



## Conference Report on European Forum for Restorative Justice [EFFRJ] 10<sup>th</sup> International Conference: Expanding the Restorative Imagination, restorative justice between realities and visions in Europe and beyond (14-16 June 2018)

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The conference took place at the Tirana International Hotel & Conference Centre, Albania, 14-16 June 2018 and was attended by over 300 delegates from around the world. It was organised by the European Forum for Restorative Justice in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Albania and the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution & Reconciliation of Disputes, with the support of the Justice Programme of the European Commission, OSCE Presence in Albania, Save the Children Albania Country Office, the Open Society Foundation for Albania, UNICEF Albania, the US Embassy in Tirana and the Municipality of Tirana.<sup>1</sup> The conference brought together both academics and practitioners in a really welcoming and innovative way; it consisted of a variety of plenaries, presentations and workshops which were often thought-provoking and challenging to a criminal justice historian who is more used to dealing with dead people!

I attended the conference as together with my colleague, Dr Yasmin Devi-McGleish, I was fortunate to have been invited to present a paper entitled 'A new approach to an old system of justice', in which we discussed the origins of restorative justice in England and Wales (which have largely been overlooked by many criminologists) together with the use of printed public apologies in newspapers from the early eighteenth century onward as a form of restorative justice and re-integrative shaming – over 3,000 examples having been found as part of our ongoing research.<sup>2</sup>

The conference began with a Welcome Session in which various participants, including the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Albania, discussed the increasing use of restorative justice in Albania and its importance as an adjunct to the more 'traditional' forms of justice practiced in the country. It was clear that the current government of Albania has been making huge strides with regard to the use of restorative justice in their country since the major justice reforms instigated in 2014, especially with regard to young people who came

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<sup>1</sup> For further details of the European Forum for Restorative Justice see <http://www.euforumrj.org/>; for the Albanian Ministry of Justice see <http://www.drejtesia.gov.al/>; and for the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution see <https://www.immediation.org/QAP/albanian-foundation-conflict-resolution-reconciliation-disputes/>.

<sup>2</sup> For further details of this paper, see <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1606-PWVI-A-new-approach-to-an-old-system-of-justice-Cox-Devi-McGleish.pdf>.

in contact with the criminal justice system, and it was refreshing to hear that the principle of restorative justice has been enshrined within the Albanian justice system.

There were a number of parallel workshops and sessions throughout the conference, interspersed with plenary sessions. The following report gives just a flavour of the vast range of topics and subjects covered by the workshops and plenaries, as it was obviously impossible to attend all such sessions.<sup>3</sup> The first parallel session that I attended included a fascinating presentation on restorative justice and daily life in prisons in both Spain and Belgium (presented by Roberto Moreno [Head of the Adults Justice Service of the Basque Government] and Bart Claes [Avans University of Applied Sciences]), in which the presenters recounted their respective experiences of life within Spanish and Belgian prisons.<sup>4</sup> This session was followed by an interesting presentation by Pieter Verbeeck and Ine Verboven [victim-offender moderators at Moderator, a Belgian victim-moderator mediation service], which detailed the aims of the 'Through the Looking Glass' project, which operates in Flanders and Brussels. The project brings together victims and offenders of unrelated crimes in order to explore the ways in which both look at each other and deal with conflict, with the aim of achieving a 'symbolic restoration'.<sup>5</sup> Another participant, Libardo Ariza [University of Los Andes, Colombia] was unfortunately unable to appear, but a video of his presentation is available online.<sup>6</sup>

The first plenary session included a presentation in which Jonathan Doak [Nottingham Trent University] and David O'Mahony [University of Essex] gave a compelling account of their critical theory of restorative justice and its application within criminal justice systems.<sup>7</sup> They drew largely on empowerment theory and stressed that the twin concepts of agency and accountability should be maximised within any application of restorative justice.

After these sessions I took advantage of the opportunity to visit Bunk'art 2, a new exhibition created in 2016 about the history of the Sigurimi (the Albanian Secret Service police who operated between 1945 and 1991). The museum is located in one of the numerous bunkers constructed during the post-war period in preparation for a (non-existent) nuclear attack from the West, and details the disturbing and shocking history of the development of a police force in a totalitarian Communist state. Over 5,500 Albanians were murdered during Enver Hoxha's brutal regime, with over 50,000 people being interned in both internment and labour camps within the border. Hoxha's view was that Albania was the only truly uncorrupted Communist nation on earth, and he went to great lengths to ensure its isolation from outside influences; a 1972 statement from the Ministry of Internal Affairs stated that 'punishment is a weapon in the party's and people's hand to defend our socialist victories from enemy elements and malefactors and to strongly support the educational work of the party with the masses'.

Next day's conference events included a very interesting presentation by Patrick Wolff [an RJ facilitator and trainer] of the use of restorative justice in an indigenous community; that of the US administered island of Guam. He detailed the formulaic approach of both victims'

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<sup>3</sup> For a number of presentations and plenary sessions given at the conference, see <http://www.euforumrj.org/news/presentations-efrj-conference-2018/>.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1406-RJ-and-daily-life-in-prisons-in-Belgium-Claes.pdf> and <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1406-RJ-and-daily-life-in-prisons-in-Spain-Moreno.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1406-PWII-Dialogue-between-VO-of-unrelated-crimes-Verbeeck-Verboven.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> See <https://vimeo.com/277052298>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Plenary-1406-Restorative-intersections-with-criminal-justice-Doak-OMahony.pdf>.

and offenders' families to ensure that public apologies and restitution by the offender and his/her family were carried out by means of various prescribed events such as the physical prostration of the offender before the victim's family and the ritualistic form of apology that could include giving one of the offender's immediate family members to the family of a murder victim as financial recompense in order that the victim's family would not lose out after the loss of their loved one. Wolff also raised thought-provoking questions about the difficulties of judging the sincerity of an apology and this theme was again referred to in another parallel session by Bas van Stokkom [Radboud University, Nijmegen] who referred to the apologies given during young offenders' restorative conferences as often being simply part of "a repenting ritual... muddy and messy" and who argued that the sincerity of such apologies is often difficult to assess, but that this often did not matter too much to the victims; it was more the fact that a partial apology of some kind was given by the offender.<sup>8</sup>

The last day of the conference was begun by a plenary in which Ivo Aertsen [founder of the EFRJ], Edit Törzs [Executive Director of the EFRJ], Tim Chapman [Chair of the EFRJ board] and Rasim Gjoka [Director of the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes] gave an overview of the conference, together with an appeal for both practitioners and academics to work together to ensure that restorative justice continued to progress in European countries and became a mainstay of the respective criminal justice systems.

After lunch, the conference concluded with a series of guided tours of a variety of the many sights Tirana has to offer. As someone who is extremely interested in policing history, I chose to visit the House of Leaves, the former surveillance headquarters of the Sigurimi. Originally constructed as a maternity clinic, it was commandeered during the war and used for the housing of technical surveillance equipment. The museum gave a chilling impression of what it must have been like to live under an all-seeing and all-hearing totalitarian dictatorship, in which one in three of the adult population were thought to be informants (due to the dire threats made in cases of non-compliance with the State). It emerged that the conference venue had originally been the only hotel available to foreign dignitaries and that all of their rooms had been bugged.

My overall impression of the conference was that it was reassuring to see the strides that both Albania and other European countries have made since the dark days of the Cold War and that such conferences served a vital purpose of bringing both academics from various countries and disciplines together with practitioners of restorative justice. Hopefully conference delegates will be able to put many of the ideas and thoughts generated and discussed at the conference into practice, be it in future academic outputs or practical applications of what should surely become an important structure within all European criminal justice systems. After attending the conference it is apparent that in many aspects England and Wales still have a long way to go in regard to the implementation of restorative justice in the wider field of criminal justice, but it is to be hoped that conferences such as this stimulate progress.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the organisers of the conference for such a seamlessly well-organised conference and for the opportunity of also exploring several aspects of a country about which I knew very little before my visit. I took away many ideas which will be related to my future academic research and teaching as well as a great

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.euforumrj.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/1606-PWVI-Decent-retribution-Van-Stokkom.pdf>.

appreciation for the struggles that Albania is continuing to experience following decades of an oppressive regime. Finally, as an illustration of the unfailing hospitality of the Albanians whom I encountered, I would like to thank the young man who found my wallet (which I had inadvertently dropped whilst getting out of a taxi in Durrës) and kindly returned it to me fully intact – an example of restoration in practice!