

Betty Williams



Betty Williams of Ngāti Maru, and Ngāti Pūkenga is from Manaia in the Hauraki rohe. She was a school teacher until an experience of structural analysis helped her critique the impact of the Pākehā education system on learners. Betty was part of an indigenous peoples international study group that visited developing countries and analysed the effects of capitalism on indigenous peoples. She has been active in the liberation struggles of the tangata whenua since the first land hīkoi in 1975 followed by the Whaingaroa ('Raglan Golf Course'), and Bastion Point land protests. Betty wrote a case study of the 'Passage of Māori Land into Pākehā Ownership' and the involvement of the Māori Land Court—which was established to precipitate Māori land alienation—using her own experiences to highlight the way this occurred.

Active in many issues pertaining to her hapū and iwi in the Hauraki rohe, Betty is also renowned for an absolute commitment to the protection of natural resources. She has been a leader in the resistance to gold mining companies as well as in fighting for the protection of the takutai moana and the environment of Tikapa Moana (the Hauraki Gulf). Her commitment to the environment is inseparable from a passion for education as a method for liberation and to create a deep and respectful connection between humans and the earth.

Betty has two tamariki and five mokopuna and is a fierce and inspirational kuia in Hauraki and beyond!

In the 1970s we were involved in some struggles to stop our coastal Māori land being designated public reserve at Manaia and to stop our harbour from being mined. These small struggles somehow became notable around the world and around this country, including by nationally active people like Elsie Locke.¹ At the time I only knew her as someone who wrote for the school journals. She sent us some money completely out of the blue to help us out—I've never forgotten that.

We were also fighting CRA (CRA Exploration Pty Ltd, now Rio Tinto Exploration Pty Ltd) to stop them from destroying our pipi beds by mining, and a man from the United Nations heard about us. This man, Marcus Arruda, was a very poor Brazilian who had started out as a worker in the Mercedes Benz car factory. One day he was walking through the slums along the duckboards on the way home and he looked down at his shoes. Then he looked up at the mighty buildings and compared them to his people's living conditions. He realised that he worked all day making flash cars when he and his family would never have a car. He started a union and was thus attacked by the bosses. He was tortured and jailed for his efforts. However the United Nations chose him to head the unit on the transnationalisation of indigenous peoples' resources.

Marcus wrote to me and asked about our opposition to CRA mining our harbour. He sent us a huge chart of where CRA were operating all over the world and he asked how we were managing to stop a huge corporation. I was then invited to a conference in Wellington with Marcus Arruda to explain how Manaia was fighting back. I told them how we did it. We had no money but used allies—certain key people helped us. An example I gave was of the chief planner from Auckland Regional Authority who gave me critical information by explaining the meaning of a public advertisement to prospect in our harbour. I couldn't understand it because of the way it was written with all this jargon and obscure coordinates. He told me that it meant Manaia Harbour was under a mining application.

So Marcus heard our story and said, 'We need your help.' He asked me to come to Germany with all kinds of other indigenous people from all over the world, including Sami from Scandinavia, Australian Aboriginal people, Africans and so on. Every story was the same. That was where I learned that the mongrels use the same methods everywhere. We went to Australia and New York and Africa where we shared experiences. This was funded in part by the New Zealand Council of Churches. At this stage we had no structural analysis and we were all raw but we were brought together with some powerful multinationals so that we could tell our story and learn who the

¹ Elsie Locke (1912-2001) was a peace campaigner, an environmentalist, a feminist, a community worker and a prolific author.

enemy was. We told our stories and we learnt from that experience that profit optimisation was their only agenda.

I remember sitting next to a guy from Sri Lanka at a lunch at Bosch Industries. I liked that company because they were totally honest with us, absolutely no pretence at fairness. They said, 'We bring in migrant workers across the borders, we provide schools, houses and work but no right to vote.' This company had subsidiaries everywhere. They laid out this spick-and-span spread for us, a beautiful meal, and the guy next me who was from Sri Lanka couldn't eat. He said, 'This meal could feed my family for a week,' but I ate everything. That whole experience was very important to me.

I first became directly involved with Freirean ideas when Filip Fanchette came out to Aotearoa. He too had read about the small coastal village of Manaia which had got involved in fighting mining. This was some years after my travels, and the New Zealand Council of Churches selected 40 people for a workshop with Filip Fanchette in Auckland. We had to agree to participate and to stick to rules like staying for the whole week and living together. Of course there were many dynamics but by the end of the week we started to understand the same things.

They had selected participants for the workshop in terms of sector groups for example, six Māori and six teachers and so on. At the beginning of the workshop we were sent into occupational sector groups, with no culture caucusing, and I couldn't get a word in. I soon had a guts full of it as I tried to tell my group about what happened when I was child—my group of all Pākehā just didn't listen. I didn't realise it was deliberately set up like that by Filip Fanchette. After a while I said, 'I am damned if I will waste my bloody time like this' and Filip said 'Okay, what is another way to do it? Are you going to walk out?' All the Māori present had the same experience, so we set up the Māori caucus and it was great. Each group was asked, 'What is your the vision for the future New Zealand?' Our group did our vision in ten minutes, and when we went to feed back all we had on our paper was 'To survive.' The Pākehā groups had pages and pages of stuff and they still weren't finished.

This workshop was a very valuable experience for me as a teacher, because it showed me how I was just recycling marketplace capitalism. We were told to organise society into groups, in terms of dominant class, auxiliary class and oppressed class, and to look at which groups operate together. You know who the dominants are. The auxiliary groups were the teachers, church people, media—those who help the dominant to stay where they are, and who force the value systems onto the oppressed people. When we had organised society into power groups and oppressed groups Filip said, 'Now put yourselves into these groups.' I put myself in the oppressed group and he asked me,

‘Betty are you really in that group? What do you do?’ I said I was a teacher and he said, ‘What are you teaching? Are you contributing to the upholding of the capitalist state?’

In the structural analysis workshops we drew a plan of the IPA (Ideological Political Apparatus). I saw that the political apparatus and the ideological apparatus depend on using persuasion; that is, until we, the oppressed, finally resist and then the state uses violence. When I saw the IPA drawn up there were heaps of things I couldn’t understand but I saw that as a teacher I was part of the ideological apparatus. It was a painful process.

We all had to look at ourselves. Some Pākehā were really upset about being part of the colonising oppressor group and said things like, ‘My grandfather was a pioneer and do I have to pack my bags and go?’ We said, ‘We are talking about tino rangatiratanga and if you can’t handle it then piss off.’ One woman cried—they all cried—and we said, ‘These are the conditions and if you can’t accept that this was and is our only country, and we have nowhere else to go, you can go.’ We asked, ‘What’s the problem with accepting these conditions?’

Filip was just great because he had all these techniques for helping this woman who cried to overcome this hurdle. He didn’t leave anyone feeling put down. He had a subtle way of turning things around so that we Māori all came to the conclusion that transnational corporations were controlling our resources here and we were a minority in our own country. We talked about what we could do about it. He talked about mobilising forces and looking at the forces against us.

We applied this in many future campaigns. The *Coromandel Watchdog*² was a good example of a group who also applied this method. They had the facts and used both education and activism. The statement that to gain an ounce of gold you had to move a tonne of earth actually woke me up and made me able to challenge. When the Māori Affairs Department came in to argue for development on our land we were able to say, ‘What do you want? What’s your agenda?’ This also happened when Fletcher Challenge came to us and wanted 3000 acres around Manaia for forestry.

The process we had learned was so useful because we were forced to identify our friends, enemies and allies. Every year we used it on the hīkoi to Waitangi because every year there was an implant from the SIS, (the New Zealand Security Intelligence Service), a Māori, and we knew about this from learning to analyse political struggles. I continued to be a teacher on the North Shore of Auckland after that workshop but I used different tactics, which didn’t go down very well. For example, I got the kids to

² An anti-mining campaign in Hauraki.

write to the press challenging the way they were being brought up. Some of the parents went mad about that but some parents were really supportive, they could see it.

When I started as a teacher I was a real colonised bitch and I didn't want to be Māori. This was because being Māori was the bottom of the barrel and I had heard 'dumb Māori, black Māori' all my childhood. I thought it was a shameful thing to be Māori. I went off to be a teacher and thought I was just 'it.' My own people thought it was great. My uncle said, 'Don't marry a Māori—marry a Pākehā because they are clever.' Māori boys used to say to me, 'What the hell is wrong with us?' when I wouldn't go out with them.

In 1968 I had that colonised stuff whipped out of me. By then I was married and a teacher, but one day I got this notice in post from the Māori Land Court saying, 'Your shares in this land are being sold as they are not economic.' They said they didn't have to inform people and there was no right of redress. I snapped then because my mother had left this particular land to me and my siblings. I had lost my mother when I was eight years old, I didn't even know my mother, and this land they were taking came from her. So I thought then, 'No you bastards, don't.' I had carried this huge lump in my chest for years from when my mother died, and I didn't know what that lump was. She was Ngāti Huarere and Ngāti Pūkenga. She died in Manaia and on rainy nights all through my childhood I would lie awake and worry about her lying in her grave all cold and wet. So after that letter from the Land Court I had to learn rapidly. It was a shocking awakening and I was now in meetings with Māori radicals all the time, before that I had been what they called a real 'house nigger.'

I really believe in Freire's words when he said, 'Liberation must be carried out by the oppressed to restore the humanity of both the oppressed and the oppressor.' The Freire educational experiences clarified the logic of profit optimisation, otherwise I wouldn't have got it. And the loss of my mother and the threat to her land also woke me up.

I realise now there are the things we have changed and we believe it's for the betterment of our people but the state has always counteracted us by using our people against us. In 1945 the government came to talk about the fishing grounds here, and people were asked to delineate where our traditional fishing grounds were so they could be reserved under the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act. Back then it was actually recognised that they were our fishing grounds but my Dad didn't want to do it because the term was 'for the exclusive use of Māori'; it excluded Pākehā. We could have had all that under the reserve but he refused which was stink. What was he playing at?

Then in 1968 the Māori Social and Economic Advancement Act was replaced by the Māori Affairs Amendment Act and the section about our fishing ground being reserved was repealed. We had lost our chance. Now we have the Foreshore and Seabed

legislation, which is a further raupatu and Te Tiriti breach. If you read Te Tiriti it is clear. What's the use of making submissions to Parliament? What more do they want? At the Foreshore hui in Paeroa Trevor Mallard said he was indigenous. I said to him, 'If you can whakapapa to Papatūānuku you are indigenous. I can do that here but not in England because I haven't worked out what my responsibilities are to that land. I know what they are here.'

Once our fishing beds were massive. I have often chased fishing boats out of our harbour to protect it. Now launches full of Pākehā come on to the fishing banks and most have only a little pot, but some Māori from elsewhere come with great big fishing baskets and sacks. One day I saw heaps of people on the pipi beds, about 30 people, and I asked them if they had read the notice about the rāhui we had put over the area. I found them all co-operative and told them to put the kaimoana back. I then wrote to the Hauraki Trust Board and MAF (Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry) and who wrote back and basically said, 'Stupid bitch, you were endangering yourself.' I didn't feel unsafe. I think that's because it was tangata whenua pointing out that there was a rāhui; a paid flunkey was not policing it. This work is the responsibility of all mana whenua. It shouldn't be turned into a capitalist concept.

A Pākehā we know caught some snapper the other day and just took one fillet on these big old snapper, wasting the head and guts and all, and those snapper were full of roe. Without knowing much about spawning cycles I know we need to stop wasting them and a new education process needs to teach kids that kind of wisdom. When I was a kid we were sometimes told to take the pipi back because it was the wrong time or the wrong size, and that's how we learnt. I taught Nikky, my moko, to throw the first fish back and he said, 'Why?' I said, 'Because it's the right way,' but I wasn't clear of the reason. And then my moko said, 'Maybe Tangaroa wouldn't like us picking on his little brothers.'

We might have ten years left but the impact of ecological issues is already happening. So the vision for education has got to change. It's like te reo was 20 years ago, the Christians in our own community resisted it. Now there is also resistance to a different vision. At the local education cluster meeting I am trying to get from people the reason why are we educating our children. For the market place? Who owns the market? How many failures and how many successes are there? Māori are constantly labelled as failed capitalists. Look at the rapid degradation of our natural world—we will soon be forced to look at this basic fact. If we focus on the marketplace we won't have a natural world. The transition from an old vision to a new vision is vital. We need to tell our children to question the subjects they are learning and ask, 'What has this got to do with my responsibility to the natural world?' I think they get messages with pets and with nature. My moko had a whānau of snails and they all had names. She played with centipedes as

well. One day I killed a centipede and my moko observed and said to me, ‘Nana, the little one’s got no mother now.’ She had seen the closeness in the centipede family.

We don’t need schools—we need places of learning where people go to refresh their understanding of their relationship with the natural world. Especially for Māori because as a Māori I am connected to the natural world—chemically and biologically there is no separation. That’s tikanga Māori and it’s not about standing up on the marae and banging on about it in te reo. I am not saying the language doesn’t help—it does help, but they think they know the tikanga because they wave the walking stick around or take off their shoes.

I am using structural analysis stuff now in education to completely turn around the so-called ‘vision.’ For a start there will be no failure. In the old days people were chosen for their different gifts; for example, Bonnie my sister would be the one for gifts of whakapapa, I have always been the one with the gift for caring about the environment and Sue my daughter would be in the healing strands as that comes naturally to her. All of us have these strands connecting us with nature. Whakapapa teaches me about this other kind of medicine, it teaches us about the connection. For example, if I smoke and get sick it’s because why? It’s because I broke the tapu by breaking the connection between the air and me, and only I can rebuild that. I have to face that fact or die of it.

Like whakapapa, our connections to the earth cannot be broken. How do we ensure this is passed on to our children? They must know who they are and where they came from—that is the kind of school that is needed. In doing that kind of education we maintain the integrity of the things outside and within ourselves. That is the natural world but how many years have we got left to do it?

We need to get rid of schools, as we know them, since they are recycling the capitalist ethic. We also need to change the justice system, hospitals, police and so on. These are the IPA (Ideological Political Apparatus) issues. There is a powerful use of manipulation in schools to make us good children—if you can’t bow to the system you at least have to respect it. Tino rangatiratanga means get rid of courts and jails—we need our own disciplinary codes. We need doctors and other people who will work with us to put the responsibility back onto to us for our own behaviour and collective well-being.

All these powerful dynamics have played out in my life and I am really grateful. And I hope I am seeing a new vision with clarity. At the end of this type of education I believe you won’t get a job but you might know how to live and be at one in the natural world.

I am of course having trouble with Pākehā educators who can’t see that they are part of the environment—people say the right things about everything being connected, but don’t seem to include themselves. We have to change people’s values systems and ask, ‘What do I value the most in this world?’ The corporates value property and if that’s

what we value there's no hope for the natural world because that's where the profits come from. But if I have a sense of survival and look around at the natural world and say, 'This is where my wealth comes from. This is about the food and how it is produced.' That's what we need to learn and pass on.

An Environment Waikato scientist told me that the water we drink today has been through a human body ten times already. I've been trying to explore this with scientists. I want to be able to describe how we are connected with water. For example, what are the common strands between the human body and the waters? I want to get the scientists to tell the teachers how we are part of nature. What are the common elements? For example, we share carbon and oxygen but what else? How else are we connected?

There is a huge gap for many people. I wasn't brought up with tikanga Māori but that doesn't mean to say I don't know some of it—some of it is natural to everyone. We can shut it down, we can choose when it's too difficult; for example, when fishing, if I don't catch a fish all day and then catch a small one I eat it but I feel guilty. My old uncle told us that you didn't say grace at the table—you said it where you gathered the kai, in the garden, or where you caught the fish. I once said to my moko, 'Give thanks to Io for our kai,' and he said, 'Io didn't buy it.'

Māoridom is full of strong contradictions,—my hapū and iwi, they don't know what I am on about it. The Hauraki Trust Board Education Unit will set up more schools and stuff to get people more educated, but why? I am on a Health Board of the Hauora, but what a load of shit. People have come up through the ranks as managers; to them it's all about being a provider, giving massage for old people and removing the young people's tattoos. I want programmes about giving power back to people; for example, give them the knowledge to care for themselves, learn about how we look after ourselves, and learn about tapu in terms of health—'Why do we need to keep our bodies tapu?' When people have got the vision right you don't need the pūtea, you just need one another. That's what we are about.

Structural Analysis is still badly needed. My own family is connected to colonising churches all over the country. I often think about Freire saying, 'The essential task of liberation is to change the situation which causes oppression and not to change the consciousness of the oppressed to adapt themselves to the situation which oppresses and exploits them.' When it came to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* I couldn't read the whole book, I understood it but I had to break it down bit by bit. It was marvellous to be made to think and to think about the issue of liberation of the people and the use of timelines and stuff like that to understand oppression. I like that concept of the liberator and the liberated working together.

Betty Williams wrote this letter to the New Zealand Listener 8–14 December 2007:

RISK OF TERRORISM

The whole exercise of the police raids under the Terrorism Suppression Act wasn't about Tuhoē or Tame Iti. It was about paving the way for corporate access to, exploitation and control of our untapped natural resources. As the editorial (November 24 2004) points out, most of the violent acts that constitute terrorism, eg, murder, kidnapping ... are already offences ... and well tested in case law". What it doesn't discuss is that, under the new law, an act doesn't need to be violent. It could be an act of peaceful protest, such as blockading a mining rig to prevent it going about its legitimate activity, or stopping a helicopter from unloading gear associated with mining. That is what happened back in the 1970s, with protests against mining in the Waiomu Valley. In this scenario, the way is now open for corporate interests, such as CRA, the mining giant, to revisit those areas where, in the 80s, it did not succeed in gaining an application to explore for gold in the Manaia harbour and Hauraki Gulf. A small Māori community was adamant that the integrity of its traditional shellfish and fishing grounds should remain intact. To this end, they strenuously opposed the application and rallied the support of both national and international organisations. The mining company withdrew.

Leaders warned about complacency and the likelihood that the company would back off, gird its loins and return for the kill at some future date. That date has arrived, and it's on the cards that peaceful protests like those of the 1970s/80s will now end in a prison sentence. Who, may I ask, are the terrorists?