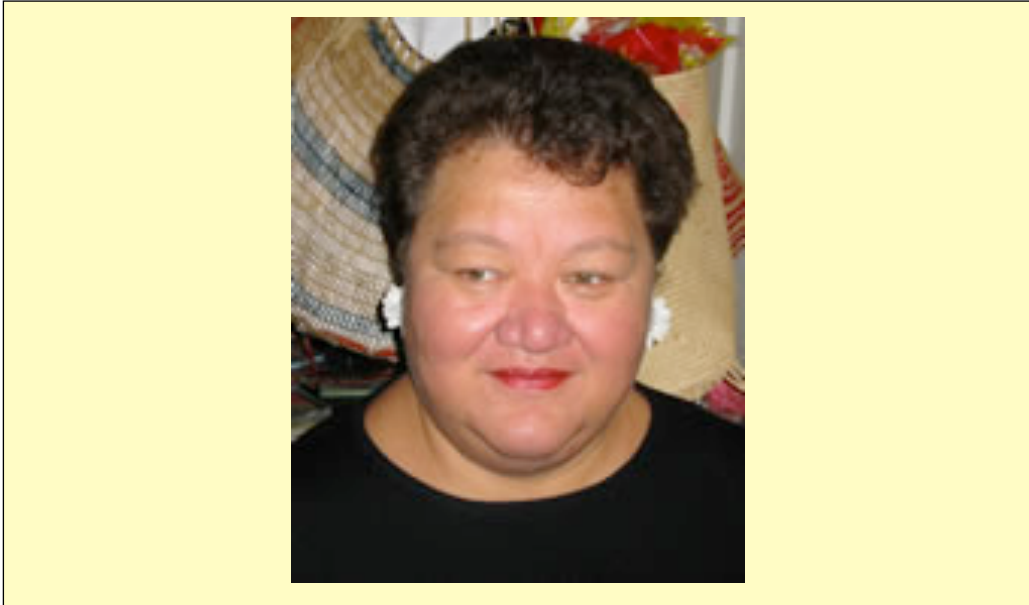


# Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese



Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese is Coordinator of the Pacific Section of the Family Centre.

She specialises in family research as this applies to the Pacific nations and to Pacific people - for example in relation to mental health, poverty, housing, unemployment, cultural and gender deprivation.

In relation to social policy analysis, Kiwi is engaged in the development of new social policy perspectives emanating from various Pacific cultural rationalities. She is also concerned with the impact of government policy decisions on the Pacific Sector of New Zealand society.

Further areas of her work include: documenting and analysing the effects of cultural dislocation upon the Pacific community in New Zealand; a focus upon Pacific youth; and patterns of migration to New Zealand from the Pacific. Kiwi is regularly contracted to speak and advise in areas of applied social policy at national and international levels. She is often on secondment to Afeafe O Vaetoefaga from the Family Centre .

## **Key influences of Freirean concepts**

The Family Centre in Lower Hutt, and other agencies are central to the journey of working with Paulo Freire's ideas. I joined the Family Centre in 1982 and at that time the Family Centre itself had developed practices that are connected to Paulo Freire. I am referring to work based on the praxis of Action and Reflection whereby workers reflect on their actions to consider what has been achieved, what have been the gaps and to review the vision. Reflection enables workers to take these reflections into account for their plans for the time ahead. The Family Centre established a pattern of six-monthly retreats for reflection and evaluation and planning. The retreats started as about three days then were increased to five days. At that time the retreats were to reflect on our work of the past six months in order to plan for the next six months.

One of Freire's educative gifts was to balance action with reflection. The presumption was that if you're just acting all the time it leads to blind activism. And if you're analysing all the time then it leads to paralysis. There needs to be a both in order for us to sustain action in our contexts.

The other key thing is his educative process of conscientisation. Conscientisation is people becoming conscious of the world in which they live and how they are situated. They learn about power and how it works, and how societies are ordered through systems of power. This consciousness means understanding the structures in which they are embedded, and internalizing this knowledge. I think the postmodernists would refer to discourses. In Freirean terms education is a process by which people become conscious of themselves as persons, as well as what constitutes us as human beings. Freirean education involves looking at the structures and cultures of societies in which we live. It means seeing how lives are either constrained by those structures or, in his own words, 'how we make spaces' or 'open spaces within those structures in order to become free.' So freedom was another big idea of his.

Freire referred to freedom as self-directed or self-determined actions by those who are marginalised, for the purpose of establishing the conditions for finding wholeness for themselves at the personal level and for collective benefit. It would mean transforming the institutions to become inclusive of their values, their worldviews, their languages. For Freire, and for us at the Family Centre, freedom was underlined by such concerns. Freire brought a specific language to the fore, the language of colonised, coloniser and colonisation. He wasn't the only one. Māori and Samoan people and also Pākehā who were involved in Treaty of Waitangi commitments all worked with this language. These different groups of peoples articulated the meaning of colonization and its effects. Paulo Freire, as an educational theorist, brought these terms into the field of education. From the Family Centre we took it into the field of family therapy and psychology. And we

were joined by other people. We directly took these terms into the field of psychology and family therapy and psychotherapy—not only here in Aotearoa New Zealand and in the Pacific, but also internationally. Before saying more about that let's go on with the effect of Freire on movements for freedom, or liberation, during the 1980s.

At that time of initiatives mobilized through Freirean praxis at the Family Centre, we became part of a network of agencies that were developing and hosting training on structural analysis here in Aotearoa-New Zealand. It was linked to a Freirean institute in Paris called INODEP<sup>1</sup> and their Pacific work was coordinated by a group called the Urban Training Centre, which had people like Margaret Nolan and Mike Smith involved. INODEP was centred in Paris and of course it was a very lively place that had different groups of people co-ordinating work on conscientisation and freedom throughout the world. The centre here for the Pacific was the Urban Training Centre. There was a centre for the African work around Dakar and Senegal that I later visited, and Pipal Tree in Bangalore, India with Siddhartha as a centre for Asia. These people, these training centres, had key educator trainers. The Pacific trainer was Filip Fanchette.

Some key civil society organisations like the Family Centre gathered into a network around the Urban Training Centre here in Wellington and started setting up workshops and seminars. They included people from different churches, the Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches, and groups like YWCA and YMCA. Some people in these networks were very enlivened intellectuals really. They were questioning key practice issues and key structural issues, and key cultural issues in the society that we live in—Aotearoa-New Zealand. It was just after the Springbok Tour. So the anti-racism energy and analysis were heightened; so was analysis of the patriarchal nature of New Zealand's dominant culture. The whole colonization and marginalisation of Māori and Pacific peoples, the loss of tangata whenua status of Māori, the loss of memory around New Zealand's historical colonisation of the Pacific. These were key issues that were being talked about and these networks grew in the country. There are many people who have continued to be involved in justice and leadership who were part of those networks, really, who were part of the enlivened conversations. It was a moment when we were all intensely alive.

It was a moment of everyone coming together for conscientisation and training and planning. It was also the beginning of each one of our groups beginning to look at our direct responsibilities for decolonisation. These became the conversation spaces around decolonisation. We became very aware of the different responsibilities around that. Māori gatherings, Pacific gatherings, Pākehā gatherings for anti-racism and Treaty of

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<sup>1</sup> The Ecumenical Institute for Development of Peoples.

Waitangi gatherings. Yes, and infused within that was a very strong class analysis and a mushrooming gender analysis.

### **Paulo Freire - beyond class analysis**

There were different streams of analysis about colonisation and the Treaty in Aotearoa and all the streams missed out reference to Pacific peoples and our positioning here in Aotearoa-New Zealand as Pacific peoples. We had to develop an analysis by which all the facets of our lives and all the realities of this country could be held together. We were really enlivened by a lot of class analysis at the time—you know, Marxist analysis—and we had friends who were mucking around with Trotsky's ideas of class analysis.

What became very apparent to us was that class analysis only explained part of our reality. It didn't explain all of our reality. Even if a class struggle became successful and there were openings for all of us to either become middle class or upper middle class, whatever the case might be at that time, we would still be alienated as Samoans, meaning our cultural mores wouldn't be in the pot; our language wouldn't even be. New Zealand's historical relationship with us would not take centre place in ensuring the responsibilities of freedom either. If we had stayed confined to a class analysis the status of Māori as tangata whenua wouldn't have been recognised. Certainly we would have been forced into certain positioning as women. We wouldn't be looking at our own cultural/gender arrangements or the complexities of the interface of gender and culture in our lives.

All these areas of colonisation, culture and gender informed and shaped our community development work and opening spaces in the structures from which we were excluded. These were priorities for us at the time. Later colonisation, culture and gender became linked to the field of therapy. It was this broadening to include all these areas that most probably forced us to open up the critique of psychology and family therapy as we have done.

The class analysis left us with brilliant community development projects such as those we became engaged in. These were setting up the Unemployed Workers' Union and supporting it; setting up the Tenants' Union nationally; setting up the Employment Network; the Housing Network in the country. Fantastic. But those kinds of class issues needed to also have a cultural and gender lens on them. What was fantastic about Freire's work was that in his attention to colonisation he took the Marxist analysis into the cultural sphere. He took away the constraints of the class analysis and broadened it.

So that fantastic, fantastic decolonising orientation—that was very helpful from him. I could see why he used language of colonization, coming from Brazil. He didn't want any misinterpretation or interpretation and misunderstanding of what he was on about.

We've worked in Brazil and we've worked in Argentina in the therapy world and it would have come to Freire as it came to us at that time, that indigenous peoples are minorities, extreme minorities in big countries like Brazil and Argentina. There are also complications of people who have been brought in from Africa to work the plantations. So you've got double, treble layers of oppression going on. So as somebody coming out of that context he would have been very, very conscious of that.

I'm sure he would have given his awareness to the work of churches and the partnership between the state and the church when he considered oppression in Brazil. So he would have been very conscious of that. So these ideas of his permeated many, many growths in our own work. You know if there were to be any influences outside of our own that would have helped us rethink some of these things he is one of the key people that we could point to.

It was in the context of not only myself, but also groups of people sitting down together like workers here at the Family Centre; or networks sitting down together and reflecting on our situation. And remember this context—1980s Aotearoa-New Zealand—the closure of the factories around here. The Hutt Valley was the fourth largest industrial area in the whole country. And in the 1980s we faced a lot of business closures so it was a time of active reflection on what was happening, and action on what had to be done to respond to what was happening to families—their housing situations, their employment situations, as well as to cultural self-determination. The Hutt Valley became an intense place of thinking activity, practice activity, rethinking activity. So it was a heady time for us. So yes, those key ideas of his fell on fertile ground. We needed his ideas at the time to actually think our way through.

Freire's ideas were fantastic decolonising concepts that could explain political, economic and societal contexts in which the Pacific peoples now lived. And that was fantastic. To take ourselves further we needed to know our own stories, our own history; and to know our own gender arrangements. We needed our own concepts with which to reconstruct our lives. What Freire did was to show what had happened to our lives. To reconstruct our lives we needed to do research into our oral histories and our own gender arrangements.

We did workshops here in Aotearoa with Phillip Fanchette and we brought workers from around the country too. We took those workshops out into the region, to Samoa and to Hawaii. There were two gathering points for the Pacific, one was in Samoa and one was in Hawaii. You would have people from Guam and those nations in the Pacific that have been influenced or colonised by the United States, and some of the Polynesian nations would gather in Hawaii. In Samoa you would have people like the Cook Island people or those nearer to Samoa and gather there. And those were the sites.

One of the key ideas that came to us through that time was the need for dialogue amongst the marginated. The new word is conversations. I like the old word, which is dialogue, which presumes that we're not going to leave it at the talk level. Dialogue was at the deeper level. From this dialogue would grow praxis, meaning practices or approaches that are intentional, that are thought through. It led us into many, many things. Some of which were community development projects around creating what is politely termed the civil voice. This meant engagement at the political level, and sometimes this meant protests.

### **Development of Freire's work in Aotearoa and the Pacific**

The Family Centre is an agency which has always been committed to eliminating poverty. It was, and still is, organised around a unique combination of community development and Family Therapy. Through the work of leaders such as Paulo Freire and Charles Waldegrave, as well as through Māori and Samoan leadership, we developed a strong cultural framework for our work.

At the Family Centre we were asking, 'How do we bring those private issues of pain, usually through employment, unemployment, ongoing racism and ongoing sexism or homelessness into the public arena? How do we bring these issues that I experienced at the family level out into the public sphere? How do we support women to bring these issues to the fore?' And, 'What are the alternatives?' It is one thing to protest and have a civil voice but what is it that we would want to reconstitute? So we were actively thinking about, and debating, what can be reconstituted in the place of oppression. So we were engaged in housing policies and employment policies.

We did this with people who were directly experiencing these issues and by being in networks with people working for their rights, their employment, their own situations. We also networked with others working on these issues. So we grew the employment network. It was easy to grow into an employment network because we were already networking with those people around structural analysis. So we developed policy positions and we could lobby Government with a clear position. We participated in government conferences, and this led to being on advisory groups and reference groups. The changes that we wanted to see society make were not only for ourselves, they were also to change the mainstream—its structures, its language, its practices—to create openings for the participation of other peoples and other issues. The fermentation of building capacity and then building analysis and then participation—all those democratic processes took time. But there were other times when you jumped from base one on to base ten in a matter of weeks, and that was basically because the opportunity was there. For example, a government through negotiations was ready launch a conference in areas of our concern such as housing and these occasions needed people to speak to our

perspectives. And when you turned around, you know, you were the person that was to speak to those perspectives.

We just had to school ourselves in all sorts of areas to be able to address those situations. But sometimes we needed very careful planning over a long period of time for people to be ready to step into positions. So we did the usual thing of organising in our networks. We worked with a core team and built that up through meetings and workshops. When I started out there were only about six or seven Pacific social workers in Aotearoa-New Zealand so what you saw in those seminars over a year was the beginnings of bringing together Samoan and Pacific social workers. So in a matter of about ten years we grew and it wasn't only us. There were other agencies involved as well and other universities who were assisting with the training—we not only grew the workers from here, we went to universities and they asked for us to help reconstitute their own programs to be inclusive of Pacific perspectives, and practices and approaches, and models. So it was multi-levelled for a number of years.

We had multiple strategies and multiple energies, but we needed to be clear about our analysis and our reconstituting approach. If I reflect on it now we were lucky to have been amongst a group of people that were thinking about these issues—Family Centre staff, the networks that the Family Centre were part of, these training networks. We also came by some great, great Samoan and Pacific workers, young and old, who were starting to question these kinds of things along with us, who were not afraid to step in to make changes.

We practised and then we trained and sometimes the training was from morning till night and then practised and trained and practised and trained. They were heady days, heady days... we were young—you could train for five days, and you could be on your feet for five days and to support all that you did with reading. I did a lot of reading: liberation theology, economic analysis, a lot of gender analysis stuff. Fantastic, fantastic stuff but in the end we had to construct our own models of work.

We were training intensively in Aotearoa, and we were training people in the Pacific as well. So you know that has led to many, many changes. People have gone on and done their own projects; for example, some people went on and created a Pacific national radio programme. So you've got those things coming out. A lot of people that went through structural analysis are now leaders of the health movement, not only for the Pacific here but for the Pacific out there in the Pacific. So it can be surprising where people have ended up. Some are politicians working for change at that level. Some people have concentrated on trade and working through what economic development is, that is, culturally and sensitively either inspired or driven. You know there are so many things that happened out of all of that. If you look at the whole NGO movement in

Samoa, some of the key players went through that training. Freirean education became a birth for other activities.

### **Family Therapy**

I started out in the whole community development field. I never saw myself as too interested in therapy or in the internal world of families. People live their lives in their own relationships and work out their own internal issues. I was more interested in changing societies and structures—much more interested in that. But what drew me into the whole therapeutic area was the recognition that the people who are marginated take those marginations into their family lives. The unemployed struggle for bread on the table every day and that causes fights, overcrowding, on-going sexism. The violence that women face in the home, ongoing racism, the violence that they face out there as marginated people and as immigrants become internalised.

And now with Pacific peoples in Aotearoa-New Zealand you've got two types of cultural groups living in one household: the children in schools are palagi-fied and come home to parents who are not so palagi-fied. So there were natural conflicts or for want of a better word, breaking points in these families. I had to be involved because of that. When I went into the therapeutic world I was appalled at its base assumptions. There's the glaring assumption of language. How could a Samoan family who are already struggling with major cultural conflicts in their relationships, be therapised in English, which you know sides with one part of that cultural conflict experience at home. When a Samoan family comes for therapy, are they greeted as Samoans? Do they feel that you as a therapist know to honour the place of parents? Or is therapy just another extension of the lowering of the position of parents and over-riding their own values? So it's all those kinds of things were confronting me and I was very angry as I went through this.

Therapists are great people. Fantastic people but their whole practice is presupposed on European lines, European cultural lines—the importance of the individual, the importance of children, the democracy in families and rights and entitlements along individual lines. All these kinds of things you know were quite appalling.

At the Family Centre people were beginning to critique a lot of that. Pākehā were beginning to critique a lot of that, Māori were critiquing a lot of that, Samoans were critiquing a lot of that— with the need to reconstitute our own way of working with families. We needed to make these concerns the concerns of therapy.

Mostly, therapists presuppose that families have food. If people come to therapy when their real issues come from having no food on the table, then it is the responsibility of therapists to ensure that these basic needs are met. Addressing poverty must be a central concern of therapy. If families go home after therapeutic talk and sit around the table where there is no food, what is the use of therapy? What is the use of therapy that does



not have the ability to ask questions such as, ‘Who's cooking at home?’, and ‘What food is there to be prepared?’ Those issues are just as important as how you discover depression. And to presuppose that depression is an emotion. Depression is caused by these external issues—it is not totally internal, psyche driven, or theologically conceived or soul driven. Depression lives in context of relationships that might be dysfunctional or in contexts and situations that create dysfunctionality, like poverty.

Therapy was so monocultural, so bound in its own conceptual foundations and in the individualized style of therapists. We had to expand the view of family to include cultural understandings of families. People living together across cultures, people living together across genders, across generations. We had to really rename that and expand on that, and then we had to look at the different cultural descriptions of the self. We had to really examine that because of the heavy, heavy weight of how the self is conceived that therapy was aimed at. We had to re-conceptualise the self. So we did that through research projects.

We looked at conceptual foundations and at growing new types of therapies that would take into account people's cultural lives, people's colonised cultural lives. So we embarked on the decolonisation of family therapy and psychology and psychiatry all around the world. It led us to challenging the conceptual underpinnings and we had some heavy, heavy conflicts both here and internationally. One of the things that helped was the growth at the time of constructivism and of critical postmodernism. Already social science was beginning to bite its own tail. So while we launched out these philosophical developments became very helpful conceptual allies for paradigm shifting for the decolonisation project. Freire's work was helpful for questioning base assumptions around these later conceptual developments. Freire's work was formative.

The intellectual community around family therapy and psychology and psychiatry, especially around psychology and family therapy, is highly developed but tended to be more internal in its psychological and psychiatric formation. In our experience it was not embedded in the broader social, economic and political context of the psyche, or in its historicity. Now that was one of Freire's gifts—he brought to the field of therapy a helpful conceptual ally in our critique of postmodernism. You see ideas like postmodernism have gained a god-like status, meaning it became ahistorical, and also apolitical. It also became asexual. It just gained that kind of deity where it just did not have historic, cultural and contextual conceptions. So many people engaged with postmodernism, but in our experience many people did not question it—they were given it. And it gave heightened professional status in the fields of therapy and psychiatry, especially psychiatry.

We had to learn to engage with postmodernism, and to convey our concerns and our meanings with a robust knowledge of postmodern theory so that people would listen. In doing that we found great comfort and alliance with the works of people like Tupua Tamasese and Albert Wendt, and we then drew from people like them. We've got many more people to draw on now and we have furthered it and redrawn it in different fields. It's great work. It's energising. We developed a base concept of the relational self. You see it everywhere, being drawn on by people in job offers, Pacific job offers, Pacific psychologists. Academic theses referred to it. It became a base concept that was applied in many disciplines.

You can see those changes in the work of the Dulwich Centre narrative therapy in Adelaide. They always subscribed to community development and to indigenous issues and indigenous projects, so the seeds were there already. The narrative therapy from the Dulwich Centre was developed from reference to cultural marginalisation and in reference to privilege and dominance. These came out of awareness of indigenous issues. They acknowledge that. Michael White, who led the Dulwich Centre said, 'In this type of work we need to be de-centred. The work is about those people. We also need to stay influential.' He was referring to removing the 'self' from the centre of analysis—a shift that we had developed at the Family Centre, and that was also part of the postmodern philosophical movement. Michael's reference to staying influential referred to the responsibility of therapists to broaden their sphere of influence and remain vigilant about the effects of marginalisation and oppression. He was also referring to our work to put culture at the centre of the therapeutic disciplines.

And you see the influence of that all around the world. We have worked in the US, Canada, the UK, Europe and Poland, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa, Zimbabwe—mostly in this territory of therapy. We looked at community development projects, especially around counselling and HIV in Zimbabwe; around psychology, family therapy, psychiatry and community development in South Africa; and then around social justice projects in the United States.

I was in Germany about six weeks ago, at a Protestant University in Dresden at a symposium around children and children's rights. Quite a large number of children in Germany are born addicted to P, cocaine, all these other types of things, or alcohol. There's some work being done to try and free the children from addictions earlier on in their life, as babies. It's really important work. There was this theologian starting to speak about the self of these children as 'in between.' The self is not so much located in the anatomy of the child itself—the child is in the relationship between the parent and the service providers well before the child is born. And even between the relationships of the parents the child is being treated in relational terms. These selves are located in these

relationships. What then are our responsibilities as therapists and social workers to these children who are born out of these relationships? Not only sexual relationships but professional relationships as well. So the concept of the relational self is altering all those types of dialogue.

Part of our problem is that academia tends to produce meta-theories. We've got to be careful around Freire's work too, that it doesn't end up as this meta-theory which explains everything, and under which all these things become constrained. Rather, I see his work as part of the fertile soil. You know we've got to find a metaphor to prevent everything becoming constrained, or frozen under a big meta-theory—because then indigenous knowledge and women's knowledge gets constrained. This whole idea around meta-theory ... we need to reposition it. There's some amazing stuff happening in the Māori world. Tangata whenua/Māori were articulating their protocols and understandings of farewellling those who have passed on in the rituals of tangi, and how ancestors continue to influence and guide the future. This knowledge of tangihanga being communicated more widely began a process of bringing cultural knowledge to a wider audience. Probably Witi Ihimaera's book *Tangi*<sup>2</sup> contributed to this too. What was conveyed was something very interesting, around how stories are always pliant until they get written and then they are frozen. This indicates an articulation of a worldview that is quite different to the Western worldview where literacy and the written word are unquestionably esteemed.

Even Freire can be seen as a meta-theory. We've got to be really respectful of him and what he's trying to do by recognising his eldership and his gifts. We've got to come at it from a Samoan or Māori or Pacific perspective. He has eldership in the field—his thoughts and his work are really, really helpful in these areas. But we're drawing also on other elders. We've got to deconstruct this whole meta-theoretical approach and resist any fundamentalism in interpreting his work—the tendency to be too literal with his concepts such as freedom and conscientisation. He would die if he saw us doing that to his work. So what we are doing now is always a work in progress. There's never any end point so this. But what keeps it enlivened are networks of people who share the same kind of values and share the same kinds of direction having ongoing enlivening dialogue.

### **The Pacific context now**

What are the new challenges to us in the Pacific? There's climate change bringing something else to this conversation. It's not only about human culture that has no regard to the environment. It is looking at what the best of our cultural knowledge and practices are in relation to the environment. So those are the works that have been really enriched by Paulo Freire's own work and there are many, many connections. His own eldership in

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<sup>2</sup> Ihimaera, Witi. 1973. *Tangi*. Auckland: Heinemann

the field of education, that led us to rethinking and questioning the status quo, continues to lead us as we face new challenges. The Pacific is the region that has the most cultures and the most languages in the whole world. We've got climate changes. We've got natural disasters such as tsunamis that were not part of the picture for hundreds of years.

If we look at Freire from a Samoan viewpoint, we don't grow out of an elder and their teachings. You live with them for the rest of your life. Albert Wendt has referred to, 'Our Dead are the splendid robes our souls wear.'<sup>3</sup> They don't just get replaced by something else. He's part of the package. When you're facing the challenges of tsunami and running a trauma counselling project we ask, 'Okay what are the other development issues that need to come out of this?' You know this is not just works of mercy, there need to be some development out of all of this. People need to be enabled to develop livelihoods, for want of another wording.

Now that we've dealt with all the shock of a tsunami and feelings of powerlessness and nightmares out of this terrible disaster we've got to think about the next step, which is helping people into livelihoods, stepping into livelihoods. So what needs happen there? What are the constraints around people's own incomes? What income generating projects are available from their knowledge of the world? Is there respect for their own knowledge about housing? What are some of their solutions around water, for example? What are some of the additions we can bring in from New Zealand or urban centres to rural water challenges? So those are the kinds of questions. For me it's like you carry your elders with you everywhere. He's not just dead and gone in Brazil somewhere, he's impacted on us and we've impacted on the other groups.

In development work and rebuilding after a disaster we think about, 'How do we open people up to their own imagination?' Once poverty constrains imagination it constrains the spirit. Colonisation also. Once it constrains imagination it restricts peoples' future and their children's.

The younger I was the more I was oriented towards the bigger change. But the older I get the more I'm realising that change needs to happen for people as well as in structures. And I think part of my reluctance too was realising that we needed to decolonise the whole discipline. And that was a big job. But you know, God is good.

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<sup>3</sup> *Parents and Children*. Wendt, Albert. 1984. In *Shaman of Visions: Poems*, Auckland: Auckland University Press.