

*The Treaty on The Ground: Where we are headed and why it matters*

Edited by Rachael Bell, Margaret Kawharu, Kerry Taylor, Michael Belgrave & Peter Meihana  
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*The Treaty on The Ground: Where we are headed and why it matters* provides a timely assessment of how the Treaty of Waitangi has come to operate (or not operate) among us and its importance moving forward into the future. The book follows a 2015 conference that marked the 175th anniversary of the Treaty's signing. Although the conference's sub-title 'Dialogue and Difference, Crisis and Response' was dropped, the book's title maintains an ominous tone. When, in 2017, leading academics and professionals in a range of public services find it necessary to include 'why it matters' in the title of such a book, we can safely assume that in practise, if not theory, many in this country still struggle with the Treaty's relevance. And that's the point and strength of the book – it explores how and why we are still grappling with the Treaty, which Rachael Bell points out “sits at the heart of not only Crown- Māori relations, but also of government, public and institutional life” (19). Having lectured in the fields of Māori and New Zealand history, I've observed how mere mention of the Treaty can cause some students to develop an eye-rolling condition and others to go into shock. Claims of “Treaty overload” are perhaps more indicative of something this book tries to address. For many the Treaty is like a long lost relative – one that leaves behind a truck of knowledge that New Zealanders are unsure how to drive. This book encourages and enables readers to learn from the driving lessons undertaken by others.

The perspectives and experiences of a diverse group of men and women are presented in *The Treaty on the Ground*: academics, policy managers, educationalists, activists, “museum people”, young and old, regional and metropolitan, Māori and Pākehā. Focusing on the period 1945-2015, the book is divided into three roughly chronological parts, beginning with the historical context of the Treaty, then moving on to Treaty settlement processes, and finally to how various organisations and government institutions have or have not incorporated the Treaty into their organisations. As Rachael Bell notes in the introduction, a number of recurring themes also run through the book. The persistence of a Māori worldview and an ongoing quest for tribal autonomy pushes against the enormous weight of the Crown and the various (seen and unseen) privileges it bestows on the Pākehā majority. The second theme, government policy, illustrates the complex tensions that developed in the wake of neo-liberal policies, while the third theme illustrates how the institutionalisation of the Treaty has isolated individuals from the Treaty, both hampering their ability, and then excusing their inability, to meaningfully engage in Treaty conversations and living.

The opening chapters provide the historical groundwork so to speak, respectively outlining the “historical links drawn between the Magna Carta and the Treaty”, Māori and Crown engagement between 1945 and the 1970s, and how Māori activists influenced the Trade Union movement from the late 1960s. In the latter chapter, Cybele Locke also introduces how the Treaty began operating on the ground, a focus which strengthens in the remainder of the book (73-90). The book illustrates how “walking the Treaty talk” has evolved into a multi-layered process, shaped by many people in a wide range of places and contexts. Peter Meihana, Richard Bradley, Mark Moses and Judith MacDonald's chapter on The Kurahaupō claim describes, in a refreshingly frank way, how the Treaty settlement process enabled the iwi of Te Kurahaupo to not only seek redress for Crown breaches of the Treaty, but to also address its history in relation to other Te Taihū tribes (151-168). Kawehau Hoskins also provides a thought-provoking insight into the ways that marae tikanga and whanaungatanga have the potential to

affect the engagement of parties at Waitangi Tribunal hearings. Other chapters provide excellent examples of how institutions, and the people working within them, have attempted to make the Treaty work in their spaces. Elizabeth Cotton and Edwina Merito, for example, discuss “He Korahi Māori”, a cultural philosophy introduced at Tāmaki Paenga Hira Auckland War Memorial Museum as a practical guide for the museum to achieve its Treaty obligations and bicultural foundation (233-254).

Margaret Kawharu’s reflection on the Treaty on the Ground conference provides a well-rounded assessment of how far New Zealand has come, and how far we have yet to go (297-312). Her assessment also implicitly reinforces a point made in the foreword, that all of the authors in the book viewed their contributions as part of an “important journey”, not a “typical product of an academic process” (11). The commitment of this volume’s authors to that journey shows, and they all should be congratulated for sharing their knowledge and sometimes personal experiences. As the book illustrates, the journey toward making the Treaty work on the ground is not easy, and at times exposes the presence of deeper issues harking back to the outset of colonisation. Even the book’s cover image of Tuaiwa Hautai “Eva” Rickard and other demonstrators on the 1984 Hikoi ki Waitangi provides a visual reminder that the challenges are on the ground, right in front of us, ever present.