

# Chapter 15

## Indigenous Ceremonial Peacemaking: The Restoration of Balance and Harmony

Polly O. Walker  
Juniata College, USA

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores Indigenous conceptualizations of peace, focusing on some Native American, First Nations, Native Hawaiian, and Australian Aboriginal approaches, with an emphasis on peacemaking ceremonies. The author articulates some of the central tenets of Indigenous paradigms and explains how these shape historical and contemporary peacemaking, both among Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous and Western peoples. The ways in which colonialism has impacted Indigenous peacemaking are also explored, along with examples of the resilience of Indigenous approaches to peace. Finally, the chapter proposes ways in which “collaborations of integrity” have transformed contemporary conflicts by re-centering Indigenous peacemaking processes.*

### INTRODUCTION

For centuries, Indigenous peoples’ ceremonial approaches to peace have sustained these nations, their ways of being, and their relationship to the natural world. Although colonialism has severely impacted Indigenous languages, cultures, and governance, a number of Indigenous peoples continue to practice peacemaking as embedded in their own worldviews. In this chapter, the author explores the tenets that characterize a number of Indigenous approaches to peace, the ways in which these peacemaking processes have been impacted by colonialism, and ‘collaborations of integrity’<sup>1</sup> in which both Indigenous and Settler peoples address contemporary conflicts through Indigenous ceremonial peacemaking. The author argues that Indigenous peacemaking may inform wider processes of peacebuilding, and that to do so requires the development of respectful and reciprocal relationships and collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous peacemaking ceremonies are powerful events sustaining Indigenous peoples and their cultures, even in the face of the onslaught of colonialism, in part because they engage individuals and collectives in holistic ways. Mind, body, spirit and connections with the natural world are revitalized

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-3001-5.ch015

and rebalanced in Indigenous ceremonies, which are regarded both as sacred and practical traditions among Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous ceremonies have a long history in peacemaking across differences. Haudenosaunee diplomacy on the American frontier involved days of ceremonies that included oratory, dancing, eating, smoking and drinking before any verbal negotiations were undertaken (Shannon, 2008, p. 12). These ceremonies also incorporated the exchange of wampum belts and songs that both symbolized and strengthened friendship (Shannon, 2008, p. 13). The rituals established obligations among participants to meet regularly and exchange gifts, with the purpose of keeping alive the relationships they represented.

*In particular, the condolence and requickening ceremonies became the paradigms by which they engaged diplomacy and extended their notions of kinship and reciprocal obligations to outsiders. (Shannon, 2008, p. 43)*

Similarly, before the British invasion, Aboriginal Australian diplomacy involved rituals of exchange with the Maccassans, with whom Aboriginal Australian peoples established long-term reciprocal relationships (De Costa, 2009).

A number of Western scholars also maintain that ritual<sup>2</sup> is an effective peacemaking process. Tom Driver (1991, p. 175) claims that ritual is a powerful, holistic force, transforming not only individuals, but also the societies in which they live. Lisa Schirch (2005) explains how ritual transforms conflict through holistic processes that engage “people’s minds, bodies, all or many of their senses, and their emotions.” Michelle LeBaron (2003) states that through ritual, individuals both *reaffirm* relationship networks and *transform* identities, roles and relationships within those networks. Most importantly in terms of transforming conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, ceremonies “connect people across difference” (LeBaron, 2003, p. 278).

The time cosmology of ceremony is also conducive to conflict transformation. Ceremonial time is considered to be in flux, with past, present and future co-existing in the same space (LeBaron, 2003; Peat, 1994). These expanded notions of time in Indigenous ceremonies create opportunities for the transformation of historical and contemporary conflicts, as well as enhancing the sustainability of peace in the future. Physicist F. David Peat maintains that within the spacetime of Indigenous ceremony, participants can access all aspects of time and can move through them to effect balance and harmony (Peat, 1994). Indigenous ceremonial leaders and participants describe how injustices of the past have been called into the present and addressed through ceremonial time. Furthermore, generations not yet born are also invited into the flux of past, present and future, with the purpose of setting conflict prevention mechanisms in place for the coming generations.

## **BACKGROUND**

In addition to differing notions of time, Indigenous peacemaking ceremonies share a number of characteristics that distinguish them from dominant Western peacebuilding processes. These ceremonies arise out of Indigenous ontologies and include the following tenets:

- Peacemaking is place based - in relationship with particular sites and the natural world.
- Spirituality is integral to peacemaking.

19 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/indigenous-ceremonial-peacemaking/210520](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/indigenous-ceremonial-peacemaking/210520)

## Related Content

---

### Service-Learning and Social Justice for College and University Students: Replacing Memorization with Meaning

Susan Trostle Brand (2020). *Handbook of Research on Diversity and Social Justice in Higher Education* (pp. 78-104).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/service-learning-and-social-justice-for-college-and-university-students/253793](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/service-learning-and-social-justice-for-college-and-university-students/253793)

### Peer Support of Graduate Students of Color Through a Formal Graduate Student Association

Kya Rose Roumimperand Audrey Faye Falk (2021). *Research Anthology on Empowering Marginalized Communities and Mitigating Racism and Discrimination* (pp. 1089-1107).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/peer-support-of-graduate-students-of-color-through-a-formal-graduate-student-association/277613](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/peer-support-of-graduate-students-of-color-through-a-formal-graduate-student-association/277613)

### Ruling the Country Without Losing the Self: An Exploration of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern's Identity Construction and Maintenance

Angelique Margarita Nairn (2021). *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Women, Voice, and Agency* (pp. 24-54).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/ruling-the-country-without-losing-the-self/259541](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/ruling-the-country-without-losing-the-self/259541)

### Peace in Economic Equilibrium: A Micro-Perspective

Anubhuti Dwivedi (2019). *Handbook of Research on Promoting Peace Through Practice, Academia, and the Arts* (pp. 427-439).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/peace-in-economic-equilibrium/210527](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/peace-in-economic-equilibrium/210527)

### Global and Intercultural Leadership: Implementing a Comprehensive and Sustainable Peace Process in Colombia

Antonio Jiménez Luque (2021). *Research Anthology on Empowering Marginalized Communities and Mitigating Racism and Discrimination* (pp. 492-508).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/global-and-intercultural-leadership/277579](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/global-and-intercultural-leadership/277579)