



REFLECTION ARTICLE

On the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration: 'Reach, Relevance and Implementation'

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I begin this discussion on the making, meaning, and reception of the Tandanya-Adelaide Declaration with deep humility and respect for the experiences of the Survivors of the Canadian national residential school programme. The history and legacy of residential schools represent a painful and unresolved chapter in the shared history of Indigenous peoples and settler society in the country where I live. I write in support of the rights, dignity, and well-being of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples across Turtle Island. That their experiences of childhood deprivation, incarceration, abuse, and loss, will be respectfully remembered and learned from; that this remembrance promotes healing, confronts deniability, supports Indigenous rights and reparations, and gives reason for the sovereignty and self-determination of Inuit, First Nations, and Métis peoples.

I open this essay in observance of the Indigenous Survivors of residential schools in Canada not only to be reflexive but also to introduce the genealogy of the Declaration. My work as the Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) coloured the tone of the International Council on Archives (ICA) Declaration. By the time that the ICA had created its first Committee uniquely devoted to Indigenous issues in 2019, and ICA official Normand Charbonneau had asked me if I would be an author of an ICA declaration on archives and Indigenous issues, I had spent 4 years working to construct the NCTR archives, a decolonising institution, from the ground up. By this time, critical theory had offered an interpretive framework to consider how records are the culturally mediated products of relationships of power and knowledge.¹ The epistemology of the global colonial condition had been articulated by representatives of the colonised such as Aimée Césaire, Franz Fanon, Edward Said and C.L.R. James.² The groundwork had begun to develop to build a decolonising archives on a national scale. In Australia the ATSILIRN Protocols for safe and ethical information practice were published in 1995³; *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, with a call for addressing the record of the residential school system in Canada, passed in 1996⁴; the Protocols for Native American Archival Materials were formulated in 2007⁵; the same year as the release of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Developing the NCTR Archives helped me to gain clearer focus on the principles of establishing such an institution.

The mission of the NCTR is to be guided by Indigenous communities to create a safe and honoured house of remembrance for the history and legacy of the residential school system.⁶ A

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trusted and sacred place where Indigenous and settler knowledge practices can come together to encounter, learn, and heal from a colonial programme of genocide.⁷ The creation of the NCTR archives brought together, within the concept of decolonisation, issues of sovereignty and self-determination, privacy, private property, Indigenous knowledge mobilisation, and Indigenous research methodologies. All of these subjects I addressed in the Declaration.

The drafting of the Declaration began in late 2018. The Expert Group on Indigenous Matters was created by the ICA Programme Commission in November in Yaoundé, Cameroon. By the start of 2019, Expert Group on Indigenous Matters (EGIM) was forming terms of reference. It was agreed that a Declaration was required stating the ICA's views on the valued relationship between Indigenous peoples and the social phenomenon of public archives. Normand Charbonneau, an ICA Director, reached out to me to begin a draft of the Declaration in February of 2019. It was scheduled to be released for the ICA conference in Adelaide, Australia in September. I commenced with meetings with Karine Duhamel, who just finished a leading role in the federal report, 'Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls'.⁸ Shortly thereafter Phyllis Williams, Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Engagement, for the National Archives of Australia joined the project. We began with meeting notes, and in the next several months, I wrote several drafts for comment by Duhamel and Williams. As the Declaration progressed it was circulated for comment by several Indigenous representative groups across the globe, active in the EGIM including, representatives from Sweden, Norway, Japan, New Zealand, the U.S. and Australia. I also received comment from the Spiritual Guides from the NCTR as well as the Centre's Survivors Circle of 16 Indigenous Survivors of residential schools in Canada. I incorporated all this feedback into the final draft in preparation for the public release in Adelaide in October 2019. It has always been my thought that this is a living document and only the first draft. There remains a tremendous opportunity for refinement through engagement with Indigenous communities across the globe.

In this article, I comment on the reach, relevance and implementation of the Declaration. The reach is notable. The document has been translated into seven languages: English, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Portuguese. I have heard that work is underway to create a Sami version. I gave a Zoom presentation to the National Archives of Norway on this topic 2 years ago. There are also plans to produce versions in several Indigenous languages in Canada. Several state professional archival organisations around the world promptly recognised the document. In 2021, Rose Barrowcliffe, Lauren Booker, Sue McKemmish, and Kirsten Thorpe published an article in *Archives and Manuscripts* on 'activating and supporting' the Tandanya Declaration.⁹ It was the subject of a symposium in October 2024, led by the special interest group of the Australian Society of Archivists, at the Te Pae Convention Centre in Christchurch, Aotearoa (New Zealand). When Abu Dhabi hosted the ICA Congress in October 2023, there was a prominent special session of the conference where the National Archivists of New Zealand, Canada, and Australia discussed the document. An ad hoc committee recently translated the document into Arabic. It has become a part of the archives programme curriculum for the American University in Beirut. There will be a formal ICA release event for the Arab translation, an impressive and grassroots accomplishment, in the Spring of 2026.

The central reason for the international reach of the Declaration is that it addresses sovereignty, the fundamental issue of the global indigenous experience. I made this clear in the Declaration's preamble:

Centuries of imperial and colonial state expansion are [a]... component of our common humanity. This expansion transplanted colonial settler states into diverse global locales

creating new relationships with local Indigenous societies. Indigenous dispossession, assimilation, and genocide have characterized these colonial relationships.¹⁰

This has been the Indigenous condition since Enlightenment philosopher Jean Bodin formulated principles of state sovereignty and the requisite knowledge models that supplied its foundation. Bodin took care to marginalise holistic local knowledge models premised on relationships of spirituality and ecology; he prioritised text as the primary medium of memory and historical evidence, effectively banishing alternative immanent Indigenous knowledge practices. Until recently, the historiography of ideas has depicted the replacement of Indigenous knowledge paradigms with European knowledge epistemologies in colonial locales as a cognitive *fait accompli*. Alongside the dispossession of lands occurred the gradual and purposeful erosion of Indigenous knowledge methods in the colonial era: the progressive loss of social bonds, community memory, cultural and spiritual identities, and normative laws resulting from the overwhelming assertion of imperial sovereignty and uncompromising colonial settlement.¹¹

However, Indigenous societies have always resisted these assertions of state authority and their juridical knowledge models.¹² This resistance is often reflected in the character of archival material concerning Indigenous peoples stored in colonial public archives. The directives of the Declaration deal with this archival material. Local indigenous resistance to state sovereignty has been an historical constant since the dawn of Westphalian imperialism. As Indigenous legal scholar James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson has noted, this is because of the incompatibility of these legal epistemologies:

These two views of law – legal doctrines as founded on the latent normative order, and law as the will of the sovereign – are incompatible; ... The Eurocentric legal tradition of the imposed order of a sovereign has never been able to exclude the immanent or sacred, or customary law. These residual laws have resulted in several legal revolutions or transformations in the Eurocentric legal tradition.¹³

I've written elsewhere the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, is a revolution in human rights, it addresses 'the minimum standard for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world'. Although the UNDRIP never mentions archives, it speaks of revitalising and transferring to future generations, 'their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures ...'.¹⁴ The Tandanya/Adelaide Declaration recognises the value of the UNDRIP as a generational statement on the rights of Indigenous peoples, and places these value statements into the context of the history of colonial archival practices.¹⁵ As the Declaration says: 'to reimagine the meaning of archives ... [to] become an engaging model of social memory; to embrace Indigenous worldviews and methods of creating, sharing and preserving valued knowledge; to open the meaning of public archives to Indigenous interpretations; to bring new dynamics of Indigenous spirituality, ecology and Indigenous philosophy into the European traditions of public memory. To support a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter'.

The Declaration addresses the cognitive consequences of sovereignty in a documentary fashion: the intertwined global forces of colonialism and capitalism.¹⁶ Indigenous peoples across the globe have struggled at the oppressive interface of these forces. Canadian historian Byran Palmer has recently noted, that although the creation of Canada, as with most colonial jurisdictions, cannot be understood without appreciating what he calls 'these twinned and deep structures of determination', such a broad study over centuries has

been rarely attempted.¹⁷ The Declaration's reception comes at a time when these structural elements are hardening into a neoliberal globalisation that threatens the international assertion of human rights.

Transgendered people, known as two-spirited in many Indigenous societies in Canada, is a human rights concern that has gone under recognised in decolonising dialogues. It references another field of the Indigenous cognitive landscape that requires illumination and support. In Nehiyaw (Cree) culture, the translation of the term for transgender is 'walking in two worlds'. The term acknowledges two-spirited community members as gifted. They are blessed with the ability to see the world in more than one way. Christian organisations pathologised this special status. It is known in Indigenous communities that two-spirited children suffered some of the worst abuses in the history of the residential school system. They were not recognised in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.

The social, political and spiritual challenges two-spirited people face highlight areas that the Declaration did not address. In Indigenous cultures two-spirited people were often healers, Knowledge Keepers and ceremonial leaders. These were totemic roles that carried deep spiritual significance and an intimate relationship with the natural world. More than anything, this role of spirituality and the guiding and symbiotic relationship with Mother Earth is an area of Indigenous knowledge that should be recognised in an amended version of the Declaration.

Finally, it bears observing that the languages that the Declaration have been translated into are primarily those of the colonisers. There remains a need for Indigenous peoples to come together as in the success of the UNDRIP. To promote this there needs to be more outreach into communities worldwide. One way this can be done is through language. There was not enough time to perform any significant engagement when writing the Declaration. If ever there was an opportunity to amend the Declaration, I would recommend a translation project that would bring the Declaration into communities where it could become more of a living document updated with local community observations.

I am heartened by the international reception of the Declaration. As I noted, one reason for its reach is that it can be considered a counterbalance to the expansive neoliberal cognitive and physical dispossession of Indigenous peoples around the globe. For centuries, Indigenous peoples have travelled a hard road resisting incursions on their sovereignty and maintaining their Indigenous identities in colonial jurisdictions. The Declaration notarised the success of the UNDRIP and addressed the necessity of remembrance. But is it really a small road map in a journey that has far more road to travel.

Notes on contributor

Raymond Frogner is the Senior Director of Research and the Head of Archives for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR). He graduated with a Master of Arts Degree in History from the University of Victoria and a Master of Archival Studies Degree from the University of British Columbia. His mother was Métis with Cree relatives from Duncan's First Nation in Northern Alberta. He is the co-chair of the International Council for Archives (ICA) Committee on Indigenous Matters. In 2019 he was the principal author of the ICAs *Tandanya Declaration* concerning public archives and Indigenous self-determination. He has twice won the W. Kaye Lamb Award for best article of the year in the journal *Archivaria* for articles on the topic of archives and Indigenous rights. In 2020 he was nominated a Fellow of the Association of Canadian Archivists. In 2022 he was appointed to the National Administration Committee to support the investigation of unmarked burials sites of residential school children. In 2026 the Society of American Archivists awarded him the Best Article on Archival History Award for 2025 for the article, "Red Jenkinson: Tracing Indigenous Influences on

Canadian Archival Theory.” He continues to research, teach, and publish on issues of Indigenous identity, rights, and social memory.

Notes

1. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 2nd ed., Routledge, London, 2001.
2. Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Présence Africaine, Paris, 1956; Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, Grove Press, New York, NY, 1963; Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, Pantheon Books, New York, NY, 1978; C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Revised ed., Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1963.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library, Information and Resource Network, *ATSILIRN Protocols for Libraries, Archives and Information Services*, Australian Library and Information Association, Canberra, 2005.
4. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 5 vols., Canada Communication Group – Publishing, Ottawa, 1996.
5. First Archivist Circle, *Protocols for Native American Archival Materials*, April 2007, Society of American Archivists, Chicago.
6. Jean-Pierre Wallot first brought the phrase ‘house of memory’ into Canadian archival discussion in his 1991 article titled ‘Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal’, published in the *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*. Terry Cook subsequently employed it in his influential article, ‘What Is Past Is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift’, *Archivaria*, vol. 43, 1997. Wallot’s piece reflects the expansive seven-volume French study *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, edited by Pierre Nora, which examined ‘sites of memory’ or the value of symbols, events, and places of collective memory (Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, Gallimard, Paris, 1984–1992). In English archival discourse, the phrase ‘house of memory’ is widely associated with Jeannette Allis Bastian, who used it prominently in her 2009 article ‘In a “House of Memory”: Discovering the Provenance of Place’ published in *Archival Science*. In this work, she explores how archives serve as repositories not just of documents, but of collective memory, and how memory can be tied to both records and physical spaces. The genealogy of this phrase also influenced my perspective on the NCTR Archives and the Tandanya Declaration.
7. On October 27, 2022, the Canadian House of Commons unanimously passed a motion recognizing the Indian Residential School System as genocide.
8. National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, Privy Council Office, Ottawa, 2019.
9. R. Barrowcliffe, L. Booker, S. McKemmish and K. Thorpe, ‘Activating and Supporting the Tandanya Adelaide Declaration on Indigenous Archives’, *Archives and Manuscripts*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2021, pp. 167–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2021.1961086>.
10. Expert Group on Indigenous Matters, International Council of Archives, *Tandanya – Adelaide Declaration*, 2019, p. 1, International Council of Archives, Paris.
11. In Canada, the most known government action against the practice of Indigenous ceremony and social protocol is the laws prohibiting Potlatch ceremonies in Indigenous communities on the Pacific coast. Settler authorities issued the first anti-Potlatch proclamation in 1883. The *Indian Act* of 1885 contained the first formal anti-Potlatch legislation. Restrictions on the Sundance ceremony and other Indigenous cultural expressions would follow. See for example, Katherine Pettipas, *Severing the Ties that Bind: Government Repression of Indigenous Religious Ceremonies on the Prairies*, University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1994. The Sun Dance was outlawed under the *Indian Act* of 1895. For an example of the enforcement of the Potlatch ban, see Tina Loo, ‘Dan Cranmer’s Potlatch: Law as Coercion, Symbol, and Rhetoric in British Columbia, 1884–1951’, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 73, no. 2, June 1992, pp. 125–65. The legislated colonial attack on Indigenous knowledge practices occurred in colonial jurisdictions around the globe. In New Zealand in 1907 settler society passed the *Tohunga Suppression Act*, a piece of legislation designed to prohibit the *tohunga* (traditional Māori healers) from sharing their traditional knowledge through community cultural protocols. The *Act* specifically prohibited the *tohunga* from performing ‘quackery’, otherwise described as traditional medical treatment. For an overview of this cognitive erasure see Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books/University of Otago Press, London and New York, NY, 1999, pp. 85–8. Susan Shown Harjow, wrote in the Afterword to Vine Deloria’s *God is Red*, how the U.S. Civilization Regulations from the 1880s to the 1930s banned the Sun Dance ‘and

- all similar dances and so-called ceremonies' in the U.S. Vine Deloria, Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion*, 50th Anniversary Edition, Fulcrum Publishing, Wheat Ridge, CO, 2023, p. 94. See also, David McNally, *Defend the Sacred: Native American Religious Freedom beyond the First Amendment*, Princeton Scholarship Online, Princeton, NJ, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.23943/princeton/9780691190907.001.0001>, accessed 13 June 2024.
12. For the influence of resistant Indigenous epistemologies on Canadian archival theory see Raymond Frogner, 'Red Jenkinson: Tracing Indigenous Influences on Canadian Archival Theory', Special issue on the legacies of critical theory in archives, *Archivaria*, vol. 100, Fall 2025, pp. 74–122.
 13. *Indigenous Diplomacy and the Rights of Peoples: Achieving UN Recognition*, Purich Publishing Limited, Saskatoon, 2008, p. 15. Colonial studies have thoroughly examined the international history of Indigenous dispossession and its cognitive resistance. See Aimée Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. J. Pinkham, Modern Reader, New York, NY, 1972; Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. C. Farrington, Grove Press, New York, NY, 1963; C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, Secker & Warburg, Ltd., London, 1938; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming, Herder and Herder, New York, NY, 1972; Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, New York, NY, 1979.
 14. Article 13.1, United Nations General Assembly, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, GA Res 61/295, UN Doc A/RES/61/295, 13 September 2007, United Nations, New York, NY.
 15. Recently the Canadian federal government passed Bill C-15.
 16. Bryan D. Palmer, *Capitalism and Colonialism: The Making of Modern Canada, 1500–1890. A New History for the Twenty-First Century. Volumes One and Two*, Fernwood Publishing, Winnipeg, 2024 and hagwil hayetsh and Charles Menzies, 'Capitalism and Colonialism – Settler and First Nation: An Uneasy History', *Labour/Le Travail*, vol. 93, Spring 2024, pp. 309–322. <https://doi.org/10.52975/llt.2024v93.01>.
 17. Palmer, p. 10.