

Apologies and the Legacy of Abuse of Children in Care. Edited by Johanna Sköld and Shurlee Swain. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. 217. Paper €79.99. Hardback.

This edited collection concerns how states and other institutions respond to the systemic abuse of children in out-of-home care. The focus is largely upon those rectificatory responses for which survivors of those institutions, called care-leavers, now campaign. The text brings together academics, practitioners and former care-leavers, most of whom are members of a common network.¹ Their chapters encompass a broad range of rectificatory response, including public inquiries, apologies, monetary reparations, museum exhibitions and oral histories, record searches and criminal trials, as well as more general histories of abuse and redress. These differing practices are, however, described as a single transnational model of redress for systemic abuse. This model has become standardised over the past few decades and states are now assessed by reference to both whether and how they fulfil the demands of the model's various components. In terms of structure, the volume is broken into three domains of reflection: 1. general questions that emerge from the practice; 2. detailed case studies of practice; and 3. practical implementation. My review will deal with each in turn.

The first section of the volume contains chapters that turn a critical lens upon the development and implementation of rectificatory responses. The section is 'bookended' by chapters in which first Sköld, and then Swain, address questions raised by the emergence of the phenomenon itself. These two chapters, however, develop different elements of the topic. Swain focuses upon how changes in public understandings of both care institutions and child sexual abuse worked to 'uncover' the occurrence of abuse—her chapter is epistemic in focus. Sköld's chapter is practical and focusses upon developments in response procedures, tracing the development of redress as a transnational practice. Other chapters in this first section include Wilson and Golding's attention to the often contrasting, but potentially complementary, roles of official and survivor narratives. Ericsson addresses the problem of children's agency in discursive contexts that figure them as objects of violence. Brennan examines the workings of Ireland's 'Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse' with a particular critical emphasis on its therapeutic efforts, while Arvidsson analyses the politics surrounding a Swedish reparations programme.

The volume's second section offers five 'case' studies wherein authors explore particular features of individual programmes. The first chapter, by Rytter and Rasmussen, examines Denmark's 'Gohhavn Inquiry' into the abuse of children in residential schools. The authors draw the reader's attention to a unique characteristic of this inquiry, namely that it was conducted by a museum. Consequently, both the inquiry (and the chapter) paid/pay greater attention to the collection and display of artefacts than is the inquisitorial norm. The second case study by Dekker and Grietens offers a brief history of abuse in care in the Netherlands. The third study is authored by Simonsen and Petterson. It attends to Norway where the mistreatment of the Travellers ethnic minority, indigenous children and those born to one or more German parents during wartime occupation complicates contemporary redress politics. Moving outside Scandinavia, the final two case studies by Kendrick *et al.* and Cradock focus, respectively, upon Scottish and Canadian responses to abuse in care. In general, these five case studies draw

attention to the limits of particular responses, how they may exclude some care-leaver populations, or how particular political agents have failed to enact one or more element in the 'standard model of redress'. Furthermore, the case studies' attention to redress in high-capacity states reflects a characteristic of the practice. This is a 'transnational', not 'international' practice.

The third and final section offers four chapters focused on practical questions. Discussing her Australian experience with care-leavers' case files, Musgrove reflects on the roles and responsibilities of historians in redress programmes. Similarly, Sköld and Jensen describe their experiences with Swedish case files and reflect upon the mismatch between the purposes for which those files were created and contemporary use of those files by lawyers and survivors. Kendrick and Hawthorn sketch some of the lessons that can be drawn from histories of abuse to improve social work practice. The volume closes with a chapter by Swain reflecting upon the challenges posed by vicarious trauma for those working in programmes responding to institutional abuse.

Reflecting on the volume as a whole, the text is clearly an important development in the field. Identifying, and perhaps helping to define, the various components of redress practice, the text makes a decisive claim identifying a transnational practice. The point is not merely that institutional abuse and rectificatory response happens in many jurisdictions. Rather the point is that response is transnational as a practice. Not only do states emulate one another, but survivors, professionals and academics with interests in the practice are situated within transnational networks of advocacy, support and analysis. To date, most work in this area focusses upon particular case studies and addresses itself to a local audience. This text will help cement the field's transnational character.

However, while the text is field-defining, it suffers from deficiencies common to new fields: a lack of refinement and rigour. It is fair to say that a number of the chapter contributions are little more than basic reports. There is little critical analysis of previous scholarship (an exception here is Brennan's chapter) and some of the contributions are repetitive: Standard potted histories of institutional abuse are retold to provide context in chapters that are already very short (averaging 12 pages per contribution) and comments on familiar phenomenological commonalities (eg. that testimony can be traumatic) are repeated in various chapters.

Not only is the text repetitive at points, the brief and generalist character of several contributions means that complex and difficult questions are treated in brief. I will develop one example in some detail. At least three chapters note that care-leavers seeking access to personal information held in institutional records, have, on privacy grounds, very limited access to third-party information. The impression is that these obstacles are gratuitous. But questions surrounding access to third-party material are serious and complex with legal, moral and social practice implications.² The restrictions that record-seekers confront are not mere bureaucratic hindrances, but reflect efforts to balance the rights of survivors to access their personal information with the rights of others to keep their personal information private. It is very possible that different states have not struck the balance correctly, but making that judgement requires sustained analysis. That the point is engaged only *en passant* in this volume

is illustrative of the formative character of the field, with domains of analysis still being defined.

Lastly, I return to the text's key contribution, the identification of a transnational practice. As we have seen, this practice is complex and multifarious. As a theorist, I think it would be useful to assess the practice as a whole, probing its internal unity, its sufficiency, and the normative demands that it satisfies. Those tasks remain undone.

To conclude, readers who are interested in rectificatory practice in OCED countries should read this volume. Readers interested in political responses to institutional abuse must read this volume. They are likely to find questions and answers both.

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¹ The "International Network on Studies of Inquiries into Child Abuse, Politics of Apology and Historical Representations of Children in Out-of home Care" is convened by Johanna Sköld. Readers should note that I am a member of that network.

² An excellent recent discussion is, Department of Social Services, *Access to Records by Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants: Access Principles for Records Holders and Best Practice Guidelines in providing access to records*" (Australian Government, 2015). As of 22 March 2016, this report was available [here](#).