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INTERVIEW WITH JO-ANNE WEMMERS

VICTIMS / VICTIMES

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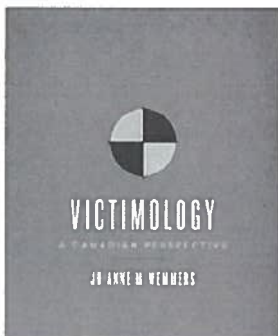
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The Colour of Justice - *Victimology: A Canadian Perspective* by Professor Jo-Anne Wemmers

MARGOT VAN SLUYTMAN

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*In this article/review, Margot Van Sluytman discusses Jo-Anne Wemmers' 2017 book, **Victimology: A Canadian Perspective**, as a user-friendly gps for navigating what she terms a changing justice terrain, pointing out that each chapter is a precious and provocative piece that can prove a rich guide for first-time readers and seasoned researchers in the field of victimology. Van Sluytman here also ponders a perceived use of "restorative justice" as a catch-all term for alternative victim-centred theories, noting that a restrictive language framework can sometimes help maintain the status quo. Holding up Jo-Anne Wemmers' "reparative justice" as an example, Van Sluytman stands resoundingly in favour of restorative models through which victim rights are not only clearly identifiable, but also enforceable.*



***"A right delayed
is a right denied".***

– Martin Luther King, Jr.

Each time I hear the phrase "restorative justice", I pause and reflect about what is and is not being implied. I ponder how

it is that our justice system must be coloured by and contoured in a framework of language that yearns to offer us ways to navigate the terrain of shared-humanity, of sharing humanity, while many of us are working diligently to assure this and in so doing have found different ways to articulate justice.

Reading Professor Jo-Anne Wemmers' newest book, *Victimology: A Canadian Perspective*, addresses justice through a lens that speaks the values of respect, responsibility, relationship

within a Sawbonna crucible. Wemmers work verily reaches to the core of what is possible in our common law system, when human rights becomes the foundation upon which we address and articulate justice.

Each chapter in *Victimology: A Canadian Perspective* is a precious and provocative piece replete with information that can prove a rich guide for first-time readers and seasoned researchers in the field of victimology. Jo-Anne's book is as a user-friendly gps, whereby twelve chapters are organized in a way that invites a reader into a relationship with historical and theoretical content that is clearly explicated. Starting with how and when the notion of "victim" came into being, to the very salient and suffocating fact that in Canada today the victims' only role is witness for the Crown, Wemmers points out that while "numerous laws have been introduced to curb the rights of the accused, victims in Canada still do not have a legal right to participate in the criminal trial other than as witness" (39).

For me, Chapter Eleven, Reparative Justice, is as a linchpin that both underscores and highlights why this book is a brush stroke of genius. Jo-Anne makes a clear and vital case that an us vs. them view of justice is not what victimologists desire. I would suspect that it is not what many victims desire either. I for one do not.

Reparative justice is victim centered, and, as such looks at justice and reparation differently than restorative justice. While it shares the same values as restorative justice, it gives victims a distinct status and recognizes them as more than just an “interested party.” Its focus is on victims and their needs. However, “victim-centered” does not mean that the offender rights are to be neglected or ignored” (Victimology, Wemmers 205).

That victims' rights are human rights equates with loosening the grip of unenforceable rights that are purported to be created for victims. Unenforceable rights are questionable at the very best and distasteful, insulting, and virtually useless at the very worst.

What I have gleaned from my first reading of this book, a book I will read much more than once, is that justice is a palette of many hues. That each hue insists that the language we choose to use must find its foundational footing in human rights. In doing so we do not create hierarchies about who is more worthy. Rather what we offer is a way in which we address shared-humanity via a human rights lens. ■

ABSTRACT

The Colour of Justice - Victimology: A Canadian Perspective by Professor Jo-Anne Wemmers

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Dans cet article/compte rendu du livre de Jo-Anne Wemmers publié en 2017, *Victimology: A Canadian Perspective*, Margot Van Sluytman évoque l'image d'un GPS convivial pour naviguer dans ce qu'elle qualifie de terrain judiciaire changeant. Elle fait remarquer que chaque chapitre constitue un guide précieux et audacieux autant pour les novices que pour les chercheurs chevronnés en victimologie.

Margot Van Sluytman réfléchit aussi à l'utilisation de l'expression justice réparatrice comme terme générique pour des théories alternatives en matière de justice, notant au passage qu'un cadre langagier restrictif peut bloquer le progrès. À l'aide d'exemples de son projet, Sawbonna, et de propos de Jo-Anne Wemmers sur la justice réparatrice, Margot Van Sluytman se range résolument du côté des modèles de restauration qui caractérisent les droits des victimes de manière définissable et applicable.

Le livre a été publié simultanément en français : *Victimologie: Une perspective canadienne*. Jo-Anne Wemmers. Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2017.