



# Whakapapa, Tikanga, and Māori Epistemic Resistance through News Media: The Battle for Environmental Justice at Ihumātao

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## Abstract

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori resistance to environmental harm is rooted in ancestral relationships with whenua, meaning that land is not classed as property but as a living ancestor. However, this relationship is equally shaped by ongoing colonial disruption, in which media play a vital part. In this article, we examine how mainstream and Māori news portrayed the Māori-led “Protect Ihumātao” environmental justice movement and thus shaped public understandings of it. Our thematic analysis of 59 news items revealed starkly divergent portrayals. *Te Ao Māori News* centred Māori voices, maintained a positive outlook, and depicted activists as taking collective responsibility in accordance with Indigenous culture and self-determination. The *NZ Herald* focused on conflict and power dynamics, maintained a negative tone, and portrayed activists as threatening public order. Our analysis of these contrasting depictions exposes the fundamental rift between Māori relational abundance worldviews and individualist economic logics of colonial-capitalist systems. Recognising journalism as an active site of power and cultural (re)production, we argue that the *NZ Herald's* coverage of “Protect Ihumātao” enacted epistemic violence—repressing and distorting Māori ways of knowing and doing—while *Te Ao Māori News* exemplifies epistemic resistance. We conclude that by elevating Indigenous voices and affirming the right to Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous media challenge the erasures of mainstream coverage and, therefore, constitute a counter-narrative vital for environmental justice. Māori media allow Indigenous truths to be seen, heard, and remembered, and permit the public to focus on what unites humanity in the face of climate change.

**Keywords:** Indigenous media; Indigenous Green Criminology; Indigenous environmental justice.

In the following text, two versions of the article are offered. The version on the left uses Māori words where we deem their use conceptually necessary. The version on the right offers the same text, but all Māori words have been translated into English. All Māori words and their English translations are highlighted in bold in both versions. The version on the right also contains explanations of the Māori concepts (an additional glossary is also available after the reference list). These explanations highlight how mere translations are often inadequate to capture the full meaning and breadth of culturally significant concepts. Grasping these stark differences will aid Western readers who are not familiar with Māori culture and its concepts to understand why New Zealand mainstream and Indigenous media portrayals of the events at Ihumātao diverge so significantly and reflect very different worldviews.



<p><b>Where we begin</b></p> <p>In <b>te ao</b> Māori, a speaker does not begin with themselves.</p> <p>They begin by acknowledging their <b>tūpuna</b>, their <b>whenua</b>, and their <b>wai</b> through <b>pepeha</b>, a declaration that grounds them as <b>māngai</b> who carry their people and their histories into the <b>kaupapa</b> ahead</p> <p>In presenting our positionality through <b>pepeha</b>, we acknowledge that our research voice arises from these connections rather than from an individual, detached self. For readers beyond Aotearoa, this may differ from conventional academic positionality statements.</p>	<p><b>Where we begin</b></p> <p>From the <b>Māori worldview</b>, a speaker does not begin with themselves.</p> <p><i>Te Ao Māori: Te ao Māori can be interpreted as “the Māori worldview,” but it means “the Māori world.” It speaks to a way of being and living in a web of relationships—between people, whenua, wai, atua, and wairua. To call it a “worldview” risks framing it as just another perspective, rather than a lived reality.</i></p> <p>They begin by acknowledging <b>their ancestors</b>, their <b>land</b>, and their <b>waters</b> through <b>self-introduction</b>, a declaration that grounds them as māngai who carry their people and their histories into the <b>journey</b> ahead.</p> <p><i>Tūpuna: Often translated as “ancestors,” tūpuna refers to those who continue to exist and shape our past, present, and future, embodying the continuity of whakapapa. Tūpuna invokes relationships that are continually reactivated through karakia, kōrero tuku iho, waiata, and daily practice. Within this research, tūpuna are honoured as integral participants whose influence guides the kaupapa and why it matters.</i></p> <p><i>Whenua: More than “land,” whenua also means placenta, origin, and identity. It marks a living bond rather than ownership—the source that nourishes us physically, culturally, and genealogically, and to which responsibilities endure.</i></p> <p><i>Wai: Beyond “water,” wai signals life, wellbeing, and connection. It sustains bodies and binds relationships, reminding us that health and balance depend on flows that link people, places, and time.</i></p> <p><i>Pepeha: Narrowly called a “self-introduction,” a pepeha is a confirmation of relationship. It situates a person with tūpuna, whenua, and wai, presenting the self as embedded in kinship, place, and obligation. It is belonging that is collective and intergenerational.</i></p> <p><i>Māngai: Usually rendered “spokesperson,” māngai is the living mouth of the people that carries the voices of their community and tūpuna with integrity, rather than a mere title or role.</i></p> <p><i>Kaupapa: Foundational philosophy or guiding purpose—the base upon which thought and action stand. It carries both practical and spiritual dimensions, describing not only what is done but why. Kaupapa reveals direction and collective efforts, ensuring they align with inherited principles, relationships, and responsibilities. In English, “purpose” or “policy” doesn’t encapsulate kaupapa as a living ethic grounded in meaning, balance, and ancestral obligation. When describing a “journey” as a pathway or forward movement, kaupapa isn’t linear or individual progression, it is collective movement guided by ancestral principles. Where “journey” centres the traveller, kaupapa centres the purpose that calls people to act, together, in alignment with what must continue.</i></p> <p>In presenting our positionality through <b>self-introduction</b>, we acknowledge that our research voice arises from these connections rather than from an individual, detached self. For readers beyond <b>New Zealand</b>, this may differ from conventional academic positionality statements.</p>
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<p>However, the intent is similar in that our identities and obligations shape the perspectives we bring to this <b>mahi</b>.</p> <p>The difference may lie in the emphasis on the intergenerational relationships and responsibilities that make this research both possible and necessary.</p> <p>The first author is a 24-year-old Māori <b>wahine</b>.</p> <p>The stories of my <b>tūpuna</b>—and particularly those of my <b>hapū</b>, Te Whānau-a-Taupara, of the iwi Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki—our resistance to colonial violence and our relationship with the <b>whenua</b> still colour my view of the world and myself.</p> <p>They are intergenerational, lived experiences embedded in our connections with each other, the <b>whenua</b>, the world, and the</p>	<p><i><b>Aotearoa:</b> Aotearoa cannot translate as “New Zealand.” The two names have different origins. Aotearoa is often translated as “land of the long white cloud,” with whakapapa in oral traditions that describe how our ancestors first encountered this whenua, tying them to the land and to descendants who continue to live in relationship with it. Using Aotearoa reinforces Māori as tangata whenua within those narratives. By contrast, “New Zealand”, derived from Zeeland in the Netherlands, continually affirms British colonisation.</i></p> <p>However, the intent is similar in that our identities and obligations shape the perspectives we bring to this <b>work</b>.</p> <p><i><b>Mahi:</b> Mahi, often translated as “work,” reaches beyond employment or productivity. It highlights contribution, purpose, and responsibility, especially in service to our whānau, hapū, iwi, and te taiao. Where “work” often centres output or personal gain, mahi is relational. It connects people to our collective roles and obligations. The value lies in whether our mahi upholds mana, demonstrates integrity, and aligns with tikanga.</i></p> <p>The difference may lie in the emphasis on the intergenerational relationships and responsibilities that make this research both possible and necessary.</p> <p>The first author is a 24-year-old Māori <b>woman</b>.</p> <p><i><b>Wahine:</b> Wahine is often translated as “woman,” yet it refers to more than gender. In Te ao Māori, gender and sexuality are fluid and inclusive; wahine highlights a lineage of strength, care, and resilience.</i></p> <p>The stories of my <b>ancestors</b>—and particularly those of my <b>sub-tribe</b>, Te Whānau-a-Taupara, of the iwi Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki—our resistance to colonial violence and our relationship with the <b>land</b> still colour my view of the world and myself.</p> <p><i><b>Hapū:</b> Commonly glossed as “subtribe,” hapū is an extended kin group descended from a common ancestor and the primary political, social, and economic unit in traditional Māori society, through which whakapapa, land, and mana are exercised and protected. The kupu also means “pregnant,” expressing genealogical and generative continuity. Belonging to a hapū is to participate in an intergenerational cycle of care and obligation.</i></p> <p><i><b>Whenua:</b> For us, whenua is far more than land; it is our ancestor, the sustainable source from which life, identity, and belonging flow. It nourishes us physically, spiritually, and genealogically, linking to the placenta that connects us to Papatūānuku and to one another. Our histories are etched into its soil; our tūpuna rest within it; our obligations to protect and nurture it endure across generations. Whenua names both ancestral places of hapū or iwi and the wider relationship Māori hold with Papatūānuku herself. Disconnection from whenua is a loss of self, with social, spiritual, and ecological consequences that reverberate through every part of life.</i></p> <p>They are intergenerational, lived experiences embedded in our connections with each other, the <b>land</b>, the world, and the</p>
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Tearing our people from the land, which provided us with economic, cultural, and spiritual value, led to lasting bereavement. These are not relics of history—they continue to manifest in the socio-economic disadvantages that Māori face today (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016).

The second author was born in the 1960s as a second-language learner of my Indigenous language. My grandparents were beaten for speaking **te reo** Māori in school. This resulted in my parents not being taught **te reo** Māori, which then meant it was not spoken in our home. Whilst I learnt it sporadically throughout my primary and secondary years at school, that was only for an hour a week, and it stopped at the school gates.

Motherhood and the **Kōhanga Reo** movement became the catalyst to start reclaiming my language and cultural identity, not just for my sake, but for the sake of my **tamariki** and **mokopuna**.

systems that still seek to hold us down. Like many other **families**, mine is still waiting for the outcome of our Waitangi Tribunal claim to settle the extensive loss of land and resources.

*Whānau: Often translated as “family,” whānau extends far beyond the nuclear model. It encompasses whakapapa across generations and chosen ties built through shared responsibilities and aroha. Whānau is a living system of support, healing, and accountability where identity is shaped, values are practised, and collective wellbeing begins.*

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*Te reo Māori: Commonly rendered as “the Māori language,” te reo Māori is the living voice of a people, an archive of history, spirituality, and connection. It carries creation stories, genealogies, and values; speaking it is participation in an intergenerational continuum. When we reclaim te reo Māori, we resist and restore. Literally “the Māori voice” or “the voice of Māori,” it gives breath to collective identity.*

Motherhood and the movement for **full-immersion Māori language daycare centres** became the catalyst to start reclaiming my language and cultural identity, not just for my sake, but for the sake of my **children** and **grandchildren**

*Kōhanga Reo: Literally “language nest,” Kōhanga Reo emerged in the early 1980s as a community-led movement to revitalise te reo Māori. These are safe, loving environments grounded in tikanga, whakapapa, and collective responsibility, where language learning is inseparable from identity, spirituality, and connection to whenua. Describing them as “daycare” discounts the intrinsic connections to resistance, renewal, and intergenerational learning.*

*Tamariki: Often translated as “children,” tamariki carries meanings of chiefly status and light, naming young ones as inherently tapu, born with mana and potential. They are living connections between past, present, and future, embodying the aspirations of their tūpuna.*

*Mokopuna: Commonly glossed as “grandchildren,” mokopuna combines moko (imprint) and puna (spring). It evokes descendants as living imprints of the source—the continuation of ancestral essence. Mokopuna centres intergenerational reciprocity and accountability: our actions ripple forward, and our descendants call us to honour both past and future.*

In this never-ending journey of reclamation, our connection to **whenua** is paramount. When we entered this physical world, we came from the cocoon of our own **whenua**. When we return to our spiritual world, our physical body is returned to **Papatūānuku**. Therefore, resistance to colonial violence is essential in our journey to reclaim and maintain, not just our everlasting connection to our **whenua**, but our roles and responsibilities as **kaitiaki**.

The third author is **taiwi**, born and raised in East Germany

I was a young woman when West Germany annexed my country and subjected my people to economic exploitation and cultural colonialism (Baylis, 1995; Knight, 2017; Rosenberg, 1991; Sogerman, 2019). When I first arrived in **Aotearoa** in 2005, I was struck by the ongoing, unapologetic genocidal state violence (Giannacopoulos, 2024) that targeted Māori. Due to my own experiences, my empathy was visceral. Ever since, my scholarship has focused on anti-racism and the amplification of Indigenous voices. This study is one such endeavour, undertaken at the invitation of the first author. Advocacy for and support of Indigenous-led research function as an assertion of Māori sovereignty, the elevation of Māori voices, and the recognition of Māori authority to tell their own stories (Balchin, 2021). My engagement is grounded in a strength-based perspective, a commitment to confronting privilege (including my own), and an ambition to advance social change that dismantles all forms of oppression (Deckert, 2017; Land, 2015).

When we use collective pronouns referring to Māori ways of being and knowing, the third author is excluded. Although her scholarly contributions may enrich this **mahi**, her perspective remains distinct from the Māori positionalities signalled by “we” and “us.” When the third author is included, it is signposted through the phrase “the authors.” By clarifying this usage, the authors seek to honour the integrity of the Māori standpoint while acknowledging the collaborative nature of our research team. Moreover, the use of collective pronouns is not a stylistic decision but serves as epistemic signposting into

In this never-ending journey of reclamation, our connection to **land** is paramount. When we entered this physical world, we came from the cocoon of our own **land**. When we return to our spiritual world, our physical body is returned to **Mother Earth**. Therefore, resistance to colonial violence is essential in our journey to reclaim and maintain, not just our everlasting connection to our **land**, but our roles and responsibilities as **guardians**.

*Papatūānuku: Papatūānuku is a living ancestor—the primordial mother and the earth itself—whose union with Ranginui grounds a shared whakapapa for all life. This relationship is reciprocal; harm to the environment is a breach of whanaungatanga with an ancestor. Retaining Papatūānuku honours this ontological truth and the ethical obligations it carries.*

*Kaitiaki and Kaitiakitanga: Often rendered “guardian” or “protection,” these kupu arise from whakapapa and inherited responsibilities to uphold the mana of Papatūānuku and the balance of living systems. Kaitiaki are kin with te taiao; kaitiakitanga is care enacted through aroha, reciprocity, and tikanga—not management from a distance.*

The third author is a **foreigner**, born and raised in East Germany.

*Taiwi: Frequently translated as “foreigner,” taiwi literally combines arrival (tau) and people (iwi), naming those in Aotearoa who live in relationship with tangata whenua. It invites responsibility and reciprocity within the web of relationships, including obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.*

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Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing by which this research was guided. These terms link us to our **tūpuna** and our **whenua**, and are a way to strengthen our presence and authority in academia. They hold **wairua** and carry our stories, our **whakapapa**, our truth (Gaudry, 2011).

**Kupu Māori** are used throughout this article to acknowledge the status of **te reo Māori** not only as the mother tongue of the first two authors but also as an official language in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ History, 2024b). **Kupu Māori** are not italicised as this would wrongly present them as foreign (Somerville, 2022). These linguistic choices are acts of respect that recognise the **mana** and **mauri** of **te reo Māori** and affirm it as a repository of **mātauranga Māori**. Language is a tool and conduit of knowledge, identity, and resistance.

To the authors, Ihumātao represents a continuation of colonial wrongdoings, and the related Māori-led protest shares a **whakapapa** of resistance to other colonial wrongs; of standing for **whenua** and **tinu rangatiratanga**. Hence, this research is not written from a position of detachment, but rather committed objectivity (Agozino, 1999) against the long shadow of colonisation.

Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing by which this research was guided. These terms link us to our **ancestors** and our **land**, and are a way to strengthen our presence and authority in academia. They hold **spirit** and carry our stories, our **genealogy**, our truth (Gaudry, 2011).

***Wairua:** Commonly rendered “spirit” or “soul,” wairua is the invisible current that connects the physical and spiritual, the individual and collective. It refers to “two waters,” it signals balance and relational harmony. Māori approaches to wellbeing restore alignment between tinana, hinengaro, whānau, and wairua.*

***Whakapapa:** Often translated as “genealogy,” whakapapa means to lay in layers, naming the layered connections among people, lands, waters, stars, and atua.*

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***Kupu Māori:** Kupu can mean speech, utterance, promise. The creative power to call things into being. Kupu Māori are vessels of mātauranga, shaped by histories and relationships. Translation flattens them; using kupu Māori lets meaning stand on its own terms and resists linguistic erasure.*

***Mana:** Commonly glossed as “authority” or “prestige,” mana is a living force—spiritual power, integrity, and relational influence—both inherent through whakapapa and shaped by action. It arises from balance, reciprocity, and service, and inheres in people and in the natural world.*

***Mauri:** Often translated as “life force,” mauri is what allows the forming, flourishing, and remaining in balance.*

***Mātauranga:** Sometimes rendered “Māori knowledge,” mātauranga Māori is a living, relational system of understanding—spiritual, ecological, social, intellectual—transmitted intergenerationally and inseparable from whakapapa, whenua, and wairua. It is communal and dynamic, grounded in responsibility.*

To the authors, Ihumātao represents a continuation of colonial wrongdoings, and the related Māori-led protest shares a **history** of resistance to other colonial wrongs; of standing for **land** and **self-determination**. Hence, this research is not written from a position of detachment, but rather committed objectivity (Agozino, 1999) against the long shadow of colonisation.

***Tino rangatiratanga:** Often translated as “self-determination” or “sovereignty,” tino rangatiratanga arises from rangatira—leaders who weave the people. It names collective authority to live by tikanga, uphold mana, and protect whenua and resources entrusted by tūpuna. In Te Tiriti o Waitangi, tino rangatiratanga guarantees the continuation of Māori authority—misrepresented in English texts as mere “possession.”*

We start this article by sketching the story of Ihumātao and mapping a timeline of key Māori environmental justice campaigns. Starting with the 1840s, this chronology shows that “Protect Ihumātao” is but one chapter in a long legacy of Māori activism—centuries before modern climate science—and that environmental stewardship has always been an integral part of the Māori world. Next, we review the literature on media portrayals of Māori peoples, Māori protest, and Māori environmental activism; outline our research design; and review the limitations of this study. Then, we present the findings of our thematic analysis, which reveal starkly divergent portrayals of Protect Ihumātao. While *Te Ao Māori News* centred Māori voices, maintained a positive outlook, and cast activists as taking collective responsibility in accordance with Indigenous culture and self-determination, the *NZ Herald* focused on conflict and power dynamics, maintained an overall negative tone, and cast activists as threatening public order. We discuss these contrasting portrayals as reflecting the fundamental divide between Māori relational abundance worldviews and individualist economic logics of colonial-capitalist systems. We argue that the *NZ Herald*'s portrayal of Protect Ihumātao enacted epistemic violence as it repressed and distorted Māori ways of knowing and being, while *Te Ao Māori News* embodied epistemic resistance.

When we use the terms epistemic violence and epistemic resistance, we use them as they were conceptualised by Spivak (1988) and Medina (2012), respectively.

The concept of epistemic violence was developed by Spivak (1988) in his critique of how colonial discourse silences the “subaltern.” It operates through silencing and discrediting Indigenous speakers, erasing or excluding colonial histories and Indigenous languages, distorting Indigenous knowledge to fit dominant paradigms, and institutional gatekeeping that privileges certain methods and languages. The silencing of Indigenous voices also affects academic criminology (Deckert, 2014, 2015, 2023, 2025; Goyes & South, 2021). These practices have material effects: delegitimising knowledge systems strips communities of influence over land, health, education, and governance, and enables harmful policies to be justified as neutral expertise, linking epistemic violence to broader colonial and unequal power structures (Dotson, 2011). Epistemic resistance, on the other hand, was coined by José Medina (2012). The term refers to actions and strategies—intellectual, political, and social—that contest the mechanisms that silence, discredit, or erase Indigenous knowledge and testimony. It responds to epistemic injustice by creating spaces for marginalised voices and building institutional practices that recognise and protect epistemic agency (Medina, 2012).

We conclude that by elevating Indigenous voices and affirming the right to Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous media challenge the erasures of mainstream coverage and constitute a counter-narrative that is vital for environmental justice because Māori media ensure Indigenous truths are seen, heard, and preserved, redirecting public focus toward our shared humanity facing climate change.

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We conclude that by elevating Indigenous voices and affirming the right to Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous media challenge the erasures of mainstream coverage and constitute a counter-narrative that is vital for environmental justice because Māori media ensure Indigenous truths are seen, heard, and preserved, redirecting public focus toward our shared humanity facing climate change.

<p><b>Ihumātao</b></p> <p>For over 800 years, Ihumātao was a thriving centre of Māori life. Its stonefield gardens—among the oldest in Aotearoa—sat alongside carefully tended wetlands and <b>pā sites</b>.</p> <p>Guided by <b>mātauranga, tapu, mana, utu,</b> and <b>kaitiakitanga</b>, these systems reflected a <b>tikanga</b>-based legal order that treated the <b>whenua</b> as a <b>tupuna</b>, teacher, and kin.</p> <p>Ihumātao was also a <b>whare wānanga, where rangatahi</b> learned through daily practice that harming the land was a breach of a sacred covenant.</p> <p>In 1863, the Crown broke this covenant violently when its troops confiscated land, evicted <b>tangata whenua</b>, and desecrated sacred sites (O’Malley, 2019).</p>	<p><b>Ihumātao</b></p> <p>For over 800 years, Ihumātao was a thriving centre of Māori life. Its stonefield gardens—among the oldest in Aotearoa—sat alongside carefully tended wetlands and <b>fortified villages</b>.</p> <p><i>Pā: Commonly glossed as “fortified village,” a pā was a living expression of community, identity, and environmental relationship—centres of governance, ceremony, protection, and trade, informed by sophisticated engineering, spirituality, and mātauranga. Defensive features symbolised foresight and care, not domination.</i></p> <p>Guided by <b>knowledge, rules that define the sacred, authority,</b> and the <b>principles of restoration and guardianship</b>, these systems reflected a <b>customary-based</b> legal order that treated the <b>land</b> as an <b>ancestor</b>, teacher, and kin.</p> <p><i>Tapu: Often translated as “sacred” or “forbidden,” tapu is a central principle that maintains balance between physical and spiritual worlds. It recognises intrinsic sanctity, defines boundaries of relationship, and operates with mana, noa, and tikanga to sustain harmony.</i></p> <p><i>Utū: Sometimes misread as “revenge,” utū is better understood as principles of restoration. It values balance that is maintained through accountability, reciprocity, and reconciliation. It aligns with tikanga to restore harmony rather than punish.</i></p> <p><i>Tikanga: Frequently rendered as “custom” or “protocol,” tikanga derives from what is tika, what is right, just, and true. It guides behaviour and decision-making among people, environment, and spiritual realms. More than “values,” it is enacted law and philosophy that is adaptive, relational, and restorative. Grounding social order, conflict resolution, and environmental stewardship.</i></p> <p>Ihumātao was also a <b>university</b>, where <b>young people</b> learned through daily practice that harming the land was a breach of a sacred covenant.</p> <p><i>Whare wānanga: Sometimes compared to “university,” whare wānanga names houses of higher learning where knowledge is passed on through whakapapa, ritual, and lived experience.</i></p> <p><i>Rangatahi: Often translated as “youth,” rangatahi literally translates to weaving as one. Leaving the responsibility to young people as a collective force who carry the legacy of their people forward. They are active participants in the continuity of whakapapa and renewal of cultural life.</i></p> <p>In 1863, the Crown broke this covenant violently when its troops confiscated land, evicted <b>people from the land</b>, and desecrated sacred sites (O’Malley, 2019).</p> <p><i>Tangata Whenua: Often coined “people of the land,” tangata whenua expresses a reciprocal, genealogical relationship between people and place—whenua as both land and placenta. It affirms belonging as kinship and responsibility, not</i></p>
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Despite the Royal Commission Inquiry into the Confiscation of Native Lands (1927) and the Waitangi Tribunal (1985) deeming the confiscation unjust, the Crown provided neither restitution nor compensation. Over the next 150 years, infrastructure developments—including Auckland Airport, highways, and factories—drained wetlands, compacted soils, and polluted waterways. By the late twentieth century, Ihumātao had become an industrial corridor, its traditional ecological systems dismantled and its **tikanga** stripped of legal authority.

In the 21st century, systematic colonial degradation continued. In 2011, the Auckland Council rezoned Ihumātao as residential. In 2014, Fletcher Building received consent to construct 480 houses. These planning decisions epitomised colonial violence in its bureaucratic form (Giannacopoulos, 2024) by excluding **mana whenua** from statutory co-governance as per **Te Tiriti o Waitangi**. The redesignation of Ihumātao was not an unbiased planning policy but the latest in a long sequence of decisions privileging market value and profit over **whakapapa** and **tikanga**.

In response, descendants of the original inhabitants returned to Ihumātao in 2016, occupying the **whenua**. They came as protectors—as **uri whakaheke** bound by **kaupapa tuku iho**.

Through occupation, **kaitiaki** reframed Ihumātao as a **whare wānanga** once more, revitalising **tikanga** and affirming inherited obligations to **Papatūānuku**. Protect Ihumātao catalysed national and international solidarity, with thousands gathering in 2019, and **King Tūheitia** leading a tikanga-based

*possession, and grounds this writing in Māori understandings of authority and care.*

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***Mana Whenua:** Spiritual, political, and genealogical authority rooted in whenua and mana (spiritual authority, dignity); not possession but obligation to protect the mauri of place and people. Inherited through whakapapa, sustained by ahi kā (enduring occupation), enacted via kaitiakitanga. All mana whenua are tangata whenua, but mana whenua recognises hapū/iwi as holding authority through continued occupation and stewardship.*

***Te Tiriti o Waitangi vs. the Treaty of Waitangi:** Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Māori text) affirms tino rangatiratanga (Māori authority) for iwi/hapū and grants the Crown kāwanatanga (limited governance over settlers), establishing a reciprocal, covenantal relationship grounded in Māori jurisprudence. The English “Treaty of Waitangi” underpinned divergent worldviews through colonial law as a cession of sovereignty.*

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***Uri Whakaheke:** Uri (offspring) and whakaheke (to descend/flow) names inheritance as responsibility to carry tūpuna values, obligations, and unfinished work; descendants act as kaitiaki of memory, knowledge, and land, embodying kaupapa tuku iho (principles handed down).*

***Kaupapa Tuku Iho:** Enduring, intergenerational principles. Kaupapa (foundational purpose/why) and tuku iho (handed down). Gifted to guide identity and action; not static “values” but living instructions to be embodied, adapted, and kept faithful to their ancestral source.*

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process of resolution, which culminated in 2020, with the government purchasing the land, promising co-governance. However, questions of ecological restoration and **tino rangatiratanga** remain unresolved.

### Māori-led Environmental Resistance: A Timeline

From the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's opposition to the Dakota Access Pipeline to the Nepalese Newar community's protests against the Fast Track Road Project, Indigenous peoples worldwide are resisting global capitalism to defend land, water and air, and the intertwined harms of colonial and environmental violence (Dhillon, 2022).

Māori environmental campaigns are a continuous assertion of **whakapapa**, **wairua**, and intergenerational **kaitiakitanga**, not a new phenomenon. Rooted in **tūpuna**-led practices and guided by **atua**, these sacred duties survived colonial disruption when land confiscations, ecological destruction, bureaucratic rezoning, and the silencing of **tikanga** Māori sought to sever our ties to **te taiao**.

Although "Indigenous ways of 'knowing and seeing' the natural world lead to more protective behaviours than the dominating economic approach" of colonial capitalism, Indigenous environmental ontologies tend to be silenced (Goyes et al. 2021, p. 965). Yet, Māori spiritual leadership endured, reaffirming our role as guardians. From resisting land dispossession in the 1840s to Protect Ihumātao in the 2010s, each generation has reasserted its duty to care for the **whenua**. The following timeline sketches some of these campaigns.

#### 1840s: New Zealand Wars

Māori resistance to land alienation began soon after the signing of **Te Tiriti o Waitangi** in 1840. In the 1843 Wairau incident, Māori leadership defended **whenua** and **wai**—not as resources but as kin (Laing, 2022). From the 1840s to the 1870s, **iwi** across the **motu** resisted Crown encroachment through both local defence and the **Kingitanga** movement (Belich, 2013). These wars were military but also assertions of environmental sovereignty.

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*Kīngi and Kīngitanga: A uniquely Māori movement (Kīngitanga) for unity and protection of tino rangatiratanga; Kīngi denotes leadership grounded in mana atua (spiritual authority) and mana tangata (people's mandate), guided by tikanga; contemporary presence (e.g., Kīngi Tūheitia) signals tikanga-based dialogue, restoration, and pan-tribal unity.*

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Māori environmental campaigns are a continuous assertion of **genealogy**, **spirituality**, and intergenerational **guardianship**, not a new phenomenon. Rooted in **ancestor**-led practices and guided by **the divine**, these sacred duties survived colonial disruption when land confiscations, ecological destruction, bureaucratic rezoning, and the silencing of Māori **customs** sought to sever our ties to **the natural world**.

*Atua: Ancestral life-forces animating domains of the natural world (e.g., Tāne, Tangaroa, Rongo-mā-Tāne, Tūmataunga); kin rather than distant deities; alignment with atua means acting in balance and reciprocity within a genealogical cosmos.*

*Te Taiao: The living whole—land, waters, skies, relationships, energies, genealogies—into which humans are woven by whakapapa; foundation for kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga, unlike "environment," which treats nature as an external backdrop.*

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### **1865-1975: Native Land Court**

The Native Land Court, established in 1865 (Gilling, 1994), aimed to break up collective landholding. While it enabled vast alienation, Māori **whānau**, **hapū**, and **iwi** used the Court to assert ancestral rights and capture histories of occupation and **whakapapa** (Māori Land Court, 2025). The Māori Land Court Minute Books (1865-1975) stand as enduring records of environmental resistance.

### **1970s: Land March and Occupation of Bastion Point**

Led by Dame Whina Cooper, the 1975 **hīkoi** travelled from Te Hāpua to Parliament, demanding “Not one more acre” of land loss (Bates, 2014; NZ History, 2021). The image of Whina Cooper walking hand in hand with her **mokopuna** symbolised intergenerational duty to protect **whenua** (Forbes, 2015). The **hīkoi** reignited national consciousness of dispossession and remains one of the most powerful declarations of Māori resistance.

In 1977/78, Ngāti Whātua ki Ōrākei occupied Takaparawhau for 506 days to stop Crown subdivision of one of their last remaining urban lands (Harris, 2004). Perched above Waitematā Harbour, the whenua was a repository of **whakapapa** and **wāhi tapu**. The violent removal of protestors by police became a turning point in national awareness, reaffirming **iwi** as protectors of **whenua** and **mokopuna** (Walker, 2004).

### **1980s: Sawmill Workers Against Poisons (SWAP)**

In Whakatāne, Māori workers exposed to toxic chemicals formed the SWAP collective (Delahunty, 2021). Linking workers’ rights with Indigenous struggles for **hauora** and **whenua**, SWAP highlighted the intersection of environmental degradation, corporate exploitation, and intergenerational health. Their advocacy became a landmark in Māori-led environmental justice.

***Iwi:** Literally “bones”; genealogical collectives connecting people to tūpuna, whenua, and wairua; through iwi, rights and responsibilities (including mana whenua and tikanga) are exercised; “tribe” misses this layered kin-law.*

***Motu:** The collective body of Aotearoa—lands, waters, peoples—bound through whakapapa; also carries the sense “to be cut off,” evoking colonial severance; the health of the motu mirrors relationships with Te Taiao.*

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### **1970s: Land March and Occupation of Bastion Point**

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***Hīkoi:** Purposeful, embodied journey that asserts belonging and carries kaupapa tuku iho; political in action, spiritual in intent; more than a “march,” it transforms protest into ceremony and memory.*

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***Wāhi Tapu:** Places imbued with tapu (sacred potency/bounds), living repositories of whakapapa and identity protected by tikanga; harm to wāhi tapu damages people’s mauri; “sacred site” flattens these living kin-relations.*

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***Hauora:** Holistic balance of taha tinana (body), hinengaro (mind), wairua (spirit), and whānau (relational); wellbeing is relational and ecological—harm to whenua/wai harms people—beyond individualised “health.”*

**1990s: The Foreshore and Seabed Act**

The Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 extinguished Māori customary title to coastal areas, undermining centuries of stewardship (Hickford, 2015). Protests across the **motu** and the formation of **Te Pāti Māori** reflected a refusal to accept the Crown's redefinition of sacred **whenua** and **moana** as state property.

**2000s: MV Rena Disaster**

When the Greek merchant vessel *Rena* grounded on Otāiti, it spilt oil and wreckage that desecrated customary harvesting and assaulted the **tupuna** that feeds and guides—Te Moana-a-Toi (Astrolabe Reef, 2024). In response, **hapū** convened **wānanga** for ecological restoration, demanding justice, recognition of Indigenous knowledge, and the right to **kaitiakitanga** rooted in **whakapapa** and **atua** (Fa'au, 2017).

**2010s: Ihumātao**

Protect Ihumātao continues a long tradition of Māori resistance. From the standpoint of green criminology, it exposes how capitalist colonialism desecrated the mauri of **whenua** and severed relationships with **atua**, **whenua**, and **wai** (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016; Rākete, 2023).

Yet, Ihumātao also embodies hope and resilience, affirming that **tikanga** Māori endures as an Indigenous legal order that regards **whenua** as ancestor and understands justice as being grounded in **whakapapa**, not profit.

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*Te Pāti Māori: A linguistic and political reclamation grounded in tino rangatiratanga; indigenised pāti within te reo asserts kaupapa, continuity with earlier movements, and a mandate from whakapapa and community—more than a party label.*

*Moana: Ancestor and living relative with mauri and wairua, holding voyaging memory and interconnection (domain of Tangaroa); “sea” strips kinship and guardianship; moana names duties to a being that teaches and sustains.*

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*Wānanga: Commonly translated as “learning” or “forum,” wānanga carries deeper meanings. It refers to a sacred process of sharing, reflecting, and generating knowledge in alignment with whakapapa (genealogy), wairua (spirit), and tikanga (ethical order). Today, wānanga continues to describe both formal institutions and the living practice of collective learning—spaces where understanding emerges through dialogue, reflection, and relationship. Unlike the English notions of “classroom” or “workshop,” wānanga emphasises reciprocity: every participant is both learner and teacher, and knowledge is treated as a taonga (treasure) that must be respected and used responsibly. To “hold a wānanga” is therefore to create space for transformation—to connect intellect, emotion, and spirit in the pursuit of truth, balance, and collective growth.*

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Yet, Ihumātao also embodies hope and resilience, affirming that Māori **culture** endures as an Indigenous legal order that regards **land** as ancestor and understands justice as being grounded in **genealogy**, not profit.

*Tikanga Māori: Jurisprudential framework of what is tika (right/just/true) that governs relationships, conduct, and decision-making; lived law and philosophy, not mere “custom” or surface “culture.”*

The Ihumātao protest, beginning in 2016, became a high-profile demonstration of Māori land rights and cultural protection. While Manukau City Council incorporated parts of the area into the Ōtuataua Stonefields Historic Reserve in 2007, later efforts to rezone adjacent land as a Special Housing Area reignited tensions (Doyle, 2018; Hobbs, 2017). Fletcher Building Limited's 2014–2016 housing development proposal intensified concerns, with **mana whenua** and heritage groups viewing the project as a threat to Māori heritage, identity, and spiritual connection to place (Doyle, 2018). In response, Save Our Unique Landscape (SOUL) activists occupied the **whenua** in 2016, launching a grassroots movement challenging the proposed development (Malva, 2018).

By 2019, the protest had grown into a national movement, supported by thousands of people, including prominent artists and public figures (Hancock et al., 2020). Police confrontations further elevated its visibility, transforming it into the wider Protect Ihumātao campaign, focused on recognising and restoring Māori historic rights to the land. In December 2020, the government agreed to purchase the disputed land from Fletcher Building, acknowledging the historical injustices and promising to work with **mana whenua** on future decisions (Mika et al., 2022; Oldham et al., 2024).

Although the purchase represented an important victory, it also underscored unresolved issues surrounding the full restoration of Māori land rights and the Crown's continued failures to uphold **Te Tiriti o Waitangi** (Doyle, 2018; Hancock et al., 2020; Hobbs, 2017; Malva, 2018). The Protect Ihumātao movement ultimately brought national attention to long-standing grievances over land loss and cultural dispossession, reaffirming Ihumātao as a symbol of ancestral connection, Indigenous resistance, and the ongoing struggle for **tino rangatiratanga**.

### Media Portrayal of Māori

Mainstream (i.e., **tauiwi**-led) media have a long history of harming Indigenous peoples by reinforcing racist stereotypes, obscuring the diversity of Indigenous identities, and exacerbating historical injuries (Alia, 1999, 2005; Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007; Kohm, 2025). Early colonial media depicted Māori through reductionist tropes—such as the *noble savage* and *violent, lazy primitive*—undermining Māori autonomy and legitimising land theft. As Māori resistance grew, media hostility intensified, often scapegoating Māori for tensions with **tauiwi** (Abel, 2006; Belich, 2002, 2013; Bell, 1992; King, 2012; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; Spoonley, 1993).

Although Te Tiriti o Waitangi obliges all New Zealand media outlets to observe the principles of partnership, protection, and participation, contemporary mainstream media continue to perpetuate negative stereotypes, marginalise Māori voices, and sanitise systemic racism and inequality (Allen & Bruce, 2017;

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*Mana whenua: The people of that land who have the ancestral connections, authority and the responsibilities as kaitiaki to protect and care for their whenua and each other.*

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Colvin, 2010; Gregory et al., 2011; Harding, 2007; King, 2012; Liu, 2009; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; McCreanor, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2010; Nairn et al., 2012; Webb & Deckert, 2023). Echoing a global pattern, New Zealand mainstream news media overreport on crime, particularly on violent crime, resulting in distorted public perceptions and audiences developing irrational fears (Beckett, 1997; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; McGregor, 2017; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Ross & Nightingale, 2012). With Māori disproportionately featured in crime news, negative stereotyping of Māori as violent in mainstream news thus persists (Nairn et al., 2012; Webb & Deckert, 2023).

Mainstream media also depict Māori activism in a negative light, portraying it as uneducated and disruptive, without providing relevant historical context (Abel, 2016; Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; Lupien et al., 2024; Wall, 1997). Therefore, scholars have called for transformational media practices that centre and amplify Māori voices, honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensure equitable Māori presence in the media, accurately reflect nuances of Māori experiences, and dismantle entrenched racism and silencing (King, 2012; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). While Māori-led media strive to offer counter-narratives, they remain peripheral in their influence on mainstream public perceptions (Farr, 2019; Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990; Taira, 2009), and research into their practices and representations is still scarce (Kaire-Melbourne, 2019; Middleton, 2020).

Previous studies have investigated differential depictions of the environment in New Zealand mainstream and Māori media (Howard-Williams, 2009); media portrayals of other Māori-led environmental protests, e.g., against the Foreshore and Seabed Act (Hodgetts et al., 2005); and have used Protect Ihumātao as a case study, examining it from a human rights (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2019), food sovereignty (Oldham et al., 2024), and resilience theory (Mika et al., 2022) perspective. Finally, Hancock et al. (2020) analysed how corporate and Indigenous visions of Ihumātao competed, analysing corporate, government, and campaign documents. However, news media portrayals of Protect Ihumātao have yet to be examined. We start closing this gap in the literature by juxtaposing New Zealand mainstream and Māori news media depictions of Protect Ihumātao.

### Research Design

This comparative case study, grounded in social constructionism (Andrews, 2012; Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and green cultural criminology (Brisman & South, 2012, 2014; Lam et al., 2024), investigates how news media shape public perceptions of Māori-led environmental justice through reinforcing or challenging stereotypes and marginalising or centring Indigenous voices (Brisman & South, 2014; Gamson et al., 1992; Karsgaard & MacDonald, 2020; Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Nairn et al., 2012). Focusing on August 2019 coverage of Protect Ihumātao—peaking with the visit by **Kingi Tūheitia** on 3 August and a police-vehicle incident on 5 August (Haimona-Riki, 2019; McLachlan, 2019)—it compares reporting by *Te Ao Māori News* and the *NZ Herald* using mixed

Colvin, 2010; Gregory et al., 2011; Harding, 2007; King, 2012; Liu, 2009; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; McCreanor, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2010; Nairn et al., 2012; Webb & Deckert, 2023). Echoing a global pattern, New Zealand mainstream news media overreport on crime, particularly on violent crime, resulting in distorted public perceptions and audiences developing irrational fears (Beckett, 1997; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; McGregor, 2017; Roberts & Doob, 1990; Ross & Nightingale, 2012). With Māori disproportionately featured in crime news, negative stereotyping of Māori as violent in mainstream news thus persists (Nairn et al., 2012; Webb & Deckert, 2023).

Mainstream media also depict Māori activism in a negative light, portraying it as uneducated and disruptive, without providing relevant historical context (Abel, 2016; Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; Lupien et al., 2024; Wall, 1997). Therefore, scholars have called for transformational media practices that centre and amplify Māori voices, honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensure equitable Māori presence in the media, accurately reflect nuances of Māori experiences, and dismantle entrenched racism and silencing (King, 2012; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). While Māori-led media strive to offer counter-narratives, they remain peripheral in their influence on mainstream public perceptions (Farr, 2019; Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990; Taira, 2009), and research into their practices and representations is still scarce (Kaire-Melbourne, 2019; Middleton, 2020).

Previous studies have investigated differential depictions of the environment in New Zealand mainstream and Māori media (Howard-Williams, 2009); media portrayals of other Māori-led environmental protests, e.g., against the Foreshore and Seabed Act (Hodgetts et al., 2005); and have used Protect Ihumātao as a case study, examining it from a human rights (NZ Human Rights Commission, 2019), food sovereignty (Oldham et al., 2024), and resilience theory (Mika et al., 2022) perspective. Finally, Hancock et al. (2020) analysed how corporate and Indigenous visions of Ihumātao competed, analysing corporate, government, and campaign documents. However, news media portrayals of Protect Ihumātao have yet to be examined. We start closing this gap in the literature by juxtaposing New Zealand mainstream and Māori news media depictions of Protect Ihumātao.

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methods: content analysis to quantify representations (Macnamara, 2005) and inductive thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

It is crucial to outline the ownership structures, editorial orientations, and audience reach of both outlets, as these characteristics shape how each organisation frames socio-political issues and signal the broader epistemic traditions in which they operate. The *NZ Herald*, as the country's largest commercial newspaper, reflects mainstream, commercially driven, and historically settler-aligned perspectives, whereas *Te Ao Māori News*, operating under **Whakaata Māori**, is grounded in **kaupapa** Māori values and Indigenous media practice.

The *NZ Herald* is owned by New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME), one of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest commercial media companies (NZME Limited, 2024). Its editorial stance has traditionally leaned centre-right, although it positions itself publicly as an impartial, independent national news outlet (National Library of New Zealand, 2025). The *NZ Herald* has the widest reach of any newspaper in the country, with an estimated weekly audience of approximately 2.4 million across print and digital platforms (NZME, 2023). Its daily print circulation sat around 100,000 in 2019 (Te, 2021), and NZME's combined platforms engage more than 3.5 million people monthly (NZME Limited, 2023). As the country's major national outlet, the *NZ Herald* holds substantial agenda-setting power, shaping dominant narratives about governance, criminal justice, Māori–Crown relations, and land conflict (Te, 2021). These features make it a representative example of mainstream, settler-colonial media norms relevant to this study's comparative framework.

In contrast, *Te Ao Māori News* operates as a division of Whakaata Māori (formerly the Māori Television Service), a publicly funded Māori broadcaster established to promote te reo Māori, uphold **tikanga** Māori, and support Māori self-determination through media (Taurima, 2024). Its journalism is Māori-led and grounded in **kaupapa** Māori commitments to cultural responsibility, **whakapapa**, collective wellbeing, and Indigenous sovereignty. While **Whakaata Māori** does not publish separate circulation figures for the news division, its overall platform reach provides insight into its audience base: approximately 2.53 million annual television viewers, 3.3 million annual online users, and around 714,000 social media followers (Whakaata Māori, 2025a). These metrics demonstrate the extensive national and digital presence that **Whakaata Māori** has and highlight the centrality of *Te Ao Māori News* in providing Māori-centred journalism that amplifies Indigenous perspectives absent from mainstream outlets (Whakaata Māori, 2025b).

Together, these structural and operational differences frame the comparative analysis of Ihumātao coverage. The *NZ Herald* exemplifies dominant national news values and commercial

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*Kaupapa Māori: a perspective that is grounded in Māori worldviews, values and tikanga.*

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*Whakapapa: A person's genealogy or ancestral lineage that is the foundation of their identity and connection to their whenua.*

Together, these structural and operational differences frame the comparative analysis of Ihumātao coverage. The *NZ Herald* exemplifies dominant national news values and commercial

priorities, while *Te Ao Māori News* provides a distinctly Māori framing of land, protest, and sovereignty grounded in te ao Māori. Understanding their ownership, editorial traditions, and audience reach is therefore essential for interpreting how each outlet constructed the Ihumātao protest for its respective audiences.

Data was harvested from the *Te Ao Māori News* and *NZ Herald* websites in 2023 using the search term “Ihumatao”<sup>1</sup>. Articles that did not focus on events at Ihumātao or were published before 1 August 2019 or after 31 August 2019 were excluded. Items with fewer than 100 words were also excluded as they provided insufficient context and detail.

Only open access (i.e., non-paywalled) *NZ Herald* articles were included to allow for an accurate comparison with *Te Ao Māori News*, which is entirely open access. About 10,000 *NZ Herald* readers were subscribed to paywalled articles in August 2019, equating to 0.2% of the entire New Zealand population (NZ Herald Premium digital subscriptions soar past 10,000, 2019) and 0.6% of the *NZ Herald*'s digital readership (Roy Morgan, 2025). Hence, the impact of paywalled *NZ Herald* articles on public perceptions is negligible.

This study analysed 59 media items covering the Ihumātao protest in August 2019. Of these 59 items, 29 originated from *Te Ao Māori News* and 30 from the *NZ Herald*. The keyword search on the *Te Ao Māori News* website yielded an initial return of 204 articles. Of these 204 articles, 47 were published in August 2019. A further ten articles were excluded because they lacked focus on events at Ihumātao. Another eight articles were excluded because they contained fewer than 100 words, leaving 29 articles for data analysis. The keyword search on the *NZ Herald* website yielded a search return of 104 articles published by the *NZ Herald* in August 2019. Of these 104, 52 were paywalled and therefore excluded. A further 13 articles were excluded as they lacked focus on events at Ihumātao. Another eight articles were excluded because they contained fewer than 100 words, and another one was excluded because the respective link returned a “404 error”<sup>2</sup> message, leaving 30 articles for data analysis.

The authors recognise the following four study limitations. Firstly, by comparing only two news media outlets over August 2019, the study misses perspectives from other outlets and other timeframes, though it still provides a snapshot of public sentiment at the protest's peak. Media portrayals may have markedly shifted by the protest's resolution in December 2020—changes this study would have missed. A longitudinal analysis could better capture those evolving narratives.

Secondly, omitting about half of the *NZ Herald*'s paywalled articles may have excluded alternative viewpoints and skewed our findings, but since those pieces reached only 0.2 % of the New Zealand population and 0.6 % of the *Herald*'s digital readership, paywalling such alternative viewpoints would reflect the choice to serve the majority audience. Thirdly, given that *Te Ao Māori News* serves a mainly Māori audience and the *NZ Herald* a mainly non-Māori audience (Roy Morgan, 2025), their impact on public perceptions remains largely siloed. However, reinforcing their distinct narratives also contributes

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to the wider national debate because together they make up the competing frames through which the public understands environmental justice. Finally, thematic analysis can be subjective and prone to researcher bias, while purely quantifying terms risks oversimplification. To mitigate this, the three authors—drawing on diverse ages and backgrounds—collaboratively coded texts, selected positive and negative keywords, and iteratively refined themes.

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**Contrasting depictions of Protect Ihumātao in Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald**

Overall, the thematic analysis revealed sharply contrasting portrayals. In other words, *Te Ao Māori News* and the *NZ Herald* told two very different stories about Protect Ihumātao. *Te Ao Māori News* centred Māori voices, celebrated **kaitiakitanga** and **mana motuhake**, and cast the protest as a cultural and spiritual resurgence

The *NZ Herald*, by contrast, depicted Protect Ihumātao as conflict-driven, sidelined Māori voices, and portrayed protestors as threatening public order. While these divergent narratives reflect media bias, they also shape the wider public debate and, as such, inform the extent of a shared national identity and prospects for environmental justice in **Aotearoa**. Acting as catalysts of cultural reinforcement, news outlets have the power to maintain, narrow, or expand the rift between Indigenous and settler-colonial narratives, with negative framing most likely to intensify separation (Harding, 2007).

**Te Ao Māori News**

The thematic analysis brought to light that *Te Ao Māori News* foregrounded Māori voices, conveyed resilience and hope through positivity, and cast activists as taking collective responsibility in accordance with Māori culture and self-determination.

*Te Ao Māori News* foregrounded Māori voices, drawing on a diverse range of speakers, including **rangatahi**, artists, **kaumātua**, activists, and **Kīngitanga** leaders. Doing so reflected the intergenerational and relational nature of Māori resistance.

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*Mana Motuhake: Collective authority to live by Māori law and determine futures from whakapapa—mana (inherent/earned spiritual authority) and motuhake (to stand distinct); at Ihumātao, a reactivation of ancestral authority to protect whenua and mauri.*

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*Kaumātua: Elders by mana and service, not age alone—repositories of mātauranga who steward relationships with karakia, counsel, and example; their presence anchors action in tikanga and intergenerational balance.*

While young Māori activists were portrayed as revitalising Indigenous narratives through art and political action (Flicker et al., 2014; Martineau, 2015), elders and cultural leaders were depicted as providing ancestral authority and spiritual grounding. For example, Ngāti Tahinga Wilson’s assertion—“We’re just here for our whenua and our king”—articulated the depth of obligation to **whakapapa** (Black, 2019a). By reporting on the presence of **Kīngi Tūheitia** and the invocation of the **Kīngitanga** legacy, *Te Ao Māori News* linked the protest to a broader whakapapa of Māori land rights and sovereignty movements

This depicted the protest not as an isolated dispute but as part of a generational continuum of resistance and cultural resurgence (Durie, 1998b; Smith, 2012; Takerei, 2019). *Te Ao Māori News* also amplified the voices of global Indigenous solidarity. For example, Hawaiian activist Dr Emalani Case was cited speaking of resonances between Ihumātao and Mauna Kea (Haimoana-Riki, 2019), highlighting trans-Indigenous connections grounded in *aloha ʻāina*<sup>5</sup> and **kaitiakitanga**. Foregrounding Indigenous voices served to present Protect Ihumātao not only as a national but also as an international kaupapa.

Moreover, *Te Ao Māori News* employed affirming language. Phrases like “peaceful resolution,” “generation rising,” and “protector” conveyed strength, care, and cultural responsibility. The term “protector” instead of “protestor” reframes resistance as an act of **kaitiakitanga** and preservation, not aggression—a framing seen across Indigenous movements such as Standing Rock and Mauna Kea (Godin, 2021; Grote & Johnson, 2021). These linguistic choices serve to inspire hope and optimism, convey resilience, and generate empathy and solidarity (McIntyre & Gibson, 2016). While *Te Ao Māori News* acknowledged political and cultural conflict, it focused on constructive responses, preferring to report on “dialogue,” “de-escalation,” and “resolution” over terminology that conveys confrontation. Such depictions positioned Ihumātao as a dignified, forward-looking movement grounded in non-violent resistance and cultural survival, a narrative echoed in Māori traditions of peaceful defiance, such as Parihaka<sup>6</sup> (Belich, 2013; Walker, 2004).

*Te Ao Māori News* embeds the Ihumātao protest within a Māori epistemological framework by weaving untranslated Māori words—**whenua, mana mokopuna, mana motuhake, whaikōrero, karanga, haka, waiata, pōuri te ngākau**—into articles otherwise written in English, thus reinforcing Māori ontologies (Anderson, 2018; Royal, 2007).

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*Mana Mokopuna: Sacred status and inherent authority of children as mokopuna (imprint of the source/spring); obliges whānau and systems to honour their voice, rights, and mauri—children as taonga tuku iho, not incomplete adults.*

*Whaikōrero: Formal oratory performed on the marae ātea (ritual forecourt, domain of Tūmatauenga); the speaker acts as māngai (mouthpiece), weaving whakapapa, tapu, and tikanga to bind relationships.*

*Karanga: Ceremonial calling by wāhine on the marae ātea, a reo wairua (spiritual voice) bridging ao wairua (spiritual) and*

<p>Reporting on rituals and <b>karakia</b> recasts Ihumātao as a <b>marae ātea</b>—a communal space for discussion and problem-solving.</p> <p><i>Te Ao Māori News</i> thus prioritised <b>tikanga</b> over spectacle and centred Indigenous knowledge. Unlike mainstream outlets that reduce culture to symbols (Alia, 1999, 2005), this way of reporting foregrounded <b>whakapapa, wairua, and mana whenua</b>, directly challenging colonial journalistic norms and asserting the right to Māori self-determination.</p>	<p><i>ao kikokiko</i> (physical), locating hosts and visitors within shared ancestry and purpose.</p> <p><b>Haka:</b> Often reduced to “dance” or “war dance,” haka is an embodied form of oratory that expresses collective emotion, identity, and purpose. It unites kupu (words), wairua (spirit), manawa (emotion), and tinana (body) to activate mauri (life force). Every haka carries whakapapa and kaupapa, giving physical form to values such as mana, tapu, and aroha. It can serve as protest, lament, celebration, or prayer—an act of ceremony and communication, not entertainment. To perform haka is to connect with tūpuna and affirm collective presence and sovereignty. The English “dance” strips away its legal, spiritual, and genealogical dimensions; in te ao Māori, haka is a living language of acknowledgement, resistance, remembrance, and renewal.</p> <p><b>Waiata:</b> Commonly translated as “song,” waiata are oral vessels of whakapapa, mātauranga (knowledge), and wairua. The kupu wai (water) and ata (form/reflection) evoke sound as a flowing mirror of feeling and ancestry. Waiata carry emotion and memory across generations—through waiata aroha (love songs), waiata tangi (laments), oriori (lullabies), and mōteatea (ancient chants). Singing waiata is an act of connection and restoration. It binds people to their tūpuna, whenua, and each other. Each performance reawakens mauri and maintains balance between past and present. “Song” fails to capture this relational power; waiata are living archives, breathing history and identity into the present.</p> <p><b>Pōuri te Ngākau:</b> Literally “the heart is heavy.” Pōuri (darkness, shadow) signals a sacred space for reflection and reconnection, while ngākau refers to the seat of spirit and emotion.</p> <p>Reporting on rituals and <b>prayer</b> recasts Ihumātao as a <b>communal space for discussion and problem-solving.</b></p> <p><b>Karakia:</b> Commonly translated as “prayer,” karakia are sacred invocations that connect the physical and spiritual realms through the power of spoken word. The kupu comes from kara (chant, incantation) and kia (to be or to make), signifying words that bring something into being. On the whenua, karakia restores connection and clears spiritual pathways; in moments of struggle or protest, it transforms resistance into ceremony. To retain the kupu karakia in te reo Māori preserves its depth as a living practice of creation, law, and care—speaking the world back into balance.</p> <p><b>Marae Ātea:</b> Threshold between realms and peoples—the juridical/ceremonial space where karanga and whaikōrero occur under tikanga; words here are acts that restore balance and reaffirm moral order.</p> <p><i>Te Ao Māori News</i> thus prioritised <b>traditional practices</b> over spectacle and centred Indigenous knowledge. Unlike mainstream outlets that reduce culture to symbols (Alia, 1999, 2005), this way of reporting foregrounded <b>physical and spiritual connections, and collective responsibility</b>, directly challenging colonial journalistic norms and asserting the right to Māori self-determination.</p> <p><b>Tikanga:</b> Traditional practices grounded in Māori values and customs.</p>
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Finally, coverage emphasised solidarity. As *Te Ao Māori News* equally reported on the grassroots “Hotty Station,” the Ka Mānu music video linking Ihumātao to global Indigenous struggles, and leadership authorities like **Kīngi Tūheitia**, Meng Foon, and **tamariki** guardians, it cast protesters as taking action because of their intergenerational responsibility to **whenua**, with their solidarity rooted in **tikanga**. By portraying participants as protectors, *Te Ao Māori News* connects the Protect Ihumātao to a lineage of peaceful Māori activism and affirmed decolonisation as an ongoing cultural praxis.

**NZ Herald**

The thematic analysis brought to light that, in contrast to *Te Ao Māori News*, the *NZ Herald* reporting on Protect Ihumātao highlighted conflict and power dynamics, showed the protest through a lens of negativity, and portrayed activists as a threat to public order, while sidelining Māori perspectives.

The *NZ Herald* reporting focused on tensions between the Government and Māori, particularly by depicting Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s refusal to visit Ihumātao (Jancic, 2019a), her reliance on **Kīngitanga** to mediate (Jancic, 2019b), and her insistence that resolution must come from **mana whenua** themselves (Jancic, 2019b).

Instead of casting Ardern’s actions as strategic restraint and respect for Indigenous self-determination, the *NZ Herald* portrayed them as avoidance strategies. Moreover, the Government’s temporary halt to building developments at Ihumātao and its role as facilitator were depicted as inadequate measures that met neither protestors’ calls for land return nor structural redress (Cheng, 2019). Quotes from Māori Ministers, such as Peeni Henare and Willie Jackson, were scant and selective. Henare was cited for criticising “murky” backroom deals while still affirming Labour’s position (Keall, 2019), and Jackson for defending Ardern’s decision not to visit (Jancic, 2019b), but neither served as a key informant to these *NZ Herald* news reports. Overall, the articles conveyed a government that endorsed Māori-led talks while stepping back from direct responsibility, and cast protesters as being left dissatisfied with the lack of substantive action.

The *NZ Herald’s* coverage leaned heavily on conflict-oriented terminology, with negative keywords dominating the reporting. Through the use of terms like “dramatic standoff,” “shambolic,” and “costly,” the *NZ Herald* depicted Protect Ihumātao as disorderly and cast protestors as irrational, disruptive, and opportunistic. Columnist Mike Hosking went so far as to ridicule the **kaupapa**, calling it “a distraction” and suggesting to protestors to “park yourself and wait for the

*Wairua: The connections between both the physical and spiritual realms.*

*Mana whenua: The people who not only have ancestral connections to that land, they also have a collective responsibility as kaitiaki to protect and care for their whenua and each other for the benefit of their tamariki and mokopuna.*

Finally, coverage emphasised solidarity. As *Te Ao Māori News* equally reported on the grassroots “Hotty Station,” the Ka Mānu music video linking Ihumātao to global Indigenous struggles, and leadership authorities like **King Tūheitia**, Meng Foon, and **guardians of children**, it cast protesters as taking action because of their intergenerational responsibility to **land**, with their solidarity rooted in **Māori protocols and customs**. By portraying participants as protectors, *Te Ao Māori News* connects the Protect Ihumātao to a lineage of peaceful Māori activism and affirmed decolonisation as an ongoing cultural praxis.

**NZ Herald**

The thematic analysis brought to light that, in contrast to *Te Ao Māori News*, the *NZ Herald* reporting on Protect Ihumātao highlighted conflict and power dynamics, showed the protest through a lens of negativity, and portrayed activists as a threat to public order, while sidelining Māori perspectives.

The *NZ Herald* reporting focused on tensions between the Government and Māori, particularly by depicting Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern’s refusal to visit Ihumātao (Jancic, 2019a), her reliance on **the Kīngitanga movement** to mediate (Jancic, 2019b), and her insistence that resolution must come from **the people with ancestral authority** themselves (Jancic, 2019b).

Instead of casting Ardern’s actions as strategic restraint and respect for Indigenous self-determination, the *NZ Herald* portrayed them as avoidance strategies. Moreover, the Government’s temporary halt to building developments at Ihumātao and its role as facilitator were depicted as inadequate measures that met neither protestors’ calls for land return nor structural redress (Cheng, 2019). Quotes from Māori Ministers, such as Peeni Henare and Willie Jackson, were scant and selective. Henare was cited for criticising “murky” backroom deals while still affirming Labour’s position (Keall, 2019), and Jackson for defending Ardern’s decision not to visit (Jancic, 2019b), but neither served as a key informant to these *NZ Herald* news reports. Overall, the articles conveyed a government that endorsed Māori-led talks while stepping back from direct responsibility, and cast protesters as being left dissatisfied with the lack of substantive action.

The *NZ Herald’s* coverage leaned heavily on conflict-oriented terminology, with negative keywords dominating the reporting. Through the use of terms like “dramatic standoff,” “shambolic,” and “costly,” the *NZ Herald* depicted Protect Ihumātao as disorderly and cast protestors as irrational, disruptive, and opportunistic. Columnist Mike Hosking went so far as to ridicule **Protect Ihumātao**, calling it “a distraction” and suggesting to protestors to “park yourself and wait for the

ministerial limousine with the bootload of cash” (Hosking, 2019, para. 10).

Hosking’s dismissal echoes long-standing colonial tropes that have repeatedly presented Māori activism as illegitimate and self-serving (McCreanor & Nairn, 2002). Also, public statements of solidarity with Ihumātao protectors—such as All Black TJ Perenara writing “Ihumātao” on his wristband—were cast in a negative light by citing regulations that demand players “do not involve themselves in conduct that may bring their employer, and the game, into disrepute” (Film star Julian Dennison, 2019, para 6), thus reinforcing the idea that Māori activism is disrespectful and unwelcome in mainstream national identity narratives.

Finally, the *NZ Herald* consistently centred police actions in its news reporting, portraying them as justified and necessary, often describing police officers as “being forced” to intervene. This positioned the police as neutral peacekeepers, obfuscating the colonial origins of the New Zealand police force as well as its genealogy of racially targeted policing (Norris et al., 2024). It also ignored the asymmetrical power relations between the Crown’s use of force and unarmed Māori protectors. In addition, the use of sensationalising language, such as “30 police cars at breakneck speed,” “manhandled,” and “rammed,” was designed to create, in the imagination of the reader, a spectacle of disorder while diminishing the peaceful, **tikanga-driven** nature of the Ihumātao protest.

Even when no arrests were made, the *NZ Herald* reports left the sheer scale of the police response largely unchallenged. When physical harm occurred, such as Pania Newton being struck by a gate, these were depicted as isolated incidents rather than patterns of state violence. Such uncontextualised representations perpetuate colonial narratives that cast legitimate protest as illegitimate obstruction and police presence as a symbol of order. In the rare instances that *NZ Herald* news reports criticised police action at Ihumātao, such criticism was instantly neutralised by statements that affirmed the legitimacy of state control.

### **Exposing the Fundamental Rift Between the Māori and Settler-Colonial Worldviews**

Although the study results—contrasting portrayals that reflect Indigenous versus European values—may seem predictable, they reveal a deep divide between Māori relational worldviews and the individualistic logics of colonial-capitalist systems. They expose the epistemic colonial violence embedded in journalistic practice—how media represses and distorts Māori ways of knowing and doing—even where ethics codes require fairness, balance, and avoidance of content that reinforces negative stereotypes, stigma, or unequal treatment (NZ Media Council, 2025).

Protect Ihumātao was more than political dissent; it exposed profound epistemic tensions between Māori settler-colonial worldviews (Hancock et al., 2020). These same tensions also

ministerial limousine with the bootload of cash” (Hosking, 2019, para. 10).

*Kaupapa: in this instance kaupapa refers to Ihumātao as the driving foundation and foreground of collective action.*

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Protect Ihumātao was more than political dissent; it exposed profound epistemic tensions between Māori settler-colonial worldviews (Hancock et al., 2020). These same tensions also

emerge from among the themes we identified in our findings, meaning that they were reproduced in divergent news reporting by *Te Ao Māori News* and the *NZ Herald*. Recognising journalism as an active site of power and cultural (re)production, news reports become harmful when they exert epistemic violence through distortion and thus legitimise direct violence (Buiten & Cresciani, 2023), including state violence. The authors argue that the *NZ Herald's* conflict-oriented narrative enacted epistemic violence by sidelining Māori environmental epistemologies, while *Te Ao Māori News's* **kaitiakitanga**-oriented narrative constitutes a form of epistemic resistance (Thompson, 2009; Winter, 2022). In doing so, our discussion adds to green cultural criminological dialogues aimed at decolonising environmental justice, because, for Māori, **whenua** is **tupuna**, alive with **mauri** and inseparable from **whakapapa**, **wairua**, and **tikanga** (Anderson, 2018). Environmental harm, therefore, encompasses not only environmental degradation but also the rupture of intergenerational relationships to **whenua**. By contrast, the individualist economic colonial-capitalist worldview frames land solely as property—a consumable commodity (Goyes, 2023; Goyes et al., 2021)—which means Ihumātao is understood as a mere legal dispute, and the protest as an interruption to state order.

The divergent reporting on Protect Ihumātao examined in this article highlights the profound disjunction between Māori and colonial worldviews. The *NZ Herald* drew on colonial assumptions, privileging colonial-legal and political authority through terms such as “standoff” and “illegal occupation” (Ihumātao tension, 2019). Its conflict-oriented narrative positioned the **kaupapa** as negative and disruptive to colonial order, narrowing public perception to confrontation with the state, obscuring the cultural, historical, and relational dimensions of resistance. The authors argue that the *NZ Herald's* overall reporting on Protect Ihumātao in August 2019 enacted epistemic violence by silencing Māori environmental ontologies, reducing the **kaupapa** to questions of legality according to nomocidal colonial laws (Giannacopoulos, 2024), and by focusing on the disruption of colonial encroachment (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016).

Further, the authors argue that *Te Ao Māori News* countered this erasure through epistemic resistance. Its coverage centred on tikanga, referring to participants as land protectors and **whenua** as **tupuna**. Where colonial framing saw illegality, Māori asserted **kaitiakitanga** and **whakapapa**.

*Te Ao Māori News*, by contrast, presented Protect Ihumātao as a **marae ātea**—a space of both **wero** and welcome—where kaitiakitanga is not merely reactive but proactive—a continuous practice of healing, remembering, and envisioning futures outside colonial frameworks.

By reporting on artists recording Ka Mānu in solidarity, on **tamariki** premiering Pipi Mā at the frontlines, and on **kaumātua** offering **karakia** under police observation—*Te Ao*

emerge from among the themes we identified in our findings, meaning that they were reproduced in divergent news reporting by *Te Ao Māori News* and the *NZ Herald*. Recognising journalism as an active site of power and cultural (re)production, news reports become harmful when they exert epistemic violence through distortion and thus legitimise direct violence (Buiten & Cresciani, 2023), including state violence. The authors argue that the *NZ Herald's* conflict-oriented narrative enacted epistemic violence by sidelining Māori environmental epistemologies, while *Te Ao Māori News's* **guardian**-oriented narrative constitutes a form of epistemic resistance (Thompson, 2009; Winter, 2022). In doing so, our discussion adds to green cultural criminological dialogues aimed at decolonising environmental justice, because, for Māori, **land** is **our ancestor**, alive with **life giving energy** and inseparable from **ancestral connections**, **spiritual essence**, and **protocols** (Anderson, 2018). Environmental harm, therefore, encompasses not only environmental degradation but also the rupture of intergenerational relationships to **land**. By contrast, the individualist economic colonial-capitalist worldview frames land solely as property—a consumable commodity (Goyes, 2023; Goyes et al., 2021)—which means Ihumātao is understood as a mere legal dispute, and the protest as an interruption to state order.

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*Wero: Ritual challenge that tests intent and invites integrity; a sacred encounter calling parties to stand in tika (rightness), clearing space for honesty, reconciliation, and new beginnings.*

By reporting on artists recording Ka Mānu in solidarity, on **children** premiering Pipi Mā at the frontlines, and on **elders** offering **prayer** under police observation—*Te Ao Māori News*

*Māori News* reinforced that care for the **whenua** is inseparable from cultural expression and intergenerational wellbeing.

By foregrounding positive narratives, *Te Ao Māori News* extended the scope of environmental justice to include healing, intergenerational survival, and a long-term vision for the entire **motu**. This aligns with the argument that decolonisation is as much a struggle against oppression as it is a celebration of endurance (Smith, 2012). Focusing on positivity in the reporting on Protect Ihumātao, *Te Ao Māori News* directed attention to **kaitiakitanga** as the core principle of environmental justice and contested mainstream media scripts of the protest as merely oppositional, thus enacting epistemic resistance.

Finally, the divergent reporting on Protect Ihumātao exposed a critical tension between cultural and political authority (Hancock et al., 2020). *Te Ao Māori News* highlighted that Māori understandings of environmental justice at the site rested on **tikanga: kaitiakitanga, manaaki, whakawhanaungatanga, and utu.**

The decision to involve the Kīngitanga was portrayed as signalling the collective assertion that a resolution must emerge from tikanga Māori rather than colonial law (“Ihumātao land protectors “energised” by Kīngitanga visit,” 2019). Such reporting emphasised restoration over punishment, **whakapapa** over ownership, and **mana** over bureaucracy.

The *NZ Herald*, on the other hand, reinforced state authority as the ultimate arbiter of order. By portraying police actions as responses to provocation, the narrative shifted blame onto protesters, implying they had instigated—and even self-inflicted—violence. By frequently presenting politicians and legal experts as the foremost authoritative voices, the *NZ Herald* diminished Māori political authority and autonomy, reducing **tikanga** to cultural expression rather than recognising its legal dimension. By dismissing **tikanga** as mere cultural practice rather than law (NZ Law Commission, 2001), the *NZ Herald* left colonial-capitalist hegemony unchallenged, even though Māori legal orders carry real authority over **whenua** Māori (NZ Law Commission, 2001).

At Ihumātao, cultural authority was not ancillary to political or legal resolution; it formed the foundation of justice itself. In sum, the divergence in news reporting exemplifies how

reinforced that care for the **land** is inseparable from cultural expression and intergenerational wellbeing.

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*Manaaki: Ethic of uplifting others’ mana (mana and aki “to lift”) through generosity, humility, reciprocity—socially and ecologically (manaaki te whenua); obligation, not charity; heartbeat of tikanga.*

*Whakawhanaungatanga: The active work of recognising, building, and honouring relationships—human and more-than-human—through pepeha, stories, kai, and care; a sacred, enduring commitment to mutual wellbeing beyond instrumental “networking.”*

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*Tikanga: Traditional foundation of te ao Māori that is used to shape values and act as a guide for how we live and relate to each other and the world we all live in.*

At Ihumātao, cultural authority was not ancillary to political or legal resolution; it formed the foundation of justice itself. In sum, the divergence in news reporting exemplifies how

environmental justice at Ihumātao cannot be understood through a colonial-capitalist lens alone but requires recognition of Indigenous law and authority (Hancock et al., 2020)

These findings stress the necessity and importance of the recently released Te Tiriti Framework for Newsmedia (Rankine et al., 2002), commissioned by Irirangi te Motu/ NZ on Air, New Zealand's independent government funding agency that invests in locally made public media — TV, radio, music and online — to reflect and develop the identity and culture of Aotearoa. The framework is a practical guide that helps news organisations align reporting, governance, and practice with the principles of Te Tiriti, centring Māori rights, perspectives, and partnership. The guidelines are designed as a starting point for outlets, like the *NZ Herald*, to develop a tailored Tiriti strategy that fits their context and audience.

### Overall Discussion

The authors examined how *Te Ao Māori News* and the *NZ Herald* constructed meaning around Protect Ihumātao. Our analysis shows that journalism is not a neutral observer but an active site of power and cultural (re)production, corroborating green cultural criminology assertions that contemporary environmental battles are fought out in the press (Bisman & South, 2014, p. 27). Who wins and who loses these battles is not a mere question of ideology but has real-life effects, because the stories that media tell about **whenua**, **kaitiakitanga**, and environmental harm, “we store away in our consciousness to be used when we make decisions in our everyday lives” (Bisman & South, 2014, p. 29).

While *Te Ao Māori News*, grounded in **te ao Māori**, positioned land as a living ancestor and protesters as guardians of future generations, the *NZ Herald*, rooted in Western liberal paradigms, reduced **whenua** to property and protesters to disrupters, reinforcing state authority and sidelining Māori perspectives.

From a green cultural criminology perspective (Brisman & South, 2014), the *NZ Herald* coverage perpetuated environmental injustice by sidelining and distorting Māori environmental epistemology and by obfuscating the slow and ongoing violence of colonisation. The “story stowed away” portrays Māori as unnecessarily blocking progress and as acting out of greed and self-interest. *Te Ao Māori News*, by contrast, foregrounded kaitiakitanga and whakapapa, portraying Protect Ihumātao as a reclamation of order and justice. The “story stowed away” is a hopeful vision for humanity: that collective responsibility and peaceful unity to protect **whenua** can secure a better future for all. While the distinctly different Indigenous approaches to environmental justice have been well documented in the international literature, and the conceptual fusion of green criminology and Indigenous rights is visible across academic and policy writing, we note that an Indigenous green criminology is still lacking a canonical manifesto. We therefore argue it may be time to consider the development of a distinct Indigenous green criminology—co-produced with Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders, and communities—to generate methodological standards, and praxis-oriented frameworks that centre Indigenous sovereignties,

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epistemologies, and legal orders in analyses of environmental harm.

In settler-colonial jurisdictions like Aotearoa, environmental harm cannot be separated from colonial violence (Goyes, 2023). The authors argue that the desecration of land, the displacement of **tangata whenua**, and the silencing of Indigenous voices, which advocate for intergenerational environmental justice, constitute colonial violence that is normalised through state institutions and by mainstream news media.

Confronting such environmental harm requires epistemic realignment: recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems that have long sustained land and sea. *Te Ao Māori News* embodies media that are accountable to **whenua** and **whakapapa** rather than to power and profit. By framing Ihumātao in terms of restoration instead of obstruction, *Te Ao Māori News* highlights that intergenerational environmental justice necessitates grounding in **tikanga**. Māori are not stakeholders but **kaitiaki**, genealogically bound to **whenua**.

Furthermore, the authors argue that not only are colonial violence and environmental harm intertwined in Aotearoa, but this colonial violence can become epistemic in mainstream news media portrayals of Indigenous resistance to environmental harm. This study also illustrates that Indigenous media are sites of epistemic and environmental resistance (Ross, 2025) when journalists assert **tikanga**-based authority in public narratives.

### Conclusion

The **kaupapa** at Ihumātao did not stand alone. As *Te Ao Māori News* highlighted, support flowed from Indigenous communities around the world—from Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i to Standing Rock protectors in Turtle Island.

**Haka** performed by Māori abroad, the global circulation of **waiata**, and the invocation of ancestral ties connected Ihumātao to a planetary resistance against environmental colonialism.

Its global impact makes Ihumātao significant as a subject of study in green criminology. It is not merely a case of national land protest. It is part of a global constellation of Indigenous-led environmental movements that are grounded in relational law, ancestral obligation, and restorative ethics (for examples, see Lobo et al., 2024). In this sense, **tikanga** Māori and **kaitiakitanga** are not only relevant to Aotearoa—they contribute to global environmental justice and praxis. Indigenous philosophies are not supplements to Western colonial frameworks, but frameworks in their own right. The voices from Ihumātao, as amplified by *Te Ao Māori News*, show us what epistemic resistance looks like. They are grounded in **whenua**, **wairua**, and **whakapapa**, and they demonstrate that intergenerational environmental justice is not a technocratic solution, but a cultural and spiritual rebirth.

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Furthermore, the authors argue that not only are colonial violence and environmental harm intertwined in Aotearoa, but this colonial violence can become epistemic in mainstream news media portrayals of Indigenous resistance to environmental harm. This study also illustrates that Indigenous media are sites of epistemic and environmental resistance (Ross, 2025) when journalists assert **custom**-based authority in public narratives.

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<sup>1</sup> The macron was omitted from the keyword because some website-specific search engines may not handle macrons well unless configured to do so, which can lead to incomplete search results.

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<sup>5</sup> Aloha āina (love and respect for the land) is a distinct Kānaka Maoli/Indigenous Hawaiian term that unifies **love** and **guardianship** into a unique cultural concept.

*Aroha: Active, relational ethic (aro—turn toward; hā—breath of life) that uplifts others' mana through generosity, humility, reciprocity; powers manaakitanga and sustains kaitiakitanga and whanaungatanga—far beyond sentiment.*

<sup>6</sup> The pacifist Māori settlement of Parihaka was invaded by Crown troops on 5 November 1881. Despite residents remaining peaceful, troops looted and destroyed homes and crops, killed livestock, and forcibly removed residents.

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## Appendix

### Glossary

<b>aroha</b>	love, compassion, empathy
<b>atua</b>	an ancestor with continuing influence, a supernatural embodiment of the environment and natural elements, deity
<b>haka</b>	a ceremonial dance or challenge
<b>hapū</b>	subtribe; extended kinship group descended from a common ancestor
<b>hauora</b>	to be fit, well and healthy
<b>hīkoi</b>	land march
<b>iwi</b>	tribe, people
<b>kai</b>	food, to eat
<b>kaitiaki</b>	guardian, custodian or protector
<b>kaitiakitanga</b>	guardianship; sacred duty to protect the environment and cultural heritage
<b>karakia</b>	prayer or incantation; used for spiritual grounding and protection
<b>karanga</b>	ceremonial call; expression of spiritual connection and welcome
<b>kaumātua</b>	elder(s)
<b>kaupapa</b>	the journeying, purpose, principle, or cause; the driving foundation of collective action
<b>kaupapa Māori</b>	a research, philosophical, and practice-based framework grounded in Māori worldviews, values, and tikanga
<b>kaupapa tuku iho</b>	intergenerational purpose
<b>Kīngitanga</b>	commenced in the 1850s, culminating in Pōtatau Te Wherowhero being appointed the first Māori King. It was initiated to stop land loss, maintain law and public order, and promote traditional values
<b>Kīngi Tūheitia</b>	The Māori King
<b>kupu Māori</b>	Māori words
<b>mahi</b>	work
<b>mana</b>	authority, prestige, spiritual power; sourced from whakapapa and upheld through action
<b>manaakitanga</b>	hospitality, care, and generosity expressed in action
<b>mana mokopuna</b>	intergenerational responsibility to future generations
<b>mana motuhake</b>	autonomy, independence, self-determination; especially in governance and identity
<b>mana whenua</b>	authority over ancestral lands and responsibilities tied to that place
<b>māngai</b>	spokesperson, representative
<b>marae ātea</b>	open space or public forum; area in front of a wharenui where whaikōrero (speeches and debate) are performed
<b>maramataka</b>	Māori lunar calendar, lunar cycle

<b>mātauranga</b>	knowledge
<b>mātauranga Māori</b>	Māori knowledge
<b>mauri</b>	life principle, life force, vital essence
<b>moana</b>	sea, ocean
<b>mokopuna</b>	grandchild / grandchildren; symbolic of future generations
<b>motu</b>	country
<b>pā</b>	fortified village
<b>Papatūānuku</b>	Our Earth Mother
<b>pepeha</b>	a traditional form of introduction that expresses cultural identity and relationship to people and places of significance
<b>pipi</b>	a shellfish found just below the surface of sandy harbour flats
<b>Pipi Mā</b>	a toy franchise of the world's first 100% Māori speaking dolls
<b>pōuri te ngākau</b>	with a sad heart
<b>rāhui</b>	temporary restrictions put in place for the protection of land, water and people
<b>rangatahi</b>	youth, the younger generation
<b>rangatiratanga</b>	chieftainship, leadership grounded in whakapapa and cultural values
<b>tamariki</b>	children; the heart of intergenerational care
<b>tangata whenua</b>	people of the land; people born of that whenua with ancestral rights and responsibilities
<b>taonga</b>	treasure; includes language, land, and sacred knowledge
<b>tapu</b>	sacred
<b>tauiwi</b>	non-Māori
<b>te ao Māori</b>	the Māori world
<b>Te Pāti Māori</b>	The Māori Party
<b>te reo Māori</b>	the Māori language
<b>te taiao</b>	the natural environment
<b>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</b>	Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori version that claims our chiefly authority
<b>tikanga</b>	customs, protocols, correct practice rooted in Māori values
<b>tino rangatiratanga</b>	absolute sovereignty and self-determination; as promised in Te Tiriti o Waitangi
<b>tupuna</b>	ancestor
<b>tūpuna</b>	ancestors
<b>uri whakaheke</b>	descendants
<b>utu</b>	restorative balance and harmony in relationships
<b>wāhi tapu</b>	sacred sites or places
<b>wahine</b>	woman
<b>wai</b>	water
<b>waiata</b>	song / sing; tools for storytelling, remembrance, and resistance
<b>wairua</b>	the spiritual essence or soul of a person; integral part of Māori being

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<b>wānanga</b>	to meet and discuss issues of importance, a school of learning
<b>wero</b>	challenge
<b>whaikōrero</b>	formal speech, to make a formal speech, oratory
<b>whakapapa</b>	genealogy, ancestral lineage; foundation of identity and authority
<b>whakawhanaungatanga</b>	the act of relationship building
<b>whānau</b>	family, extended family; unit of social and cultural strength
<b>whare wānanga</b>	a school of learning
<b>whenua</b>	land; not property but a living ancestor tied to identity and belonging