

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

A Sustainable Peace

MARTY BRANAGAN AND HELEN WARE

In December 2022, the University of New England in Australia convened the conference, 'Environmental and Sustainable Peace, Social Justice and Creative Activism: Celebrating 40 Years of Peace Studies at UNE', held on country and curated by the Anaiwan and neighbouring groups. We wanted to hold it on country where Peace Studies began at this university, and also chose to use a hybrid format of face-to-face as well as Zoom in our sessions to allow some excellent international speakers to participate with a minimal carbon footprint. We began with a Welcome to Country by Anaiwan Elder Uncle Steve Widders, complemented by a yarning circle involving another Elder, Aunty Rose Lovelock and her sister Fiona.

Thanks to the late Bernard Swan and his creative thinking, passion and perseverance, 40 years ago Peace Studies had entered through the back door of UNE. This was at a time when, amazingly, no university courses were discussing solutions to the threat of nuclear war, then humanity's greatest challenge, and now joined by the anthropogenic global warming and species extinction crises which developed countries' Peace Studies have increasingly focussed on.

In recent decades, Peace Studies has faced many challenges under the neo-liberalising of Australian universities, including a doubling of the cost of arts degrees, understaffing, and cuts to majors and units. Everyone benefits from peace, but it is often taken for granted and few have any economic motivation to want to pay for it. Peace Studies rarely have 'industry partnerships' or corporate sponsorship. We aim to change the future for the better. We at UNE have a good reputation internationally among peace academics but, being non-violent, we rarely feature in the news, which is why we continue to hold international events such as our 2022 conference.

Peace Studies is often thought to be a bit 'simplistic' or airy-fairy. But if achieving peace were simple, we could expect to see far more of it. In reality, Peace Studies is complex, multi-layered, dynamic and multi-faceted. As one student noted:

Working in science, the notion of peace studies is the source of much hilarity among my co-workers, but people are always shocked to learn what it is

we talk and think about in the discipline. Unicorns and rainbows? Not so much. These are among the hardest questions in life and if only it was just abstract academic questions – the practical application of the study is so frustratingly difficult!

Peace Studies addresses not just the symptoms but the root causes of the planet's major challenges, seeking solutions from the grass roots to the elite and the international. We attempt to understand how to minimise the inter-linked forms of violence, whether direct, ecological, structural or cultural. None of this is straightforward; nonviolent action, conflict transformation, peacemaking and peacebuilding are hard work. Peace is assertive action, not passivity – so Peace Studies is sometimes in trouble, and we are rarely adequately staffed or funded. As Martha Nussbaum's 2010 *Not for Profit: Why democracy needs the humanities* argues, democracies need people capable of critical, global thinking. Rather than just supporting individual success, we aim to create collegial, cooperative, empowered graduates capable of being active, informed, questioning global citizens, motivated to speak truth to power. We aim for graduates who are not compliant but provocative, capable of challenging embedded paradigms of militarism, consumerism and infinite growth, and resisting powerful interests such as the colossal arms industry with its tentacles in so many facets of our lives.

We hope the tide is turning for Peace Studies both at UNE and nationally. As Aboriginal band *No Fixed Address* sang: We have survived. We are the last official Peace Studies discipline in Australia, although other universities certainly have peace-related units, often linked to security or conflict work which attracts more industrial support. There are some promising developments and we hope to continue to thrive for another 40 years.

Over 40 years, we have impacted on thousands of students over several generations, and given them a sound theoretical understanding of how to achieve peace. We have contributed to intellectual debates that impact on the real world, and sent graduates out into the world, including the extreme danger zones of frontline peacebuilding, such as working to protect

vulnerable groups in the Darfur region of Sudan with the Nonviolent Peaceforce organisation. We have scores of PhD graduates scattered across the globe, making a difference in all manner of positions – a university chancellor in the Solomon Islands, a minister in Nigeria, founders of peacebuilding NGOs and permaculture institutes, UN workers, nonviolent activists and artists, land rights and environmental advocates, social justice practitioners, and many others.

All of these are working towards what Johan Galtung (1969, 1990) termed 'positive peace'. Much more than the mere absence of armed conflict, positive peace requires socio-economic justice and equity which are statistically linked to better environmental outcomes, superior developmental outcomes, greater resilience and stronger income growth (Institute for Economics and Peace 2022).

The 2022 'Environmental and Sustainable Peace, Social Justice and Creative Activism' conference began on 1 December. This is Abolition Day in Costa Rica, the date when in 1948 that country abolished its military forces – a momentous and beneficial decision described by Ambassador Vargas in his stirring address at the conference. Our outstanding speakers included Gem Romuld, Director of the Nobel Peace prize-winning International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, who discussed ICAN's astounding success in getting nuclear weapons declared illegal by the majority international community. Dr Sue Wareham is President of the Medical Association for Prevention of War, and Bernie Shakeshaft is the founder of the renowned BackTracks organisation. Federal senator David Shoebridge provided other highlights for an engaged audience who actively joined in with this historic occasion.

The conference produced numerous resolutions, which can be found at the link at the end of this editorial. Recordings from the conference sessions can be heard on the conference website (see below). The conference was organised by a small and overworked group from Peace Studies and the UNE Creative and Cultural Arts Network. This was at a university that has been through a tornado both literally – recent severe flooding in this part of Australia from unprecedented adverse weather events – and metaphorically.

Complementing the in-depth academic program was a substantial cultural program, including multiple art exhibitions featuring artists such as Yuin Elder Uncle Lloyd Hornsby who recently exhibited at the Louvre. There was a performance of Dr Lorina Barker's immersive play 'Trucked Off'. A Human Rights and Nonviolence Film Festival featured films such as 'Atomic Confessions', 'Pray the Devil Back to Hell' and 'The Bentley Effect'.

There were musicians, an Indian dance performance and yoga sessions aiming for a holistic, non-dualistic and inspiring conference. We wanted cultural aspects embedded and integrated into intellectual inquiry and academia, as occurs in most Indigenous societies.

We also acknowledged our forebears in Peace Studies, such as the late Max Lawson and Raja Jayaraman, Toh Swee-hin, Bert Jenkins, Geoff Harris (who joined us via Zoom from South Africa), Rebecca Spence (running a peacebuilding workshop in Asia), Vanessa Bible (Zoom from Darwin), and current staff: former diplomat Helen Ware, Marty Branagan, Johanna Garnett and DB Subedi, whose history of Peace Studies at UNE can be found on our website (see below).

As deep ecologist John Seed puts it, we are privileged to be called into this time of such major challenges. In this summit on Anaiwan high country, we welcomed people from other nations within Australia and overseas. With our cultural cringe here in Australia, we often imagine that the main game is elsewhere, maybe in the cities of the northern hemisphere. But attendees were asked to visualise, for a moment, a world centred on New England. What we do, even in a small rural university town, can have an unpredictable impact.

Attendees were asked to imagine also, not all the doom and gloom of the world, exacerbated by saturation news, fear-mongering arms dealers and fossil fuel corporations dragging us down, but instead the eternal streams of good in the world, the mass social movements and inventions and divestments striving for a sunnier future, sometimes just needing an intelligent tweak here or a nudge there to reach critical mass and sudden positive change, such as the unexpected fall of the Berlin Wall. Here in this special place, on land sacred to the Anaiwan, attendees had five days to make a difference to the world. We tried to seize it by being open to new ideas, by being brave enough to seek out new people and to have challenging, respectful conversations. Together we could agree that wars and militarism make the world less safe rather than providing protection, as civilians of all ages and capabilities are killed in greater numbers than the military, and are wounded and traumatised, the environment is damaged, civil liberties are eroded and resources which could save and improve lives are wasted in creating destruction.

Peace Studies is by its very nature and mission an interdisciplinary field. A small selection of articles from the Conference have been included in this issue of *Social Alternatives*. They range from Africa to Australia and from literature to youth unemployment.

In 'Resisting weapons industry influence in our schools and elsewhere' (2023), Sue Wareham warns of the impact of arms manufacturers on schools while Brian Martin explores the consequences of killer robots and deepfakes for peace activists in his article 'Killer Robots and Deepfakes: Activists and Artificial Intelligence' (2023).

It has become a cliché to say that peace processes fail because the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed. Both Obayedul Patwary's report on the Chittagong Hill Tribes of Bangladesh (2023) and Christina Mammone's study of the youth of Sierra Leone (2023) describe situations where root causes remain unresolved and the potential for conflict remains. In Bangladesh this is because of the majority's lack of willingness to recognise the rights of the Hill Tribes. Sadly, one common feature of violent conflicts is that each side finds reasons to declare the other side as sub-human and therefore ripe to be killed. In Sierra Leone there is some desire to find a path to education and an economic role for the many jobless youths, but there is also an adverse tendency to stereotype them as 'lumpen', lazy and useless.

Issah Tikumah's discussion of the extent to which there was a 'Colonial Creation of Tribalism in Africa' (2023) represents a good example of the results of the opportunities which the University of New England offers to scholars from developing countries to have the space and time to consider issues of concern in a multidisciplinary context, temporarily free of the politics of home. As a novelist and former refugee, Issah has a special perspective on the consequences of colonialism which are still moulding Africa. A recent global history of Africa included over 900 references, only 32 of which were written by Africans (Reader 1999). At UNE we aim to support graduate students to publish their insights into their own countries during their research to redress the balance of outsiders from developed countries being able to afford to do research when locals cannot.

Godwin Yidana's (2023) study of women peace activists in Myanmar represents the research of an outsider but one who is also from a developing country. Whilst asking what motivates women to stand up for their rights, however dire the situation, it shows some wonderful examples of courage and determination in the face of a government purveying terror to its own people.

Scott Hearnden's (2023) work on Sri Lanka discusses the experiences of someone who was at once an outsider and an insider: an outsider by birth and nationality but an insider as a member of a minority group discriminated against for their sexuality. His report raises many implicit questions about just how well a Sri Lankan researching

a similar topic in Australia would fare in seeking the cooperation of politicians and bureaucrats.

At first glance, Merri Bell's (2023) discussion of the Canadian author of *Anne of Green Gables* subtle gender activism through the arts might appear to be somewhat distant from the concerns of the Conference. Yet that book has sold more than fifty million copies in multiple languages around the world and demonstrates that he or she who shouts the loudest is not necessarily the one who has the most influence.

Helen Ware's article on 'Lessons in Truth and Reconciliation for Australia from Overseas' discusses a current issue of domestic peace which each Australian state and territory must address, considering both the needs of the First Nations and the probable responses of all those who personally or through their ancestors are migrants to this continent. Reconciliation has been a popular 'soft' concept overseas, where there may have been previously friendly relationships to restore. For many Indigenous Australians, their goal is to secure their basic human rights, rather than to reconcile, a viewpoint ignored by many in government.

Links

Conference website: www.une.edu.au/2022peaceconference.

Conference resolutions: <https://blog.une.edu.au/pulsenews/2022/12/15/resolutions-for-peace/>.

Peace Studies website: <https://www.une.edu.au/about-une/faculty-of-humanities-arts-social-sciences-and-education/hass/study/political-international-peace-studies/peace-studies>

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Yidana, G. 2023 "I wanted to contribute to the peace process" Women's motivations for peace in Myanmar', *Social Alternatives* 42,1: 22-29.

Authors

Helen Ware has had a number of research, academic and bureaucratic careers. She was the Director of the Twelve Nation Study of the African Family and Director of Projects at the Australian Human Rights Commission. She covered the Pacific as an Assistant Director General of AusAID and served as Australian High Commissioner to Zambia, Malawi and the African Liberation Movements. She is currently the Inaugural Professor of Peace Studies at the University of New England.

Marty Branagan is the Convenor of Peace Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, Arts, Social Sciences and Education at the University of New England. He has been a long-term participant-observer-researcher in nonviolent activism including the Franklin River, Roxby, Borneo, Jabiluka and NSW old-growth forests campaigns. He recently co-edited *Rethinking Wilderness and the Wild: Conservation, Conflict and Co-existence* with Routledge. An exhibited artist, his illustrated non-violent action novel *Locked On!* is based on the Leard and Bentley climate campaigns.

POETRY AUTHORS

Sharon Kernot is an Adelaide-based poet, short story writer and novelist. Her verse novel, *The Art of Taxidermy*, was shortlisted for a number of prizes including the 2019 Prime Minister's Literary Awards.

Sheila A. Murphy's most recent book is *Golden Milk* (Luna Bisonte Prods, 2020). In 2023, BlazeVOX will publish *Learning to Relax*.

Juliet A. Paine is an Adelaide-based poet and aspiring novelist. These poems were written as part of Varuna Residential Fellowship.

Reneé Pettitt-Schipp is the author of the award-winning collection of poetry, *The Sky Runs Right Through Us*, written about Reneé's time on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Reneé's non-fiction novel about her return to the islands in 2016, will be released by Fremantle Press in 2023. Reneé currently lives in the Great Southern region of Western Australia.

Provinces*

1.

My mind gathers provinces
I travelled through,
resting in wooded declivities;
girls who danced the Bandari;
men who played Pasur.
I dream of bayonets like beaking birds,
and lost regions of mind—
a letter I wrote to my mother
still travels obscure routes;
my signature sprawls strangely.
Swimming and surfacing,
I see the pointed weapons.

2.

The future becomes the gargoyle I'd carved
in childhood. And flat, dusty land
with weeds scragging margins;
squeezed bungalows;
fencelines of bristling light;
disinfected air smelling of rope;
unwieldy, dragged postures.
They took my son for silent days
that itched on my arm.
My wife's blacked-out letters
fell into skerricks.
I remembered a doll with straw-filled face
that my son used to carry
and, in fields near our village,
the guns of soldiers carousing in dirt.

3.

If you have seen me through laurel;
if you have caught sight of a fugitive image
that reminds you; or wondered
when a voice hangs in dusk;
or sensed remnant longing
in a wayward shred on your elegant clothes,
please know that, for me,
you keep the oleander's warm and bitter scent;
that this poor landscape remembers you.

4.

Hoping, and refusing hope, shifting chairs
while daylight hangs on furniture
like a form of transgression.
It's been more than an hour
yet there's no news. My world's all memory—
of hauling water
and holding my mother like a damaged parcel
as her brown eyes bleed.
I'm accosted by swathes of dark feeling.
The prospect of departure
is as shapeless as longing

PAUL HETHERINGTON

*Commended entry from the 2022 Seeking Asylum Poetry prize