

# Becoming whānau: Māori and Pākehā working together on the Indigenous-led campaign, #ProtectIhumātao

Frances Hancock and Pania Newton

**Abstract:** This paper explores how the Indigenous-led, community-supported campaign #ProtectIhumātao became a site for decolonisation work that nourished productive bicultural relations. For six years we worked together, alongside others, to stop a transnational corporation building houses on culturally significant, but contested, whenua (land) at Ihumātao, Auckland. Pania draws strength from her Indigenous Māori whakapapa (ancestral relations), and Frances from being a New Zealander of Irish descent. Committing ourselves to the campaign kaupapa (values, principles, plans), we embraced different roles: Pania as a *kaitiaki* or *land protector* and Frances as a *hoa tū tata* or *close friend, standing by, ready to assist*. Along the way, we became our own whānau (extended family); a kaupapa-based whānau (people mobilised for a shared purpose). Here, we share knowledge from our campaign experiences to explore what *becoming whānau* means to us in relation to Ihumātao. Thinking and writing at the interface of Māori and Pākehā ways of knowing, we interact with ideas from Māori philosophy and Indigenous–Settler relations. Through telling our stories, we illuminate relational qualities that made our different roles and evolving relationship possible, and glean insights to inform ongoing Indigenous-led, decolonising practices at Ihumātao, and elsewhere.

**Keywords:** whānau, #ProtectIhumātao; Māori political movements; Māori–Pākehā relations; Indigenous–Settler relations

## Introduction

This paper explores how an Indigenous-led, community-supported campaign in Aotearoa-New Zealand became a site for decolonisation work, nourishing productive relations between Indigenous Māori and Pākehā (European) settlers. In early 2015, six cousins who whakapapa (have ancestral connections) to Ihumātao founded the Save Our Unique Landscape campaign – SOUL, later known as #ProtectIhumātao (Hancock et al., 2020). Their aim was to stop a transnational corporation building a commercial housing development on 32 hectares of Crown/government confiscated whenua (land) at Ihumātao, an area of outstanding cultural and heritage significance in Auckland, our country’s largest city. While the campaign mobilised diverse peoples, our focus here is on bicultural relations between Māori and Pākehā, reflecting our own identities and location within a particular set of broader power relations.

For six years, we (Pania Newton and Frances Hancock) worked together, alongside others, on the campaign. Our lives became profoundly entwined in the continuing struggle for justice at Ihumātao. Here, we consider what *becoming whānau* (extended family) means in this context: how we each became involved in the campaign, our different roles and responsibilities, and what we learnt from working together. Thinking and writing at the interface of Māori and Pākehā ways of knowing, we interact with ideas from the fields of Māori philosophy and Indigenous–Settler relations. Through telling our stories, we hope to illuminate the relational qualities and decolonising practices that made our evolving relationship and different roles possible. We glean insights, albeit partial and subjective, to inform decolonisation work at Ihumātao and elsewhere.

Integral to the paper are concepts expressed in the Māori language. The following translations are of Māori terms we use most often: whenua (land), whānau (extended family), Māori (Indigenous New Zealanders), Pākehā (New Zealanders of European descent) and Ahi Kā (literally, the ones who keep the home fires burning). Other Māori terms are translated in the text. The campaign used various terms, with different nuances, to describe the Indigenous peoples of Ihumātao: tangata whenua (literally, Indigenous people of the land), mana whenua (tribes exercising spiritual/customary authority in an area), hau kāinga (home people) and Ahi Kā as above. We mainly refer to Ahi Kā to avoid confusion. Also, following Todd (2003), we use *Other* (capitalised) to distinguish the alterity of a particular embodied person and *other* (lower case) to describe other persons.

## Background on Ihumātao

Polynesian voyagers landed at Ihumātao more than 700 years ago and, over subsequent centuries, were sustained by the whenua (Jones and Biggs, 2004). The treaty signed between representatives of the British Crown and over 500 rangatira (Māori chiefs) in 1840 – Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti), was meant to protect their rangatiratanga (Māori sovereignty) over their lands and other taonga (treasures), but the Crown quickly claimed Aotearoa as another possession of the British Empire (O'Malley, 2016). Mass migration of settlers accelerated the pressure for land. In 1863, the colonial government used legislative means and military force to confiscate 1100 acres of Māori land at Ihumātao, exiling Ahi Kā (O'Malley, 2016; Waitangi Tribunal, 1985). The government granted the now contested whenua to settlers in 1867. Upon their return to Ihumātao, Ahi Kā were effectively landless and reduced to subsistence living (McCreanor et al., 2018). Other actions – quarrying sacred maunga (mountains) for roading material, a wastewater treatment plant that polluted the moana (harbour) and awa (river), and industrial encroachment – benefited the growing city of Auckland but caused environmental desecration and further heartache (Waitangi Tribunal, 1985). Manifest injustices and breaches of Te Tiriti at Ihumātao have been recognised by independent bodies but never **honoured** by the Crown through its Treaty Settlement process (Sim et al., 1928; Waitangi Tribunal, 1985).

Makaurau Marae (a tribal gathering place) is at the heart of the Ihumātao papakāinga (village) and represents the descendants of Te Ahiwaru, a tribal grouping with recognised Ahi Kā status. Other tribal groupings of Waiohua and Ngāti Mahuta also have connections to the area and, along with Te Ahiwaru, are represented by Makaurau Marae. Over the generations, Ahi Kā have tried to heal the wrongdoing at Ihumātao. The leaders of Makaurau Marae worked with central and local government to establish the Ōtuataua Stonefield Historic Reserve adjacent to the contested whenua and were assured this land would become part of the reserve. But, a court ruling (Environment Court, 2012) and developer-friendly legislation (Parliamentary Council Office, 2019) paved the way for development. In 2016, descendants of the original settler owners sold the contested land to Fletcher Building Limited (Fletcher) (Malva, 2018).

While Fletcher saw land ripe for development, Ahi Kā recognised the contested whenua as wāhi tapu (a sacred place) and wāhi tupuna (a place of ancestral significance) (Waitangi Tribunal, 2015; Hancock et al., 2020). Archaeologists also argue this whenua is part of the broader cultural heritage landscape of Ihumātao (Lawlor, 2018; Veart, 2018). Heritage specialists suggest the whole Ihumātao landscape embodies a continuous history of cultivation, ecological and cultural values, geological features, and endemic fauna and flora

(Short and Menzies, Forthcoming). Recognising its outstanding values, the contested whenua and the Historic Reserve were granted New Zealand's highest heritage listing status in 2020 (M. Jones, 2020).

Individuals and groups across the country responded to the call from Ahi Kā to #ProtectIhumātao. The campaign operated on a modest budget sourced through crowdfunding and other donations. A multi-pronged strategy evolved including: petitions and hīkoi (marches) to Parliament and Auckland Council, media engagement, public education, land occupation, legal action, and attendance at UN meetings in New York and Geneva. The campaign delayed development but, at Fletcher's behest, police arrived on 23 July 2019 to evict land protectors living on the whenua (District Court, 2019). Intense media scrutiny alerted the nation to the conflict and thousands of supporters flocked to the whenua. The Prime Minister intervened on 26 July 2019, authorising a process (with Fletcher's agreement) to resolve the crisis (Neilson, 2019). In December 2020, the Crown purchased the land and initiated a new process, now underway, to decide its future.

At Ihumātao, complex power relations produced profound tensions. Crown actions and inactions over generations created the conditions for a corporation to decide its future. The current controversy exposed a contestation over different ways of knowing, being and doing across the Māori and Pākehā worlds. It made visible competing values – the preservation of an exceptional cultural heritage landscape for future generations versus its wilful destruction to enable commercial development for shareholder gain. These distinctly different futures challenged people from all walks of life to think about who we are as a nation and what we value. Many assumed the persuasive interests/resources of the corporation would override Ahi Kā aspirations/efforts. But the corporation failed to secure a social license to operate at Ihumātao. The sudden display of significant public support defeated the police presence on the whenua and demanded Crown intervention. A seemingly unthinkable and impossible future – that of Ahi Kā reclaiming the whenua and exercising mana motuhake (political self-determination) – became increasingly thinkable and possible (XXXX, 2020). Evolving relationships, in and through the campaign, nourished those liberating possibilities.

[Insert Figure 1 roughly here]

[Insert the following caption under Figure 1 :]

*Figure 1.* A sea of tents belonging to supporters who began arriving at Ihumātao on 23 July 2019 to express solidarity with the #ProtectIhumātao campaign. Photo credit: Emily Parr

## What becoming whānau means

'Becoming whānau' sits among other metaphors coined by scholars seeking to describe the terrain of Indigenous–Settler/Māori–Pākehā relations and the work that goes on there (Hancock, 2018). Such metaphors include: *Borderwork* (Haig-Brown, 1992), *hybrid or contact zone* (Somerville and Perkins, 2003), *cultural interface* (Nakata, 2007), *working the hyphen* (Jones, 2008a, 2012), *alliance-building* (Davis, 2010), *intercultural hyphen* (Stewart, 2016), *te*

*ara whanaunga* (the relational path) (Hoskins, 2017), and *mawopiyane* (let us sit together/the making of relatives) (Hager and Mawopiyane, 2021).

The metaphor of becoming whānau also interweaves Māori conceptions of *whakapapa* (ancestral relations) and *whanaungatanga* (kinship, a social orientation of responsibility and care for others). In te ao Māori (the Māori world), whakapapa is constituted in a relational way of being that activates whanaungatanga (Marsden, 2003; Hoskins, 2012, 2017). Whakapapa and whanaungatanga are the foundation of human subjectivity, relatedness and ethical responsibility. Whakapapa informs how people understand themselves, relate to and interact with whenua/place and each other. Whakapapa is not ‘limited by blood ties but is extendable by adoption, bond friendship, and alliance’ (Salmond, 2012: 132). Māori kin networks are open, flexible and contextual, enabling individuals/groups to activate different relationships in different situations for specific purposes (Salmond 2012: 122). The dynamic, changing, multi-layered and flexible notion of whānau connects people with blood ties (whakapapa-based whānau) or, in our case, mobilises people for a common purpose/interest (kaupapa-based whānau) – both forms of whānau have shared values, structures and ways of working (Mead, 2003; Metge, 1995).

Our stories below act as a reminder that humans exist in relation and are constantly making/remaking relationships with others, including whenua. Human becoming (like becoming whānau) is a complex process. It calls for a transformative pedagogical orientation that challenges us to exceed ourselves in our encounters with the Other (Todd, 2003, 2014). Transforming the limits of our self-understanding allows us to become more human and, in the campaign, enabled us to become more like whānau. Todd (2014: 241) highlights two qualities of relation for human becoming that apply to becoming whānau. First, ‘a respect for the otherness of the Other’, which enables an exchange in which each can move ‘beyond their own limits’. Second, ‘a respect for the Other’s becoming/their future’, which enables present encounters to open up possibilities for productive future engagements. In the campaign, activating these and other relational qualities (such as manaakitanga – caring, kindness, hospitality) helped people to disrupt the ‘simple binaries’ of ‘bad-coloniser and good-Māori’ and vice versa (Jones, 2020: 215). They challenged people to explore who we, Māori and Pākehā/others, can become together.

## **Becoming whānau as a decolonising project**

Our exploration of becoming whānau sits within a broader decolonising project striving for ethical–right–just relations, policies, laws and systems. Although, a ‘tricky thing to define’, decolonisation ‘recognises the deep impressions and scars on landscapes and on peoples’ caused by the colonial/imperialist enterprise (Mercier, 2020: 47, 40). It seeks to: create space for Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, being and doing; uphold the political status of Indigenous peoples as tangata whenua (literally, the people of the land); prioritise Indigenous futures as defined *by them*; disrupt relations of domination; and explore relational possibilities for respectful Indigenous-Settler coexistence (Bell, 2014; Mercier, 2020, Smith, 2012). Such a project challenges Pākehā to address the historical amnesia over their past relations with Māori and its costs (Bell, 2007). It calls for ‘a productive acceptance of ignorance of the other’ (Jones, 1999: 315), in other words, ‘a certain humility’ regarding how to be together and what it is possible for Pākehā to know (Bell, 2007: para. 53).

Notwithstanding the incalculable travesty of injustice wrought by colonisation, productive relationships remain possible. Scholars remind us, and our own lived experiences in the campaign concur, that a ‘complex reciprocity’ between Māori and Pākehā/others is possible when people engage ethically (Jones and Jenkins, 2008b: 187). Such engagement enhances ‘the mana – the identity and standing – of others’ and fosters good personal relationships, ethical conduct and mutual commitments (Hoskins and Bell, 2020: 4–5). Bell (2007) emphasises the need for distance in Māori-Pākehā relations so that Māori can flourish, as Māori. She defines this distance as ‘ethical proximity’:

... a kind of closeness that also leaves a space for difference. A proximity in the sense that Māori concern us, Māori matter to Pākehā. But a proximity that allows for distance and difference – in forms of knowledge, in ways of being. (Bell, 2007: para. 70).

The stories we tell below of our lived experiences of the campaign explore the ideas of complex reciprocity and ethical proximity at work in the process of *becoming whānau*, in our case a *kaupapa-based whānau*. We offer ideas for decolonising practices that can support respectful relations in Indigenous-led, community-supported political movements.

Our approach here recognises an Indigenous preference for story/storywork as a critical qualitative decolonising research methodology (Archibald, 2008; Bishop, 1996; Archibald et al., 2019). Stories can illuminate ethical-political commitments and animate human life (Frank, 2010; Nelson, 2001). Stories also have the capacity to re-present who people are *and* who they are becoming in the ever-evolving present between the past and the future (Mattingly, 2010). Our storywork approach seeks to preserve the integrity, diversity and uniqueness of particular voices/stories and to co-construct meaning.

In crafting the following stories, we each explored three lines of inquiry. The first focusses on how our whakapapa (ancestral relations) prepared us for the struggle at Ihumātao, and how we each became involved in and connected through the campaign. The second explores our different roles and responsibilities. The third examines what we learnt from working together. For each inquiry, we make meaning of what our lived-experiences and personal insights taught us about becoming whānau in relation to/through #ProtectIhumātao.

## **Campaign stories and insights**

### **Activating whakapapa/whanaungatanga/kinship**

#### ***Pania’s story***

*Our tūpuna (ancestor) Hape was a great tohunga (expert) but his clubbed feet excluded him from joining the voyage across Te Moana-nui-a-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean) that led our people to Aotearoa. Instead, Hape navigated this great ocean on the back of Kaiwhare (a stingray), overcoming enormous challenges to find a home at Ihumātao. This pūrākau (cultural narrative) confirms what I have always known: that our tūpuna (ancestors) are resilient, courageous, and determined warriors. We, the co-founders of the #ProtectIhumātao campaign, inherit those qualities through our whakapapa (ancestral relations).*

*Only now do I realise the significance of such storytelling in shaping our people. Growing up, I saw first-hand the devastating impacts of colonisation and intergenerational trauma. I was determined to make a difference for our people. At the age of nine I decided to become a*

lawyer. I wanted to change the laws that oppressed Māori. Like Hape, I overcame the challenges I faced growing up and made my way to university where I completed a conjoint degree in law and health sciences.

When I heard the news of the proposed Fletcher development, I realised that my upbringing and university training had geared me up to protect our whenua. As a descendent of our whenua, I felt a huge responsibility to protect it through kaitiakitanga (practices of taking care).

Six of us cousins began the campaign. We're all rangatahi (younger members) of our marae (tribal gathering place) and were raised around Ihumātao. In early 2015, we came together to discuss Fletcher's plan and to decide how to respond. We talked about our tūpuna (ancestors) and pakeke (Elders) who had cared for the wellbeing of our papakāinga (village) and whenua. Like them, we felt a shared responsibility to protect our kāinga (home) at all costs. We agreed that our people and whenua had suffered enough for the greater good of Auckland.

We draw strength and encouragement from pūrākau (cultural narratives) and other Māori-led self-determination movements. One of our sacred maunga (mountains), Puketāpapatanga-a-Hape, carries the name of our tupuna (ancestor) Hape and is the smallest cone in the volcanic field of Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland). The stories and status of our maunga remind us to value humility and be humble. So, the peaceful, passive, positive approach of the people of Parihaka (Buchanan, 2009), who sustained their Indigenous-led political movement by adhering to kawa (protocols) and tikanga (correct conduct), resonated with the humility you encounter at Ihumātao. We recognised our privileged position; we could learn from their stories, lessons, and legacies.

Our own whakapapa (ancestral relations), legacies of mana motuhake (political self-determination) and commitment to exercising kaitiakitanga (guardianship) inspired us to stand together for justice at Ihumātao. We agreed to do everything in our power, using all legal and political means available, to stop the development and seek the return of the whenua under the mana (standing, identity, authority) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of our marae (tribal gathering place). We were confident our whānau would support us and received a marae mandate to progress the campaign.

It didn't take us long to recognise we needed other skills to take on this struggle. We also noticed a language barrier; we didn't speak the same language as the government or the Fletcher corporation. So, we decided to develop a working relationship with willing Pākehā to help us navigate the Pākehā systems that produced the crisis. From our perspective, Pākehā also needed to fix their own systems.

We met Pākehā whose values aligned with our kaupapa (values, principles, plans). We began meeting weekly with them and community groups that had fought other local battles or supported Māori-led protests. We held public meetings calling on our community to come together to support the campaign. Frances and her cousin Brendan stepped up early on. Putting their knowledge and skills to work, alongside other contributions, helped to legitimise what we were aiming to do. Having Pākehā friends open doors and speak the same language as the people we encountered – council managers, government officials, politicians – paved the way for our campaign spokespeople to engage with them, and made a significant difference.

### **Frances' story**

I am a third generation Irish–Pākehā with dual Irish and New Zealand citizenship (Hancock, 2020). In our family, being Irish meant fierce loyalty to family, faith, land, language, country, and past, present and future generations. My forebears fed starving families during the Great Irish Hunger in the 1840s and helped to bury the dead. Decades later, my cousins fought

against British rule in the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War, and were imprisoned in Dublin's infamous Kilmainham Gaol.

My great grandmother Catherine was born in Ardra, southwest Ireland in 1863, just prior to the land confiscations at Ihumātao. She and her sisters joined the Irish diaspora to Aotearoa/New Zealand. Their journey across the world unwittingly conspired in the British imperialist project that dispossessed Māori of their lands and other taonga (ancestral treasures) as well as usurped their human rights to maintain their ways of living and determine their futures. Catherine arrived in Aotearoa in 1884 and lived among other Irish settlers. She is remembered as a hardworking, resilient, generous, kind and strong-hearted woman with strong convictions; I try to be like her.

Growing up, I lived in communities where neighbours struggled to make ends meet but were incredibly kind and generous. Notwithstanding our own difficulties, our family benefited from structural advantages and white privilege inaccessible to whānau living around us. Pākehā systems and values marginalised, ignored and sought to erase their/Māori presence, voices and interests. Realising all this during undergraduate studies compelled me to work for justice.

As a young woman I made an unlikely path to Harvard University. Later, another improbable route led me to participate in a multi-year relationship-building initiative involving First Nation individuals and allies in Maine and New Brunswick (Hager and Mawopiyane, 2021). Returning to Aotearoa, I worked as an organisational ethicist, government policy adviser on Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and writer/consultant on many projects involving Māori. Perhaps my ancestral relations and life/work experiences prepared me for the campaign at Ihumātao or at least cultivated a certain stamina for messy entanglements.

Before the campaign I knew no one at Ihumātao and almost nothing about its history. I didn't know the names of hapū (tribal groupings) that had lived there for centuries, and I struggled to pronounce 'Ihumātao' correctly. My cousin Brendan Corbett was known at Ihumātao and passionate about the area. His ethical-political concern called me to action. Later, learning about the harrowing injustice of the 1863 confiscation and the Crown's failure to address it sustained my engagement with the campaign.

During the first year of the campaign, I attended weekly meetings and events, and helped with writing. Mainly I listened; there was so much to learn and there still is. Pania and I rarely missed a meeting, so I got to know her. She was always gracious and welcoming, grateful for support, and listened intently to what people said – Māori and Pākehā. Her legal training had prepared her well to undertake research and her political instinct was always astute and timely. I also worked alongside some of her cousins and whānau members.

I began visiting Ihumātao and was slowly introduced to the place they call home. I caught a glimpse of Ihumātao through their eyes – an often windswept but always beautiful landscape embedded with pūrākau (cultural stories) and a rich but troubled history. I was reminded of a critical difference between us. While I/we Pākehā could abandon the struggle at any time – an entitlement of white privilege – their lives and futures depended on it.

### **Insights**

At Ihumātao, people connected through blood ties and through a shared kaupapa/campaign and a common goal. Centuries of kinship in this place, and a vision of a sustainable Indigenous future here, led Ahi Kā to stand up for the whenua and its peoples. Their call to action brought different peoples (Māori/Pākehā/others) together under the mana of Makaurau Marae. Māori ways of being supported the work of decolonisation. Practices of whanaungatanga (kinship, a social orientation of responsibility and care for others), manaakitanga (caring, kindness, hospitality) and aroha (unconditional love) cultivated a sense of belonging to people and to place as well as an ethical-political obligation to assist/be helpful (Marsden, 2003; Mead,

2003). Whānau and Pākehā at the core of the campaign sought to act in the interests of Ahi Kā and whenua, and to behave in ways that would cultivate collective cohesion/spirit. Inevitably, some people made significant personal sacrifices.

By and large, diverse people got along and exercised tolerance when necessary. Fraught moments revealed the humanity of individuals or tensions when negotiating fundamentally different worlds – te ao Māori (the Māori world/ways of being) and te ao Pākehā (the Pākehā world/ways of being) and the multiplicity of perspectives in each (Salmond, 2012). But encounters within/at ‘the pae, that perilous border zone’ (Salmond, 2012: 121) between cultures produced possibilities for authentic engagement that forged lively exchanges and surprising levels of cooperation. Whether connected by blood ties or joined by a common purpose, those at the core of the campaign developed deep and enduring bonds that *felt-like, feel-like*, whānau – a kaupapa-based whānau (Metge, 1995: 305).

## **Exercising different roles and responsibilities**

### ***Pania’s story***

*My whakapapa (ancestral connections) to Ihumātao comes through my father's side. We were raised as kaitiaki, and that is how I see myself. A kaitiaki is someone who accepts a responsibility to care for and protect the wellbeing of our environment and our people. A kaitiaki takes a long view; to move forward we have to understand what happened in the past. We're always thinking of our tūpuna (ancestors) and our mokopuna (descendants).*

*Reclaiming the whenua for us was about upholding and restoring its mauri (lifeforce), and our connection to it, including our tikanga (correct conduct) and reo (language). We needed to restore our mana motuhake (political self-determination). For too long Makaurau Marae and our whānau had been pushed aside and disregarded, so reclaiming the whenua was our way of saying, ‘We exist. We are here to uphold the mana (the standing, identity, authority) of our people, our marae and our whenua. Ongoing Tiriti (treaty) injustices at Ihumātao must end.’*

*In late 2016, we knew Fletcher was about to finalise its purchase and the clock was ticking. The whenua faced an imminent threat of destruction. I went to a hui in Te Tai Tokerau (Northland). Being around like-minded rangatahi (young adults) gave me the courage to act; their expectations as activists connected to my own longing. Returning to Ihumātao, I and others went onto the whenua, with the blessing of my cousins, whānau, marae, and core campaign supporters. Many now agree we wouldn’t have gotten such widespread support, without taking that action.*

*Since then, I and others on the whenua have lived in tents, caravans, cars, portacabins, the cowshed and anything else we could use as shelter. It was tough in the middle of winter and I will never forget people bringing a kai (food) on lonely days and cold nights. Eventually, we took over a house and, three years later, another homestead on the whenua, where I now live.*

*As kaitiaki (guardians/land protectors), we planted gardens, transformed the barn into a space for workshops, hui, events and celebrations, and offered manaakitanga (caring, kindness, hospitality) to thousands of visitors. We hosted guided tours and events to introduce diverse individuals/groups to the whenua, while campaign efforts to influence political and legal processes continued.*

*Us cousins shared leadership responsibilities throughout the campaign, taking on specific roles: kaupupuri (holders of tikanga knowledge/correct behaviour), kaimanaaki (nurturer/carer), kaikōrero paki and kairautaki (communications specialist and strategist),*



*māngai (spokespersons) and kaitiaki moni (treasurer). When they put the call out, our marae whānau climbed on buses and made their presence felt at various events. Ours was the largest-ever 'public' contingent presenting a petition to Auckland Council's Governing Body. We all helped to organise actions, sustain the occupation, navigate the police presence, and oversee the campaign.*

*I unwittingly became the campaign māngai (spokesperson) during the early days of the noho whenua (reclamation of the land). No one else was available; my cousins were busy starting their families, businesses, and careers. I quickly became more bound up in the campaign; it became my life and I sacrificed relationships and time with whānau. My reputation was redefined by the media; I became a radical, an activist, a disrupter. I encountered new expectations about what I should do and how, and became more conscious of how my actions might reflect on the campaign.*

*The campaign faced constant challenges and barriers, and failed a lot. In those tough times, Frances offered wisdom. She would comfort me with kind words, or post a poem or a quote online to motivate and inspire us all. Her support helped me to accept closure when necessary, be resilient and keep going. Other times, we'd meet with politicians or company representatives, or she would write something with me or for me. I appreciated her calm presence and could always rely on her.*

### **Frances' story**

*My strongest sense of myself is as a writer and diverse life/work experiences have taught me valuable lessons. Hoping my knowledge and skills could be useful to the campaign, I took on tasks at weekly planning meetings and gradually the responsibilities of writing and advising, but always alongside others. Pania and I acted as key contacts for the government, Auckland Council, Fletcher, and incoming enquiries.*

*In 2016, a few of us presented the campaign's first submission to a Parliamentary Select Committee. I felt challenged speaking for thousands of community supporters, but could not imagine the weight of responsibility on Pania's shoulders. When she spoke, however, everyone witnessed the courage, calm, and eloquence now associated with her leadership. Her relational connections to Ihumātao 'spoke' to our audience and forged political alliances.*

*The campaign navigated its way through legal, political and corporate systems. This work was time consuming, required endless research and writing, and constant attendance at meetings. It was often deflating because those systems favoured the corporation and excluded those most affected – Ahi Kā. Pākehā systems/laws/processes created the crisis at Ihumātao, so we, Pākehā, shouldered as much of this work as possible. But exercising this responsibility could only happen within a clear mandate from the campaign leaders who, in turn, acted on the mandate of the people of Makaurau Marae. Any other approach would have usurped the mana motuhake (political self-determination) of Ahi Kā. Always our contributions relied on our relationships with the cousins; we, Pākehā, could only contribute because of their support, oversight and direction.*

*While Pania fronted the campaign in the media and various forums, her cousins performed other roles. I worked closely with Qiane Matata-Sipu (another campaign co-founder and strategist). Juggling commitments, we three often talked at unsociable hours or flooded internet highways with personal messaging. It was not unusual for urgent requests to fly in all directions late at night. Sometimes I disagreed with their tactical decisions, but always I followed them. The cousins were leading the campaign, not me. They knew things I would never understand; they had to consider complex obligations, and their whānau would bear the brunt of any negative impacts. There was no quick fix or set path to follow.*

*Pākehā can easily take up/over the space we're in – we centre ourselves and attend to our interests, oblivious that we're simultaneously othering and marginalising Māori. Typically, we have limited, if any, understanding of mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge), local tikanga (correct conduct), kawa (protocols) and te reo Māori (the Māori language). Pania and her cousins live and breathe a bicultural existence, whereas I and most Pākehā do not. So, the possibility of Pākehā trampling on their mana (standing, identity, authority) is always a risk, often a likelihood, and easy for us, Pākehā, to overlook.*

*When the police moved onto the whenua, the campaign shifted gear. Ahi Kā came together to address the enormous challenge in front of them. They maintained a strong presence on the whenua, dealt with media demands, hosted countless manuhiri (visitors) and convened a whānau strategy group to guide decision making. Somehow, they also continued living their lives, while carrying intergenerational mamae (hurt/suffering) and holding onto hope for justice.*

*Previously we, Pākehā, had stepped forward to assist; now we needed to step back. It was that simple, but for some of us it took some working out. 'The campaign won the war,' an adviser said, 'and now Ahi Kā have to win the peace – only they can do that.' Know your place, stay in your lane, Frances, I thought, and behave like 'a hoa tū tata – a close friend, standing by, ready to assist' (Kevin Prime quoted in Hancock, 2018). It was on that basis that I and others had tried to be useful to the campaign and later we responded to further calls to action.*

### **Insights**

Over time, encounters in a variety of contexts with police, politicians and company executives cultivated respect for the way campaign stalwarts demonstrated mana tangata (power and status accrued through one's leadership). Māori and Pākehā took on different roles and exchanged cultural knowledge/skills, political influence/networks, professional expertise, and other resources. In doing so, they exercised different ethical response-abilities: Māori generosity towards Pākehā learning and Pākehā responsiveness to Māori political interests (Hoskins, 2010). Both demonstrated personal qualities of integrity, kindness, patience, perseverance, tolerance, and wisdom that also fostered relationship. As bonds deepened, sharing/learning from cultural narratives, practising tikanga (correct conduct) and kawa (protocols), enjoying a meal together, and acting collaboratively united and strengthened everyone.

Exercising mana motuhake (political self-determination) challenged Ahi Kā to explore broader relational possibilities in support of the campaign. Maintaining their independence was necessary for entering into interdependent relationships with their supporters and political allies (Hoskins and Bell, 2020). The integrity of an Indigenous-led approach was carefully held/upheld in the campaign, notwithstanding tense moments due to significant pressures and other commitments, as well as different personalities and ways of being. As a decolonising project, developing particular strategies helped to sustain Ahi Kā political authority and independence. These strategies included assigning/accepting roles and responsibilities, gaining a marae mandate, operating accountability processes and maintaining a separate whānau strategy group. Regular hui, one-to-one engagement, and collaborative action with Pākehā/other supporters activated productive interdependent relationships. Pākehā respected the need for distance/ethical proximity in the relationship (Bell, 2007) but at times felt bewildered, frustrated or challenged. Learning was inevitable, and intentionally embraced and supported by the campaign co-founders.

[Insert Figure 2 roughly here]

[Insert following caption under Figure 2:]

Figure 2. Campaigners planting trees at Ihumātao on 26 July 2019 during the height of the police occupation. Following this peaceful act the police retreated from that area of the contested land. Photo credit: Emily Parr

## What we each learnt from working together

### *Pania's story*

*Initially, I was surprised by the numbers of Pākehā willing to support the campaign and, without saying so, questioned their intent: Was it sincere? Would they keep going? I was sceptical because of what had happened in the past between Māori and Pākehā through colonisation.*

*Hearing Pākehā criticising Crown actions instilled confidence; they saw the flaws from their standpoint. I later realised they were more privileged than us Māori; they had time, resources, knowledge and capacity to take on this raruraru (conflict). Some had credibility to get us through doors we couldn't access, and be taken seriously. I thought if it was good enough for these Pākehā to know why the whenua should be protected, then other Pākehā should be willing to understand what the raruraru was about.*

*In the second year, I noticed how inclusive the whenua was/is. People from many different backgrounds came to connect to it, bringing their interests such as climate change, heritage preservation, Tiriti issues, environmental degradation, and cross-cultural/interreligious dialogue.*

*During the third year, it was incredible that we were going to the United Nations, amazing when we got there, and heartening when the UN issued a favourable recommendation to the New Zealand government (Hancock et. al, 2020). Being heard at an international level helped legitimise the campaign. Our own government had ignored our appeals but, at the UN, our people were seen and heard.*

*The following year, things stagnated and some people fell off the waka (gave up). Our failure to engage the government and the corporation was discouraging. Often, I was the only Māori at weekly planning meetings. Capacity was an ongoing issue for our whānau and listening to continual knock-backs at meetings aggravated intergenerational mamae (pain) and a sense of hopelessness. I felt the burden of carrying the mahi (work) when whānau couldn't, but seeing our Pākehā nannies each week, I thought, if they can get to meetings, I should be able to turn up.*

*I recall media reports stating that Pākehā professionals and academics were leading the campaign. That wasn't the case; the cousins and our marae whānau always led the campaign and our Pākehā whānau never acted without their mana (authority). Frances, especially, maintained a close working relationship with Qiane, who approved all written communications on behalf of our whānau and was crucial in setting our strategy. Pākehā did valuable mahi, but it wasn't the only work done, and they were very aware of that.*

*In the fifth year, we went on a memorable haerenga (journey) from Auckland to Wellington, the capital city, making connections with other Māori political movements at sites of significance, whose whānau encouraged us to keep going. Our campaign whānau, Māori and Pākehā, got to know one another on a deeper level; we made memories together and had fun.*

*A few months later, when the police came onto the whenua to evict us, everything changed as we expected it would. Ahi Kā naturally moved to the forefront; it was their time to take up the mānuka (baton) in a way they hadn't previously. As difficult as I imagine it might have been, our Pākehā whānau humbly stood back. I felt so proud of them for the way they*

demonstrated aroha (unconditional love), respect, humility, and a willingness to awhi (embrace) Ahi Kā they hadn't met before. For me, the transition was flawless and eased anxieties discussed over the years about the ultimate stand on the land.

As the sixth-year ends, I'm proud of the enduring relationships at the core of the campaign. We've been through so much – we've lost members, celebrated milestones, argued, laughed and cried together. As a kaupapa-based whānau we, Māori and Pākehā, always reunite under the umbrella, #ProtectIhumātao. I will never forget the words of a Pākehā supporter, 'I came for the whenua and remained for the people', and we're all still deeply connected.

### **Frances' story**

Six years on, I'm still learning from Pania and Ahi Kā. Working together helps me to better understand the complex power relations at Ihumātao. I continue to write, within their mandate, to support a future defined by them. Visiting the whenua, I feel a growing sense of belonging to this place, its history, and the ones who have known it longest and best. The Irish in me senses a thin place, where physical and eternal worlds meet. I see signs of human occupation and a just cause – the fire burning continuously in all weathers, placards with campaign slogans, a village made of wooden pallets, flourishing gardens – and it all looks so beautiful to me, and inviting.

In the second year, I noticed new people would arrive just when the campaign needed them but, sometimes, we had to work out what the campaign needed them for. During the third year, as pressure mounted from constant knock-backs, it would have been easy but disastrous for Pākehā to do our own thing. 'This campaign is mana whenua-led, and that's a non-negotiable for me,' I said at weekly meetings. The following year, when things occasionally went awry due to inordinate pressures or human intolerances, 'No-one died,' I said. Witnessing the peaceful, passive, positive resistance of Ahi Kā on the whenua in the fifth year, I and others agreed it was magnificent. In the sixth year, seeing Pania and whānau living their best lives on the whenua while waiting for a resolution, I wrote, 'Justice will prevail', on Facebook posts.

I feel aroha (unconditional love) when I meet people I worked with on the campaign. I also recall the stupid things I did or said over these years. Like the time I asked a whānau member, 'Are you from here?', trampling on mana (standing, identity, authority) derived from centuries of living 'exactly here' and exposing me as the ignorant Other/newcomer. Or, the time I expected to know something that wasn't mine to know – that annoying Pākehā/colonising sense of entitlement to anything (especially knowledge) simply because it exists and you want it. Or, the times I said, 'I' and the cousins said, 'We'. Or, the time Pania invited me to a hui (a gathering) on the whenua with senior Māori police officers. During the kōrero (discussion), she asked me to talk about campaign strategies. The campaign had nothing to hide, so I gave a great sweeping summary. I now chastise myself: Frances, did you need to go on so long? What were you thinking! I certainly wasn't thinking and didn't understand then, that Pania was exercising respect for someone twice her age by inviting me to speak. So, yes, I cringe recalling times when I talked too much or took up space that rightfully belonged to Ahi Kā – I must have seemed like a 'painful Pākehā know-it-all'. I also try to remember that I am human and especially this: Frances, take the lesson, show more humility and respect next time, and keep going.

I could always count on Pania's tolerance, kindness and wisdom. Her great big loving heart accepted my misadventures, and never judged me. When I acknowledged some stupid thing I had done or said, Pania would say, 'we've all done that before' and Qiane would reply, 'we don't remember any of that'. Their words reminded me, as a kaumātua (Elder) once did, that kindness is another name for generosity. Perhaps, in those moments especially, the cousins and I (and others) became a bit more like whānau and a bit more human together.

### ***Insights***

Becoming whānau encourages people to see the Other as human and treat them as you would want to be treated. Waitere (2008: 45) suggests ‘a call to a relationship’ is also ‘a call to action’. It worked both ways for Pākehā; the initial call to action to protect the whenua became a call to an ever-evolving, always imperfect, often challenging ethical-political relationship with Ahi Kā. That relationship was, at the same time, deeply human and authentic. It called for ongoing political action in support of Ahi Kā leadership, political interests, ethical concerns and Indigenous ways of being. Doing the work of decolonisation in the campaign challenged Pākehā to interrogate their colonising ways of being (paternalistic and racist assumptions, attitudes, styles of communication and behaviours) and to embrace a transformative relational orientation that enabled *learning from the Other/Ahi Kā* (Todd, 2003, 2014).

The process of becoming whānau called for ethical practices. First, remembering past injustices and their deadly ongoing effects, alongside accepting distinct Māori and Pākehā ways of being and political positionings. Second, forgiving human idiosyncrasies, irritations, or paternalistic behaviours. Those practices, among others, somehow made aroha (unconditional love) possible between individuals and peoples who could not have been more different from one another but, at Ihumātao, were compelled to work together to achieve a common purpose. Or, was it aroha that made remembering, accepting and forgiving possible? Or both? Together, Ahi Kā *and* Pākehā campaign supporters sought to understand intertwining historical factors creating the crisis at Ihumātao, rather than perpetuate the historical amnesia that allowed the government, Auckland Council, and Fletcher to conveniently dismiss decades of colonial oppression from which they and Pākehā settlers had benefitted (Matthewman, 2017). Without acts of *critical* remembering/accepting, and *kind* forgiving, productive engagement at Ihumātao might not have been possible.

[Insert Figure 3 roughly here]

[Insert the following caption under Figure 3:]

*Figure 3:* A hīkoi (march) to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s local electorate office in Auckland on 22 August 2019, involving around 300 supporters. Campaign leaders presented a petition, signed by more than 26,000 New Zealanders, inviting the Prime Minister to visit Ihumātao and experience the whenua first-hand. Photo credit: Emily Parr

### **Last thoughts**

In this paper we used a storywork approach to make meaning of our lived experiences of and personal insights on becoming whānau in the Indigenous-led, community-supported campaign #ProtectIhumātao. We explored three main lines of inquiry to illuminate the influence of whakapapa (ancestral relations), our different roles and responsibilities, and lessons in working together. At Ihumātao, and elsewhere, Indigenous Peoples are taking action to reclaim mana motuhake (political self-determination) and protect their cultural heritage landscapes, knowing their survival, health and wellbeing depend on it. Working with supporters is often essential but fraught with challenges. At Ihumātao, Ahi Kā and their supporters chose *whanaungatanga* (kinship, a social orientation of responsibility and care for others) as the basis for working

together. Ahi Kā leadership oriented campaigners (from all walks of life and their own whānau) towards ways of knowing, being and doing that cultivated respectful, loving and enduring relationships. The choice to engage was an ethical-political decision that required Ahi Kā and others to keep the faith that our relationships would survive the pressures of campaigning and endure into the future. Trusting the Other exceeded commitments of collegiality or even allyship (Todd, 2014) and called for vulnerability and tolerance of the kind commonly associated with family/whānau relationships. Ahi Kā not only reclaimed the whenua and exercised mana motuhake but also, generously, created the conditions for community supporters to become whānau.

At Ihumātao, becoming whānau was all about cultivating a decolonising pedagogical orientation that allowed Māori and Pākehā to whakawhanaungatanga – to do kinship/remake relations – for a purpose. It was about standing together for justice, learning with, from, and alongside one another, and staying with the journey until the end. It was about finding a way to value and trust one another *inside* a contested, ongoing and often fraught history of Māori-Pākehā/Indigenous-Settler relations. Whatever the challenges, the campaign witnessed a shared determination among Ahi Kā and Pākehā, and other supporters, to work productively together. Different roles, responsibilities and decolonising practices became ways to call attention to and accept difference. When Pākehā learn to recognise and accept distance in their relationships with Māori, the autonomy of difference and new forms of sociality can flourish (Bell, 2007, 2014). At Ihumātao, time together and apart enabled Ahi Kā to preserve ethical proximity and enter into meaningful commitments with Pākehā/others dedicated to the campaign (Hoskins and Bell, 2020).

Importantly, Ahi Kā looked to the legacies/lessons of whakapapa (ancestral connections) and other Māori-led political movements for guidance. They resolved to maintain control, uphold tikanga (correct conduct) and kawa (protocols), progress multiple strategies, and avoid risks that would expose whānau to more trauma (such as police convictions and serious injury). They activated the partnership approach promised in Te Tiriti o Waitangi by seeking to engage reasonably, honourably and in good faith with local and central government. They forged a kaupapa-based whānau with like-minded people, choosing Pākehā/others for particular roles, some visible to the public, some active behind the scenes.

Critical reflection is crucial in any decolonisation project. Becoming whānau challenged Pākehā supporters to become aware of, consciously critique, and let-go/exceed a deeply ingrained mindset that ‘Pākehā know best’ when only Ahi Kā know what they need, want and how things must go at Ihumātao so whānau can thrive. Pākehā supporters had to work hard NOT to claim control or overpower Ahi Kā through a dominating presence, will and mindset. Frances’ story shows that reflecting on those stupid things done or said has much to teach, if/when Pākehā are willing to take the lesson. Being mindful of and attentive to relationships in the present can create possibilities now and in the future for interrupting dominating practices, welcoming and learning from difference, and cultivating relations of co-existence (Bell, 2014). Transformative relations preserve difference and the human right of Māori to live as Māori, encourage meaningful engagement and strengthen community (Hoskins, 2010, 2017).

The #ProtectIhumātao campaign offers an example of what Tiriti/bicultural relations can look like in Aotearoa when people commit to a shared kaupapa (values, principles, plans) led by Ahi Kā. It also illustrates possibilities for decolonising practices that enable Māori and Pākehā

to join forces and begin to heal the wrongs of history, replacing a sense of hopelessness with an audacious and shared hope. At Ihumātao, people came together as they were – as Ahi Kā/Māori/Indigenous peoples and Pākehā/others/settlers *and* as human beings with our own foibles. We stood in solidarity to reclaim and secure the future of this ancestral whenua under the mana (standing, identity, authority) and kaitiakitanga (guardianship) of Ahi Kā. Perhaps the unexpected but now deeply cherished gift was becoming whānau.

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