

Book Review

Kim D Weinert, Karen Crawley and Kieran Tranter (eds) (2020) *Law, Lawyers and Justice: Through Australian Lenses*. Abingdon: Routledge

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Introduction

In *Law, Lawyers and Justice*, 17 scholars of law and popular culture come together to consider how the legal system is experienced in Australian film, television and (most innovatively) social media. It uses these cultural artefacts to uncover and reveal the reality of justice in Australia. As the contributors to this collection recognise, the law lives beyond the formal rules and institutions of the justice system. The law should be viewed in its context; that is, in the wider cultural world from which most people gain their understanding of the law.

Background

Law and popular culture is an increasingly prominent topic in contemporary legal scholarship. There is a growing recognition of the mutual influence that law and popular culture have on one another. In the last two decades, there has been a steady growth in work on this area. It is in the many edited collections that have emerged that law and popular culture has most shown itself to be a vibrant field of scholarship, including Freeman's (2005) *Law and Popular Culture*, and Greenfield and Osborn's (2013) *Readings in Law and Popular Culture*. Notably, Australian scholars have been at the forefront of the law and popular culture movement, including figures such as Manderson (2000), MacNeil (2007) and Young (2010), who have regularly published collections in this area of scholarship. However, the contributions made by Australian scholars have often focused on global works and drawn out more universal themes. It is in this area that *Law, Lawyers and Justice* makes a unique contribution. It establishes its distinctiveness by interrogating the subject through Australian lenses exclusively.

Summary

One of the main results of this extended focus on law and popular culture in Australia is that the reader is not simply provided with one lens through which a single image of Australian legal culture among a global cornucopia is presented; rather, this



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collection encourages readers to explore a diverse range of Australian experiences in relation to the law as found in film, television and social media.

The book is organised into two sections. The first section considers the legacy of settler colonisation; that is, genocide and contested sovereignty. While the second section considers the intersectionality of contemporary Australian identity, notably challenging the traditional emphasis on one type of Australian masculinity.

One of the key chapters in the first section's investigation of settler colonialism is by Anthony and Tranter (pp. 59–81), who unpick the cultural trope of the chase (i.e., the pursuit of First Nations people by officers of the settler state). They trace a lineage across film and into contemporary social media spaces to show that the pursuit and killing of First Nation youngsters has an enduring heritage. These authors produce a powerful account that shows how the scripted, dramatised events on the screen can be used to frame spontaneous, everyday dialogue. The recognition of the way in which the white Australians who frequent 'law and order' Facebook sites repeat the language and imagery of state enforcement officers in films provides insight into how notions of justice are moulded through cultural consumption.

In the second section, in an important chapter speaking to changing identity, Tranter (pp. 258–274) examines the Mad Max franchise, which speaks to the changing conceptions of nature and the role of masculinity in Australia. The original trilogy (in which men doled out violence and rode in powerful machines) was known for its glorification of masculine power. Conversely, the key message of the fourth instalment, *Fury Road*, was of a future beyond this masculine age. The author questions the degree to which the series was ever as heteronormative as has been supposed and develops the idea that *Fury Road* shifts important masculine assumptions about the series. In the fourth instalment, the women lead the way, male violence is not the answer and the women, who could rescue society, push different values.

Evaluation

This review selected two chapters that capture the core messages of each section; however, every contribution is valuable and deserves wider readership. For those looking to understand how customary conceptions of Australian legality have become established and could be challenged, *Law, Lawyers and Justice* provides compelling insights.

The organisation of the collection into two sections works well, as it provides a breadth and depth of Australian identities. The reader is given an understanding of the law and the legal system over time and the span of current legal spaces. The reader is shown how First Nations peoples have been ignored by the state (Klippmark's chapter, pp. 129–143), prevented from engaging with the state (Quirk and Murphy's chapter, pp. 42–58) and brutalised by the state (Crofts and van Rijswijk's chapter, pp. 106–128). A hopeful contrast is provided in Duncanson's chapter (pp. 144–175), which shows some of the pockets in which resistance and expression have emerged.

It is revealed how hegemonic masculinity has become normalised (Pâquet's chapter, pp. 202–219). This understanding grounds the explorations of the resulting gendered violence, which is explored in other chapters, such as those by Joseph and van Rijswijk (pp. 275–287) and Arnold (pp. 220–239), who examine male rape. In one chapter, Weinert (pp. 240–257) considers the role of neoliberalism on such violence and in doing so, highlights the need to challenge contemporary political orthodoxies.

For a collection that explicitly focuses on Australian popular culture, this book is far from insular. Most of the cultural choices are widely known; however, even in relation to the lesser known cultural choices (e.g., the social media components), the editors and the authors have presented the book in such a way that the narrative is accessible and easy to follow and will have wide appeal for the international readership.

Conclusion

The collection provides insights into Australian cultures and the role that law plays in the lives of different groups across the country. There is abundant potential for an international readership to draw wider parallels (e.g., parallels with other states constructed from settler colonisation and parallels with colonising nations that are facing similar challenges to, for example, hegemonic masculinity).

What we are given is a unique analysis of Australian legal culture that stands on its own merits. The work should be primarily understood as a successful deep dive into how law and justice in Australia has been formed and legitimised and thus how it has affected the lives of people across the country. Australia has made a distinctive contribution to popular culture. This collection understands and probes into that contribution by applying Australian lenses to the law and justice. This book is essential reading for those who want to get a handle on how the law functions in Australia.

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