

Avril Bell, *Becoming Tangata Tiriti: Working with Māori, Honouring the Treaty* (Auckland University Press, 2024), 168pp. Paperback. NZ\$29.99. ISBN: 978-1-7767-1134-5.

This fascinating book by Avril Bell is published at a very significant time: at a moment when the current right-wing Aotearoa New Zealand coalition government is attempting to diminish the position of Te Tiriti Waitangi (Treaty of Waitangi) in the country. Bell contrarily asks Pakeha (New Zealanders of European descent) to truly engage with Te Tiriti Waitangi and attempt to fulfill the promises that were made to Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand in 1840, on the basis of which those that signed Te Tiriti Waitangi welcomed Pakeha to share their land. If Pakeha are sincere in their efforts they can become Tangata Tiriti.

The research for the book is based on interviews that Bell conducted with a dozen Pakeha who in some way are engaged with Te Tiriti Waitangi, and so are Tangata Tiriti. This includes in disparate fields such as education, health, and even the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal. Bell tackles head on some of the criticisms that might be made of her book. This includes the major one that this is a time for Māori voices, not Pakeha ones, especially as the former have been marginalised in Aotearoa New Zealand society for so long. However, Bell makes the fair argument in my opinion that space to express oneself is not a zero sum game, i.e. Pakeha expressing their views on Te Tiriti Waitangi does not take away from Māori perspectives on the subject. Furthermore, Bell quite rightly adds that it is especially important to highlight Pakeha engagement with Te Tiriti Waitangi as they are the ones who have historically ignored it and not fulfilled their ‘end of the agreement’.

This highlights the use of terminology to describe Te Tiriti Waitangi itself. Pakeha have often described it as a *partnership* between Māori and Pakeha. However, one of Bell’s interviewees quite rightly illustrates that Māori have always had problems with this description as a *partnership* implies an equal relationship between the two parties, when the reality is that it has always been uneven. So, a *relationship* between Māori and Pakeha would perhaps be a better description of what Te Tiriti Waitangi represents. And it is improving this *relationship* from the Pakeha side that Tangata Tiriti is all about.

On this, a person that Bell interviewed who works in the Treaty of Waitangi Tribunal reflected on their firsthand experience of witnessing testimony from a range of generations of Māori who commented on the harm that had been done on their communities since the signing of Te Tiriti Waitangi which was in direct contravention of it. The interviewee emphasised that historical injustices were not just something of the past, but had real-life consequences to this day.

A very important theme that another interviewee stresses is the practical benefits to Aotearoa New Zealand’s environment that would flow from a Māori centred approach to environmental management, personified by the granting of personhood to mountains, rivers, and national parks in the country. A few interviewees commented that they would also be perfectly happy to have a portion of their rates (local taxation) go to Iwi in their region to reestablish a financial base for the community after colonisation.

Another interviewee reflects that Māori are very graciously offering Pakeha the opportunity to improve the relationship between the two communities through becoming Tangata Tiriti, working with Māori and honouring the treaty. This was probably the strongest takeaway from the book, especially at this moment in time. It is not just the

responsibility of Māori to resist the moves the current right-wing coalition government in Aotearoa New Zealand is taking to diminish Te Tiriti Waitangi. Pakeha also have an even greater responsibility to actively resist the moves as it is they who have not historically honoured the treaty and need to do more, not less, to improve their relationship with the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand. As the latter welcomed them to share their land based on friendship and mutual respect, which the subsequent land wars and colonisation more broadly acted completely against.

I strongly recommend this book to readers, especially Pakeha, and in particular the ministers in the current government of Aotearoa New Zealand as the path they are currently going down is a very dangerous one in my opinion, and will not lead to a better future for Māori or Pakeha in the country.

*Jatinder Mann, University of the Fraser Valley*