

Beyond Survival: Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement. Ejeris Dixon and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Eds.) (2020) Chico, CA: AK Press. \$18.99 (paperback)/\$9 (e-book). ISBN-13: 9781849353625

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A growing amount of literature outlines *why* abolishing existing processes of criminalisation, the police and the Prison Industrial Complex is necessary. Yet, questions relating to *how* abolitionism can be implemented are less widely discussed. As a result, solutions for how communities can hold people who do harm accountable and support survivors, without being complicit with the state's priority to punish and control remains ambiguous. What options do marginalised groups have when they experience violence or abuse, yet calling the police is not safe for them? What steps can community organisations take to respond to harm which does not rely on calling emergency services? This book seeks to answer these questions through a focus on accessible everyday examples of Transformative Justice in practice. Transformative Justice (TJ), as defined by Mingus (2019¹), is a community-based political framework for responding to violence, harm and abuse without reliance on the state (e.g. police, prisons, the criminal legal system, immigration services and social work).

This book brings together a collection of essays by a diverse range of individuals and organisations from across North America, with first-hand experience of TJ work. Structured into four sections, the anthology includes accounts from those who have personally engaged in TJ processes, as either the survivor or perpetrator of harm, as well as reflections from practitioners on the challenges, trial and error, nature, and rewards of TJ work. It includes accounts from marginalised groups, such as sex workers and trans people, which were developing alternatives for responding to violence and abuse long before the term 'Transformative Justice' was conceptualised. The book provides a much-needed tool for reimagining what we know about punishment, justice and harm through examples of intersectional abolitionist praxis. This book argues that TJ approaches should be multi-faceted and flexible rather than following a rigid set of rules. Indeed, multiple authors stressed the importance of TJ processes being shaped by local practitioners who have established relationships and trust with those in need of support.

Throughout this anthology, there is a consistent theme of creativity and perseverance which encourages the reader that they too can develop TJ approaches in their community. Many chapters provide guidance, frameworks and worksheets. Of particular note, I enjoyed Mia Mingus' contribution on the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective's development of Pods and Pod-mapping. This was a response to the ambiguity of what 'community' means when planning community responses to crisis situations. Likewise, Kai Cheng Thom's 9-step guide to "confronting the abuser in you, in me, in us all" in chapter 6 provided a timely framework for holding people who harm accountable, whilst challenging the victim-perpetrator binary. Something Mariame Kaba also discussed in chapter 26 as 'both/and thinking' regarding how TJ demands we centre survivors, whilst also recognising those who cause harm are often survivors of violence or abuse themselves.

¹ Mingus, M (2019) Transformative Justice : A Brief Description. Article available on Transform Harm : A Resource Hub for Ending Violence at: https://transformharm.org/tj_resource/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/

That being said, as a reader I would have liked there to be more of a focus on the mistakes almost every author acknowledged “we all make.” This would have been a good opportunity to hear from practitioners with first-hand experience: what did not work and why. However, I appreciated the honest reflections throughout the anthology on how messy, challenging and emotionally intensive TJ can be. In particular, Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha’s chapter on 'Crippling TJ' stood out. This chapter explored the impact supporting TJ processes had on practitioners who are often themselves survivors of harm. I especially appreciated the argument for using disability justice practices in slow TJ processes, to help practitioners plan how to sustainably respond to everyone’s needs. Similarly, Elisabeth Long's chapter on 'Vent Diagrams as Healing Practice' put into words a challenge I have been grappling with for a while when they reflected on the complexity of holding space for multiple truths within TJ processes - even when those truths seem contradictory. As the editors noted in their introduction: “Addressing violence while not engaging with police, prisons and courts is a beautiful task that can also feel totally overwhelming” (pp. 9).

This book provides a timely, realistic yet inspiring conversation about what justice could look like when abolitionism shapes the work of healing and accountability. There is so much nuance and complexity required in digesting this book. Both readers currently engaged in TJ work, and those less familiar with what justice is when disentangled from punishment will benefit from this book. I am so grateful for the energy, wisdom, vision and humanity of all those who have developed and continue to do this work which enabled this beautiful collection to exist. As a reader interested in the intersection where abolitionist theory meets real-life practice, this book is one of the most important books I have read to date. Yet, as all books that encourage deep reflection on practice should, I am left with a number of follow-on questions. Including most prominently, how the lessons in this book - derived from the work of TJ in the US - would translate in the UK context?