2026 Joan Cook Memorial
State of the Pākehā Nation Essay

Treaty education group Network Waitangi Whangārei (NWW) has commissioned annual reflections on the State of the Pākehā Nation since 2006. Founding member Rev. Joan Cook died in 2009; and the essays since that time commemorate her pioneering Treaty/Tiriti and anti-racism work. As an Australian, she was so intrigued by the racial and cultural contradictions of her adopted country that she learned about, then taught us our hidden history over several decades.

All the State of the Pākehā Nation speeches and essays are free to download from the NWW website networkwaitangiwhangarei.org.nz, along with PDF copies of the book 'Treaty of Waitangi Questions and Answers'.

NWW has also co-published (with Te Kawariki) an independent panel report on Stage 1 of the Ngāpuhi claim (WAI 1040), called 'Ngāpuhi Speaks'. This is available as an e-book from meBooks.co.nz. Hard copies of this book, as well as 'Treaty of Waitangi Questions and Answers', can be ordered from the NWW website above.

The 2026 author is Alex Barnes

Alex Barnes is a Pākehā pāpā shaped by the kaupapa Māori education movement — raised through kōhanga reo and kura kaupapa, and still deeply rooted in those values today. Based in Tāmaki makaurau, he holds connections to Mātaatua, Tainui, and Te Tai Tokerau through his ongoing involvement in kaupapa Māori movements and through his daughter Hautonga Mary Hotere-Barnes (Ngāti Maniapoto, Te Aupōuri, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Wai, Europe).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi sits at the heart of everything Alex does personally and professionally. He's driven by a curiosity about what makes meaningful connection and collaboration possible across differences, rather than people simply talking past each other.

Over more than 25 years, Alex has worked across education, public health, and adult education with a focus on cultural, social, economic, and environmental justice. His PhD explored Tiriti-based co-governance education in Aotearoa.

Aroha atu, aroha mai: A reflection on Tauiwi and Pākehā Tiriti Work

Alex Barnes in conversation with Tayyaba Khan, Lincoln Dam and Mikesh Patel

I slipped into the world of "Pākehā Treaty work" through osmosis. Both my parents were deep in the anti-racist and Tiriti movements of the 1980s (Barnes, 2006). I followed a similar path in my early 20s, when I started taking deliberate steps alongside other young Pākehā and Māori to honour te Tiriti. It's been a profound, messy challenge—one that's stretched me in ways I never expected.

Here in 2026, I often feel swamped. Relentless attacks on Indigenous rights worldwide, and on te Tiriti o Waitangi right here, lay bare the enduring grip of colonialism and capitalism. It's scary. Moments like these demand that our Pākehā Tiriti networks pause and ask: what do we really need now?

There's still a massive "white elephant" (pun intended) in the room for Pākehā Tiriti circles: a Pākehā-Māori Tiriti relationship can feel exclusionary. The critique lands like this:

> When "Tauiwi of colour"/"Tangata Tiriti" groups get sidelined from Tiriti relationships, we prop up a Pākehā monopoly. This shrinks the chances of building a Tiriti-honouring movement that spans ethnicities, cultures, and economies.

When I got the invitation to contribute to this collection, I knew I had an opportunity to address this criticism. What better place to start than with a “Pākehā State of the Nation” essay.

Spotlighting Tauiwi-Pākehā Tiriti dynamics isn't new. Avril Bell (2024) reminds us: these "Treaty-centred relations are dynamic and evolving," always simmering under the surface (p. 141). And globally? We've got lessons from people worlds apart, building what bell hooks and Thich Nhat Hanh call a "community of love”.

To tap into that loving energy, I turned back to my mentor and friend Jen Margaret. Back in 2013, she edited *Working as Allies: Supporters of Indigenous Justice Reflect*—a collection I chipped in on. Like Bell's 2024 book, *Becoming Tangata Tiriti*, Jen's book aimed to chronicle "the work of allies."

She frames allies holistically: their worth, their pitfalls, even better terms (2013, pp. 192–193). Allies are "people who support those more directly affected by a particular justice issue" (Margaret, 2013, p. 9). Her book digs into four big questions:

> What leads people to this work? What are some of the challenges of this role? How do people respond to those challenges? What informs people's approach and how do they know their work is useful? (Margaret, 2013, p. 9)

The voices in her pages show that "being an ally is a practice and a process—not an identity" (p. 193). Twenty years on from the first "State of the Pākehā Nation" essay, addressing Pākehā-Tauiwi Tiriti relationships feels more urgent than ever. They're the heartbeat of this piece.

Aroha mai, aroha atu

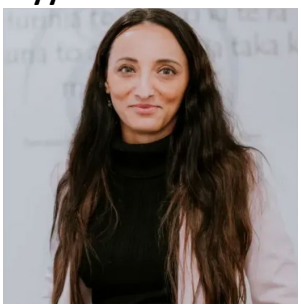
I've been learning and using te reo me ngā tikanga Māori since kōhanga reo days in the mid-1980s (Barnes, 2006; 2023). Growing up, "aroha mai, aroha atu" rang out often in Māori circles—a proverb summing up "love received, love returned" or "love given, love received" (Elder, 2020). It captures the give-and-take of how love draws people in.

He aroha mau roa nōku mō te Tiriti. I hold a deep, lasting love for te Tiriti and for the people it fires up. With that spirit, here's a chat with friends Tayyaba Khan, Lincoln Dam, and Mikesh Patel about:

- **Tauiwi Tiriti orientations:** What drew them in? What shapes their approach?
- **Learning and action:** What's shifting for them?; and
- **He tauutuutu:** What ideas do they have for forging "Tangata Tiriti" coalitions into the future?

These brief reflections aim to interrupt the spell of Pākehā-Māori-only Tiriti dynamics: a trance I've fallen under too many times.

First, some quick intros:

Tayyaba Khan 	I am CEO of the Counselling Services Centre, Founder and Managing Director of the Khadija Leadership Network, and serve as the New Zealand Peace Ambassador for the European Muslim League. I'm also a member of Global Women NZ. My current board roles include serving as out-going Chair of Belong Aotearoa, Chair of the Advisory Board for Professional Development Council New Zealand and member of the Advisory Board for the Pearl of the Islands Foundation.
Lincoln Dam 	I was born in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) to a Thai-Chinese mother and a Chinese-Cambodian-refugee father. I am a Senior Lecturer in Te Kura Mātauranga, the School of Education, at AUT. My work broadly examines the identities and experiences of Asian peoples in Aotearoa New Zealand. My current research explores the ethics and politics of Asian-Māori and Asian-Tiriti relations.

Mikesh Patel 	I'm a 2nd and 5th generation Gujarati New Zealander born in Whangārei and now itinerant. I have worked on making a landback intentional community and trying to help end colonisation through constitutional transformation.
Alex Barnes 	I'm a Pākehā Pāpā raised in kaupapa Māori and bilingual worlds. Tiriti organising hooked me in my early 20s. I straddle education, health, and environmental wellbeing. I'm eccentric: I love art, music, politics, philosophy, sports, public radio, and I don't take myself too seriously. My PhD explored Tiriti-based co-governance in education.

Tauiwi Tiriti Orientations

Tauiwi-of-colour communities have their own Tiriti frameworks that draw inspiration from their own traditions and intertwined histories. For this conversation, Islamic good faith principles and Buddhist interconnectedness were omnipresent. My Tauiwi friends shared how their family histories and ethics moved them to become interested and active in Tiriti relationships. Each person talked in their own ways about growing up between worlds.

Tayyaba and Mikesh shared that their families moved through Pakistan, India, the Netherlands, Japan, Australia and Aotearoa. Their lives have been shaped by colonisation, racism and dislocation, so they are attuned to how power, poverty and privilege are linked. This fuels their commitment to Tiriti justice:

> **Mikesh:** I do most of my work in Auckland and the diversity of Tauiwi of colour is amazing. We are facilitating learning and actions across different communities, informed by the histories and gifts that they bring. This shows us the radical consequences of colonisation: of the coloniser and colonised.
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> **Tayyaba:** We've been here for a while, and for a very long time, it didn't feel like I could ever belong. I think it's that that led me to the territory of justice. The recognition of colonisation and our histories. The same people that colonised New Zealand also colonised the lens that I come from. Our ancestors have also experienced exponential violence because of that colonisation. Carrying of that history of colonisation does get passed down from generation to generation… And so it really drives my motivation for justice: recognising colonialism here and how it plays out. I want to contribute to some semblance of justice in some way, shape or form.

Experiencing the weight of their own histories of displacement and colonisation, each person found a partial antidote in te Tiriti. All three friends shared how solidarity with tangata whenua emerged from family and personal experiences with shared colonial legacies, which transformed into a motivation for justice.

Lincoln grew up learning about “the Treaty” at school and “found myself always positioned outside of it and attendant discussions of national belonging. The Treaty (or later, te Tiriti) was framed as a relationship between Māori and Pākehā, and thus had nothing to do with Asian people like me (or so it seemed).” He went on to explain that “it wasn’t until university - especially my studies in Te Puna Wānanga (TPW), the School of Māori and Indigenous Education, at the University of Auckland - that I started to realise that te Tiriti was my treaty too and for which I had responsibilities.” This is when he started to consider how Buddhist philosophies on interconnectedness were related to te Tiriti:

> **Lincoln:** …te Tiriti is not just a thing of the past and to which I have no relation. Asian philosophies remind me that I am always-already in relationship with te Tiriti. Te Tiriti is what allows me to be here in the present and going forward into the future. I am one of the “others yet to come” (preamble) foreseen by te Tiriti and those who signed it. For many Asian philosophies, seeing ourselves as interconnected with others gives rise to an orientation of responsibility for the other.

Mikesh shared that his approach is guided by a collective orientation influenced by Indigenous decolonial movements internationally. His involvement in Indigenous justice began in so-called Australia. Here he was exposed to First Nations activism and was inspired by "amazing indigenous mentors" who corrected our "burgeoning ally" missteps at the Tent Embassies and Redfern and other places. Returning to Aotearoa, Mikesh participated in a Tiriti workshop with Tangata Tiriti, which shocked him into action: "Learning that the history of the country is so different from what people in Aotearoa and abroad perceive... It blew my mind." Mikesh acknowledged that the “broader Tiriti education community” is a longstanding collective movement, and may even be unique amongst global settler colonies. He discussed how “learning how to be an ally” was important. Aboriginal activists like Gary Foley and Māori thinkers such as Moana Jackson (amongst others) had a big influence on his approach. Recognising Māori complexities offer important learnings: such as Māori agreements and disagreements, when to have an opinion and when to step back.

Learning and action

Understanding the context and influences of their motivations for Tiriti involvement led us to talk about what are they learning, and what practical ideas they have about building future coalitions between all "Tangata Tiriti".

Lincoln pointed out that there are growing numbers of Asians “learning te reo Māori”, and that these “engagements with te ao Māori are important”, but he also offered a caution:

> **Lincoln:** Te Kawehau Hoskins reminds us that: “Māori don’t want us to be Māori, they want us to think positively about how we can have productive relationships with Māori.” Similarly, Tina Ngata recalls her aunt saying: “Stop trying to be Māori, I don’t need you [Tauiwi] to be Māori – I’ve got that covered. I need you to be a good treaty partner”.

These cautions encourage Lincoln to return to Confucian thought and “look back” to Asian ancestors and philosophies. Grounding Tauiwi cooperation within his own ancestral ethics challenges superficial biculturalism. Lincoln is interested in how Tauiwi, particularly Asian Tauiwi, re-centre their focus to their own philosophies towards just relationships with tangata whenua.

Tayyaba shared that her approach is “informed by the people I serve”. For her being context-responsive means being “fluid and open about how to address justice issues”. She explained that her work is about being “in the hearts and minds of people… I think that happens when you have a very interpersonal approach in your interactions with others”. Tayyaba also has a Māori-Pakistani niece, which has motivated her to recognise multiple worldviews while honouring tangata whenua as the first people of Aotearoa.

Inviting people to share where they come from and how colonisation has touched their families illustrates peoples’ own place in the experience of colonialism. This reflection further supports us to frame Tiriti work as part of a bigger global resistance to colonisation, and how this plays out in Aotearoa for all people.

Tayyaba stressed that moving beyond Tiriti articles to the everyday messiness of intercultural relationships is important. Embracing uncertainty and change is important. She explained that it’s valuable for people to do homework before jumping into relation with tangata whenua: clarify your "why/how"; show up with genuine intent even if imperfect. It is heart work, not checkboxes, that builds trust one step at a time:

> **Tayyaba:** For me the learning is a lot deeper than it used to be. It's not just about Tiriti articles, although this is important. It is also about deepening our engagements and relationships with tangata whenua on a day-to-day level. I’ve learnt not to just rock up to a marae with an issue I want their perspective on. I need to do my homework beforehand and be intentional about my why, what and how. It is not a tick box exercise. I might not get everything right. I'm genuinely there with the best of intentions.

Similarly, Lincoln shared that te Tiriti is not frozen in 1840 articles, but alive with ongoing responsibilities that change through everyday relationships. For him the Buddhist teaching of anattā is instructive: nothing's fixed, everything's in flux, shaped by connections. This means Tiriti responsibilities grow through daily interactions rather than rigid rules:

> **Lincoln:** To be open to and comfortable with uncertainty and working things out as we go. Carwyn Jones reminds us that the Tiriti relationship "does not begin and end with the specific articles of the Treaty, rather there are enduring obligations on the Treaty partners to continually respond to exchanges within the relationship". All things exist in a perpetual state of flux and are reliant upon and conditioned by relationships with exteriority (such as the surrounding environment). Anattā challenges us to remember that, like human beings, te Tiriti does not sit flat. Te Tiriti and the ethical responsibilities that it demands continue to evolve through ongoing, everyday interactions and relationships.

Mikesh is inspired by Māori resurgence and reclamation of culture and capital. For him this revitalisation is the real driver of national change, and it makes him consider how Tauiwi can productively respond:

> **Mikesh:** The landscape in Aotearoa has shifted so much. The power of the Māori economy and the reclamation of te reo and tikanga Māori is inspiring. That's the stuff that is really changing our country. It is informing our work much more than it used to. The opportunity is that we now account for it and think about our response and responsibilities at a deeper level. We work this into our Tiriti workshops, because of how important this learning is.

He tauutuutu

Te Aka Māori Dictionary explicitly defines *tauutuutu* as both "alternating speakers between tangata whenua and manuhiri at a pōwhiri" and as "reciprocity". The term is a protocol of mutual exchange of speech, support, and relationship-building between groups or people. hooks and Nhat Hhan share a similar interest when building a community of love. It requires different groups to willingly and repeatedly "step up" to listen, to give, and through the process, be changed. He tauutuutu in this context is a useful Māori metaphor where relationships are organised around reciprocal care, shared responsibility, and the ongoing practice of giving and receiving that strengthens and challenges the whole, rather than inflating individuals.

So, what type of tauutututu needs to take place between Pākehā and Tauiwi if we are to come together in our differences to advance Tiriti relationships? Lincoln, Mikesh and Tayyaba were clear: we need to name the de facto Pākehā "monopoly" over Tiriti relationships with Māori:

> **Tayyaba:** One of the biggest problems is that there is a Pākehā monopoly over Tiriti relationships. There is a whole raft of other people on this land who are trying to find meaning about how they can relate to te Tiriti. Before we can even make a shift, we need to start by acknowledging this. That would be my first practical step. Like any social and cultural movement, it can become clicky.

> **Mikesh:** While creating a Tauiwi Tiriti group, we discussed whether Pākehā should be involved or not. Some were clear that Pākehā should not be involved because they are likely to take over the group. At the time, I said no. We need Pākehā too because they're broadly responsible for colonisation, and they should have a big role in ending it. Unfortunately, I was wrong. Pākehā in the group did take it over. Since then, Tauiwi of colour have disappeared from that group.

Even when well-intentioned, my Pākehā people (me included) can easily re-centre ourselves in a Tiriti relationship. This suffocates the potential of working with our Tauiwi friends and allies. It puts on hold an array of strategies and actions that could be taken to affirm honourable kāwanatanga and Māori tino rangatiratanga.

There is an invisible weight of being Pākehā that can shape every encounter, and obscure Tauiwi histories of colonisation, migration, and survival:

> **Tayyaba:** When Pākehā walk into the room often they don't always realise they bring generations of accumulated resources and power. They have confidence in knowing the system they have built. This is totally different for refugee communities. Another complexity can be internalised racism of Tauiwi of colour groups: depending on your histories and how you view whiteness, this could mean you become the compliant minority.

Tayyaba and Mikesh's reflections made me rethink Pākehā roles in Tiriti coalitions. How can Pākehā Tiriti organising be less "Pākehā-centric"? A partial answer lies in demonstrating how Tauiwi-Pākehā-Māori relationships can express shared responsibility, generosity, and mutual accountability:

> **Lincoln**: Tiriti organising will only advance if we practice generosity with one another and recognise that this mahi can be carried in many different ways. We need breadth and depth: those willing to confront power head-on, and those who work relationally; those pushing for transformation from inside existing institutions and those imagining and building alternatives outside them, and everyone who moves between these spaces. Tiriti justice will not be won by one tactic, one style or one strand, but by many different people bringing their distinct strengths into a shared kaupapa.

We Pākehā are being asked to treat Tiriti organising as more than just political strategy. We can broaden our view of leadership by recognising and valuing that justice work takes many forms, not one fixed approach. Practices of mutuality and reverence remind us that being an ally "is a practice and a process—not an identity" (Margaret, 2013, p. 193).

No one group "owns" Tiriti relationships.

When Pākehā and Tauiwi work in concert to honour te Tiriti, we can generate a powerful and complex vision for living together with divergence. Bringing our strengths into a shared Tiriti vision, echoes the teaching that love is not about individual saviours but about meaningfully supporting one another. To underscore this, maybe it's time to rename this essay series "Te Tiriti and Tauiwi State of the Nation"?

Pākehā are called to keep adapting, collaborating, and redistributing resources so that many different people can carry the beauty of our work together.

Practicing humility and remaining open to learning about our organising failures and successes, big and small, is a daily discipline of aroha I'm keen to be part of. How about you?

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