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BOOK REVIEW

Meredith Rossner, *Just emotions: rituals of restorative justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, 208 pp, ISBN 978-0-19-965504-5 (hbk), £65.00.

Just emotions is an ambitious study. It aims to uncover the successful interaction patterns of restorative justice conferences and to show that 'high solidarity' conferences will result in significantly less offending than 'low solidarity' conferences. It is also a somewhat curious study because the author suggests that successful conferences depend on the right kind of emotional expressions and that this emotional expression can be planned. She tends to overrate the possibilities of what these rituals might attain.

The author, lecturer in criminology at the London School of Economics, has studied restorative justice conferences as rituals, including conversational rhythm, gestures and demeanour. Building on the work of Thomas Scheff and Randall Collins, *Just emotions* examines what happens at the micro level of a conference; the meeting itself and its situational dynamics, and especially 'the promise of emotional transformation'. The author employs a mixed-methods approach, including an analysis of the observed dynamics of conferences run by the Metropolitan Police in London, and a quantitative analysis of systematically observed interactions that were studied in an earlier Australian study.

In the introductory chapter Rossner suggests that details of crime, characteristics of the participants and other background variables are not the primary influences in determining the success of a conference. Rather, success depends on ritual outcomes such as group solidarity and cohesion: 'I will argue that the emotional and ritual dynamics within a restorative justice conference hold the key to understanding, monitoring, and measuring its success' (11). And this group solidarity has a far reaching impact: 'It … is translated into long-term emotional well-being and the potential for reduced offending' (11).

In the next chapters the author points out that emotions are the heart of restorative justice. Emotions are good because they contribute to healing victims and turning offenders into law-abiding citizens. Rossner's book aims to offer in-depth analysis of how this happens. But at the same time, she argues that we need to look beyond emotions to the micro structure of interaction. Success means ritual success.

Chapter 4 is a case study of a single conference run by the Metropolitan Police. This case—entirely filmed—provides a detailed micro analysis that gives good insights into the emotional dynamics, turning points and the way participants' cues alter the

emotional dynamics. The author also examines power and status imbalances and the impact of these imbalances on the participants. The key component is the forming of an interactional rhythm, a rhythmic entrainment between the participants.

In Chapter 5 the author shows how facilitators prepare participants to 'maximize their emotions' and follow turn-taking rules, and how they use strategies to engage participants in conversational rhythm and balance. This chapter uses qualitative interviews with facilitators from the London study to examine successful and failed conferences. All facilitators categorised their best conferences as being the most emotionally intense for all parties. The author stresses that expressing emotions, also prior to the meeting, is welcome, but at the same time she says that facilitators should 'project an aura of calmness and control, to ease the anxiety or impatience of the participants' (82). Successful rituals include group-level emotions of solidarity, shared morality and emotional energy. In failed rituals there is no rhythm; the participants are uncomfortable the entire time, and there is no dramatic turning point.

Chapters 6 and 7 provide an empirical test of these suppositions. Chapter 6 presents the short-term outcomes of successful conferences. The author provides a quantitative test for the variables of interaction ritual, using systematic observations of conferences in Canberra, from the well-known Reintegrative Shaming Experiments (RISE) study. She develops a model of interaction ritual in which high levels of balance, and low levels of stigmatisation and defiance, will result in higher levels of solidarity, reintegration and emotional energy. These positive outcomes are indeed successfully predicted. An important finding is that individual characteristics such as race, age and gender do not influence ritual outcomes.

The next question is how this interaction ritual does influence offending behaviour. Is it plausible that an intense and emotionally powerful conference could influence an offender's future behaviour for years after the interaction? This intriguing question is dealt with in Chapter 7 and the author hypothesises that powerful rituals may indeed have this long-term impact. She analyses reoffending rates, again using observations from the RISE study, and shows that situational and ritual aspects of a conference may have significant crime reduction effects. Nevertheless, the results are puzzling: whereas high solidarity conferences are significantly related to less offending, highly re-integrative conferences do result in more offending. Contrary to her hypothesis, emotional energy was not found to be a significant variable related to reoffending. The author suggests that emotional energy may decay when not reinforced by subsequent interactions. Rossner offers interesting explanations for these unexpected results.

This book deserves praise for the meticulous ways in which the author has analysed interaction rituals. It is a rich book with excellent descriptions, for instance about the ways in which female participants do the emotion work of the conference and how participants engage in subtle tactics to raise their status. The book has an intriguing title which will upset many Kantians. Moral philosophers fight each other over the question

of whether emotions can contribute to justice at all. Wisely the author has left out that discussion.

The good news resulting from this study, the author states, is that interaction ritual dynamics are malleable and can be controlled. 'A good facilitator can ensure the right ingredients are there to create a successful conference' (142). Therefore, facilitators need more 'high level skills in understanding and managing the micro dynamics of emotion' (142). At the same time they should 'maximize the expression of … emotional displays through the build-up of anxiety, anger, and shame in the lead-up to the conference' (80). The focus should be on bringing emotions to the surface: 'the stronger the emotions, whether they be positive or negative, the better the conference' (81).

How to evaluate this approach of 'maximizing emotions'? I think it should not be the aim of conferences to build or stimulate emotions prior to the event. In this phase facilitators should rather stress respectful and prudent behaviour. Likewise, during the conference, not all emotions are welcome; many negative emotions should be contained. I believe restorative justice should not be an energetic solidarity ritual, but a careful justice ritual. The overall thrust lying behind Rossner's perspective is the malleability of collective feelings. She does not address the question of whether emotions such as compassion and remorse should be the object of planning at all.

The author claims that the conference does provide offenders with 'just enough' emotional energy to motivate them to stop or reduce offending (37). This is not plausible. Do we really need energetic conferences to change behaviour? Might it not be possible that offenders participating in emotionally 'flat' conferences are nevertheless stimulated to change their behaviour? And the other way around—would it not be possible that offenders participating in energetic meetings look back at these rituals as stifling and oppressive? More importantly, as desistance studies show, what is needed is a change in self-narrative and identification.

How to explain low reoffending rates after attending a conference? Does the entrainment ritual during the conference do the work as Rossner suggests? It is possible that offenders already felt remorseful and were already engaged in developing other self-narratives prior to the conference. In other words, offenders engaging in high solidarity rituals may have put aside harsh and defiant feelings beforehand. If this is true, individual characteristics do play an important role after all.

Researchers might conceive conferences as rituals, but participants do probably experience these meetings in other ways: as opportunities to say what bothers them, to ask about the offender's motives, and above all to seek justice. These justice proceedings might be viewed successful when agreements help to rectify and set right. If the participants are satisfied with the agreements, why bother about a shortage of entrainment or rhythm or imbalance during the conversation? However, the author thinks that outcome agreement may be viewed as less important than the emotional interaction, culminating in a shared understanding of what had gone on. If the victim is able to move on, outcome agreement is secondary (100).

A last critical point is related to the language used by participants. The author does not really provide an analysis of their argumentation and rhetoric. Although she refers to the importance of 'the invocation of symbols' in the conclusion, this aspect is missing in her research. Which claims do participants express? Which meanings of justice are phrased? Which messages do they try to convey? If we want to know how self-narratives are changing, this moral language seems to be important.

Rossner has studied restorative justice as ritual. This is a more promising perspective than an analysis focused on emotions like shame and guilt. Unfortunately the book is overambitious. It is not convincing to include reduced reoffending in an interaction ritual model. Internalising the values and convictions that lead to desistance, is, for the most part, beyond the power and abilities of a restorative justice conference.

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