

Tim Howard



Tim is married to Carol and they live with their extended family on an avocado and beef farm on the outskirts of Whangārei in Northland. Tim is employed as a community development worker with Northland Urban Rural Mission, where he works on a range of community development, social justice and environmental issues within a framework of Tiriti justice. Tim is a member of local and national Treaty educators' networks. He is chair of Kotare Trust which, through participatory education and research, supports individuals, activist groups and broader coalitions in their work for Tiriti, environmental and social justice. Previously, Tim worked as a Catholic priest in Aotearoa and the Pacific with particular involvement in community and youth work. Tim is active in a number of international solidarity movements supporting liberation struggles particularly in East Timor, Philippines, West Papua and Palestine.

Can you tell me a bit about the work that you are involved with in support of indigenous rights issues and give some background on why you got involved, how long you've been involved and the types of work you've done?

I'd like to talk a bit about my work in the international context first as I think international solidarity work gives me some of my understandings of working as an ally. I worked in Samoa, in the Pacific, for four years in the early 1980s. That was a deep experience of being in somebody else's context. I had experienced that in Māori contexts in New Zealand before, but it was another whole level of that in terms of language, culture, social institutions, political realities. I think that exposure to Samoa has been influential for me. My life has been very much changed by that experience.

Also I've been involved in solidarity work with Indonesian human rights, Filipino human rights and justice work, Aceh, East Timor and West Papua. To refer to East Timor, their

struggle for independence from being under Indonesian occupation started in 1975 and carried on till 1999. This liberation struggle was a highly sophisticated, multi-faceted, well organised campaign. Within that long-running campaign there was a specific role for the solidarity groups internationally to run alongside Timorese liberation work. Within that complex campaign, one of the core things they referred to was that leadership and decisions about direction came ultimately from the people on the ground in Timor and from the leadership within the resistance struggle in Timor itself. I saw real value in that approach ... in having a clear place for the solidarity work, the ally work.

Stepping back from that international context, I have been engaged in various contexts in support of indigenous rights and issues here in Aotearoa New Zealand. A life commitment for me has been around the areas of social justice and environmental justice and that has grown into being specifically focused on Tiriti¹ justice. This is the work of applying the Treaty of Waitangi, the core agreement between the settler peoples under the British Crown and the indigenous peoples, a guarantee of indigenous rights in this country. The Tiriti work that I have been involved in was initially about working alongside other church-based change agents. From that, I've become involved in Tiriti o Waitangi education work and the actions that come out of that from the Pākehā side of the Treaty relationship.

Some of the work I've been involved in has been alongside specific issues for Māori, for tangata whenua. Some of that has been local, and some issues have had a broader national focus. I'd refer to the foreshore and seabed struggle—a response to the government's legislative moves to override the customary rights of Māori and to enable Crown control of economic and other resources in this country for their benefit and the benefit of transnational corporations. That struggle has been at a national level.

Some of the work has been quite local. In the area where I live, Whangārei, some of us Pākehā were involved in supporting the work of a Māori land corporation, Rewarewa D. They sought to gain respect from the local Council so they could develop their own land in the way they wished—including establishing a comprehensive recycling project for the community.

A lot of my work, where I could be seen as an ally, is in the context of working on issues where Māori and others have a common interest. For example, I work alongside Māori under a housing justice umbrella, the Northland Housing Forum. The lack of adequate housing has long been a major issue in the part of New Zealand where I live. Housing needs are common but have a particular sharpness for Māori in the north.² Our collective of Māori and other housing advocates work closely together in practical ways, but also strategically on the impacts of housing policy. It is in the close relationships within that collaboration, in its detail, that I try to keep an eye on how to be a useful ally.

Another issue of common interest is in relation to mining. The government and local authorities are currently encouraging transnational investors and mining companies to start a whole new wave of activity in the north. There are issues in that for all of us. I'm part of MineWatch Northland, a coalition of individuals and groups working in opposition

specifically to hard rock mining, what we call ‘toxic mining’ of the likes of gold and silver. We are trying to build working connections with tangata whenua and others of similar mind.

There are differences within Māori groupings in the north, and in the broader community more generally, about how we should respond to these new projects—about what, if any, limits should be put on ‘economic development.’ Questions arise for allies with Māori in these complex situations. How do we be allies and respect the roles of tangata whenua while opposing what some Māori are advocating? Do we have to choose between allying ourselves with some and not with others? Can we seek a deeper place of commonality where we can endorse tangata whenua beyond those differences? I think it’s more than possible—it’s essential to continue building relationships with tangata whenua in spite of differences with some. But care is required, and self-awareness.



*2004 hiko opposing the foreshore and seabed legislation, Tim (far right).
Photo: Jen Margaret*

A lot of my early engagement as an ally was about being exposed to, and learning and using Māori language, te reo Māori. I first started learning te reo back in the early 1970s and for me that was already a commitment to run alongside Māori in a long-term way. The language opened out for me cultural understandings that might make being an ally a possibility.

But that hasn’t been straightforward. Over the last forty years that I’ve been involved in te reo, Māori have had less and less access to, and ability to learn te reo—despite great initiatives like Te Kōhanga Reo and Kura Kaupapa Māori.³ So, naturally, there are political challenges around Pākehā like myself using te reo. One position is, ‘others should not have access and not be using the reo until all Māori have access to the reo.’ Another position is that the use of the reo is contextual. In particular contexts here in the north, I pick up an expectation from tangata whenua that the language should be used. So, between those

positions, I've worked out some things, but I'm still learning about what is useful and what is not.

What was the starting point for you—were you involved in international solidarity work before becoming engaged in alliances for indigenous justice locally or was it the other way round?

It wasn't an international starting point at all. I first became involved from connecting with a Māori secondary school and with people there for whom the reo was an obvious point of connection. At the time I was training to be a Catholic priest and I guess I was privileged in the following years by being given opportunities by Māori to be taught the language in quite a conscious, focused way. So I'd see the beginnings of my role as an ally back around 1971. I'd add that it also became contentious because I think an element of the institution that I was part of was both encouraging but also questioning of my own involvement in the area. To typify that: at the end of my time, eight years of training as a priest, my ordination was delayed. The particular thing I remember about that was being told, 'If you're as interested in being a priest as you are in things Māori, then you will be fine.' I would seriously question that statement. I think it comes out of what we would now call institutional racism. Even in those days I would have thought that a priest in this country being able to work to some degree in the Māori world—not as Māori, but to relate usefully in that world, including with the reo—would have been an advantage, but it was framed as a disadvantage.

For me one of the key aspects of the ally role has been around te Tiriti o Waitangi. In practice that has meant being involved in Treaty education for Pākehā, for my own people. It's meant a number of particular activities where the rubric of the Treaty of Waitangi is the key element. I don't think we can talk about the role of being an ally to indigenous people in this country without placing te Tiriti o Waitangi in a central position.⁴

Part of it has been an educative role allied with local groups like Network Waitangi Whangārei⁵ and with the national network of non-Māori Treaty educators, being involved in education with Pākehā, but also in understanding and debating what our role might be to work alongside tangata whenua issues, initiatives and perspectives. Also, in Kotare Trust⁶ we have been addressing Treaty issues and perspectives with environmental and social justice activists in our workshops. Beyond more focused education, the other part has been actively out alongside tangata whenua—either politically or legally or on the streets—alongside their action on their issues.

In all of this, a crucial part of our work has been naming Pākehā institutional dominance in this country. Naming will mean, for example, reframing the way the media portray issues in relation to Māori and in relation to Pākehā, and the assumptions behind those portrayals. Reframing and challenging the dominant view, giving a context for the statistics that put Māori very much in a deficit mode, and challenging the assumptions by which institutions operate.



Network Waitangi Whangārei logo

Another aspect of all this work has been supporting Māori initiatives in practical ways. What is important for me as an ally is moving beyond helping towards a rights focus. At one stage I was a youth worker in Onepoto, a state housing enclave on the North Shore of Auckland. I belonged to an organisation called Onepoto Awhina and worked with Māori young people whose working class whānau lived in that area. Part of that work was simply to be of help, walking alongside these young people as they dealt with the impact of being kicked out of schools, struggling as beneficiaries, or living in a Pākehā dominated society. The key thing in that work, though, was the formation by the young people of their own group called Tū Tangata Rangatahi.⁷ It had a strong self-determination feel to it; they were determining what their issues were and how they would respond to them. The role for me and my colleagues was taking a step back and supporting what they were doing.

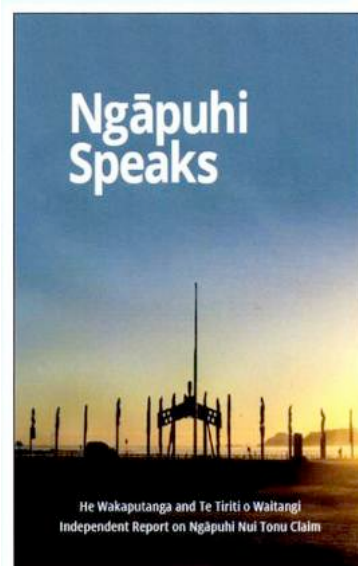
There was one time when security guards in a local mall were targeting the Māori youth hanging out there, in a way that they weren't targeting the white youth. This group knew that this was not right and they worked out themselves how they wanted to respond to that. They went to challenge the mall management and the security guards themselves, and did it in a thought-out organised way. They were very much in control of that. Our role was just asking some key questions. So while there was this work we would do behind the scenes, what was probably more important was supporting this collective as they built their own sense of agency.

I'll add one more example of the ally role. I referred before to the foreshore and seabed work which typifies several elements of ally work. Partly that was about more upfront street activism alongside Māori, with the role of allies to be visibly part of a struggle that was about Māori rights. Partly it was about educational work with Pākehā, with our own people, so that they could move beyond the prejudicial material in the media to actually get a handle on what the issues were from a Māori perspective. And partly it was political and legal, going through the policy formation submission processes as a way of speaking truth to power—challenging the government authorities about the way they were going and confronting it. I particularly want to mention Joan Cook in relation to that. Joan, who died in 2009, was a leader amongst the Treaty educators' network in this country, and a mentor for myself and many others.

Joan and I were to make an oral submission to the parliamentary select committee on the foreshore and seabed legislation and we'd watched a number of presenters earlier in the day.

We'd watched how the government and other parliamentarians were responding to the submissions that came to them, from Māori and from others. It became clear that this committee, on behalf of parliament, was not going to shift very much and were closed-minded against taking on board the Māori arguments. Joan and I talked over lunchtime and decided to throw out the reasoned argument we had been going to present—this was Joan's judgment call—and to make a full-on challenge of a fairly strident nature to the committee, and therefore the government, about their racist position. Which is what we did, with me speaking and Joan steering from behind. That was a raw debate. A number of Māori who were there, or heard about it afterwards, actually fed back that that type of contribution from Pākehā was what they wanted. I think of that as a particularly sharp example of how you know what Māori think of your work.

An Independent Panel Report on the Waitangi Tribunal hearings held in the north since 2010 has recently been drawn together.⁸ This is a beautiful project that focuses on te Tiriti o Waitangi and on an affirmation of continued indigenous sovereignty. Māori and Pākehā worked together on this report. The Pākehā writers were specifically chosen by Māori elders. Moea Armstrong and Network Waitangi Whangārei and other Pākehā researchers, were asked to work on this project; I was asked to do a small researching and writing task. The report, 'Ngāpuhi Speaks', is a rich example of Pākehā contributing to a Māori-driven project.



Cover of Ngāpuhi Speaks. Design: Fix Creative Ltd, photo: Waireti Paora

Can you give examples of some of the tensions and challenges you encounter in this ally work and the ways that you respond?

I think the core of this is to do with respect. Respect for tangata whenua in this, their land. Part of that respect is knowing where to be and where to not be. I think that for me is a useful challenge. Primarily the issues are not mine, they belong to Māori; so sometimes there may be particular issues not to be involved with. It's about being quite cautious not to be engaged in debates that are totally within the Māori sphere. There are a number of those debates going on in our region at present in terms of how to respond to Treaty settlements,⁹ how to respond to

the government in a process which supposedly is about reconciling the grievances of the past in the context of our reality now. The debate about how that is to be handled is very clearly a Māori issue. The current generation of Māori are both the ones who have been affected very significantly by the colonising processes and institutions and the ones who have now been asked to make compromises in a very sharp way. Compromises as they try to balance their survival needs in their current situation against the rights of their descendants, their mokopuna/their grandchildren, and their grandchildren's grandchildren to get full redress. There are trade-offs between past and present that are being demanded of them, so when they come now to make agreements for supposedly 'full and final settlement' there are huge tensions about doing that. These painful positions are some of the contexts that I think we as allies should be staying well clear of—the trade-offs impact deeply on them, not on us.

I think part of the role of allies is the challenge of working with Māori collectively while appreciating that we should be careful not to take one person's word of 'the Māori position' as being the whole picture. On the other hand—while accepting that 'the personal is political'—I don't think we should be diminishing our particular relationships with Māori in these contexts by individualising any problems and saying, 'Well, that's just a personality problem that I or that person has.' The Treaty, of course, is in a large part about relationships; the reality of a relationship has to be worked through in a specific context with a specific person. So there are tensions between working with the collective and working with individuals. I'm aware of key differences between some of the people involved in one particular group, Māori and Pākehā. To stay engaged in the personal relationships was absolutely essential—both for those particular people but for the organisation as a whole—so we could develop as a whole by working through those relationships and not diminishing them or side-lining them in any way.

One of the challenges I find is particularly around the use of te reo Māori and the power that that can give. Being relatively articulate, white, male, and with a certain degree of ability in the Māori language is potentially a powerful combination for an ally but one that can be misused—it needs to be managed properly and respectfully. I've referred before to that challenge around, 'No Pākehā should be using the language until all Māori can.' Yet locally with the particular Māori hapū within my area, I sense there is an expectation that in some contexts the reo should be used by all who can. I think Pākehā with some facility with te reo need to be self-aware about the amount of influence that we can exercise, so in a number of contexts it's about holding back rather than stepping forward. Checking out the context is the challenge—being careful around ego and not angling for kudos from the use of the reo, but particularly being aware of the impact of its use in particular contexts. The challenge is to be aware of, 'What is the gain for Māori in this context?' Asking yourself that question to help determine how and if you use te reo.

Another set of challenges is around when to intervene or not to intervene. For example, a government department came to our area to talk about suicide and suicide prevention. The meeting started in a very Pākehā way, without any acknowledgement and opening of the spiritual space, which would normally be done in a Māori context; without any real

acknowledgement of the depth and importance of the issue; and without acknowledging death amongst us. It was largely Māori who were present and there were many who had lost young people in particular. So for me the question became, ‘Okay, how do we deal with this? It is not appropriate to launch into it this way.’ I just sensed it was rolling on and there was a feeling of despair in the room from Māori along the lines of, ‘Will they ever learn?’ I paused and watched for a moment, then spoke up and politely addressed the person leading the seminar. I asked him to hold back, named the significance of the deaths amongst us, and just basically created a space which implied an invitation to the Māori leadership there. So it was about making that break. One of the elders spoke, farewelling the dead, opening up the spiritual dimension for the living.

I think that type of intervention is useful, yet sometimes rather than intervene in a group process it would probably be better for me to be silent. It is managing what intervention is useful and sometimes holding back.

How do you make those decisions? I understand it would be on a case by case, contextual basis but are there any guiding principles that help you determine when to speak up or not?

One of the things is, ‘Are the issues from a Māori perspective going to be sufficiently and appropriately addressed? Are Māori going to intervene?’ Contrary to the previous example, three days ago I was at a housing meeting where it was very clear that the Māori participation was going to be quite strong, vocal and contesting the government perspective. I did say some things, but in general there was absolutely no need for intervention to make sure a Māori perspective found a space. Not that I would speak on behalf of Māori in terms of housing at all, I don’t mean that.

So your role as an ally is to create opportunities for Māori to have a voice if that hasn’t been given in a Pākehā space rather than speaking on behalf of Māori?

That’s a good summary. The key for me is dealing with the Pākehā institutionalised way of operating, because that’s my people. And it is powerful.

One of the other challenges and tensions is how to prioritise, and even how to respond, when there are conflicting Māori directions on a particular issue. In part I could say that it’s important to step back and find where the commonality is between those Māori positions and to come alongside that. But sometimes it’s not quite as simple as that. For example, the big incursion of mining investors and companies into Northland with huge government and local government encouragement is a highly contested area for the community in general, and not surprisingly within te ao Māori too, for really important reasons. Māori have been shut out of economic development by the processes of colonisation. In our region particularly, the poorest region in the country by some measures although richest in some other ways, Māori have been shut out of economic development. In some situations they’re saying, ‘Look we’ve tried this and we’ve tried this and we’ve tried this, maybe we need to come alongside the new mining programmes.’ I can appreciate that. Yet there are a number of grassroots Māori, women in particular, saying very strongly, ‘No’ to mining, and there is a raft of other

positions. Behind the scenes there appears to be a lot of political manipulation already, even hints that money is starting to flow from transnational corporations into the territory, and that muddies the water.

Being an ally is about thinking, ‘What is the role that we can play in that complex area while still coming in with integrity and some understandings too?’ I don’t think it necessarily helps, it doesn’t mean we’re being good allies, if we’re coming without a backbone. We need to come with some strength of positioning and thought and courage into these engagements.

So how to prioritise when there are conflicting directions? I don’t think there is one particular answer for that. The answers apply case by case. I think part of it is being clear myself about some of the broader issues—issues around the toxic environmental effects from certain types of mining, issues around who gains from the economic development and who doesn’t. And part of it is engaging with Māori and hearing what is being said from their perspectives. I think that’s really quite important. It may mean asking questions of Māori. The questions really have to be open ended rather than closed. As I understand it, a key element of Māori culture and tikanga involves their role as kaitiaki, as people in a spiritual, protective, connected relationship with the environment, with the world. I think one of the questions may well be about how they see that role playing out in the context of proposed mining, yet it’s important not to ask that in a disrespectful way that implies we already know the answer.

The other area of challenge is how to usefully shape our organisations in a way that is responsive to te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori rights. It has to be quite case specific. One of the groups I am with, Northland Urban Rural Mission (NURM), restructured through the late 1980s and 1990s so that the group was quite strongly organised along Treaty lines. A particular issue that came up for us was whether or not to oppose the establishment of a new port at the mouth of the Whangārei harbour. Māori members went away and did their work, as did the Pākehā members. In our own contexts we each carried out a deep reflection over a period of months about how we were going to respond to this crucial issue. At the end we came back together to ask, ‘Okay, what’s our collective positioning on this?’ Both groups said, ‘No’ and that we needed to strongly oppose this so-called ‘development’; but we did it from quite different bases, from different cultural understandings, and for different reasons actually. When we came to participate in the judicial process on this we were presenting from those different bases as well as from the overall collective. That process was a reflection of the structure of the group at the time; it had Pākehā and Māori co-chairs and worked in parallel ways as well as a whole collective.

Now the same organisation is in a whole different space. Many of the people have changed, the issues are different, and the group’s effort to survive in tighter financial times has actually had an impact, which has meant we’re not operating with the strong Treaty based structure that we had before. Yet the underpinnings of those understandings are still there.

With another group, the Kotare Trust, a largely Pākehā organisation which is working alongside Māori, we’ve had a whole different series of challenges. Organisational

development has taken a different shape from NURM where the numbers of Māori and Pākehā in the organisation were similar and different approaches were possible. Within Kotare there have been different ways that we have responded to the driver of how to uphold te Tiriti o Waitangi and support Māori rights. For example, having a tangata whenua advisory group; making sure one of the facilitating group is Māori particularly when there are Māori participants in workshops; responding to current issues for local tangata whenua when we work in different parts of the country; participating in an ongoing working relationship with tangata whenua at our home base in the Kaipara; and working for the protection of the environment through an environmentally appropriate sewerage system at our centre.

The tension between how you work nationally and how you work locally is another related issue. These are challenges related specifically to implementation of te Tiriti o Waitangi and as I said, I see te Tiriti o Waitangi as central to engagement as an ally in Aotearoa.

As far as those specifics around implementation of te Tiriti in organisational contexts or local and national work, are there particular understandings of the role of an ally that you bring into those contexts? For example, a key area for allies to consider is power and decision making.

Lots of things come to mind. There are issues about power within the group about how decisions are made, as you're implying. So a Māori voice within decision making needs to have at least equal weight to non-Māori voices. It's not about numbers that dominate, it's not about a vote, it's certainly not about a vote of the majority-wins nature. Depending on how much one can push the point, one might go further to say that a 50–50 'voice' approach is not a full reflection of the concept of Māori sovereignty embodied in te Tiriti and Māori should have a greater voice. At any rate, I would think that the role of an ally is both to articulate the need for a Māori weighting in decision making, and to advocate for that to be picked up by the organisation.

Beyond hearing Māori voices, there is a further point about tangata whenua. Not all the Māori in a particular context will be from the hapū in that area; not all will be tangata whenua there. So acting as an ally will also mean raising the point of how the group could best build a relationship with the local first people; to hear what their issues might be; how they might want to relate to decisions and actions the group are taking; and how the group might respectfully respond to the tangata whenua. It's more than just responding to those Māori that you have strong alliances with, though their knowledge will have particular resonance for your work. So, in terms of what the group decides to do, it is about which issues you take seriously, who defines those issues, who draws them to your attention—and your antennae to hear those and to respond to them.

Within a group, I think there is a quite pragmatic question to ask, which is, 'What is it possible to do in support of Māori rights with these people and in this context?' Some things are not possible to work on at a particular time. Some things you have to take tentative steps

towards and other things you can work towards more robustly. I don't mean to hold back, but sometimes going too far too fast within a non-Māori organisation can be counter-productive.

Some allies working in organisations have talked about the tension of trying to retain the support of their non-indigenous members while endeavouring to respond to and meet expectations from indigenous people.

And the indigenous side may well say, 'You're not being that strident. You're not being strong enough on this one.' For example, in contrast with some earlier work when we were more politely challenging government housing policy changes, I was rightly told by my Māori colleagues to pull together a very 'blunt' report to name and challenge the institutional racism of the government department. It was the bluntness of that report that started to make a difference.

I think that part of our responsibility as allies is to help our people to work together and respond to the general calls from Māori. So the calls have to be heard clearly but people also need to be given space and time to respond. More than that, I think we need to be consciously working towards our collective responses as allies. There are roles for individuals, as mentors or catalysts or co-workers. But our cultural bias is individualistic. We have more collective power as Pākehā than we realise or are prepared to admit, as the colonisation of this country continues. And what is going to make a difference to that process from the Pākehā side is us allies working together effectively. I think there is something healing in that for us Pākehā too, as we work towards a more collective cultural identity in relation to these lands and waters, to these indigenous peoples. And not as some transposed Europeans with fragmented interests. At any rate, the relationship embedded in te Tiriti o Waitangi is very much a relationship between peoples, between collectives.

Where do your understandings of how to work as an ally come from?

Prior to my time in seminary training, growing up in working class Wellington in the 1950s and 1960s, I hadn't had much connection with Māori, and as a teenager there were hardly any Māori at my school. One of my strong memories is of a young Māori who came to school on a Monday with what was called a Mohawk haircut, which was not what you did in those days of short-back-and-sides. This was seen as a challenge to 'the Establishment.' During morning break and lunchtime he was made to sweep the yard as punishment. I watched him out there by himself. I was increasingly shocked how at the beginning of the week he was quite staunch, by the second and third days he was bowed, and by the end of the week he was broken. That stays with me very strongly, disturbingly. He left school soon afterwards. I didn't know him personally at the time as he was from another class, so I never knew what happened to him. But I think one of my understandings is anchored back to him.

A lot of my understandings are from Māori contexts and from being called to be in relationship. Partly that's about the places as well as the people. The relational invitations to engage inform what being an ally might mean—even if that's not stated overtly. I think of people like Sister Makareta Tawaroa, Te Miringa Hohaia, Takuirā Mariu, Moni Taumaunu,

Mana Cracknell, and many others. Some of them have passed through the veil. Those relationships have been the underpinning of my sense of what it might mean to be an ally. They are the key and for that I am grateful.

I think, as I said before, an understanding of the Treaty is paramount for me in terms of a framework within which to place a role for allies, in understanding and framing history and framing the present. I'd put it as 'Aotearoa is Māori land, so how are we going to relate in that context?'

A life-changing point for me was in the early 1980s, when I participated in the training carried out by Filip Fanchette in Structural Analysis—a methodology based on Paulo Freire's ideas, on liberation theology and on Marxist understandings, analysis and action.¹⁰ I'd like to name one specific way Structural Analysis has informed my sense of being an ally. This methodology is based on a class analysis. I know such analysis has the potential to blur discussion of being allies with indigenous peoples, but within it there is the useful concept of the role of the auxiliary class. What is the role of people who by life choice, experience, education, or whatever, are auxiliary or helper class, 'middle-class'? Is it a role to benefit the elite—because that is what we are geared for—or is it to work alongside conscientised groups within the working class struggle? That concept of there being a role we can choose to take going against the stream, informs my sense of choosing to be an ally with Māori. It's about realising there are options that can be taken; there are particular contributions I can make. But who's going to dictate those contributions? Who's going to frame them? As Pākehā in this country there is a choice, but our natural tendency might be to go with the majority, to work with the existing system, a deeply colonial system that doesn't benefit indigenous people. That is the default setting. Will we choose to go in the opposite direction and be with Māori in their struggles?

There have been important moments for me when 'a light went on.' Our Network of Sisters and Brothers for Justice, church-based activists, were meeting in 1987 in Whanganui with representatives of Te Atihaunui a Pāpārangi, the local hapū. They told a story about how they had chosen to come alongside local Pākehā environmentalists and conservationists on issues which had been defined and driven from the Pākehā side. When the tangata whenua themselves had a key issue, related to levels of water flow in their sacred river, the Whanganui River, and to their rights and relationship to the river, they invited Pākehā to come in support. That invitation was not taken up and was in fact argued against by some of those Pākehā environmentalists. Out of the hurt of that, the hapū reported that they would not be working with Pākehā again. That was quite a powerful moment for me, thinking, 'Right, what is our role then? They're telling us this story for a particular purpose for later. That's their story but it is a story we are asked to take seriously.' Key moments like that.

There are issues in that story about integrity and ongoing relationships.

Yes, it's about integrity. It's also about ongoing relationships, but sometimes you may not be in the context to continue working with the same people. I was working in Whanganui prior

to that meeting but have only very sporadically been in that area since. I did go back there some years later to participate in the land occupation at Pakaitore with Te Atihaunui a Pāpārangi, protesting against the intentions of the local Council. I can see there's real value in ongoing relationships with a particular hapū, but if that's not possible it's the personal commitment to be engaged in relationship with Māori that continues, no matter what context we find ourselves in.

Another moment occurred when I was offering to do some work with Onepoto Awhina, the largely Māori group in a state housing area that I referred to earlier. I had a first meeting with people from that community and there was I innocently going along thinking that I might perhaps bring some skills to help them. The opening question from them at the meeting was, 'How can we help you?' That took me back! Then I came to think, 'Okay. It's about respect. It's also about being conscious about what's needed and what's being called for more than what I bring. And it's especially about being aware of myself.' Later on I heard the challenge from Aboriginal activists in Queensland, to the effect of, 'Don't just come to help. But if you can see your liberation is intimately tied up with mine, then we can work together.' There's an echo from Onepoto in that. From these friends I began to learn.

I've learnt much from Pākehā who have walked these relationships with Māori over the years, mentors and companions like Joan Cook, Mitzi Nairn, Don Ross, Terry Dibble and others talking the issues through as they arose and working out the tactics. By sharing perspectives and making judgment calls, maybe, when working together. By encouraging me to take up a role at a particular juncture. Mitzi once spoke at Waitangi of our groups of Pākehā allies wishing to be the sort of Pākehā that the rangatira thought they were signing te Tiriti with. That made sense to me.

You have touched on this a number of times but you might want to talk more specifically about how you find out what tangata whenua think of your work, both those that you are working directly with and others. Are there specific conversations about motivations for involvement, expectations of relationships, that sort of thing?

One of the ways we've used in some of our groups in the past has been having a Māori monitor. 'Monitor' is probably not the right language, but it's a person who we dialogue with where we can say, 'This is what the work is, and this is where we are putting in effort at this stage. Do you have any comments?' It's a way of articulating our accountability as well as inviting input about possible areas of work.

A lot of the feedback however tends to be on the hoof. It might come from short comments from Māori in the middle of action, comments that you need to have an antenna out to register, and if necessary a focus to drill down into what those comments are about. If something jars, or if someone is putting across a counterview in a way that seems significant, I think we need to investigate it a bit more, or perhaps take it on board and check it afterwards with them, or check if others heard the same thing. Sometimes it's unexpected specific feedback. It can be quite blunt, and it can be positive and generous. If people go out of their

way to make a comment I think you take it seriously. So it's not in any particular structured way, it's more in the subtleties of working closely together.

I do the convening work for the Northland Housing Forum, a network that is largely composed of Māori. I know I have to think about what power I have in that situation, as a clearinghouse for information, or as a potential spokesperson. And about the need to step back as required, while acknowledging that there is still a role that I am being asked to take up. A Pākehā who works closely with Māori commented to me once, 'Well, if Māori choose a particular Pākehā to work with them in a particular way, isn't that part of their exercise of rangatiratanga, of sovereignty?' So the housing group is asking me to be in the role of convenor. I just think we need to be self-aware in these situations, so that the power that role gives doesn't take over. And to be alert to what feedback we are actually receiving.

Do you have a key piece of advice you would give to someone new to the work?

I think if you're going to be an ally ultimately this is about changing you. About informing you as a person. Hopefully for your lifetime. Maybe requiring courage to be open to change. It's about checking out what contribution you may make, but it's about relationships that change you in the process. That will mean different things in different contexts. You may not always have the same particular connections and you may have family and life commitments that might give you more or less space to do the work of an ally, but hopefully you build longer term relationships with Māori over time. We go up to Waitangi every year around the anniversary of the signing of te Tiriti o Waitangi. We might not see some people from one year to the next, but those connections with Māori get reinforced and built on over time, and there's a sense of mutual acknowledgement in that.

Part of being an ally is being conscious about being in those relationships and the change of ourselves that comes from them. I think the extra twist on it is not just drifting into things, but actually making conscious choices around our involvements. Being open to make those choices would be the main thing.

I suppose another learning is around balancing a couple of things. A huge part of being an ally is being in a relationship of respect with Māori, with tangata whenua, and actually acting that out. The other part is that there is a challenge to us not to go into the relationship as passive, unthinking servants but to go in with some strength, with some spine. We're more use to Māori if we're coming in with all our skills, all our strength, and particularly all our integrity. We need to be self-aware but go in with strength. The mix between respect and strength requires a fine balance, but it's one worth working on.

¹ Throughout this interview te Tiriti o Waitangi, Tiriti, the Treaty of Waitangi and Treaty are used interchangeably to refer to the text of the Treaty written in the Māori language, affirming indigenous sovereignty in Aotearoa.

² Referring to Te Tai Tokerau/Northland—the northern part of the North Island.

³ Pre-school and primary school system which operates under Māori custom using Māori language as the medium of instruction.

⁴ See Appendix one for further discussion of the relationship between Treaty work and allies work.

⁵ A local network of non-Māori Treaty educators.

⁶ See <http://www.kotare.org.nz>

⁷ Young People Standing Tall.

⁸ The hearings are held to enable the Tribunal to hear evidence relating to claims regarding breaches of the Treaty: for more information see <http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/claims>. While the Tribunal produces a report on each claim, in this case Ngāpuhi elders commissioned an independent panel to produce a report on their claim. See <http://www.ngapuhi.iwi.nz/news-independent-ngapuhi-report-launched.aspx> See also <http://www.nwwhangarei.wordpress.com/ngapuhi-speaks>

⁹ The ‘Treaty settlement’ process is run by Government, as a way of acknowledging the impact of breaches of te Tiriti on hapū and whanau, and of providing a minor level of compensation for those breaches, usually between 1-2% of the value of unjustly seized lands and resources. These formal ‘settlements’ are accompanied by the requirement that Māori of this generation accept this agreement as a ‘full and final settlement,’ removing any Crown liability for the crimes committed against Māori.

¹⁰ See <http://awea.org.nz/structural-analysis-gathering> for a report which gives information on Structural Analysis in Aotearoa.