

Black International Restorative Justice Week 2015

15 Nov 2015 | Theo Gavrielides

Since 2012, I have been writing [an annual commentary](#) for "Restorative Justice Week", originally introduced in 1996 by the Correctional Service Canada. Therein, I would often criticise what the international restorative justice movement did (or didn't do) during the year. This year, as I was trying to find some new "words of wisdom", the Paris atrocities took place changing everything that I was planning to say. I deleted my draft and asked myself, and through this newsletter, you ...

How can the following two issues be reconciled?

1. Those who believe in restorative justice must also believe in the inner ability of all individuals to be good. We promote dialogue and claim that by believing in human kindness we can generate opportunities for healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. We know that many factors could lead to criminal activities let those be social, economic, psychological, neurological and so on. At the same time, we engage in restorative practice to empower those touched by these factors to find their own solutions and look for a better future not against their communities but in partnership with them. **But Friday's attacks left me feeling that the very foundations of positive thinking and the restorative justice teachings of nurturing (khulisa) and ubuntu are as weak as the bricks of the Twin Towers that came down bringing also down our human rights vision of a united humanity.**

2. Following the Paris attacks, the immediate reaction of politicians, criminal justice agents and large sections of society was to declare war against the terrorists and call for special meetings to toughen up immigration rules, security policies and protocols. In Paris, people are not yet allowed to gather publicly to mourn those who died and a higher state of alert is raised in France, the UK and across Europe. Society is becoming more polarised than ever, and the "them" (criminals - terrorists) and "us" (victims) rhetoric dominates political speeches and media presentations. And I have to ask: what will it take for society to finally raise the mirror of responsibility and look well into its reflection? Every time I look into this mirror, I see nothing but myself and a thousand of other fellow citizens. We are the real architects of the social fabric that generates the extremist ideologies, which then gradually corrupt universal values such as tolerance and the respect of life, dignity and brotherhood. The extremist ideology that leads those young men, men and women to act inhumane is not an alien virus of unknown origin. It is a product of our way of living. **Sharing responsibility and the ability to look inside also made me ask whether a public debate and a restorative dialogue for responsibility-taking and reconciliation might indeed be more fruitful than yet another "war on terror"** that could take more freedoms away from every-day people including those who are most vulnerable such as those in hospitals, care homes, foster care and yes ... prisons.

And here is the dilemma that I am asking you to help me reconcile on this Sunday, ahead of our international celebrations and events for Restorative Justice Week 2015:

If restorative justice (as an ethos, a value and yes ... as an international ideology) has the potential to bring out the best of us, help us reconcile and empower the weak, then how can people like me regain their belief in it, following events such as those in Paris two days ago?