

## BOOK REVIEW WITH A FOCUS

**Edward C. Valandra (Wañbli Waphaha Hokšila) (ed.), *Colorizing restorative justice: Voicing our realities*. St Paul: Living Justice Press, 2020, 440 pp., ISBN 978-1-937141-24-0 (ebk), ISBN 978-1-937141-23-3 (pbk).**

Where anthologies are essentially collections of essays on a theme, *Colorizing restorative justice: voicing our realities* is so much more than that. It is a harmonised chorus, a carefully woven collective, in which every voice soars to enrich its most timely and critical conversation. The restorative principles of vulnerability, empathy, inclusion, safety, trust, intentionality, respect, and healing are inherently contradictory to the principles of structural violence on which Western settler societies have been founded and shaped. The Western context in which the modern restorative practices and restorative justice movement has grown up is rife with these contradictions, yet White practitioners do not experience or perceive them as People of Colour and Indigenous People (POCIP) do. With a total of more than 450 years of professional experience in restorative practices, the twenty authors of colour in this book peel back the layers of these painful contradictions, shining light on the uncomfortable and necessary steps forward to which our field must commit if we are to collectively move into integrity. It is a conversation for all who have a stake in the future of restorative practices to invest their time and attention in, now more than ever.

I came upon *Colorizing restorative justice* through an Internet search, not long after its publication, and for my final year of study in the completion of a Master of Science in Restorative Practices, from the International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP), it became one of my most valuable learning resources, highlighted, notated, flagged from cover to cover, and rarely missing from my 10-foot radius or from my discourse. Speaking from the experience of a White graduate student, reading this book largely on my own in the social isolation of a global pandemic, I contend that this book is best read, relished and digested in conversation with others, as it is designed. As the book's editor and contributing author, Dr. Edward Valandra, writes in the introduction, it is also a book 'to be pondered and digested slowly' (2). It feels a bit strange to be reviewing this book for *The International Journal of Restorative Justice*, having digested it mostly on my own so far. I am eager to reintegrate its lessons in collaboration with a wider readership and to see this landmark text take its rightful place as required reading in the syllabi of any programme or course of study that addresses either restorative or racial justice.

For both readers new to and those familiar with the field, who are looking for a fresh orientation to the core principles of restorative justice as well as the movement's historical and present context, this book is for us. For restorative practitioners and scholars of all identities interested in concrete strategies for deconstructing White supremacy culture with and within our practices, this book is for us. For restorative justice trainers and educators looking to further

discussions around equity and empowerment in the development and application of restorative practices, this book is absolutely for us. Valandra has curated an excellent balance and flow in the book's five-section chorus of theory, analysis, eloquent storytelling, historical and modern case studies and poignant personal narratives, with critical discussion questions and circle activities at the conclusion of every chapter, including activities for both mixed and racial affinity circles. The following five paragraphs highlight the specific contributions of each author, as they build, section by section.

In part 1, the authors assess the influence of White Western ways of thinking in the modern evolution of restorative practices and restorative justice. Goens-Bradley leads with a critical analysis of where the field of restorative justice is in its development in relation to pervasive White body supremacy. She calls on White practitioners to 'develop and apply a race-conscious lens' (38), providing a road map for self-assessment and then action in seven cross-cultural competencies. Sherrod calls attention to the peculiar racial silence among the field's more established advocates, where a hegemonic focus on individual harms turns a blind eye towards structural harms, bypassing the essential relational practice of trust-building and shared-consciousness. Parker then asks: when it comes to restorative circles, 'who's in and who's out?' (65). Because sitting physically in a circle does not always correlate with a sense of belonging and authentic inclusion in mixed and White-dominated spaces, Parker outlines tools that all practitioners can use to decolonise their work and examine their reliance on Western thinking. Concluding section one, Littlewolf, Armster and Paras explicitly contest the disingenuous homage that the modern restorative justice movement frequently makes, bridging modern Western restorative practices to the traditions of Indigenous People. Collectively, these authors call for the burning of this illusory bridge and challenge practitioners to reflect on, rethink and rebuild an authentic partnership between restorative justice, social justice, and Indigenous justice.

In part two, the authors reflect on how majority White and White-led work environments impact the work of restorative professionals of colour. Wilson digs into what POC experience in navigating hyper-radicalised White spaces and systems. She articulates how POCIP need accomplices more than allies in their White colleagues and clarifies the difference: beyond allyship, being an accomplice demands moral resolve to join the struggle for racial justice with a willingness to take risks. Lang speaks from a career of more than 50 years as a Black female teacher, school administrator and restorative practices trailblazer in the context of US educational apartheid. From her personal testimony, she calls on practitioners to boldly and consciously wade into the mess created in the convolution of restorative practices with White supremacy, with faith in the transformative potential that circles hold. Almengor, writing from 20 years of experience as a restorative justice coordinator in a predominantly White school, observes that the leadership of 'restorative' organisations rarely reflects the communities they serve. Meanwhile, intersectional inequities conspire to marginalise women practitioners of colour in particular. Anderson unpacks the misalignment between the ethos of restorative justice and that of Western

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academia, pointing to trainings in racial bias with a critical analysis of structural violence as an essential element of reorienting the ethos of restorative scholarship. Wadhwa concludes the section with a discussion on microaggressions and White fragility in restorative practices, relating a personal story of a White colleague at her school who accused her of racially politicising restorative justice.

Part three dives deeper into the unique experiences and contributions of POPIP in restorative justice, restorative practices, and circle work. Salazar opens the section with an original short play, called *Sippin*, that illustrates the risks and the discomfort unleashed through White fragility in mixed-raced circles. Despite the discomfort, Salazar encourages White people to lean in the transformative experience of being seen for who they authentically are. Mattis writes as a Black queer woman, observing how circles are emotionally contested spaces for POPIP, especially when there is a fear of triggering White fragility. She asks four self-reflective questions for POPIP to answer in safe affinity spaces, to address experiences of internalised oppression. Muhammed writes from his experiences of working with school-age youth of colour, applying the social discipline window to help rethink common socialisation around authority. He spotlights poetic examples of organic circling among youth of colour, which exist outside mainstream circle protocol, yet are potent crucibles for transformative healing, empowerment, and community building. Dundas concludes the section by bringing 25 years of transcultural restorative justice movement-building experience to the table, from the UK, the USA and the Caribbean. He provides a useful language for describing two distinct and often disconnected sources of power among restorative justice practitioners, one institutional and the other grassroots, with deeply untapped collaborative potential.

In part four, the authors highlight healthy and thriving communities as the source and wellspring of generative and thriving restorative practices, understanding that community-mindedness requires practitioners to decolonise their Western ways of thinking. Santana begins a discussion of trauma and equity-informed practice with a personal narrative. He shares a detailed approach for mindfully engaging communities, understanding that restorative justice can be both healing and harmful. Which outcome emerges truly depends on the sense of self and self-awareness of those involved. Dulin opens a discussion about funding for restorative practices with a 2009 American Civil Liberties Union report on the school-to-prison pipeline in Michigan. She asks the critical question ‘what and who are missing from the programming discussion, design and implementation of restorative practices?’ (262). With low budgets and inadequate training, she asserts that doing restorative justice on the cheap leaves school disciplinary culture largely unchanged. Jerome reflects on how peacemaking begins from within, with humility and self-acceptance, sharing a deeply personal memoir about her hometown and the shame that she carried from it until she returned and brought her restorative practices with her. Concluding the section, Turner turns towards the transformative justice and community accountability movement for lessons in creating safety, acknowledging that the state does not reliably ensure safety for communities of colour and Indigenous communities.

She highlights four transformative justice practices that communities can engage to create long-term safety through deepening relational intimacy.

In the fifth and final section of the book, Valandra interrogates the alignment of the restorative justice movement with its values, asking, ‘Other than adopting circles or paying homage to Indigenous Peoples’ influence on RJ, what is RJ doing to undo The First Harm perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples?’ (328). He articulates how the ‘first harm’ of settler colonialism is not an event but a structure, built on the logic of elimination to secure settler permanence and destroy all vestiges of Indigenous society. He turns to circle dialogue as the place to start in undoing the first harm but points out that such a dialogue is possible only when the fantasies of settler colonialism, White supremacy and White entitlement have been thoroughly recognised, reckoned with, and deconstructed.

At any particular moment among any grouping of people there is a unique conversation available to them only at that time. This principle of *emergent strategy*, articulated by adrienne maree brown (2017), echoes the principle of *conscientisation*, introduced by Paulo Freire (1968), wherein collective agency for transformative social change arises through conversation and the building of shared understanding of how oppression shapes our interrelated realities. It is the work of emergent social liberation to find and recognise these critical opportunities and bring these conversations to life. The twenty authors of *Colorizing restorative justice* model this principle beautifully, understanding well that the value of their chorus is far greater than the sum of its parts. Theirs is a testament to cultivating the shared intersectional analysis so greatly needed in restorative justice, and in all justice movements, to combat the virus of structural violence. In the words of Fania Davis (2019),

Let us consider how we might creatively conceive of multiple ways in which every restorative justice process we facilitate or participate in might involve truth-telling and promote healing of historical harm. (95)

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## References

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