

## BOOK REVIEW

Theo Gavrielides (ed.), *The Routledge international handbook of restorative justice*. London: Routledge, 2019, 520pp, ISBN: 978-1-47-248070-5 (hbk), 978-1-03-209502-8 (pbk).

The *Routledge international handbook of restorative justice* is an impressive collection of contributions from over 40 established and emerging scholars and practitioners. While building on previous handbooks of restorative justice, its international focus breaks new ground. Unlike the earlier *Handbook* (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2007), it is too in-depth to serve as an introductory text to restorative justice but is a lively and dynamic overview of the international state of the field. The *Handbook's* 500 or so pages comprise 31 highly readable chapters in four sections, focused on: next steps for the theory of restorative justice as a social movement; empirical evidence for the use of restorative justice in a plurality of settings and situations; critical perspectives on restorative justice; and possible futures for restorative justice.

The book responds to the fact of restorative justice having become both more international and more 'institutionalised' – that is, organised, professional and integrated with governments and criminal justice. Recent intergovernmental treaties and agreements have driven further expansion and professionalisation, particularly in the West. Indeed, underlying the *Handbook* is the debate over institutionalisation. Caught between 'purist' and 'maximalist' tendencies (Maglione, 2021), restorative justice faces a dilemma faced by other radical movements – whether to remain committed to founding principles but outside the institutions of power, or to attempt to change these institutions from the inside. The question of its relationship to the state touches on others: what restorative justice should be used for; how it deals with identity, discrimination and power; and what it means for it to be 'international'.

Boyes-Watson's chapter argues for maintaining restorative justice as a transformative movement, while Maglione, in a theoretically rich contribution, calls for a return to its 'non-sovereign' roots – a restorative justice that is democratic, anti-punitive and actively *withdraws* support from sovereign power. Other chapters – such as Walker and Davidson's discussion of restorative justice for prisoner re-entry in Hawaii, or Gavrieldies' own chapter on participants' experiences – are less critical of criminal justice, but these perspectives agree that restorative justice must never be a technocratic 'fix' for criminal justice systems and practices ever more squeezed by falling budgets and rising workloads; this would undermine its value as an *alternative* to criminal justice.

A particular problem for institutionalised restorative justice is that many criminal justice systems (including my own) see it as appropriate only for minor offences. Much of the second section of the *Handbook* serves as a corrective to this, with chapters highlighting the empirical evidence for using restorative justice – always with appropriate safeguards, preparation and training – in cases of child sexual abuse (Terry) and intimate partner violence (Hayden), among others.

Jamie Buchan

The nuanced and critical approach to implementation elevates the empirically focused chapters beyond mere evaluations. Doak and O'Mahony's chapter, drawing on empirical data from youth conferencing in New Zealand and Northern Ireland, offers a wider conception of success and its measurement than the reoffending rates which have tended to predominate in efforts to 'sell' restorative justice; critical chapters by Acorn, and Piggott and Wood, raise difficult questions about the efficacy and value of restorative justice.

These questions hang over efforts towards 'policy transfer' of restorative justice. The *Handbook's* international focus is a key contribution, with perspectives from ten countries including several of the 'Global South'. Gohar's chapter explicates indigenous restorative practices in the Pakistan/Afghanistan border region, as a bridge between human rights and indigenous approaches amid corruption, interethnic conflict and the brutality of the 'War on Terror'. Wong and Lui compare the uses of restorative justice and its relationship to local tradition in three Chinese jurisdictions. As diverse international accounts like these show, attention to local context is vital in understanding and implementing restorative justice measures; chapters like these help to counter the tendency towards ethnocentrism and Orientalism in comparative criminal justice.

To paraphrase Brangan (2021), restorative justice is *nearly* everywhere, but it is not nearly everywhere alike. There is still little comparative restorative justice scholarship; the comparative study of punishment and justice has itself only recently begun to look beyond imprisonment, while restorative justice scholarship has tended to emphasise practical responses to harm over theorising. Chapters in this *Handbook*, alongside Gavrielides' (2021) more recent *Comparative restorative justice*, set the agenda for further comparative restorative justice scholarship.

In particular, the nuanced and compelling sociological treatment of the post-Soviet context, in Matczak's outstanding chapter on Polish lay attitudes to restorative justice, points the way towards synthesising comparative penology and restorative justice scholarship, theory and practice. This would enhance our understanding of the globalisation and institutionalisation of restorative justice and point the way towards more sensitive and democratic ways of expanding its global reach.

Chiming with the book's emphasis on local specificity and nationality is a welcome attention to questions of social identity, power and discrimination in restorative justice. A highlight here is Tauri's critique – a lapidary account positioning restorative justice, as practised (and institutionalised) by a global 'industry', as a neocolonial project of cultural appropriation, which abstracts the practice from its indigenous roots and disempowers indigenous peoples (while also serving to 'manage' these groups for criminal justice systems). Elsewhere, gender and age are considered sensitively in chapters on gendered forms of offending. Bolitho's chapter, on restorative justice responses to serious crime in which disability is a factor, is particularly reflective about positionality and privilege in cases where disability may affect the process of restorative justice as well as being implicated in the harm itself. Amid this attention to social identity and discrimination, social class is an unfortunate omission, particularly given recent

scholarship on how class dynamics can affect the integrity of restorative justice processes (Willis, 2020).

Simultaneously with its 'institutionalisation' into criminal justice, restorative justice is also growing *beyond* crime and justice. While largely focused on restorative responses to criminal harm, the *Handbook* (particularly the second section) also highlights innovative uses of restorative justice to deal with harm and conflict in other areas. Liebmann's chapter discusses restorative approaches to resolving conflict between groups of road users in Bristol, while Karp and Schachter explain restorative approaches to misconduct in universities. A fascinating chapter by Carroll and Reisel focuses on restorative responses to harms in medical settings; these harms are typically complex and multi-causal, with lessons for medical practice and procedure, as well as (almost always) unintentional.

Each of these contributes to expanding the 'range' of restorative justice activity, but they also suggest the embedding of more restorative *cultures* in the various parts of social life. In this, they complement chapters by Wachtel, and Courakis and Gavrielides, on restorative justice and democratic theory, and those by Kawalek et al. and Toews on restorative justice and the built environment. These contributions gesture towards the inclusion and embedding of restorative principles in the structure of Western societies, and the harnessing of restorative justice to make societies more forgiving, caring and democratic.

Much of this review has been underpinned by the debates around institutionalisation, and the context of a growing internationalisation of restorative justice. Another tension, related to both, is that restorative justice has developed as a communitarian, non-punitive and healing way to deal with harm, in response to criminal justice systems that are increasingly punitive and damaging, in cultures that are increasingly individualistic and authoritarian. Amid both debates around institutionalisation and the diffusion of restorative practices into other settings, questions about the future of restorative justice reflect wider questions about the future of societies, particularly contemporary Western societies. The question of whether restorative practices and principles can be implemented at the widest scales becomes a question of whether the world can become restorative, particularly in responding to the many and complex human and environmental harms of the Anthropocene (Pali & Aertsen, 2021).

The overall sense at the end of the book, particularly in the epilogue, is one of optimism about the future, both about the 'uses' of restorative justice to deal with specific harm and the potential for societies to become restorative. 'Purist' scholars (and others) may question whether this optimism is justified; at least, though, the variety and pluralism of this title give us cause for optimism about restorative justice *scholarship*. One result of that pluralism is that most readers, I suspect, will find this book variable but will differ on *which* chapters or aspects are most successful or useful.

Although the structure of the book is generally clear and logical, some sections are a little more tightly focused than others, with chapters that might perhaps have fit better in other sections – for instance, the chapter on Chinese restorative justice, which had more of a descriptive than a critical approach. The theoretical focus of the first section might perhaps have been stronger. There is also a tendency for

Jamie Buchan

chapters to start by rehearsing the global growth of restorative justice, which creates a slight sense of repetition. The book is generally very well-produced, with the only slight issue I noted being the inconsistent use of footnotes and endnotes.

These, however, are minor criticisms; the *Handbook* is an excellent resource which will be useful to many restorative justice practitioners and researchers, as well as postgraduate students in criminology, forensic psychology, social work and beyond. Theo Gavrielides and the diverse contributors have produced a fascinating and dynamic book, sure to be widely read and used for years to come.

Jamie Buchan\*

## References

- Brangan, L. (2021). *The politics of punishment: a comparative study of imprisonment and political culture*. London: Routledge.
- Gavrielides, T. (ed.) (2021). *Comparative restorative justice*. Cham: Springer.
- Johnstone, G. & Van Ness, D. (eds.) (2007). *Handbook of restorative justice*. Cullompton: Willan.
- Maglione, G. (2021). Restorative justice and the state: untimely objections against the institutionalisation of restorative justice. *British Journal of Community Justice*, 17(1), 5-22.
- Pali, B. & Aertsen, I. (2021). Inhabiting a vulnerable and wounded earth: restoring response-ability. *The International Journal of Restorative Justice*, 4(1): 3-16. doi: 10.5553/TIJRJ.000065.
- Willis, R. (2020). 'Let's talk about it': why social class matters to restorative justice. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 20(2), 187-206. doi: 10.1177/1748895818804307.

\* Jamie Buchan (PhD) is a Lecturer in criminology at Edinburgh Napier University, Scotland. Corresponding author: Jamie Buchan at J.Buchan@napier.ac.uk.