

Making peace

**A \$1.25 MILLION DONATION FROM THE AOTEAROA
NEW ZEALAND PEACE AND CONFLICT STUDIES TRUST TO
OTAGO'S LEADING THINKERS INITIATIVE HAS LED TO
NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST CENTRE DEDICATED TO PEACE.**

HOW CAN WE live in a world without violence?

For retired teacher Dorothy Brown, this question is no matter of winter-evening, round-the-fire, armchair philosophy. Peace should be treated with urgency, she insists.

“We need answers, and we need them now. It’s the most important, pressing issue that society faces – and it’s one of society’s most difficult problems. We need the best minds and the best universities actively engaged in finding solutions.”

It’s a conviction Brown describes as a consequence of “having lived so long”. Over the past two years, her memories – the atomic bomb, soldiers sent to war, a litany of “cultural, legal and military breakdowns” – have been her fuel. Along with similarly passionate New Zealanders, including former Human Rights Commissioner Margaret Bedgood, retired businessman Chris Barfoot and Moriori Māori barrister Maui Solomon, Brown formed a trust and embarked upon a single-minded fundraising and lobbying campaign to establish a Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies, led by a chair and hosted at a New Zealand university.

New Zealand is the perfect place to promote these principles at the level of university study, believes Brown. “Peace-making and peace-building are central to our security and foreign policy strategy. Our leadership role in the abolition of nuclear weapons is part of the nation’s identity. We have many indigenous traditions of peace to draw upon, including those of the Moriori and at Parihaka.”

Frankly, she says, “I was ashamed we did not already have such a dedicated centre”.

The University of Otago came to the party through its Leading Thinkers Initiative, both committing to the centre and matching the trust’s \$1.25 million donation with equal funding as part of the Government’s Partnerships for Excellence framework.

So, when Professor Kevin Clements arrived from Queensland last month to become Otago’s inaugural Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies, Brown’s goals were officially achieved – for a start.

Inspired by similar centres in Bradford, England, and Queensland, Australia, the centre’s goal is to engender the knowledge needed to prevent conflicts – of all descriptions – from becoming violent. Whether these occur on the scale of international warfare or family violence, the underlying issue is the same, says Brown. “As individuals, as a society, what do we do with our anger?”

In this, Brown sees peace studies as being to relationships what preventive medicine is to health care. Clements continues the analogy when he describes the professional peace-building skills he envisages the centre ultimately offering as “akin to a clinical school for medicine”.

The University and trust are still seeking funding support to appoint more staff and to offer a full range of under- and postgraduate programmes; their ambition is to develop a workforce of professionally competent peace-builders. Graduates would apply their knowledge

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in areas from education to diplomacy, prove capable of understanding many sides of an argument and negotiate solutions with wisdom and compassion.

Whereas other academic traditions might aim to investigate their subjects with dispassionate analytic detachment, the centre’s goals are upfront. Its work is focused on the pursuit of peace, the non-violent resolution of conflict. “I don’t think John Lennon was joking when he sang ‘Give peace a chance’,” suggests Brown. “We still haven’t really tried peace as an underpinning philosophy.”

For Brown, the fundamental concepts are simple. “Peace is based on lessons we learned as children: the need to share, to be kind, to do unto others as you would have done to you. We need to understand how to bring those principles into the adult world, into the realm of organisations and countries.”

The reality, she acknowledges, is vastly more difficult. “What would enable Israel and Palestine to reach a position where they are prepared to share?”

Finding the answers requires a rich academic environment, in which it’s possible to pool efforts from such disciplines as law, politics, economics, psychology, sociology, philosophy, religious studies, gender studies, indigenous studies and history.

For Clements, who has been charged with developing and leading the centre, the opportunity to draw together a community of peace-related researchers from across the University is critical. And the talent is just waiting to be tapped. It ranges from history lecturer Dr Alex Trapeznik’s explorations of Russian revolutionary ideology, through to film and communication studies’ Professor Hilary Radner’s interest in the aesthetics of peace and war. Their work will contribute to the centre’s immediate research agenda, which encompasses the origins and resolutions of conflict; development, security and peace-building; inter-religious conflict; and sustainable communities, among much else.

Clements – whose previous roles have included leading a development NGO dedicated to conflict transformation, holding government advisory posts and establishing or

directing peace studies centres at three overseas universities – is clear on this point. “Practice must be informed by research and vice versa. It’s the only way to achieve workable, well-thought-out policy and practice.”

Since leaving New Zealand 17 years ago, Clements’ titles have included Secretary General of International Alert, Director for Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Queensland, Professor of Conflict Resolution and Director of the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, head of the Peace Research Centre at the Australian National University and Director of the Quaker United Nations Office in Geneva.

Now, he says, “the opportunity to apply this experience in New Zealand was a very easy decision to make”.

Clements was raised in Opotiki, the son of a conscientious objector who had been dispatched to the town immediately after World War Two to serve as a Methodist minister. It was there the Clements family encountered the mixed and sometimes hostile reactions of the community. Issues around dissent, the state and society became part of the fabric of the family’s identity. Questions of how to pursue constructively pacifist convictions, while respecting the values of those who were not, remained a motivating force for Clements.

He tentatively began a career in the Ministry, but was drawn to development studies, seeking to understand what made non-violent social transformation possible.

His drive to engage fruitfully in the burning issues of the time saw him appointed as a member of the 1985 Defence Committee of Inquiry into New Zealand’s anti-nuclear policy. Not only did he become conversant in alternative military technologies, he came to focus increasingly on strategies and tactics that would prevent countries from ever needing to press the red button. In particular, Clements wanted to understand how to move states and nations from unilateral concepts of national security to more inclusive ideas of co-operative security.

He talks of peaceful structures, and peaceful processes; the centrality of human rights and justice; the ability of

individuals to participate in decisions that affect them, find spaces for true dialogue, identify avenues for achieving change that don't resort to bloodshed.

Democracy? Yes, but ...

His work in Vanuatu, Clements reveals, raises doubts about a one-size-fits-all electoral process. "What we have heard from a number of community leaders is that adversarial electoral processes have created divisions where previously there were none."

Clements' current research explores concepts of "political hybridity" – that is, "ways in which different types of political organisation in developing countries combine traditional and modern elements in innovative and interesting ways".

"Instead of working 'against the grain' of custom and tradition, there are many new initiatives that enable people to think creatively about their future while standing firmly on historic sources of integration and social resilience.

"Organisations such as the Malvatumauri, National Council of Chiefs, in Vanuatu, for example, draw on custom to play positive roles in relation to the creative non-violent resolution of conflict, community development and good governance."

Clements believes in the need to pursue peace at a variety of different levels – individual, group, community, national, regional and global. And he sees a critical first step to generating peaceful processes as "a need to widen empathetic awareness".

He is troubled that "the tragedy of 3,600 deaths in the World Trade Centre attacks could generate such an outpouring of grief in the Western world, yet the 3.8 million people who have died in the conflict in the Congo in the last 10 years barely arouses notice", and cites the work of political philosopher Judith Butler who posed the question: "Who are you willing to grieve for?".

"What's required," Clements believes, "is a wider sense of species consciousness." It's an issue he intends to explore in a book he longs to write, "on enlarging the boundaries of compassion". He calls for "cosmopolitan humanism" as a guiding secular moral framework that focuses on the interdependence of all peoples, avoids simple dualisms of right and wrong, and expands notions

of political accountability as being not just to our selves or immediate communities, but to all others with whom we share the planet.

Inspired by his experiences with Tutsi and Hutu women in Burundi, whom he witnessed extending extraordinary compassion to one another following the ethnic conflict they endured, Clements is also interested in researching further the role of women in peace-building.

"Without wishing to promote any simplistic essentialist arguments, women do tend to be more intuitively peaceful than men. There is quite a lot of research, for example, suggesting that women have a more relational view of security. Their security is achieved through the quality of relationships rather than the assertion of self."

Meanwhile, he suggests, the financial crisis is providing some cause for hope in terms of stimulating higher levels of co-operative behaviour. "Crises do focus the mind. What we are seeing is an awareness on the part of many political leaders that there is no unilateral solution to global economic problems. They will only be resolved with higher levels of intentional, analytical, collaborative processes."

Imagine if such efforts were turned to achieving peace. "Peace and conflict studies focus a lot of their attention on ways of generating higher levels of tolerance, co-operation and collaborative problem solving."

Is world peace possible?

"Yes," says Clements. "But only if people want it. It won't happen spontaneously and it won't happen through wishful or idealistic thinking. It will happen through a combination of heart and intelligence by applying the best minds to analysing the sources of violence and by generating realistic non-violent alternatives. Peace is a never-ending process, one that must be worked at afresh by each generation."

What Dorothy Brown and the Aotearoa New Zealand Peace and Conflict Studies Trust can rest more easily about is that now, in New Zealand, we might have the ability to learn how to do this.



Professor of Peace and Conflict Studies Kevin Clements: "Peace is a never-ending process, one that must be worked at afresh by each generation."

Nicola Mutch

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