

UNDRIP TEN YEARS ON:  
THE STRUGGLE FOR PEACE IN A SETTLER COLONIAL WORLD

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*Book reviewed:*

PEACEBUILDING AND THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:  
EXPERIENCES AND STRATEGIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY  
*Edited by* Heather Devere, Kelli Te Maihāroa, and John P. Synott  
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The collection of essays contained in *Peacebuilding and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: Experiences and Strategies for the 21st Century*, edited by Heather Devere, Kelli Te Maihāroa, and John P. Synott, is a welcome and comprehensive insight into an area of great relevance to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples worldwide. Renowned Indigenous and human rights lawyer Moana Jackson opens the collection of essays by providing a thoughtful meditation on how Indigenous rights ‘might be advanced within peacebuilding frameworks’ (p. v). John Synott’s *Introduction* (pp. 1–13) anchors *Peacebuilding* around the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (‘the Declaration’, ‘UNDRIP’), the ten-year anniversary of which occurred on September 13 2017,<sup>2</sup> and how human rights frameworks have and continue to inform the process of peacebuilding for Indigenous Peoples throughout the world today.

*Peacebuilding* offers a profound diversity of perspectives, stories, and traditions that examine the experiences of peacebuilding as articulated amongst Indigenous communities as far afield as Moriori of Rēkohu (Maui Solomon, pp. 55–7), the Aymara people in Bolivia (Fabiola Belmonte, pp. 77–85), and Sami in Sweden (Guðrún Árnadóttir, pp. 143–153). The notion of ‘peacebuilding’, for the collection’s editors Devere, Te Maihāroa and Synott, is founded upon the ethic of nonviolence, and specifically concerns the struggles and inequalities that are maintained and precipitated through structural violence (pp. 174–6). Although they ponder the potentially utopian nature of their definition (‘Is,

perhaps, the promotion of nonviolence impossible to achieve and not sufficiently pragmatic in the actual context of post-conflict societies?’), they nonetheless concede that ‘peacebuilding with nonviolence at the core has been the most successful strategy for Indigenous Peoples’ (p.176).

*Peacebuilding* is divided into four thematic categories, and each of the book’s seventeen contributors explore those themes across the Indigenous contexts within which they are situated. Part One charts the pursuit of Indigenous People’s rights through political processes, and demonstrates how colonial settler states have circumscribed those rights in different ways. In the Australian context, for example, legislation enacted by successive Commonwealth governments has persistently failed to acknowledge fundamental Indigenous Australian rights, such as self-determination and native title (Andrew Gunstone, pp.17–26). This is likewise reflected in K.J. Verwaayen’s chapter, who stipulates that practices of peacebuilding remain futile so long as the Canadian government pays only lip service to Indigenous rights (pp.29–38). This superficial rhetoric is exacerbated by conservative attitudes that efface Indigenous histories and struggles, embodied in former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s ‘fantastical’ revisionist comment in 2009 that ‘[Canada] has no history of colonialism’ (p.31). Cheng-Feng Shih writes of the plethora of distinct Indigenous peoples in Taiwan, and reiterates the importance of a land base in the exercise of self-determination, an inordinately difficult task to realise given the prevalent nature of overt and structural violence towards the Indigenous populations of Taiwan (pp.41–50). These opening essays express the ‘relentless struggle of Indigenous peoples to have their human rights recognised [which] has been unceasing in the relationships between Indigenous Peoples and their oppressor cultures and governments’ (p.170).

The second section is illustrated with a vibrant tapestry of traditional peace strategies and nonviolent actions, which have inspired campaigns for the rights of Indigenous peoples. Heather Devere, Kelli Te Maihāroa, Maui Solomon and Maata Wharehoka discuss peace traditions within Aotearoa and Rēkohu (pp.53–63). Solomon describes ‘Nunuku’s Law’ for Moriori of Rēkohu, a cardinal philosophy of peace that forbade the ‘taking of human life’ (pp.55–6). As he explains, ‘Fighting became ritualised, and upon the first drop of blood being drawn, fighting was to cease’ (p.56). This became an ultimate covenant born of sacrifice, reified in blood in 1835, when mainland Taranaki iwi Ngāti Mutunga and Ngāti Tama invaded Rēkohu. Instead of resorting to violent resistance, Moriori remained steadfast in their adherence to Nunuku’s law – resulting in the enslavement and widespread killing of their people. At the greatest and most devastating of costs, the fundamental essence of what it meant (and

means) to be Moriori was sacrificially preserved for eternity. Te Maihāroa and Wharehoka's pieces continue in this vein, both of whom examine communities of passive resistance and non-violent protest in the late nineteenth century, in Ōmārama and Parihaka respectively. Jeffrey Ansloos similarly highlights how First Nations' peace perspectives can encourage 'nonviolent activism for transformative justice' (p.65), and Fabiola Belmonte explores practices of conflict resolution amongst the Aymara people of Bolivia (pp.77–85). Read together, these chapters highlight the nonviolent ways Indigenous peoples have responded to invasion, colonisation, and dispossession, as meaningful and effective alternatives to violent resistance.

Part Three explores the challenges that impede the implementation of the rights of Indigenous peoples, exemplified through Australian and Indian case studies. They highlight how discriminatory legislation and governmental inertia have been instrumental to the on-going marginalisation of Indigenous peoples. Asmi Wood begins by examining the enduring struggle for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians (pp.89–103), and urges that recognition is the fundamental starting point before 'true peacebuilding efforts between equal human beings' can take place (p.101). This is hampered by, for example, Section 51 (xxvi) of the Australian Constitution (2003), which allows Parliament to pass laws based on 'race'. As Woods notes, 'in practice [this section] has *only* been used to make laws, including detrimental laws, for Indigenous people' (p.94, Wood's emphasis). Across India, Mousumi De explores efforts at sustainable food security for the Purumunda community in the state of Odisha (pp.105–115), and Leban Serto and Mhonyamo Lotha discuss the prolonged struggle for self-determination for Indigenous peoples of Northeast India, with recent shifts away from armed struggle toward nonviolent strategies (pp.117–127).

The final section explores concepts and practices amongst twenty-first century Indigenous communities that have strived towards sustainable peace. Sophia Close demonstrates how Indigenous East Timorese peacebuilding practices are far more effective than politically liberal strategies that are otherwise employed, the former being 'critical to transforming violence in Timor-Leste' (p.131). Guðrún Árnadóttir's chapter, 'Who is Sami?', explores the political mobilisation of Sami in Sweden, and begins by providing a brief overview of Sweden's colonial history, which (as elsewhere) operated on the central assumptions of hierarchy and biological racism (pp.145–6). Sweden's population is largely unfamiliar with their own colonial history, which 'leads to little support and interest in the Sami cause' (p.153). Árnadóttir explores how Sami identity is negotiated in contemporary Swedish society, where the long hang-

over from racist colonial stereotypes of Sami endure. Lars-Anders Baer, one of her research participants, meditates on this: ‘I once showed up to a meeting in Sweden years ago as a representative of the Sami and was told, “Oh you can’t be Sami, you’re blonde and blue eyed and they are dark and short”’ (p.150). This, alongside the many other challenges Sami face today, resonated with my own whānau experiences growing up in Aotearoa, and indeed, are experiences shared throughout much of the contemporary Indigenous world.

What Árnadóttir is at pains to point out, however, is that despite Sweden’s ‘exemplary’ reputation on human rights, ‘Sami have not fully enjoyed [these] rewards’ (p.147). I particularly enjoyed reading Árnadóttir’s essay because it explored an Indigenous context outside of the Oceanic-North American domain, which I found to dominate Indigenous Studies during my undergraduate tenure in the discipline. Further, her chapter demonstrated how the destructive colonial practices of racism, categorisation and assimilation were equally imposed in Scandinavia as they were in the Southern Hemisphere. Amanda Kernell’s award-winning 2016 *Sami Blood (Sameblod)*, a coming-of-age drama set in 1930s northern Sweden, skilfully depicts these precise challenges and struggles, and, for those unfamiliar with Swedish colonialism, I recommend reading ‘Who is Sami?’ before watching the film. In the final substantive chapter, Jagannath Ambagudia discusses the methods of resistance employed by the Adivasi people, again in the Indian state of Odisha, in asserting their ancestral rights over *jal* (jungle) and *jamin* (land, water and forests). Ambagudia explores how, although non-violent strategies are fundamental to the Adivasi cause, it has occasionally ‘spilled into violence’ (p.163).

The wide-ranging examples and case studies that illustrate *Peacebuilding* articulate how different Indigenous communities around the world have struggled and worked towards recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights, a decade on from the pronouncement of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The practice of peacebuilding, expressed through the many Indigenous stories and traditions presented in the book, is central to the realisation of these rights, and is ‘also the key to the cessation of war and other forms of violence that threaten human and planetary wellbeing’ (Devere, Te Maihāroa, and Synott 2017, 177). It is important, however, that we remain cognisant and vigilant of the broader critiques of the Declaration, as Irene Watson highlights (2011). She stipulates how the fundamentally unequal distribution of power in settler colonial states remains ‘unchallenged’, and, as such, Indigenous subjugation endures beneath the auspices of the Declaration. More crucially, UNDRIP ‘fails to enable or open up space for a dialogue on coexisting sovereignties – that is, state and Aboriginal sovereignties’ (p.508).

*Peacebuilding* concludes with a final commentary from Devere, Te Maihāroa, and Synott, which includes a summary, a discussion of the definition of ‘peacebuilding’, as well as methodological considerations employed throughout the essays. ‘Definitions and Demographics of Indigenous Peoples in the Countries Researched in this Book’ is provided as a very useful appendix immediately thereafter, which discusses ‘Who are the World’s Indigenous Peoples?’ (2017, 179–82). It is brief, but very instructive.

A great strength of *Peacebuilding* simultaneously rests upon its highlighting of numerous Indigenous stories and struggles, coupled with the fact that many of the book’s contributors were writing from their own life experiences and oral histories as Indigenous peoples. Over half of the authors were Indigenous scholars, and the chapters by Devere, Te Maihāroa, Solomon, and Wharehoka, and Ansloos, ‘... present self-consciously Indigenous research methods that are shaped by the cultural perceptions of appropriate research discourse for Indigenous scholars on Indigenous research topics’ (p.177). For me, as a current doctoral student of Anthropology and Pacific Studies, such approaches to research are fundamental in challenging the dominant ways outsiders have studied and – intentionally or otherwise – objectified Indigenous peoples (see Hau’ofa 1994, Jolly 2007, Smith 2012). This attention to Indigenous methods and methodologies is a critical and severely overdue transformation that has yet to permeate much anthropological research and its attendant methodologies. The earliest iterations of these methodologies, as the editors appropriately point out, were premised on racial superiority (see Árnadóttir, pp.145–6) that ‘contributed greatly to the legitimacy of dispossession and genocide of Indigenous Peoples’ (p.177).

Due to the limitations of space and time, as well as the scope of research expertise, there remain, of course, hundreds of other Indigenous voices *Peacebuilding* was unable to include, such as the struggles of West Papuans in the shadow of vehement Indonesian oppression and aggression (TAPOL 1984; Saltford 2003; Tebay 2005; Kirksey 2012). Such stories would be great contributions for future research on Indigenous practices of peacebuilding. Nevertheless, that *Peacebuilding* offers such a far-reaching collection of stories from across the vast expanses of the Indigenous world is a testament to the book’s strength and integrity. All of the contributors’ stories achieve this, but for me, Solomon, Te Maihāroa and Wharehoka’s insights from Rēkohu, Ōmārama and Parihaka, were enlightening examples of peacebuilding within the Aotearoa context that went largely unnoticed in my undergraduate study, or in the case of Te Maihāroa’s piece on her great ancestor and namesake, the prophet Te Maihāroa, unmentioned.

For me, as a graduate of Māori Studies in mainland Aotearoa, I found this particularly striking as it disrupted the dominant narratives of Māori masculinity and violence that I was taught both throughout my degree and during my youth growing up in New Zealand. Accounts of Māori men's engagements with peaceful resistance, such as those provided by Solomon, Te Maihāroa and Wharehoka, are valuable counter narratives to the dominant hypermasculine portrayal of the Māori male as savage, warrior-like, predisposed to physicality as opposed to intellectuality, and, from the twentieth century, a 'natural fit' within rugby culture (Hokowhitu 2004, 2014). Such perspectives would have enriched my learning greatly. This is why I believe their essays should be required reading in stage one Māori and Indigenous Studies programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand. I would have relished the opportunity to read such a comprehensive collection of Indigenous-based research when I was an undergraduate student of Māori Studies, which is why I likewise feel *Peacebuilding* should be included as a core reader for students of Indigenous Studies throughout the world. *Peacebuilding* was a pleasure to read, whose stories and messages resonate long after the book has been read. They are the physical embodiment of Jackson's opening words (p. vii): 'It is living with "friends" respectful of the fullness of each other's humanity and mindful that such respect is itself an antidote to the "othering" that too easily leads to war. Therein lies the hope.'

#### NOTES

- 1 Tēnā koutou, ko Pounamu Jade Aikman ahau, he uri nō Tainui, Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Awa hoki. I am a doctoral student at the School of Culture, History and Language at the Australian National University, and my research focuses upon the nexus between Indigenous sovereignty and state violence. Nei ra te mihi ki te tangata whenua o taua rohe, o ngā Ngūnawal me ngā Ngambri hoki; I here acknowledge the traditional owners of the land in the Australian Capital Territory, upon whose dispossession white Australian society was founded, and my tenure at university made possible. Ngā mihi nui rawa ki a koutou e te mana whenua.

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2. The precise day I submitted this review essay.

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