

'*Becoming Tangata Tiriti* offers an invitation to Pākehā and, in fact, all non-Māori to be part of the conversation around what makes us New Zealanders – and how we might move forward in ways that are just and that enhance the mana of Māori and non-Māori alike.'

– Rebecca Kiddle (Ngāti Porou, Ngāpuhi), Te Wānanga o Aotearoa, co-author of *Imagining Decolonisation*

'There is a growing appetite for exactly what this book contains: views from the ground floor – rather than the grand arenas of parliaments, executives and courtrooms – about the meaning and consequences of te Tiriti for the everyday lives and work practices of non-Māori in this country.'

– Richard Shaw, Massey University, author of *The Forgotten Coast* and *The Unsettled*

'Powerful and beautifully written, this book reads as something of a guidebook for tangata tiriti trying to navigate a changing Aotearoa.'

– Matthew Wynyard (Ngāti Maniapoto, Ngāpuhi), Massey University

**Who are we as tangata tiriti? How do we identify in relation to Māori? What are our responsibilities to te Tiriti? What do we do when we inevitably stumble along the way? *Becoming Tangata Tiriti* is an accessible introduction to how non-Māori can work with tangata whenua to decolonise Aotearoa.**



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Becoming Tangata Tiriti  
Avril Bell

# Becoming Tangata Tiriti

## Working with Māori, Honouring the Treaty

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Māori, Honouring  
the Treaty**

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In memory of Mitzi (Elizabeth) Nairn (1942–2023),  
whose guiding aim was ‘to be the kind of Pākehā  
that Māori would want to sign te Tiriti with’.

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# Preface

Changes are under way in our society that are bringing Māori people, values and ways of doing things back into the heart of our institutions, from decision-making at the top of organisations to everyday practices and processes. I say ‘back’ because, of course, before my/our Pākehā ancestors arrived, Aotearoa was a Māori world.

For those like myself who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s, this is a massive change. Living in Kaitiāia, we had Māori neighbours, I went to school with Māori kids, and some were my friends. We played together at school and in the streets after school, but that was it. I don’t remember visiting their homes or them coming to ours. I don’t remember learning anything about the Treaty – let alone te Tiriti – in school, or any Māori language (apart from in the playground), or really anything about New Zealand history. The key message my history teacher left me with was that nothing interesting had ever happened here.

Nor did I know anything about te ao Māori (the Māori world) more broadly. I had never heard of the Reverend Māori Marsden (1924–1993), minister, tohunga and scholar, for example. When I did start to read his writings in Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal’s *The Woven Universe* in the last decade or so, I was struck by the fact that Marsden was from Awanui, just up the road from my home town. This intellectual and spiritual leader in te ao Māori was a local to my community and I had never heard of him! Marsden was a little bit younger than my parents, but did they ever come across him? Did they know him, or know of him? I don’t remember ever hearing his name.

It’s sad to reflect that the disconnection between our worlds allows us to live alongside each other often without any real

interaction or mutuality. What do we miss out on? How are our lives diminished by this disconnect?

My own life has been a slow, slow journey of turning towards the Māori world. Aotearoa began to change in the 1970s with the creation of the Waitangi Tribunal and the rise of activist groups fighting for the revival of te reo Māori and the return of Māori land and other resources. My personal epiphany was a lecture by Ranginui Walker while I was attending teachers' college in the early 1980s. I was stunned – and excited – to learn about the thriving Māori economy of the 1840s and 1850s that meant Māori literally fed Pākehā settlements like Auckland, as well as trading across the Tasman and further afield. These simple facts gave the lie to the stories I had heard growing up about Māori being 'lazy'. I could connect the dots – the inequalities Māori experienced that I could see in my home town were not the result of Māori 'nature' or character. Something had happened to them. I had no idea what at the time, but gradually I started to gain an education in New Zealand history.

In the early 1990s, I was very lucky to be a student in and then to work in the Education Department at the University of Auckland alongside fantastic Māori and Pākehā scholars actively engaged in the societal changes under way in the treaty settlement era. What I learnt then, and the challenges from Māori for Pākehā to focus on ourselves and sort out our own people, sparked my interest in thinking about what it means to be Pākehā, and how our identities, ways of thinking and acting, our anxieties and racism, are inextricably shaped by being in some kind of relation with the Māori world, even if we deny and ignore it. Thinking about what it means to be Pākehā has been my central focus ever since.

But, of course, as time has gone by, Pākehā are no longer the only non-Māori group with significant relationships to te ao Māori. In the twenty-first century, our multicultural society is made up of diverse communities, each of which has its own approaches to and connections with the Māori world. Increasingly too, members of these communities are actively working with Māori and supporting Māori projects and aspirations.

By the early 2000s, we were well into the era of treaty settlements, and iwi and hapū were increasingly important economic and political actors. I became curious as to how Pākehā and other non-Māori New Zealanders were changing in response. Were non-Māori organisations and communities stepping up to the plate and engaging constructively with the growing Māori economic and political presence? How were Pākehā-dominated councils, for example, building constructive relationships with Māori? And what changes were being required of non-Māori people and organisations to make these positive relationships with Māori communities possible?

This book is one of the research projects that have resulted from my interest in these questions and celebrates the work and learning of a small group of such people. As this book goes to press, a new government has indicated its intent to reverse policies that have contributed to the re-centring of the Māori world in recent years. While this is a backward step, like many others I think the groundswell of support for te reo Māori and for the reinstatement of Māori authority in our public life will continue and survive this moment. We live in an exciting time; I hope this book can be a resource for readers who support the treaty and Māori aspirations and are looking for ideas on how to make their own contribution.

# Introduction

This book centres on the experiences and insights of twelve non-Māori New Zealanders. Mostly they are ordinary New Zealanders whose work life has exposed them to te ao Māori and given them the opportunity to learn from and about Māori. They have responded to that learning in the way they go about their work, and their lives have been enriched by their relationships with Māori and the Māori world. Some would call themselves activists and are recognisable as such. Others, like Meng Foon and Andrew Judd, are well known and have public profiles. Others still are simply professionals doing their job – in local government, the arts, tertiary education and other professions.

In their work and relationships with Māori, contributors to this project have learnt about the Māori world and much more. Working with Māori, they have also learnt about themselves and their own cultural backgrounds; about what it means to work with others from different cultures and world views; about what it means to be a non-Māori New Zealander; and about the art of striking a balance between stepping up and taking responsibility, and stepping back and following Māori leadership. They have had successes and made mistakes. Their insights and experiences have something to offer to other non-Māori New Zealanders who are interested in engaging with Māori communities and in changing Aotearoa.

This book is about the work of tangata tiriti, non-Māori people who are guided by a sense of their relationship to te Tiriti o Waitangi / the Treaty of Waitangi and to te ao Māori in their work. The people in this book were approached because of their work with or for Māori communities and organisations, or battling Pākehā-centric systems and structural racism. The hope is that their reflections can be of value to others who are setting out