as the Black Panthers and Young Lords, radical visionaries like Elaine Brown and Iris Morales organized from within to center their experiences and challenges to male dominance within the core values of their organizations. For instance, women in the Young Lords Party successfully demanded that the point "Machismo must be revolutionary...not oppressive" be part of the Party's primary governing document, "The 13 Point Program and Platform for the Young Lords Party."

We stand with our ancestors at our back, holding us up.

overview of critical themes & questions

We've organized this book into four sections. The first section, "Safety at the Intersections of Intimate, Community, and State Violence," looks at creating safety while living and organizing at the intersections of intimate and state violence. What happens when your abusive partner is a cop? When you are criminalized on the daily for being a sex worker? What happens when the court doesn't provide translators and your abuser speaks fluent English? What happens when you're pushed out of the labor movement because of rampant sexual assault by a leader? When sexual violence is deemed less important than the organizing campaign?

Morgan Bassichis traces how Community United Against Violence (CUAV) grappled with critical questions of leadership, sustainability, and their relationship to the state as an anti-violence organization transforming from a traditional social services–model to a collective with a membership base. Juliet November interviews three sex worker activists—Stonewall veteran and TGI Justice Project founder Miss Major, Native Youth Sexual Health Network founder Jessica Yee, and performance artist and activist Mariko Passion—in a roundtable discussion about what creating safety from intimate violence means for sex workers, who are especially vulnerable to police abuse. Queer Black feminist writer and UBUNTU member Alexis Pauline Gumbs, in an interview with Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha spanning two years, describes UBUNTU's queer, Black, survivor-led work creating safety in Durham, NC—from organizing after the 2006 Duke University rape case to work intervening in partner abuse within their community. Meiver De la Cruz and Carol Gomez explore MataHari's work creating justice and safety within immigrant communities in Boston and beyond, and the complexities of dealing with law enforcement when undocumented.

The second section, "On Survivorship," challenges us to take a hard look at the politics of survival and what it means to our communities. For Gina de Vries, being a homewrecker was the only way she could survive and get out of her abusive queer relationship. Shannon Perez-Darby pushes us to honor the full humanity of the survivor beyond the innocent victim/evil abuser dichotomy, posing this difficult question: *How can survivors take responsibility for the range of choices they make?* Peggy Munson complicates survivorship by revealing how abusive partners are often lifelines for survivors with disabilities because intimate partner violence (IPV) organizations and our larger movement are frequently unable or unwilling, because of structural ableism, to meet or even perceive the needs of survivors with disabilities. Ana-Maurine Lara writes about the "rights and responsibilities" of survivorship, and reminds us what is possible, and what is at stake, when it comes to trauma and healing within activist communities.

The third section, "(Re)claiming Body, (Re)claiming Space," connects individual stories and experiences, and imagines what it would look like for survivors to claim agency and access their own power. Vanessa Huang's poem, "Manifesto," articulates a hope for a home where we can all be liberated. Bran Fenner thinks about consent, reflecting on the importance of establishing and respecting boundaries in an intimate relationship. Timothy Colm, a member of Philly's Pissed, shares how he was able to set boundaries with his abuser and go through a community accountability process with him. N. reveals some

of the complex realities involved in using the legal system and going to court with a queer masculine partner. Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's poem, "when your parents made you," bears witness to her choosing to tell her own story despite threats from her former partner.

The fourth section, "We Are Ready Now," looks at how community can come together to hold perpetrators accountable, taking theory into breathing practice. The Challenging Male Supremacy Project (CMS) shares their process of cisgender men creating accountability circles and what that experience looked like. The Chrysalis Collective holds a perpetrator of sexual violence accountable and walks us through the nitty-gritty details of an actual community accountability process: how to anticipate and prepare for backlash, how to create a culture of trust and respect while holding another activist accountable, how to evaluate process. Orchid Pusey and gita mehrotra of the Transforming Silence Into Action (TSIA) project and Connie Burk of The Northwest Network remind us how imperative it is to look at the values of our process—and how we must learn to understand violence in its context to recognize when unhealthy behavior is a pattern of control and when it is in response to abuse.

> "Are you sure, sweetheart, that you want to be well?... Just so's you're sure, sweetheart, and ready to be healed, cause wholeness is no trifling matter. A lot of weight when you're well."
> —Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters*

> "Are you willing to let the work transform you?"
> —Adrienne Maree Brown

We are clear that we don't own these ideas, and that they are by no means the only ideas in the world about transformative justice. We want this book to be a community builder, an educational resource, a toolkit, a prayer, and documentation of a collective effort to document where we are with this work.

We dream of how this book—going even further than the zine—is going to be picked up, used, argued with, and transcended. We can't wait to edit *The Revolution Starts at Home: The Next Generation* in ten or twenty years. We can't wait to live and breathe in the world we are going to create.

Toni Cade Bambara's classic work *The Salt Eaters* opens with the healer asking Velma, a Black feminist organizer facing a spiritual and physical crisis due to burnout and betrayal by the movements she's worked for, if she is really sure she wants to be well—and emphasizes that healing is "no trifling matter." These joyful, perilous adventures of transformative justice that we undertake with no map but our breath are also no trifling matter. In embarking on them, we set off on journeys without a map—but knowing that our feminist of color heras, like Harriet Tubman, made the same lifesaving, liberating journeys without maps, guided by our dreams, grassroots genius and longing for liberation. In doing this work, we are doing the radical work of healing—our hearts, our bodies, our families and communities. After abuse and violence, with justice, comes healing. We are making the way, and surrendering to be transformed.

notes

1 From http://www.generationfive.org/tj.php (accessed 1/30/2011).

2 "An Interview with Andrea Smith, author of *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide*, about the book and her work with INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and the Boarding School Healing Project." *The Abolitionist*. Date unknown. http://www.criticalresistance.org/radicaldesigns.org/downloads/AndreaSmith.pdf (accessed 9/8/2010).

3 For additional documentation of this groundbreaking conference and subsequent INCITE! conferences, see *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2006).

4 See the Resources section of this book for selections from "Community Accountability Within People of Color Progressive Movements: Report from INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence," Ad-Hoc Community Accountability Working

Group Meeting (February 7-8, 2004, Seattle, WA). Sponsored by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, co-sponsored by Communities Against Rape and Abuse (CARA). Also available in its entirety at http://www.incite-national.org/media/docs/2406_cmty-acc-poc.pdf. For more information about Sista II Sista's decision to deincorporate and return to a grassroots, membership-based structure, see Nicole Burrowes, Morgan Cousins, Paula X. Rojas, and Ije Ude, "On Our Own Terms: Ten Years of Radical Community Building with Sista II Sista," in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*, ed. INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

5 For more information about these projects, see http://www.criticalresistance.org, http://www.sistaIIsista.org, and http://www.nwnw.org.

6 Muriel Rukeyser, "Käthe Kollwitz," in *Out of Silence: Selected Poems*, ed. Kate Daniels (Evanston, IL: TriQuarterly Books, 1992), 129.

7 Cherríe Moraga, "Refugees of a World on Fire: Foreword to the Second Edition," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), unnumbered folio.

8 "Introduction," in *This Bridge Called My Back*, xxvi.

9 Sadly, *This Bridge* is no longer in print. For more information about the evolving publishing history of this cornerstone feminist document: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/This_Bridge_Called_My_Back.

10 "The Combahee River Collective Statement," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983).

11 Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham, "Poorani: A Women's Shelter in Jaffna," *The Sunday Leader* (9/20/2009), http://www.thesundayleader.lk/archive/20090920/review.htm.