Protest, Protection, Perception:
How New Zealand's Mainstream and Māori Media Portray the Ihumātao Dispute

by

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Acknowledgements

I recognise Ihumātao — ancient, persistent. You stand — grieving, resisting, remembering. May your mauri endure; your stories resonate in the pulse of your descendants.

I acknowledge my iwi, Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki, and my hapū, Te Whānau-a-Taupara, because their stories, our stories, are the foundation of my strength and resilience. This work has been inspired by and grounded in a history of resistance, land, and legacy from which this work originates and is situated. That was the foundation for this work, a continuation of their kōrero and a homage to the whenua, the people, and the lasting legacy of those who came before.

To my parents, thank you for grounding me in aroha and whakapapa, holding space for my goals, and never letting me forget where I come from. Thank you to my partner for journeying with me through each hurdle and for the silent strength that made this possible. And to my son, your light has guided me through the darkest nights. You are why I write, why I resist, and why I believe in a better future.

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And to all of those who stand beside and behind me, seen and unseen – aku mihi maioha.

Abstract

The media play a vital role in shaping public perceptions of Indigenous peoples and our movements, often advancing colonial frameworks through dominant Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) narratives. This thesis investigates how Māori kaitiaki (guardians, protectors) involved in the 'Protect Ihumātao' movement were portrayed by Māori news media and mainstream media in Aotearoa New Zealand, and considers the implications of these portrayals for public understanding of Māori, Māori sovereignty, and environmental protection.

Utilising a qualitative research approach, a comparative case study design, and thematic analysis, data was collected during the peak of the Ihumātao protest in August 2019. The analysis included 29 news items from Te Ao Māori News, which captured a Māori worldview, and 30 articles from NZ Herald, representing mainstream, Pākehā, and Tauiwi (non-Māori) perspectives.

The study found that Te Ao Māori News focuses on Māori voices, positivity, grounding in being Māori, self-determination, solidarity, rangatiratanga (chieftainship), and advocacy. In contrast, the NZ Herald's reporting focused on negativity, power, politicisation, and the role of the police. Te Ao Māori News presents those at Ihumātao as protectors—kaitiaki — standing for whenua (land) and whakapapa (genealogy, ancestry). At the same time, the NZ Herald more often portrays them as protesters by foregrounding confrontation and emphasising the presence of police, which subtly presents the protest as a potential threat requiring control. These contrasting depictions do more than describe; they reflect the underlying forces that shape how stories are told, rooted in cultural worldviews, the expectations of different readerships, and the institutional values that guide journalistic practice. They demonstrate how different sources frame not only the events themselves but also the very meaning of Māori presence, environmental protection, Indigenous sovereignty, and the broader movement for Indigenous rights.

The results demonstrate the media's significant contribution to framing how the public perceives sociopolitical issues, such as Māori land protests in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study serves as a reminder to many: the media shapes perception. This is about whose voices are amplified, whose stories are legitimised, and whose truths are ignored. Aotearoa New Zealand cannot uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi and silence Indigenous peoples. That is why Māori news media must fulfil a counterpoint role to mainstream media. A subsequent inquiry could examine the increasing role of social media, where stories escape newsroom confines and where Indigenous voices are finding new means to be heard, shared, and amplified.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed:

Date: 26/06/2025

Glossary

aroha	love, compassion, empathy
atua	an ancestor with continuing influence, a supernatural embodiment of the environment and natural elements, deity
haka	ceremonial dance or challenge
hapū	subtribe; extended kinship group descended from a common ancestor
hau kāinga	home people; local community with custodianship of ancestral lands
hui	meeting or gathering; especially for deliberation and shared purpose
iwi	tribe, people
kai	food, to eat
kaimoana	seafood
kaitiaki	guardian or protector
kaitiakitanga	guardianship; sacred duty to protect the environment and cultural heritage
kanohi-ki-te-kanohi	face-to-face
karakia	prayer or incantation; used for spiritual grounding and protection
karanga	ceremonial call; expression of spiritual connection and welcome
kaumātua	elder(s)
kaupapa Māori	a research, philosophical, and practice-based framework grounded in Māori worldviews, values, and tikanga
kaupapa	purpose, principle, or cause; the driving foundation of collective action
Kīngitanga	Māori King movement
Koroneihana	The anniversary of the anointing of the King or Queen
kotahitanga	unity and solidarity; a principle that upholds collective strength
kupu Māori	Māori words

mana mokopuna	intergenerational responsibility to future generations
mana motuhake	autonomy, independence, self-determination; especially in governance and identity
mana whenua	authority over ancestral lands and responsibilities tied to that place
mana	authority, prestige, spiritual power; sourced from whakapapa and upheld through action
manaakitanga	hospitality, care, and generosity expressed in action
Māoritanga	Māori culture, customs, and worldview
marae ātea	open space or public forum; area in front of a wharenui where whaikōrero (speeches and debate) are performed
mātauranga Māori	Māori knowledge
moana	sea
moko	an imprint on the skin that represents life stories, experiences, events and lineage
moko kauae	traditional marking for Māori females that represents lineage, identity and status. The male facial equivalent is mataora
mokopuna	grandchild / grandchildren; symbolic of future generations
ngahere	forest; natural environment with spiritual and ancestral significance
pā	village
Pākehā	New Zealander of European descent
pono	true, genuine, fair
rangatahi	youth
rangatiratanga	chieftainship, leadership grounded in whakapapa and cultural values
reo	language, especially te reo Māori; central to cultural identity
rohe	boundary, region, area, territory
tamariki	children; the heart of intergenerational care
tangata whenua	people of the land; with ancestral rights and responsibilities

taonga	treasure; includes language, land, and sacred knowledge
tapu	sacred
taumata	summit or high level position
Te reo Māori	the Māori language
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori version that claims our chiefly authority
tika	accurate, correct, right
tikanga	customs, protocols, correct practice rooted in Māori values
tino rangatiratanga	absolute sovereignty and self-determination; as promised in Te Tiriti o Waitangi
tūpuna / tupuna maunga	ancestors / ancestral mountains
tūpuna whenua	ancestral land
urupā	burial ground
waerea	protective chant to clear space spiritually
wahine	woman
waiata	song / sing; tools for storytelling, remembrance, and resistance
wairua	spiritual essence or soul; integral part of Māori being
whaikōrero	formal speech, to make a formal speech, oratory
whakapapa	genealogy, ancestral lineage; foundation of identity and authority
whakawhanaungatanga	the act of relationship building
whānau	family, extended family; unit of social and cultural strength
whanaungatanga	relationship building, kinship ties; maintaining interconnectedness
whenua	land; not property but a living ancestor tied to identity and belonging

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Ka whawhai tonu mātou mō te āke, āke, āke!"

We will continue to fight forevermore!

A call to action that echoes through the colonial past of Aotearoa New Zealand, expressing enduring Māori resistance and determination (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024a, para. 1). First spoken in the aftermath of the Waikato Wars, the phrase has come to symbolise the struggle against land dispossession, cultural degradation, and the erosion of Māori independence. It is unclear as to whether it was first said by Kīngi Tukāroto Matutaera Pōtatau Te Wherowhero Tāwhiao, Rewi Maniapoto of Ngāti Maniapoto or Wiremu Tamihana of Ngāti Hauā (NZ History, 2021a; Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024a). However, it is now a call to movement, such as Protect Ihumātao, fighting against the commodification and urbanisation of ancestral land. The news media are a powerful shaper of public opinion, and the way that these protests are depicted is important. There remains a tendency in colonising discourses to frame Māori and other Indigenous protesters as agitators and lawless, in an attempt to discredit Indigenous resistance (A. Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2023).

Coverage by the news media is essential in informing the public about what is happening in various communities, highlighting important issues, and providing solutions to the problems presented (Entman, 1993). As McCombs and Shaw (1972) posit in their agenda-setting theory, the media cannot instruct audiences on how to think, but they can inform people about what to think. In the process, the media plays a significant role in shaping public knowledge of social facts through stories that construct meaning and values within social discourses (Fung & Scheufele, 2014). However, there are still many problems with the representation of minority populations, especially Indigenous peoples. Studies demonstrate that media representations of Indigenous peoples often reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate colonial relations of power (Burns & Shor, 2021; A. Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2023; Taira, 2009). These representations bring about considerable division between the 'us' – the powerful Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) – and the 'them' – Māori – and work to perpetuate and replicate social disparities (Cook, 2021; Taira, 2009).

This thesis considers the way news media in Aotearoa New Zealand report Māori kaitiaki (guardians) protesting in defence of whenua (land). Of particular interest is the case study of the 'Protect Ihumātao' protest movement that occurred between 2016 and 2021. Ihumātao, or Te Ipu-a-Mataoho (the bowl of Mataoho) (Makaurau Marae, 2024), a sacred site

for Te Ahiwaru (Waikato-Tainui)[1], Te Ākitai Waiohua[2], Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki[3], Ngāti Te Ata[4], Ngāti Tamaoho[5], and Te Kawerau ā Maki[6], became a focal point of national attention when Fletcher Building Limited sought to develop 32 hectares of the whenua for a housing project (Bhatt, 2020). Poignant in light of the land's deep cultural and ecological meaning, driven by local Māori, and supported by a broad coalition of activists and environmentalists, this protest underlined the consequences of colonial-era land dispossession that persist today (Mika et al., 2022).

This thesis examines the representation of kaitiaki in the mainstream media of Aotearoa New Zealand, in comparison to that of Māori media, and the impact of such representation on public attitudes towards Māori land protests. Non-Pākehā perspectives were found to be marginalised by mainstream media and represented in ways that reinforce harmful discourses of colonisation (McCreanor et al., 2010; A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Stuart, 2003). Media representations serve as an instrument of social marginalisation of Māori (Hodgetts et al., 2004)

[1] The ancestral lands of Waikato-Tainui extend from the southern entrance of the Manukau Harbour in the north to the Mokau River in the south (NZ History, 2024c).

[2] Te Puni Kōkiri (2024b) describe that the Te Ākitai Waiohua boundary starts at Otakanini Pā in South Kaipara, near a creek flowing into Kaipara Harbour, south of Aotea Bluff. It extends east to Puhoi, then directly to the coast north of Wenderholm Regional Park. The boundary continues south along the Eastern Coast, excluding the Hauraki islands, reaching Tapapakanga Regional Park on the Firth of Thames. It then crosses the Hunua Ranges, including Clevedon, Wairoa, Papakura, Drury, and Ararimu, proceeding to Mangatawhiri and Pokeno. From Pokeno, it follows to Tuakau and Onewhero along the left bank of the Waikato River, then turns to Tuhimata and Pukekohe to Port Waikato. To the north, Awhitu, Maioro, and Waiuku are Patumahoe, Karaka, Manurewa, Clendon, Mangere, Onehunga, Hillsborough, and the islands of Manukau Bay, such as Puketutu Island. Finally, the boundary reaches Auckland Central, including eastern suburbs and Meadowbank, before moving west to the Waitakere Ranges and returning to Otakanini Pā.

[3] Te Puni Kōkiri (2024c) explain that their boundary begins at the summit of Kohukohunui maunga in the Hunua Ranges. From there, it extends to Otata, located on Aotea (Great Barrier Island). It then stretches to Kawau Island and moves south to Te Onewa, near the Harbour Bridge. The boundary continues along State Highway 1 until it reaches Mangatawhiri. Finally, it loops north to Kohukohunui, completing the outline of the Ngāi Tai rohe (tribal area).

[4] The tribal rohe of Ngāti Te Ata begins at the mouth of the Waikato River and extends west to the Kaipara Harbour (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024d). From the Kaipara, the boundary moves north to Mangawhai, then proceeds east from Mangawhai to Waitakaruru-Piako. It continues south to Pukekawa and returns to the mouth of the Waikato River. The territory includes waterways such as the Tasman Sea, the southern shores of the Kaipara Harbour, Waitematā Harbour, Manukau Harbour, and the Waikato River. Key landmarks within the rohe are Puketapu, Maungawhau (Mount Eden), Maungakiekie (One Tree Hill), Maungarei (Mount Wellington), Matukutūreia (McLaughlins Mountain), and the Hunua Ranges.

[5] The kaitiaki responsibilities of Ngāti Tamaoho are concentrated primarily in the South Auckland and Northern Waikato regions, including Papakura, Karaka, Opāheke, Ramarama, Bombay, Pukekohe, Waiuku, and the Awhitu Peninsula (Te Puni Kōkiri, 2024e). The area also encompasses Te Puuaha o Waikato, Southern Hunua, and Te Paina/Mercer towards Meremere. In addition, Ngāti Tamaoho has an RMA project in central Auckland, particularly the city, the old harbour, and the islands of Tīkapa, Rangitoto, Motutapu, and Tiritiri Matangi.

[6] The ancestral and customary interests of Te Kawerau ā Maki include Hikurangi, their heartland in West Auckland, and extends to the Auckland Isthmus, North Shore, Whangaparāoa, Mahurangi, Pakiri, southern Kaipara, and the Gulf Islands of Kawau, Hauturu ō Toi (Little Barrier Island), and Tiriti Mātangi (Te Kawerau ā Maki, 2024). Rooted in Hikurangi and the Ngā Rau Pou ā Maki in the Waitākere Ranges, this iwi has maintained strong ties with various iwi for over 400 years, preserving connections to their whenua (land), moana (seas), and taonga (treasures).

and aid in cementing that Māori are deviant and inherently opposed to state power (Cook, 2021; A. Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2023). Such representations conceal that issues of Māori concern deserve consideration and encode the Māori struggle for land and sovereignty as one of law and order.

The thesis is structured as follows. This chapter – the Introduction – briefly summarises the historical context of Māori land loss and resistance, overviews the timeline of the 'Protect Ihumātao' movement, positions the researcher to the research topic, and outlines the research questions and objectives. Chapter Two reviews the literature on Indigenous relationships with land, Te Ao Māori, the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand (including Māori land loss, displacement, and marginalisation), Indigenous land protests, and media portrayals of Indigenous peoples and their influence on public opinion. Chapter Three presents a qualitative research design through a thematic analysis of media reporting and a case study comparison involving Te Ao Māori News and NZ Herald in August 2019. Chapter Four presents and discusses the results from each case study, synthesising them under three overarching themes: Māori vs Western Worldview; Positivity vs Negativity; and Cultural vs Political. It is discussed how these themes may affect media audiences, the public's understanding of 'Protect Ihumātao' specifically, and more generally, Māori land rights and sovereignty. Chapter Five covers the conclusions drawn from the analysis. It includes a reflection on the cultural and ideological orientations of Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald.

This thesis reveals that Te Ao Māori News portrays 'Protect Ihumātao' from a community-centred perspective rooted in Māori principles. At the same time, the NZ Herald emphasises individualism and stresses political accountability from a Eurocentric perspective. The analysis underscores the importance of a diverse media landscape in Aotearoa New Zealand, where Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Te Tiriti o Waitangi is the Māori version of the Treaty of Waitangi that claims our chiefly authority) enshrines the rights of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous rights can only be protected when Indigenous perspectives and voices are represented in the mass media, allowing them to be understood accurately and garner public support. As such, Māori news media still provide a counterweight to mainstream media in Aotearoa New Zealand. Future research may need to explore how social media impacts the circulation of these stories and to what extent different media representations of Māori land protests influence the attitudes and beliefs of New Zealanders.

1.1. Historical Context: Māori Land Loss and Resistance

The scope of the protest at Protect Ihumātao must be understood within the historical continuum of Māori resistance and land dispossession, beginning with the European arrival in Aotearoa between 1250 and 1300 AD (Walker, 2004). Rather than conceptualising the land as an accessible resource, Māori understood it to be a significant social, cultural, and spiritual consequence, as it formed an integral part of our sense of self and worldview (King, 2003). Māori associated our ancestors, atua (deity), and future generations through whakapapa (genealogy), a concept that resonated throughout the land. This in-built connection to whakapapa forms the basis of Māori protest against land dispossession. However, that attachment was severely disrupted by the arrival of Europeans in the 17th century, particularly by episodes such as the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840, which many regard as the origins of the mass dispossession of Māori land (Mahuika, 2019).

Te Tiriti o Waitangi aimed to establish a partnership between Māori and the British Crown, primarily through Article Two, which affirms Māori tino rangatiratanga (absolute sovereignty) over whenua, ngahere (forest), and taonga (Orange, 2020). However, including pre-emption rights in the English translation utterly changed the landscape. It granted the Crown sole purchasing rights over Māori land, thereby establishing a method of large-scale land acquisition (Belich, 2002). Māori were, for the most part, forced or coerced to yield land, actions later proven to be illegal (Orange, 2020). Given that Māori retained, according to the Māori text of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the right to rangatiratanga (leadership), the differences between the Māori and the English version of the Treaty have led to a continuing controversy (Belich, 2002). Meanwhile, the Crown has established the legal basis for dispossession and gradually eroded fundamental rights over time.

The turning point that brought about the end of Māori land ownership was marked by the Native Lands Act 1862, which established the Native Land Court and legalised private transactions of Māori and settler land (NZ History, 2024a), and the Native Lands Act 1865, which transformed customary communal holdings into individual title (NZ History, 2021b). They undermined the communal landholding institutions that formed the basis of Māori identity and joint land stewardship responsibility. They achieved this by accelerating land transactions into the hands of settlers using individualised property titles (Carpenter, 2019). With this, it would be even more unachievable for Māori to support claimed rights to the land collectively. The change in Māori systems of land management directly contravened the Māori tradition of shared responsibility. It resulted in significant losses (Orange, 2020), promoting

extensive settler land acquisition and leaving Māori with only a fraction of our ancestors' lands by the late 19th century. The New Zealand Wars of the 1860s accelerated this decline as Māori battled to protect our whenua but eventually were forced to cede considerable portions to the settler government as reparation (Belich, 2013).

Māori resistance to land confiscation tells a long story of the various tactics employed. Protests included armed conflicts with the Crown and settlers, mass protest marches and court cases. Māori warriors fought the Crown's advance throughout the New Zealand Wars (Belich, 2013). These wars led to a wave of land grabbing that deepened the wounds of past grievances (Belich, 2013).

In the mid-twentieth century, Māori resistance developed into a coherent national protest movement for land rights. The 1975 Land March, led by Dame Whina Cooper, marked a watershed in Māori political activity, heralding a new era (Bates, 2014). In many ways, it was a direct response to ongoing alienation. Her 'Not one more acre' battle cry captured Māori determination to reclaim ancestral lands as she marched from Te Hāpua to Parliament (Bates, 2014). It was a historical march, unifying nationwide voices and making the long and arduous struggle for Māori land rights loud, thus opening future avenues for protests and activism. One of the early protests following the Land March was the occupation of Bastion Point between 1977 and 1978 (Harris, 2004). Over the years, as their territory was being eroded section by section, Ngāti Whātua ki Ōrākei rebelled against the Crown's encroachment on their ancestral territories. Because it highlighted the injustices that Māori continued to encounter in our fight for land rights, it became a pivotal moment in the history of Aotearoa New Zealand (Walker, 2004). Although it resulted in many arrests, it also raised awareness of Māori land issues and the need for compensation.

In 1997, the High Court ruled that once the Crown had purchased dry land, Māori customary interests in the foreshore in front of it were lost and that the Crown had always owned the seabed. The Court of Appeal overturned this decision and directed the Māori Land Court to hear the case. Before Māori could have their day in court, the government passed the Foreshore and Seabed Act 2004 that proclaimed the Crown owner of the foreshore and seabed except for privately owned parts (Hickford, 2015).

1.2. A timeline of 'Protect Ihumātao'

The Ihumātao protest of 2016 highlighted the ongoing struggles within Māori communities to secure land rights. Ihumātao, on Manukau Harbour's shores, has served as a reservoir of

cultural and historical value to locals, and in particular, Te Ahiwaru, Te Ākitai Waiohua, Ngāi Tai ki Tāmaki, Ngāti Te Ata, Ngāti Tamaoho, and Te Kawerau ā Maki, as an ancient settlement that is tapu (sacred) to mana whenua (authority over ancestral lands and responsibilities tied to that place) (Bhatt, 2020). The Protect Ihumātao protest is a testament to the ongoing battles for Māori land and cultural preservation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Stone gardens, pā (villages), and urupā (burial ground) form the tapestry of Ihumātao, serving as living proof of the ancestral relationship that exists between Māori and the land, as well as containing multiple archaeological entities of early settlement (Malva, 2018).

The dispossession started in 1863 when British and New Zealand troops used force to remove Māori from Ihumātao, whenua that had been under their stewardship for approximately 800 years (O'Malley, 2016). According to O'Malley (2019), the confiscation of Ihumātao in 1863 was one of many attempts by British and New Zealand troops to target Māori communities supportive of the Kīngitanga (Māori King Movement) in Waikato. Although Māori in Ihumātao and other South Auckland settlements had cared for and defended Auckland settlers for decades, they were accused of planning to attack its inhabitants, an assertion used to justify the use of force (O'Malley, 2019). After an ultimatum from the Crown, Māori were expelled by force from their homes, and many of them joined whānau (family) in Waikato. At the same time, soldiers burned down houses, ransacked belongings, and took possession of livestock. After the Waikato invasion of the 1860s, the Crown confiscated land from Māori and granted part of it to the Wallace family (Stuff, 2019), who farmed it for 150 years, severing those links between mana whenua and whenua (Malva, 2018). The unjustified confiscation was declared as such by a Royal Commission in 1927 and the Waitangi Tribunal in 1985. This action denied generations of Māori their land and jurisdiction (O'Malley, 2019). In 2007, the Manukau City Council aimed to protect the land by classifying it as part of the Ōtuataua Stonefields Historic Reserve, as it is of significant cultural value (Doyle, 2018). Proposals to rezone the land at Ihumātao and designate it as a Special Housing Area under the 2012 Housing Accords legislation, provoked strong resistance from mana whenua and heritage groups (Hobbs, 2017). This opposition shifted the discourse toward the cultural identity and protection of the whenua, and its archaeological features.

In 2014, a housing development proposal by Fletcher Building Limited appeared as a spectre on the heritage site, galvanising a rallying cry among mana whenua and their supporters who saw this as more than just another housing initiative but an attack on Māori heritage, spiritualism, and identity (Doyle, 2018). Following Fletcher's purchase of the land in 2016, Save Our Unique Landscape (SOUL) activists moved onto the whenua, initiating a grassroots

movement that would challenge the proposed development (Malva, 2018). The Ihumātao demonstration garnered significant attention, underscoring the ongoing issue of cultural preservation in the face of economic growth. It draws attention to how difficult it is for Indigenous peoples to stand for our rights in the face of powerful capitalist interests (Malva, 2018).

By 2019, the protest was in full swing, with an increasing number of people coming to support it, and well-known singers and other prominent figures speaking out in favour of the cause (Hancock et al., 2020). Following police confrontations, this one protest turned into the 'Protect Ihumātao' movement, calling for nationwide recognition of Māori historic rights to the land. To address the historical dispossession of the land, in December 2020, an agreement was made by the New Zealand government to acquire the disputed land from Fletcher Building (Mika et al., 2022) and a promise made to mana whenua when deciding what to do with it in the future (Oldham et al., 2024). This resolution was a victory for protesters. It acknowledged the challenges of achieving peace within the context of invasion and colonisation in Aotearoa New Zealand, where ongoing grievances remain tied to breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The purchase of Ihumātao by the government is a payment of sorts for past harm. However, questions remain about completing the restoration of Māori land rights and clarifying the Crown's role in land-related issues. Ihumātao brought land rights to the forefront, turning attention squarely toward the Crown's continued failure to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Paying homage to historical Indigenous rights struggles, 'Protect Ihumātao' honoured the site as a symbol of ancestral land loss and the erosion of cultural narratives, thereby mobilising public support (Doyle, 2018; Hancock et al., 2020; Hobbs, 2017; Malva, 2018).

1.3. Researcher Positionality and Related Writing Conventions

My perspective as a 24-year-old Māori wahine (woman) has a significant influence on how I approach this research. The stories of my tūpuna (ancestors) — and particularly those of my hapū (sub-tribe), Te Whānau-a-Taupara, of the iwi (tribe) Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki — our resistance to colonial violence and our relationship with the whenua still colour my view of the world and of myself. They are intergenerational, lived experiences embedded in our connections with each other, the whenua, the world, and the systems that still seek to hold us.

Like many other whānau, mine is still waiting for the outcome of our Waitangi Tribunal claim. This delay highlights the slow pace of the settlement process and the ongoing marginalisation of Māori efforts to seek justice. The Waitangi Tribunal's (2004) 'Turanga

Tangata, Turanga Whenua' report exposes the widespread and lasting consequences of Crown actions on the iwi of Tūranganui-a-Kiwa. It outlines the extensive loss of land and resources that fundamentally disrupted the region's social, political, and economic organisation. The confiscations that followed the Battle of Waerenga-a-Hika in 1865, within the rohe of Tūranganui-a-Kiwa, caused long-lasting damage, an impact still being felt in our people's lives today. These findings do more than record historical injustices; they affirm the enduring grievances that inspire and sustain contemporary Māori efforts toward redress and justice.

The Waitangi Tribunal (2004) also concluded that the Crown's shortcomings in fulfilling its duty under Te Tiriti o Waitangi, constituted a violation of the Treaty. Taking our people from the land, which provided us with economic, cultural, and spiritual value, led to lasting bereavement. These are not simply relics of history – they continue to manifest in the socio-economic disadvantages that Māori face today (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016). To me, the Ihumātao protest, and occupation are a continuation of these wrongdoings. Ihumātao is not a silo event, but it shares a whakapapa of resistance, of standing for whenua, for tino rangatiratanga with other conflicts.

O'Malley's (2000) 'An Entangled Web' provides a detailed history of how the Crown employed its military might — supported by some so-called Māori allies — to overcome Te Aitanga-a-Māhaki. O'Malley (2000) explains how the state weaponised charges of 'rebellion' to seize massive tracts of Māori land. For my hapū, Te Whānau-a-Taupara, this is not abstract history but our legacy. These are legacies that affect the ways we think, talk, and act about whenua. As O'Malley (2000) reminds us, nineteenth-century colonial policies not only expropriated land, but they also divided iwi, disrupted customary governance, and removed our economic base systems to help us self-determine. That was a direct attack on our capacity to survive as a people. In this respect, the Te Whānau-a-Taupara Trust Empowering Bill 2003 clawed back a portion of our rights and obligations concerning our tūpuna whenua (ancestral land). It was a step, however big or small. Our iwi claim, in its broader sense, remains unresolved.

This research is situated within those histories. It is not written from a position of detachment, but from within the long shadow of colonisation. This paper examines how Māori land protests, with a particular emphasis on the Ihumātao occupation, have been reported in the media and how such representations inform popular understandings of Māori sovereignty and cultural identity. It is part of an academic endeavour that supports this intergenerational movement for justice and hope, aiming for recognition and the restoration of mana (authority) and whenua. The work is also grounded in Indigenous methodologies, particularly insurgent

research approaches elaborated by Gaudry (2011). These models have become central to rejecting the extractive tendencies of research, which for so long have privileged non-Indigenous voices and silenced our own. Gaudry (2011) calls for community-based, Indigenous-accountable research— research that speaks with us, not about us. Our values, relationships, and priorities in insurgent research inform our approach. It emphasises collective well-being and cultural integrity over the academic achievement of one. This is why I use 'we,' 'our,' and 'us' in this thesis. These are not stylistic decisions — they serve as epistemic signposts into Māori ways of knowing, being, and doing. Gaudry (2011) states that using these terms links us to our tūpuna and our whenua and is a way to strengthen our presence and authority in academic establishments. These words hold wairua (spirit) — they carry our stories, our whakapapa, our truth. As Balchin (2021) articulates, demanding Indigenous research is the assertion of our sovereignty, our voice, and our right to author the story.

Within this thesis, I have woven kupu Māori (Māori words) into the text to acknowledge the appropriate and longstanding status of te reo Māori (the Māori language) as my Indigenous language, and as a statutory official language in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ History, 2024b). Following Somerville (2022), I do not italicise these words. It would present them as foreign when, in reality, English arrived here later. Following recommendations published in Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori (2009), macrons are included to maintain correct pronunciation. Where Māori texts are quoted, I maintain the original spelling and formatting, including the use of macrons. A glossary is included for those who are learning or not yet fluent in te Reo, with a translation provided for every word on its first appearance. All 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 (Māori knowledge). Language is a tool and conduit of knowledge, identity, and resistance.

Grounded in an Indigenous foundation, this thesis aims to strengthen academic spaces that are rooted in Māori values. It is shaped by the legacy of dispossession and driven by a commitment to restoration. It argues that Māori must not only be included in research—we must define how we are represented, on our own terms, and for our own futures. This is how we resist, reclaim, and write ourselves forward.

1.4. Research Questions and Objectives

This thesis analyses how Māori news media and mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand news media portrayed Māori kaitiaki who participated in the 'Protect Ihumātao' movement. This

thesis uses Te Ao Māori News as a case study to represent Māori news media, and the NZ Herald as a case study to represent mainstream Aotearoa New Zealand news media. This study's central research questions are:

1. What key themes did Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald use to portray 'Protect Ihumātao' and participating Māori kaitiaki at the height of the protest movement in August 2019?
2. How do the themes used by Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald compare, and what differential effects may they have on how respective media audiences understand 'Protect Ihumātao' in particular and Māori land protests in general?
3. How does any differential portrayal of 'Protect Ihumātao' participants by Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald affect the broader public?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review comprises eight sections, each discussing media representations of Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. It highlights the barriers faced by Indigenous peoples in settler-colonial contexts. The first three parts explore the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the land; the Māori history of colonisation, displacement, and marginalisation; and land protests by Indigenous peoples. These sections situate land as central to Indigenous identity and economic survival, examine the colonial disruption of that relationship, and illustrate contemporary concerns, including environmental crime. The next four sections highlight the media depiction of Indigenous peoples; media stereotyping of Indigenous peoples and criminality; the under-representation of Indigenous voices in mainstream media; and the impact of these representations on the public perception of Indigenous people. Finally, the review identifies the research gap and the research questions that the present study seeks to address.

2.1. Indigenous Peoples' Relationship with Land

For Indigenous peoples, the environment is conceptually intertwined with our spirituality, culture, and economy (Boiral et al., 2020). A similar perspective is derived from a view of nature not as a backdrop for, nor a product of, human activities but as a complex material mesh of life forms in which everything has a value of its own (Callicott, 1995; Sandler, 2012). Indigenous peoples have, over the centuries, developed an array of distinct and varied ways to sustain ourselves in harmony with the natural world (Gadgil et al., 1993). Indigenous peoples have a deep understanding of natural cycles and use them to sustainably manage resources (while protecting the environment) using hunting, fishing, and gathering techniques that allow resources to renew (Thompson, 1953). We also demonstrate Indigenous peoples' role as stewards of the land by realising cultural practices in a manner that reflects a deep respect for one's surroundings. We remain committed to protecting and preserving the natural world for future generations (Boiral et al., 2020). Colonialism and industrialisation encouraged environmental degradation and threatened our way of life (Whyte, 2017). Consequently, Indigenous peoples have struggled to safeguard our lands, maintain our traditional knowledge and practices, and effect sustainable development emanating from our cultures and traditions (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001).

Indigenous peoples from around the globe, including Māori, have a profound spiritual connection to the environment (Mead, 2016). Informed by the principles of whakapapa, we as

Māori are mokopuna (grandchildren) who acknowledge our whenua and its natural world to be the living expression of our tūpuna (Ministry for the Environment & Stats NZ, 2021). The significance of this deep relationship is represented in Māori culture through our art, music, and storytelling, where the natural world is revered and experienced through spiritual tikanga (customs) and kawa (protocols) (Heta-Lensen & Wrightson, 2019).

The Māori philosophy of whenua is more than land. It encapsulates the placenta, which makes humans or tangata whenua (people of the land) born from the loving embrace of the earth's womb (Thomas, 2024). Like the relationship between mother and child, our connection to the land requires mutual love and care. Māori describe our connection to the land as belonging rather than ownership (Durie, 1998a). Several whakataukī (proverbs) attest to belonging but simultaneously remind us of the transitory nature of human life and the land's endurance (Durie, 1998b):

1. "E kore au e ngaro; te kākano i ruia mai i Rangiātea… I shall never be lost, the seed which was sown in Rangiātea" (Mead & Grove, 2004, pp. 30-31). This whakataukī is an affirmation of both honouring the ancestors who have come before us and grounding us in the past and places that are part of our heritage. Rangiātea, the Māori homeland, is the foundation of our identity and is our heart and soul. The whakataukī reminds us that we each hold a piece of that ancestral legacy in us. We are seeds of Rangiātea and rooted in unbroken whakapapa. This solidarity means that wherever we are, whatever we encounter, our tūpuna and the whenua keep us grounded. However, the whakataukī also makes a crucial point: our identity as tangata whenua is not restricted to us as people occupying land; it is something that lives within us. With this internal connection that endures generationally, one gains a sense of the strength and resilience of Māori culture and heritage over time.
2. "Hāhā te whenua, hāhā te tangata… Desolate land, desolate people" (Mead & Grove, 2004, p. 59). This whakataukī reflects the idea that the health and vitality of the land directly affect the people. There is a strong, long-lasting symbiotic relationship between a community's physical and spiritual well-being and the condition of the environment. This supports the idea that land serves as a living basis for identity, belonging, and sustenance rather than merely being a resource.
3. "Ka mau koe, āe, ārahina au ki te rohe o tōku whenua patu ai, kia mihi au ki tōku whenua… You will surely understand, I must be taken to the boundary of my land to be killed, so that I can greet my land" (Mead & Grove, 2004, p. 170). This whakataukī expresses a profound commitment to land as an integral part of identity and belonging.

The desire to die within the boundaries of one's land reflects a deep-seated connection as if life is incomplete without being close to the land one belongs to. This phrase emphasises that genealogy, spirit, and continuity are deeply connected to the land. It shows how land symbolises more than just territory; it embodies a part of the self that people must acknowledge even in death.

4. "Kia horoia tāku porokakī ki ngā wai o tōku ake whenua… Let my neck be washed by the waters of my own land" (Mead & Grove, 2004, p. 210). Here, the desire to cleanse with the water of one's own home represents spiritual cleanliness and a sense of coming home again. This whakataukī says that the water from one's land has special qualities that bring spiritual nourishment and peace. It highlights not only the distinctiveness and sacredness of the resources that Papatūānuku, as our Earth mother provides, it also shows that Māori derive strength, a sense of purpose, and healing from our home.
5. "Toi te kupu, toi te mana, toi te whenua… The permanence of the language, prestige, and land" (Mead & Grove, 2004, p. 405). This whakataukī draws on the three key cornerstones of Māori culture – te reo Māori, mana, and whenua. Each part of me underpins my Māori identity, and if I lose a part of that, my identity is at risk. If they are lost, then something is missing from my life; if they are preserved, they help maintain the strength, dignity, and resilience of my culture.
6. "Whatungarongaro he tangata, toitū he whenua hoki… People disappear, the land remains" (Mead & Grove, 2004, p. 425). This whakataukī conveys the enduring nature of the whenua and its importance to Te Ao Māori. It reminds us that, however brief our lives may be, the land is enduring, carrying forward through generations. This proverb articulates a whakapapa narrative of belonging to the whenua as more than a resource – an ancestor, an identity, and the basis for collective memory and cultural sustenance. The whakataukī recognises the transient nature of human life. In contrast, it also holds that the land remains resistant to time in the same way that we pass on our stories, struggles, and sacred ties, therefore making more profound claims long after we have gone.

These whakataukī remind Māori poetically that our responsibilities are those of kaitiaki, guardians of the life force of the whenua. Māori do not consider the whenua as something we own; instead, we care for it collectively, working together to maintain and protect its integrity (Mark et al., 2022). According to H. Moewaka Barnes et al. (2018), misunderstandings and

conflicts arise frequently when the European absolute ownership model interferes with safeguarding the land.

The Wakefield brothers, Edward Gibbon Wakefield, and William Wakefield were vital figures in the early colonisation of Aotearoa in the 19th century and were associated with the New Zealand Company (NZ History, 2017). In the early 1840s, the New Zealand Company, influenced by Edward Gibbon Wakefield's colonisation theories, began preselling land in Aotearoa New Zealand before actually acquiring it (Lucas, 2009). Before securing ownership, the company advertised the land in London on the 1st of June 1839. This approach attracted settlers who arrived at Wellington Harbour on 22 January 1840, only to find that the land was unsurveyed or disputes over title were rampant. Wakefield based his strategy on the belief that land should be sold at a 'sufficient price' to ensure a balance of labour, land, and capital (Shultz, 1965). The intended price encouraged labourers to work for landowners while convincing them they could become landowners themselves. The proceeds from land sales were to finance further immigration and public works. The claims by the New Zealand Company of purchasing 20 million acres resulted in ongoing investigations and conflicts (Lucas, 2009). The presale model was formally established in 1841 when the company was granted a royal charter that permitted land sales. Confusion and disputes resulted from Governor Robert FitzRoy's waiver of the Crown's pre-emption right, which allowed people to buy land directly from Māori (Lucas, 2009). Hence, Captain George Grey re-instituted the Crown's right of pre-emption, allowing land purchases through government agents only. The schemes of the Wakefield brothers and the New Zealand Company triggered large-scale Māori dispossession and dislocation. They provoked conflicts with Europeans who sought to make illegitimate claims over territories Māori inhabited (Lucas, 2009). The unabated encroachment upon ancestral lands, from 1845 through to 1872, created a volatile period of land wars (Keenan, 2022).

2.2. Māori History of Colonisation, Displacement, and Marginalisation

Prior to the arrival of European settlers in the late 18th century, Māori society was highly functional, with its own distinct processes, values, and ways of living (Belich, 2013; Hill, 2020). Colonisation, however, prompted massive disruption and introduced new diseases, conflict, and extensive land loss, which resulted in the marginalisation of many Māori within the incipient colonising infrastructure (Orange, 2020). That Māori are a 'savage warrior race' was a carefully constructed caricature that colonisers used to justify our subjugation and to try

and explain away the violence of our oppression (Jackson, 2009). Moon (2017) maintains that this gross distortion of Māori identity influences how we and others view Māori and our world.

Belich (2002) contends that the unfair and organised theft of Māori lands essentially explains the explosive growth of the Pākehā population in Aotearoa New Zealand during the mid- to late nineteenth century. Te Tiriti o Waitangi was signed in 1840 between Māori rangatira and the British Crown, and intended to establish British governance in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as to guarantee Māori sovereign rights to our lands, resources, and cultural activities (Orange, 2020; Waitangi Tribunal, 2025). At the time of the signing, the Māori population was estimated to be 80,000, and there were approximately 2,000 Pākehā (Orange, 2012). This overwhelming majority likely persuaded many rangatira to affiliate with the Crown. Consequently, the Māori population declined in the following decades, while the non-Māori population experienced significant growth. By the 1870s, Pākehā (nearly 300,000 of them) had concluded that the Treaty was no longer of any significance because the Māori (now fewer than 50,000 people) no longer boasted significant political and economic power (Orange, 2012).

Nevertheless, British settlers employed both force and deception to acquire Māori land, thereby initiating a legacy of resentment and hostility (Belich, 2013). During the wars of the 1860s, the government confiscated massive blocks of land from 'rebel' tribal groups that had contested the Crown on their own terms. By 2004, Māori had lost 65% of the best soil in which they had been allowed to register customary title and 64% of the most fertile land in the onshore territory of the islands (Pool & Kukutai, 2018). Consedine and Consedine (2001) argue that for Māori people, the land is of significant cultural, spiritual and economic worth, and losing this has had significant negative consequences for many Māori, including the loss of cultural knowledge, economic and social disadvantage and general bad health, lack of political influence and intergenerational distress:

1. **Loss of cultural identity:** For Māori, the land reflects a woven tapestry of the living culture and spirit; it is not just a physical place where people reside but also a place of the genealogical and cultural past (Harmsworth, 1997). The drastic erosion of cultural identity resulting from the loss of connection to the land has caused severe fractures in our social and cultural makeup.
2. **Economic disadvantage:** Land is fundamental to economic well-being, supporting various industries such as forestry, tourism, and agriculture, from which revenue is derived (Amoamo et al., 2020). For many Māori, there is a personal economic disadvantage (and a collective disempowerment from seeking and developing economic opportunities) resulting from the loss of the resource on which this all-

important system is based (Pool, 2015). Accordingly, this has long-reaching impacts on generations of Māori yet to come (Cunneen & Tauri, 2016).

3. **Poor health outcomes:** Thom and Grimes (2022) identify landlessness and the loss of traditional resources, such as kai (food), as critical drivers of poor health outcomes for Māori. Losing this intrinsic link to the land and traditional practices negatively affects mental health and well-being.
4. **Limited political power:** While the land is always at the centre stage politically, the loss of it has relegated Māori to the periphery, diminishing our role in critical decisions on matters affecting Aotearoa New Zealand as a whole (Rangiwai, 2011).
5. **Intergenerational trauma:** In many Māori communities, the spectre of intergenerational trauma has become an awful reality arising from the combined impacts of land confiscation and eroded cultural practices (Thom, 2022).

After the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, the speed and size of colonisation snowballed (Mutu, 2019). By the 1860s, Pākehā outnumbered the Māori population (Orange, 2023). In 1874, Māori represented only one-tenth of the national population, a trend that continued for the next century (New Zealand Human Rights Commission, 2010). The colonial mentality, which likened Māori uniqueness to inferiority, interpreted our extinction and contributed to it through military campaigns, disease, and oppressive laws (Pool, 2015). Aotearoa New Zealand is well-feted for the racism that surrounds such undermining assertions and racist-leaning myths that Māori were a 'dying race.' This concept of 'racial death' was an extension of a broader philosophy based on racial stratification and imperial dominance that had a significant impact on the Māori population and our relations with the colonial state (Durie, 1998b). For example, in 1856, physician and politician Dr Isaac Featherston stated that it was the responsibility of Europeans to 'smooth down the death pillow' of the Māori race (Ngata, 2024; Pool & Kukutai, 2018). In 1881, distinguished scientist Alfred Newman claimed that the people's extinction was hardly a reason for outrage and that a better race was supplanting us (Pool & Kukutai, 2018). These points of view have provided the framework for the continued marginalisation and oppression of Māori.

In the North Island, Māori holdings in 1939 were 9% of its land, amounting to some 2.8 million acres or 1.1 million hectares (NZ History, 2021c). By 1864, Māori had been divested of all land in the South Island (Orange, 2018). The movement of Māori from rural to urban areas is termed 'urban drift' (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). After the land was gone, there was a massive shift to the city, unlike any other movement in the world at any other time in history, in the mid-20th century, driven by 'economic opportunity' to improve the quality of

life (Orange, 2018). Nevertheless, for Māori, the impact was more of a tidal wave of social, economic, and cultural factors because of lower educational and employment opportunities and racial discrimination (Cormack et al., 2020). Māori, however, fought for recognition as Indigenous people and developed communities and cultural repertoires within the cities.

Urban Māori also faced several obstacles, in some cases, at the hands of Pākehā institutions trying to promote assimilation (Hill, 2012). A key example is the State Housing Programme of the mid-20th century, which practised what has come to be known as 'pepper potting' by placing lone Māori families in houses among Pākehā (Rout et al., 2020). While the policy was framed as a strategy for providing affordable housing, it effectively reinforced racial prejudice, social isolation, and overcrowded living conditions for Māori (Rout et al., 2020). This scheme reflects the broader colonial enclosure process that dispossessed Māori of communal lands by transforming shared spaces into private property (Webb, 2023). Despite the obstacles stacked against them, many Māori whānau have made such estates their home and developed thriving communities. Such communities have, over time, transformed into feeding grounds for cultural survivalism and identity consolidation, maintaining a deep feeling of affinity (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). Within these neighbourhoods, Māori continue to assert our culture, uplift one another, and stand together in the face of persistent discrimination and social adversity. Voluntary organisations such as Māori Welfare Committees, Māori Women's Welfare Leagues, Māori Culture Clubs, Māori wardens, Māori benevolent societies, Māori credit unions, Māori churches, and Māori sports clubs greatly assisted these communities in overcoming the social chaos resulting from the breakdown of traditional kinship structures (Walker, 1970). These groups are essential integrative processes that foster Māori identity and social harmony, providing a means of preserving Māori culture.

More recent examples of initiatives to address historical wrongs and promote broader recognition of Māori culture and rights include the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975, which investigates alleged breaches of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Hayward, 2019), and the Māori Language Act in 1985 that acknowledges the significance of te reo Māori by formally establishing it as an official language of Aotearoa New Zealand (Martin, 2016). Māori culture has endured and remains integral to the identity and history of Aotearoa New Zealand. However, addressing the long-term effects of colonisation, relocation, and marginalisation on Māori people requires much more action.

2.3. Land Protests by Indigenous Peoples

Since land is the foundation of Indigenous peoples' lives, land alienation has a profound effect. The impact on our economic survival and physical well-being threatens our spiritual beliefs and cultural customs. Environmental degradation threatens our identity and well-being, as the health of our lands and waters is directly linked to our overall health and cultural integrity (Castellino, 2020). Illegal mining and logging are prominent abuses, where businesses encroach upon Indigenous lands without prior consent or compensation, resulting in a devastating cycle of forest destruction, water pollution, and damage to sacred sites (Aguilar-Støen, 2016; Athayde, 2014; Finer et al., 2008; Hipwell et al., 2002). Such actions often escalate into direct conflict, compelling Indigenous communities to resist state authorities or corporate powers in the struggle for survival (Liddick, 2011). Environmental contamination—such as pesticide runoff and oil spills—further endangers our health, contributing to serious illnesses like cancer and developmental disorders (Langston, 2010). Such environmental crimes need to be exposed, and Indigenous peoples' sustainable ways of life should serve as an example. In addition to being a matter of justice, promoting environmental conservation is an investment in the future of our world (Tscharntke et al., 2012).

In Turtle Island (one of the sovereign names of North America), environmental crimes have also inflicted pain and suffering on Indigenous communities on numerous occasions. Five examples follow:

1. The Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and the broader Native community resisted the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) after expressing concern about their water and sacred grounds. This pipeline project, with disdain for objections of environmental advocates and Indigenous communities, pressed on. A disastrous consequence of failing to heed these warnings was a pipeline rupture in 2017 that released over 200,000 gallons of crude oil, placing critical water supplies at risk (Moore, 2018).
2. Uranium mining on the land of the Navajo Nation, located in Arizona and New Mexico, caused an avalanche of health problems for local communities by releasing radioactive particles into the atmosphere (Gilliland et al., 2000). While the industry alleviates financial difficulties, it increases the risk of cancer and other illnesses in the population.
3. The Grassy Narrows First Nation in Ontario, Canada, has been facing water mercury contamination since the 1960s (Philibert et al., 2020). Uncontrolled mercury emissions from an upstream pulp and paper mill severely contaminated the Wabigoon-English River system, resulting in significant health impacts on the local inhabitants. One of

them is Minamata disease, a neurological disorder that results from mercury poisoning (Ilyniak, 2014).

4. Alberta First Nations communities and the health impacts from the Alberta Tar Sands. Fifty per cent of the oil extracted from the tar sands in Alberta, Canada, has impacted the Sixth Nations, who are the original owners of the impacted land (covering 142,000 square miles) (Huseman & Short, 2012). Leaders of bands reported health issues related to drinking water downstream of Tar Sands Gravel mining, which was studied with the involvement of Intergovernmental Affairs and Financial Affairs. The extraction procedure consumes vast amounts of fresh water, which is subsequently polluted and discharged into the Athabasca River, posing threats to the health of water-dwelling and land animals, as well as the sanctity of drinking water for First Nations communities further downstream.
5. The West Moberly and Prophet River First Nations strongly opposed the Site C Dam because it would destroy their traditional hunting and fishing areas, as well as other vital spiritual sites, thereby harming the foundation of their treaty rights (Rudderow, 2021).

The effects of environmental crimes do not stop at the degradation of nature itself but have gone to the extent of changing both the ecological and cultural fabric of Aboriginal Australians. Three examples follow:

1. The ongoing destruction of Aboriginal sacred sites in Australia has been a pressing issue. For instance, in 2020, mining company Rio Tinto destroyed two ancient rock shelters in Western Australia that held significant cultural and archaeological significance for the Puutu Kunti Kurrama and Pinikura peoples (Oliveri et al., 2022).
2. The effects of climate change have severely impacted Aboriginal Australians (Standen, 2022). Increasing temperatures, droughts, and changed rainfall patterns have undermined traditional cultural practices and impacted sources of water and food.
3. Clearing for agriculture and urbanisation has led to extensive environmental damage, impacting heavily on Indigenous communities (O'Neill et al., 1993). In the Kimberley region of Western Australia, land clearing is eroding the possibility of the traditional burning practice, fuelling a surge in wildfires that jeopardise cultural landmarks and species.

Environmental crimes have had a detrimental impact on our Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Here are two examples:

1. Pollution of fresh waterways in Aotearoa New Zealand is impacting the traditional ways of Māori, who would otherwise continue to fish and gather kai (Ministry for the Environment, 2020). Industrial pursuits and intensive agricultural methods are contaminating these vital waterways.
2. The 2011 grounding of the cargo ship 'Rena' sent torrents of oil into the pristine waters of the Bay of Plenty, a place of immense cultural heritage and ecological importance for Māori communities (Fa`aui, 2017). Contaminating the water and shoreline resulted in extensive disruption to marine ecosystems on which these communities rely and compromised traditional practices of fishing and gathering kaimoana (seafood).

These instances represent but a small number of the myriad environmental crimes that have besieged Indigenous communities.

The literature on Indigenous peoples as victims of environmental crime and our resistance to externally forced ecological degradation is limited (Lynch et al., 2018). While some scholars have discussed the significant role of Indigenous peoples in protesting environmental crime, they often overlook our victimhood. Large-scale ecosystem destruction is referred to as "ecocide," and Crook et al. (2018) support making it an international crime. They contend that one of the most important legal tools for defending the rights of Indigenous peoples and the environment would be to make ecocide a crime. The authors also highlight the deep interconnections between capitalism, colonialism, and genocide, drawing a direct line between the exploitation of Indigenous communities and lands and the broader historical processes of colonisation and systemic violence. Addressing these issues, therefore, demands a critical examination of how colonialism and capitalism have shaped global structures of power and control. The authors also discuss how international law perpetuates colonialism and the exploitation of Indigenous peoples and our lands by legitimising the seizure of Indigenous lands and resources, denying Indigenous peoples the ability to control our destinies. Indigenous land protests continue to demand the prevention of ecocide and environmental crimes (Lynch et al., 2018).

Various authors have discussed how Indigenous peoples are victims of environmental crimes, as well as their activism to resist ecological degradation (Bullard & Johnson, 2000; Gedicks, 1994; Lynch et al., 2018; Vegh Weis & White, 2020; White, 2009; White & Heckenberg, 2014). They argue that activism is necessary when Indigenous people suffer from ecological injustices (Bullard & Johnson, 2000) and that other types of structural injustice preclude them from protecting the environment (Fegadel, 2021).

Kaitiakitanga (guardianship) is being further adopted in Kaupapa Māori (Māori framework) research (Forster, 2023; H. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2021; McAllister et al., 2023; Roberts et al., 1995; Walker et al., 2021) and Green Criminology (Wright, 2022). Royal (2007) emphasises the role of Indigenous peoples as kaitiaki and how it upholds our cultural expressions and guides our environmental management. Indigenous peoples' deep spiritual attachment to the environment and our rich and singular approaches to living in harmony with it provide critically essential lessons regarding the protection of our natural world for future generations (Tom et al., 2019). Guided by Indigenous knowledge and practices, sustainable management and conservation can occur in service to humanity and the environment (Wright, 2022).

2.4. Media Portrayal of Indigenous Peoples

For many generations, Indigenous peoples have been affected personally and collectively by experiences of racial discrimination (Pugh & Cheers, 2010). Media culture that reinforces stereotypes negatively misinforms people about Indigenous people and exacerbates historical injuries (Alia, 1999; Alia, 2005; Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007). According to Alia (1999), all too often, media that target non-Indigenous audiences construct representations of Indigenous people that fail to articulate or even come close to the diversity and complexity of Indigenous identity. Such distortions shape the regard society has for Indigenous communities and the self-esteem and identity of Indigenous individuals, who then struggle with internalised negative imagery (Alia, 1999; Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the media in the early colonial period were tightly controlled by Pākehā settlers (MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). As a result, Māori culture and society were frequently portrayed through a colonial lens, often reduced to stereotypes such as the 'noble savage' or characterised as primitive—violent, ignorant, and lazy—figures who needed to be 'civilised' and assimilated into European norms (Abel, 2006; Belich, 2002, 2013; King, 2012). These representations positioned Māori as passive consumers of European ideas and technologies, negating our autonomy and agency. By the time Māori resistance to colonisation had grown, so had the hostility of media representations. Sociologist Paul Spoonley (1993) reminds us that the media systematically constructed the Māori' other' and frequently scapegoated us for tensions and conflicts with Pākehā. Such narratives legitimised colonisation, explaining away the suppression of Māori culture, sovereignty, and identity (Bell, 1992).

Images of Indigenous people, including Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand, in the media tend to communicate orienting negative stereotypes that also inform and shape what most people perceive as the reality, which consequently impacts policy-making via the stereotype (Harding, 2007; Colvin, 2010; Gregory et al., 2011; Liu, 2009; McCreanor, 2008; McCreanor et al., 2010; Nairn et al., 2012; Webb & Deckert, 2023). A focus on non-Māori sources has also led mainstream media to marginalise Māori views (Gregory et al., 2011) and devalue Māori culture and values (Nairn et al., 2012).

In Aotearoa New Zealand, the media is predominantly Pākehā-owned and influenced, which contributes to the marginalisation of Māori voices in society. The pervasive racism in mainstream media perpetuates the unfavourable portrayal of Māori society and centuries-old negative stereotypes (Macdonald & Ormond, 2021; King, 2012). MacDonald and Ormond (2021) use the concept of 'silencing' to illustrate how mainstream media discourse favours a harmonious portrayal of settler-Indigenous relations while overlooking colonisation's historical and ongoing impacts. Their analysis shows how the media tends to sanitise and depoliticise systemic racism and increasing inequalities. Although te reo Māori news offers alternative representations, King (2012) warns that they will likely drift towards mainstream performance, reducing their subcultural value. Both King (2012) and MacDonald and Ormond (2021) call for transformational media practices that centre and amplify Māori voices, give scope and effect to the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, achieve an equitable presence in the media, articulate the nuances of Māori experiences accurately, and destabilise the deep-seated ideologies of racism and silencing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.5. Māori news is crime news

Extensive research shows that news media often disproportionately focus on specific crimes, such as homicide, assault, and sexual violence committed by strangers in public spaces (Beckett, 1997; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; McGregor, 2017; Roberts & Doob, 1990). This distortion has a powerful influence on public perceptions, fears, and policy responses to crime, particularly because many people have little direct experience with it. Thus, the general public's understanding of crime and safety is primarily a function of media portrayals, which can exert a substantial impact on attitudes and beliefs about crime and safety (Beckett, 1997; Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000; Roberts & Doob, 1990). The media, therefore, fundamentally shape the public's exaggerated view of levels of crime and safety in specific areas (Ross & Nightingale, 2012). Moreover, media coverage generally frames crime as an individual issue caused by personal

failings. It is silent about the societal and root causes of the crime, such as poverty and insufficient mental health care, among other social injustices (Jewkes, 2015).

Aotearoa New Zealand media portrayals of crime and justice align with those worldwide yet exhibit some unique characteristics. For instance, Krzanich (2010) emphasises a focus on violent crimes against women and children, which has fuelled a 'moral panic' in Aotearoa New Zealand. As Dissanayake and Bracewell (2022) note, the media coverage is mainly focused on sexual offences, particularly those of child abuse and domestic violence. This focus creates a culture of fear by skewing the public's view of how common these crimes are (Carter, 2003). According to McCreanor et al. (2014), the media's emphasis on violent crime may unintentionally increase public support for harsh criminal justice laws even when there is proof that they are ineffective.

While there is a recognition that emotional appeals in the news can mobilise public concern (Gross, 2008), the complex effects of such coverage still need to be explored. Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) note that the media's framing of violent crimes can drive demand for similar stories, negatively affecting societal perceptions. While Shehata (2014) argues that crime news can mobilise resources and increase public awareness, most of the literature agrees that distorted media images contribute to an irrational fear of crime and moral panics, which skew political discourse and policy responses toward punitiveness (Hertog & McLeod, 2001; Partington, 2013; Pratt et al., 2013).

Studies show that Māori are often depicted negatively in the mainstream media of Aotearoa New Zealand, with questions continuing to be raised about the impact of such depictions on public discourse and policy (Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013; Nairn & McCreanor, 1990). According to Farr (2019), these sorts of portrayals may lead to harsher laws and strained relations. While there may be Māori-led media spaces, such as Mana News, which work to destabilise overarching narratives by providing counter-representations, this index still, to an extent, controls policy formation and public opinion (Taira, 2009).

2.6. Underrepresentation of Indigenous Voices in Mainstream Media

Because mainstream media in Aotearoa New Zealand operates largely within Pākehā cultural frameworks, it frequently reproduces narratives that marginalise Māori perspectives and reinforce Pākehā dominance (King, 2012). Because of this domination, Māori culture and values are widely misunderstood and undervalued (Taira, 2009). Historical media representations have reinforced negative stereotypes and denied Māori agency and voice,

depicting Māori as primitive, savage, or exotic (Wall, 1997; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). Such portrayals not only harm Māori individuals and communities but also perpetuate dominant power structures, contributing to prejudice and discrimination against Māori people and our culture (Allen & Bruce, 2017; Cosgrove & Bruce, 2005; A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012).

Critics argue that mainstream news media perpetuate colonial processes that disadvantage Indigenous voices and often silence Māori perspectives (MacDonald & Ormond, 2021; Nairn et al., 2012; Rankine et al., 2014; Smith & Abel, 2008; Taea, 2014). This framing is firmly rooted in the colonial past and persistent structural inequalities of Aotearoa New Zealand (MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). Such framing creates negative stereotypes and results in the limited representation of Māori. According to Nairn et al. (2012), explicitly defining the problem may accommodate a range of diverse views and experiences expressed through media.

Indigenous cultures, customs, and languages have been homogenised in various media, which has masked distinctive identities and reinforced the idea that Indigenous peoples are a single, monolithic entity (Moyo, 2013; Mustapha et al., 2011). Such inaccurate media representations marginalise Indigenous peoples and represent colonisers' desires to progress at the expense of Indigenous traditions and cultures (Battiste, 2018). Dismantling entrenched bigotries requires more than inclusion—it necessitates the deliberate recognition and celebration of Indigenous knowledge systems as inherently complex, relational, and spiritually rooted (Botha et al., 2021; Odora Hoppers, 2009). Media channels will need to reach out to Indigenous voices to have Indigenous peoples act as content creators and subjects, resulting in more realistic and multifaceted portrayals. This is necessary so that those speaking within localised sites can gain a better recognition and appreciation of the differences, as well as the value and contributions that Indigenous peoples bring (Iseke-Barnes & Danard, 2007).

2.7. Impact of Media on Public Attitudes Towards Indigenous Peoples

What Indigenous people choose to achieve and how they choose to do so influences how attention is focused on the media, as well as how individual Members of Parliament (MPs) respond to that attention. Research has demonstrated that the more the public focuses on crime policy issues, the more likely MPs are to act (Andrae et al., 2017; Farr, 2019). However, this action tends to address the crimes themselves rather than addressing the underlying causes that contribute to marginalisation and disadvantage, stereotyping and discrimination against

Indigenous people (Andrae et al., 2017; Farr, 2019). Therefore, there is an imperative to foster more accurate and nuanced reporting if we are to develop a less inequitable society for all people in Aotearoa New Zealand, including Māori (Krieg von Bellikon, 2022; McCreanor et al., 2014). The importance of varied representation and support for anti-crime policies that address the root causes of crime is critical in the fight against disadvantage (Miller, 2010). The portrayal of Indigenous people in the media often reflects a narrow view, depicting us as primitive, uneducated, and violent, which ignores our realities and contributions to society (Anderson & Robertson, 2021; Wall, 1997; MacDonald & Ormond, 2021). Media often emphasise conflict, portraying Indigenous protests as disruptive rather than focusing on the underlying issues (Lupien et al., 2024). This emphasis in the media may make protests seem contentious or divided, encouraging a focus on isolated acts of violence or property destruction. The Māori-led news media fills an important gap, providing a space to prioritise Māori views and values, a platform for Māori voices, and coverage of significant news not typically featured in mainstream media (Kaire-Melbourne, 2019; Middleton, 2020). However, there remains a lack of in-depth research that investigates the range of perspectives and practices within the Māori news media, reflecting inequalities and dynamics found in Pākehā-dominated media (Kaire-Melbourne, 2019; Middleton, 2020). We can more aptly understand Indigenous concerns only when such protests receive comprehensive, broad media coverage that recognises their political character and places them in a historical context. Achieving this outcome depends on increased efforts to foster reconciliation and promote public discussion that genuinely reflects the Māori perspective.

2.8. Summary, Research Gap, and Research Questions

Overall, this literature review examines the portrayal of Māori in the media and the challenges Indigenous peoples face regarding land protests and media representation in settler-colonial contexts. This review also brings into light the importance of land rights, which are culturally and economically significant to us as Indigenous peoples, and how colonisation has impacted our rights and relationship to the environment. It emphasises the importance of acknowledging the environmental crimes committed against Indigenous peoples and advancing sustainable development based on Indigenous knowledge and practices. The review also says that there are unfavourable stereotypes in the mass media, a lack of Indigenous perspectives and a focus on the impact of media on public attitudes towards Māori and our protests about the whenua. It identifies a gap in how Māori land protests are being portrayed in the Aotearoa New Zealand

media and how that then affects public opinion. The research highlights the need for ongoing research into cultural responsibility in the media's portrayal of social knowledge and awareness of Indigenous issues. It is apparent that we need more balanced media and storytelling representations featuring an array of Indigenous voices, countering stereotypes, and promoting good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In addressing these challenges, we can work to create a better future for a more just and inclusive society that respects the rights, culture, and land of Indigenous peoples.

Although European settlers generally portrayed Māori as violent and dangerous, threatening law and order and the safety of settlers (Abel, 2006), there were instances where the media was sympathetic and understood the Māori perspective. During the land grab of the 1860s and 1870s, the newspaper The New Zealander appeared to be nearly alone in adopting a sympathetic view, primarily defending Māori from cruel treatment and advocating for more equitable land deals (Papers Past, 2024; MacDonald, 1995). Contrary to the majority of publications, The New Zealander was a vocal advocate for Māori grievances, challenging and disputing the prevailing accounts that overlooked or dismissed the impact of land confiscations on Māori (Taira, 2009). Most newspapers of the day supported the government's policies regarding Māori, but a small number of dissenting media voices sought a fairer, more just, and equal treatment for land transactions. However, the detrimental effects of racist ideology on Māori are recorded and explored in several academic studies that identify innumerable messages and features of anti-Māori discourse across various media representations (A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012; Nairn et al., 2011). This literature review has underscored that media reportage of issues concerning Māori has often been biased, unfeeling, and reinforcing pejorative stereotypes that have implications for the present, concerning both the direct impact this coverage has on Māori-Pākehā relations and its indirect effects on our public health and well-being (A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012).

Māori land rights have been the primary focus of almost all Māori protests and activism in Aotearoa New Zealand (Walker, 2004). However, researchers have yet to explore how the news media portray Māori land protests. Only two sources, a dissertation by Bates (2014) and a journal article by Miller (2011), have been dedicated to the media representation of the 1975 Māori Land March and the media coverage of the Ngāti Hine Forestry Block in Northland, respectively. While not expressly related to media depictions of protests over Māori land, Nairn et al. (2009) examined media reporting of the controversy over Māori rights to land in Lake Taupō Airspace. They noted serious problems, including the failure to provide a legal and commercial background, as well as the continued portrayal of negative Māori images.

Emotionally driven stories in the media often violated standards of fairness and balance, distorted the facts, fostered distrust, and lacked credible evidence. As little research has been conducted in this area, the issue needs to be explored to understand how the media presents Māori land protests and the few instances that have been examined thus far.

The identified gaps in the literature informed the development of the following research questions:

1. What key themes did Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald use to portray 'Protect Ihumātao' and participating Māori kaitiaki at the height of the protest movement in August 2019?
2. How do the themes used by Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald compare, and what differential effects may they have on how respective media audiences understand 'Protect Ihumātao' and Māori land protests in general?
3. How does any differential portrayal of 'Protect Ihumātao' participants by Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald affect the broader public?

Chapter 3: Research Design

This chapter describes the methodology used for a comparative analysis of media coverage of the Ihumātao issue, with a focus on Te Ao Māori News and NZ Herald articles. The following sections describe the research methodology, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods and provide an assessment of the selected approach.

3.1. Theoretical Perspective

This study uses a theoretical framework that explores the complex dynamics of media portrayals of Māori people in Aotearoa New Zealand, particularly within themes of colonisation, land rights, and representation. As it is interwoven with critical theories, it helps explain how media narratives shape public understandings of the marginalisation of Indigenous communities.

Social constructionism provides the theoretical framework for an analysis that is both critical of the media's representation of Māori within the colonial logic of our history and the debate over our Indigenous identity. This theory emphasises that knowledge and meanings are not 'given' but are constructed through social interaction and that the reality of everyday life is subjective and constructed rather than external and objective (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through the application of social constructionism to media narratives, researchers can recognise how these representations within news media and their affiliated mediascapes contribute to shaping social discourses about Māori and our struggles. This perspective maintains that reality is created through personal experience, communal meanings, and cultural values (Andrews, 2012), such that media discourses represent reality and mediate public perceptions of Māori identity, culture, and issues experienced by Indigenous peoples within a settler-colonial society. Andrews (2012) noted that language lies at the heart of this endeavour, being central to the social construction of reality; hence, people may use it to frame or reframe ideas related to Māori and our identity. Since the language of media either reinforces stereotypical thinking or thoughtfully challenges such representations, the framing of Māori issues often conveys dominant narratives that marginalise Indigenous voices (A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012). Such homogenised representations fail to encapsulate the complexity of Māori identities and experiences (Moyo, 2013; Mustapha et al., 2011).

Furthermore, social constructionism emphasises how crucial socialisation is in shaping people's perceptions of the world. People internalise their culture's values, beliefs, and

conventions—including how marginalised groups like Māori are perceived—through primary and secondary socialisation processes (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Several pathways influence this internalisation, including the media, education, and family (Gamson et al., 1992). As a result, media representations that reinforce preconceptions or only show Māori as criminals or social problems can have a long-lasting impact on public opinion, feeding a cycle of misinformation and exclusion (Nairn et al., 2012). This theoretical lens also underscores the influence of power dynamics in knowledge construction (Andrews, 2012), as media narratives frequently align with the interests of dominant groups, including settler societies (Karsgaard & MacDonald, 2020). This power imbalance can result in the underrepresentation or misrepresentation of Māori perspectives, reinforcing colonial attitudes and undermining the agency of Māori communities.

Social constructionism acknowledges the powerful influence of social settings and interactions on how people perceive reality. While critics argue that it dismisses the notion of objective truth, it instead highlights how meaning is shaped through collective understanding (Andrews, 2012). The media may report on the real challenges faced by Indigenous peoples, yet these stories are always filtered through socially constructed lenses. To analyse how the media portrays Māori, it is essential to critically engage with this complexity.

Beyond the theoretical framework, media content analysis emerges as a robust research methodology that systematically examines the messages conveyed through media. It is also a means for quantifying and interpreting portrayals of various subjects through mass media. Analysing the content of media is an important aspect of this work if one wants to understand how media constructs people's sense of their world, especially about vulnerable communities, such as Māori in Aotearoa New Zealand. Media content analysis is the method of making sense of a text by objectively and systematically identifying objects within it, as Macnamara (2005) states. It can be utilised to analyse a range of media, namely news, advertisements, TV programmes, and social media. Media content analysis offers insight into how dominant narratives are structured and disseminated, capturing this trend from both quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

Media content analysis was made possible by Harold Lasswell, who used this methodology for the first time in his seminal work on propaganda in 1927 (Macnamara, 2005). It has gained increased recognition, primarily due to the growth of digital and television media. For academics exploring societal concerns such as racism, violence, and the depiction of marginalised people, it has grown to be an essential instrument (Macnamara, 2005). When analysing media material, researchers can use both quantitative and qualitative methods. In

quantitative content analysis, the frequency of particular themes, phrases, or representations in media texts is counted and measured (Macnamara, 2005). Qualitative content analysis, on the other hand, focuses more on in-depth interpretive analysis and investigates the settings and meanings of media messages.

Framing theory contributes significantly to this theoretical framework by explaining how media portrayals influence public perceptions and attitudes toward social and political issues (Chong & Druckman, 2007). It describes the process of presenting issues through particular lenses, organising information to emphasise certain aspects while guiding the audience's interpretation and response. Within a broader context, frame theory posits that people can interpret the same issue in diverse ways, and these diverse interpretations shape one's values, beliefs, and responses accordingly (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Andrews (2012) highlights the central role of language in this process, positioning it at the heart of the social construction of reality, where language is used to frame or reframe ideas. Frames are powerful tools in communication, capable of shifting behaviours and attitudes. Policymakers, media outlets, and social movements frequently employ specific frames to align with the values of their target audiences and shape public opinion (Benford & Snow, 2000). Moreover, the psychological mechanisms underlying framing effects suggest that persuasive communication depends on the accessibility of specific frames in the audience's minds (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Given the strong relationship between framing theory and social constructionism, it is essential to examine how media representations contribute to reinforcing or reshaping public perceptions of Indigenous issues.

3.2. Research Strategy

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to critically examine media coverage of the Ihumātao protest. This allowed for a detailed comparison of the competing news frames used by the mainstream NZ Herald and the Indigenous Te Ao Māori News. The study aimed to highlight the broader impact of media representations in a settler-colonial society in comparison to the two.

The research design employed a comparative case study, comparing articles from the two media during the peak of the protest in August 2019. This configuration enabled an in-depth analysis of how each news network depicted the socio-political dimension and narrated the main topics and trends present in the entire dataset.

Qualitative Analysis

The study's qualitative foundation was thematic analysis, which enabled the identification, organisation, and interpretation of recurring themes within the selected media content. This approach allowed for a more in-depth examination of how the cultural perspectives of Te Ao Māori News and NZ Herald shaped their respective coverage of the Ihumātao demonstration.

Key dimensions of the qualitative analysis included:

1. **Representation of Māori Identity:** Analysed the portrayal of individuals involved in the protest, including the language used to describe Māori protectors and their motivations.
2. **Framing of Socio-Political Issues:** Analysed how both media outlets framed different land rights, colonisation, and environmental issues.
3. **Narrative Structure and Emphasis:** This involved assessing how each outlet framed the Ihumātao protest through its narrative choices, such as which sources were cited, which voices were prioritised, what quotes were included, and which aspects of the event were given prominence. These elements reveal the underlying values and assumptions guiding each media narrative.
4. **Impact on Public Perception:** In a broader sense, the analysis examined how various representations might have influenced people's feelings about Māori issues and the Ihumātao protest. The media significantly influences how the public views and interacts with Indigenous resistance, sovereignty, and rights by highlighting or underplaying specific viewpoints.

Quantitative Analysis

A quantitative media content analysis was employed alongside the qualitative thematic analysis to systematically review and investigate the contents of media texts by the frequency of their occurrence. As such, this part of the analysis determined the prevalence of key themes, phrases, and depictions of the Ihumātao protest across the two selected news outlets.

The details of the quantitative analysis are:

1. **Emerging Themes:** The study did not rely on pre-established categories; instead, it was used to identify and analyse themes that emerged from the data. This approach made it possible to gain a deeper understanding of how issues of Māori identity and land rights influenced their portrayal in the media.
2. **Frequency of representation:** Involved counting how often key themes, words, or portrayals appeared across the media texts to identify dominant narratives and patterns

of emphasis. This helped reveal each outlet's priorities, ideological leanings, and the consistency or marginalisation of Māori perspectives in their coverage of the Ihumātao protest.

3. **Comparative Metrics:** Variances in the representation of the Ihumātao protest were investigated in terms of the emergence of themes across the two outlets. The examination involved the depiction of the protectors, the issues involved, and the tone of the articles (e.g., supportive, neutral, critical).

This methodological approach, which combined qualitative and quantitative methods, enabled a rich portrait of the production and reception of media narratives about the Ihumātao protest to emerge. Through an elucidation of the distinction between Indigenous and mainstream articles, this blended methodological approach advanced an understanding of how such representations may have influenced the public perception of the Māori community. Ultimately, this thesis aims to uplift Māori ways of discussing representation, identity, and rights, and to provide momentum towards a more equitable and authentic representation of Indigenous voices in the media of Aotearoa New Zealand.

3.3. Data Collection

This study looked at two contrasting outlets: Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald. Te Ao Māori News operates under Whakaata Māori, the Māori Television Service, whose stated mission is to "serve our people, ensuring that our stories are by, for, and about them" (Whakaata Māori, 2024, para. 7) and are guided by values such as tika (accurate), pono (true), and aroha (compassion) (Whakaata Māori, 2024, para. 15-18). Staffed largely by Māori journalists and producers fluent in te reo and grounded in tikanga (Whakaata Māori, 2025), Te Ao Māori News reflects these values in its editorial stance: truth, integrity, respect, empathy, and cultural rootedness (Whakaata Māori, 2024).

By contrast, the NZ Herald is owned by New Zealand Media and Entertainment (NZME), the country's largest multi-media company, which reaches over 3.6 million New Zealanders through its print, digital, and audio platforms (NZME, 2025). The Herald presents itself as "New Zealand's pre-eminent news organisation" offering "honest, impartial and independent journalism" to a broad mainstream audience (NZ Herald, 2024d, para.1). Its newsroom is structured by politics, business, and crime, which reflect mainstream, Pākehā-dominated journalistic traditions (NZ Herald, 2025).

These outlets were chosen because they represent two distinct media worldviews. Te Ao Māori News offers an Indigenous-led, culturally anchored perspective aligned with Māori values and worldviews, while the NZ Herald exemplifies a mainstream institutional journalism orientation shaped by dominant national and Pākehā perspectives. Analysing their coverage of the Protect Ihumātao protest enabled this study to explore how cultural frameworks, institutional structures, and audience orientations shape the portrayal of Māori land rights and protest movements.

This study focused on August 2019 because media coverage increased significantly during that period. Kīngi Tūheitia, the leader of the Kīngitanga, visited Ihumātao, and police presence increased substantially. Police allegedly rammed one of the leading protectors during an incident (Haimona-Riki, 2019a). Social media, sports, and music celebrities also contributed to the protest's widespread support and media attention. These elements worked in concert to produce a robust analysis dataset that captured the Ihumātao demonstration's widespread media coverage.

Te Ao Māori News:

On 1 October 2023, a Te Ao Māori News website search identified items containing the phrase "Ihumatao." Results were sorted based on relevance and recentness. This initial search returned a total of 204 articles. The search targeted articles published in August 2019, narrowing the analysis to a specific period and resulting in 47 relevant articles. The refinement process applied the following exclusions:

1. **Unrelated Topics (10 articles):** Articles that did not pertain to the Ihumātao protest were excluded to maintain focus.
2. **Low Data Richness (8 articles):** Articles containing fewer than 100 words were deemed insufficient for analysis due to their limited context and detail.

Ultimately, the data analysis included 29 Te Ao Māori News articles.

NZ Herald:

Using the same methodology, on 15 January 2024 a search for "Ihumātao" was performed directly on the NZ Herald website. This initial search yielded 628 results. The Advanced Search feature narrowed the search to articles from August 2019, producing 123 relevant results. A further filter was applied to include only articles specifically from the NZ Herald, resulting in the following distribution:

- **NZ Herald:** 110 articles

- **Other News Providers:** 13 articles (including Bay of Plenty Times and Whanganui Chronicle)

Among the 110 NZ Herald articles, 52 were identified as premium content behind a paywall, leaving 58 free-access articles. Only open-access (non-paywalled) NZ Herald articles were included in the data collection to allow for an accurate comparison with Te Ao Māori News, which is entirely open access. The methodology excluded paid articles to ensure identical access methods for the two sources' articles under analysis. Restricting it to freely accessible material would enable an analysis that, ideally, represents a fairer portrayal of media coverage. This exclusion is also justified as only about 10,000 of NZ Herald readers were subscribed to paywalled articles in August 2019, equating to only 0.2% of the entire Aotearoa New Zealand population (NZ Herald, 2019a).

Subsequent exclusions for this dataset included:

- **Unrelated Topics (13 articles):** Articles unrelated to the Ihumātao protest were excluded, following the approach taken with Te Ao Māori News.
- **Video-Only Content (8 articles):** The analysis focused on textual content, so articles featuring only video content were omitted.
- **404 Errors (1 article):** A 404 error disqualified the article from consideration.
- **Articles from Other News Providers (6 articles):** The analysis excluded articles from other news providers to maintain consistency.

This process culminated in a final count of 30 free-access articles from the NZ Herald suitable for in-depth analysis.

Handling Cross-Referencing Discrepancies

The Newztext database, an electronic archive of Aotearoa New Zealand newspapers and media sources, was utilised during the data collection, producing 21 results related to the Ihumātao protest. However, upon cross-referencing these findings with the NZ Herald's website, none of the identified articles matched the online content. This discrepancy necessitated modifying the approach to include news from the NZ Herald's website, similar to Te Ao Māori News. The study still has limitations as a research tool, even though this modification ensured that it would rely on easily accessible online content. The potential exclusion of articles that were exclusive to the Newztext database may have limited the dataset's comprehensiveness. Future research should use a greater range of data sources to help navigate this limitation.

3.4. Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, a well-established technique for identifying, examining, and summarising patterns (themes) in qualitative data, was employed to analyse the data collected for this study. This method enables researchers to analyse large amounts of data and identify meaningful patterns that help explain particular phenomena. The primary advantage of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis is its versatility, which enables researchers to apply it across a range of theoretical frameworks and research questions, as well as to work with both small and large datasets.

Thematic analysis is particularly effective for exploring human behaviour, perspectives, and lived experiences. It enables researchers to document participants' experiences in ways that are meaningful, accessible, and analytically robust.

Google Docs and Microsoft Excel were the primary tools used to support the thematic analysis. The data was initially reviewed in Google Docs, where keywords, phrases, and excerpts were highlighted and colour coded to indicate early points of interest (see Figures A1 and A2). The highlighted data was then transferred into Microsoft Excel for more structured analysis (Figures A3 and A5). In Excel, I recorded preliminary observations and began the process of identifying and assigning codes to relevant data segments (Figures A3 and A5). These codes were later grouped into broader categories in a separate sheet to develop overarching themes and sub-themes (Figures A4 and A6). The sorting and filtering functions 7in Excel enhanced this process by improving data organisation and enabling the identification of meaningful connections and recurring patterns.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis were followed to analyse the data systematically:

1. **Familiarising Myself with the Data:** I immersed myself in the articles from Te Ao Māori News and NZ Herald by reading and rereading them in Google Docs, highlighting key data to support early engagement with the content (Figures A1 and A2).
2. **Generating Preliminary Codes:** I transferred the highlighted material into Excel, where I began generating and assigning preliminary codes to data segments (Figures A3 and A5).
3. **Searching for Themes:** I grouped related codes in a new Excel sheet to begin identifying thematic categories and sub-themes (Figures A4 and A6).

4. **Reviewing Themes:** I revisited the full dataset to ensure the coherence and validity of the emerging themes, refining them where necessary.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** I critically examined the distinctiveness of each theme and ensured that their definitions aligned with the study's objectives.
6. **Producing the Report:** I presented the finalised themes and interpretations in this thesis as part of an evidence-based response to the research questions.

3.5. Limitations

Although this study analyses how the Ihumātao protest was portrayed in the media using an appropriate theoretical framework and analytical technique, several limitations may impair the findings' thoroughness and generalisability. Firstly, the study relies on a comparative case study design that focuses specifically on two media outlets—Te Ao Māori News and NZ Herald—during a defined period in August 2019. Significant media outlets and alternative narratives might present additional viewpoints on the protest that this research does not include. As a result, this restricted focus may restrict the scope of knowledge regarding the media ecosystem in Aotearoa New Zealand. Second, even when qualitative and quantitative methods are compatible, they have inherent challenges. In qualitative analysis, thematic coding may entail subjective interpretation, and researcher bias may influence topic identification and analysis. Despite efforts to establish a rigorous methodology, the interpretive character of qualitative research implies that outcomes may reflect the researcher's opinions as much as the facts.

Furthermore, the quantitative aspect of the study—more significantly, the numbering and classification of themes—may be required to depict the diversity and depth of media narratives appropriately. Quantitative research provides valuable insights into trends and events, but it simplifies intricate representations and reduces understanding of the social construction of Māori identities and issues. The decision to exclude paywalled content from the NZ Herald may also introduce a limitation. This method might have missed important articles with critical points of view, but it was intended to provide a fair comparison with the Te Ao Māori News, which is completely open access. This exclusion could distort the data and limit the analysis of the full spectrum of public media representations. Evaluating potential changes in how the media portrayed the Ihumātao protest becomes challenging due to the study's focus on news from August 2019. Since media narratives can change in reaction to current events, a longitudinal analysis might offer a more complete picture of the dynamics at work. Finally, although the theoretical framework based on framing theory and social

constructionism offers insightful information, some contend it ignores objective reality. The study may ignore the real-world effects of colonisation and ongoing Māori rights battles, apart from media depictions, by concentrating mainly on created narratives.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The analysis of media items published by Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald in August 2019 reveals distinct, contrasting themes in their coverage of the Ihumātao land protest. Four key themes were identified for Te Ao Māori News, namely (1) Māori voices at centre stage, (2) positivity, (3) cultural grounding, and (4) self-determination (emerging from the three subthemes: solidarity, rangatiratanga, and advocacy). The NZ Herald, in contrast, identify the following four key themes: (1) negativity, (2) power dynamics, and (3) law enforcement. This chapter provides a detailed description of each of these themes and analyses their likely effects on reader perceptions. The final section contains a general discussion of the thematic differences, examining how they (a) represent the broader socio-political and cultural contexts of each media platform, (b) reflect the tone and emphasis each outlet uses to connect with their target audiences, and (c) highlight different narrative strategies that shape readers' understanding of the Ihumātao protest.

4.1. Te Ao Māori News

Te Ao Māori News consistently highlights Māori voices (121 codes), demonstrating the platform's dedication to elevating Māori viewpoints (Whakaata Māori, 2024). The frequent use of positive language (98) highlights an optimistic approach to reporting and its cultural grounding through the normalised use of kupu Māori (65). The subthemes of advocacy (18), rangatiratanga (19), and solidarity (21) taken together describe how Māori communities were empowered in their fight for land rights. Lastly, the theme of self-determination unites these subthemes.

Māori Voices at Centre Stage

Te Ao Māori News elevates the Māori voices at the centre of the 'Protect Ihumātao' movement. The media not only tells a story but gives it vitality by incorporating a variety of Māori viewpoints, highlighting the movement's significance and goals with genuineness and nuance. Young activists, well-known community leaders, Kīngitanga supporters, and contemporary figures are among the diverse voices that characterise the Ihumātao protest; everyone adds a distinct layer to the intricate web of this fight for justice.

Te Ao Māori News reported that young Māori voices added a vital and energising addition to the media narrative with their active presence during the protest. In political

activism, passionate and dedicated university students and artists play a crucial role in bridging generational gaps. This coverage aligns with scholarship showing that youth activism is essential for maintaining continuity within social movements and fostering intergenerational dialogue (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021; Earl et al., 2017; Melucci, 1996). Additionally, research indicates that Indigenous art, in particular, communicates cultural narratives relatable to people of all ages, demonstrating the long-standing potential of art to express sociopolitical messages and promote intergenerational harmony (Flicker et al., 2014; Martineau, 2015). Their engagement, along with that of Youth Parliament members and Youth Minister Peeni Henare, represents an effort to incorporate younger generations into political processes and ensure their active participation in social issues. By weaving together these younger voices, Te Ao Māori News reporting captures the dynamic atmosphere of the protest and reinforces the need for intergenerational dialogue. In doing so, any future Māori leaders are cognisant of and participate in the diverse socio-political movements that their communities are engaged in.

Leadership and the Kīngitanga

Te Ao Māori News highlighted the voices of prominent figures, such as Ngāti Tahinga Wilson. This was significant in lending weight and credibility to the Ihumātao protest. Wilson states, "He [Kīngi Tūheitia] has answered our call as a marae. We are not worried about what's been thrown around on multimedia. We're just here for our whenua and our king..." (Black, 2019a, para. 2). His kōrero emphasises how the community desires to cling to their culture to create a sense of obligation towards their ancestors. Their sentiments are valid; the anticipation of the arrival of Kīngi Tūheitia shows how the community believes his leadership in this authentic struggle for their land holds significance. As the chief executive of Fletcher Residential further said, "We know there is a lot of mamae and passion in this debate, and hopefully his presence will help to bring people together" (Black, 2019a, para. 6). This quote illustrates that there was more emotional depth and cultural significance to the protest. The reporting from Te Ao Māori News may empower people via voices that give gravitas to the struggle of a community steadfast in its commitment to protecting what is considered sacred.

This reporting illustrates how Te Ao Māori News illustrated the protest through leaders whose authority is rooted in whakapapa and tikanga. Such coverage aligns with research that indicates that respected leaders within Indigenous communities legitimise cultural causes. Their involvement often shifts public perception and media narratives toward a more profound recognition of the cultural and spiritual significance of such protests (Pieratos et al., 2021). In

Māori contexts, people view leaders as advocates and carriers of historical and ancestral knowledge, a role that is critical in establishing the protest as a continuation of longstanding connections to the land and responsibilities to whānau and iwi (Hope, 2004). Indigenous leaders favour protests, opposing reductionist perspectives that see them as merely political conflicts (Budd, 2021). Their participation goes beyond simply rising; it is about standing tall in their mana and identity. This is a real-life example of affirming Indigenous identity, asserting rights, and promoting cultural survival. Their discourses on Ihumātao delve deeply into spiritual connection to the country, with a much greater depth than politics.

Te Ao Māori News reported on the voices of Kīngitanga supporters, who have a long history of resistance. This serves to connectthe current battle at Ihumātao to earlier land battles. The involvement of Kīngitanga supporters links the tradition of Māori sovereignty with each stage of the protest, making it more than merely a call to action (Waikato-Tainui, 2024). This link honours earlier initiatives by situating the protest within the larger context of Māori land rights and places contemporary advocacy within a never-ending pursuit of justice and acknowledgement. This reporting aligns with scholarship that identifies the Ihumātao protest in the historical continuity, as portrayed in media narratives that discuss the struggle's deep roots. This chapter marks a significant milestone on the journey toward Māori sovereignty, a journey often misrepresented by the mainstream media in Aotearoa New Zealand (A. Moewaka Barnes et al., 2012).

Activists of today, including Pania Newton, are part of the modern face of Ihumātao protectors; their movement serves as a bridge between past struggles and contemporary efforts to reclaim and preserve Māori land. Such voices focus sharply on the continuum of the movement for land rights and how, over time, the community refines its strategy while remaining true to its foundation. Traditional structures such as the Kīngitanga and leadership figures, such as Kīngi Tūheitia, stand at the forefront of this activism. Te Ao Māori News reporting on Newton's feeling of being "energised" (Te Ao – Māori News, 2019a, para.1) by his presence exemplifies how traditional structures support modern advocacy and lend continuity and cultural authenticity to contemporary Māori activism. Research suggests that these enduring governance frameworks enable modern leaders to draw on historical authority, thereby imbuing current movements with ancestral legitimacy and fostering community cohesion (Durie, 1998b). The Kīngitanga, established in the mid-19th century to unite iwi under the protection of a single leader, has become a symbol of Māori resistance and unity. According to Takerei (2019), the significance of the Kīngitanga extends beyond political activism as it provides Māori with a cultural and spiritual anchor that connects past battles to

current challenges. Movements like Protect Ihumātao, in addition to being political, strengthen claims to be deeply ingrained in Māori cultural and spiritual continuity by enlisting the aid and direction of traditional authority. Smith (2012) discusses how traditional frameworks, such as tikanga Māori, guide and reinforce activism, creating a movement that resonates with Māori at the whānau, hapū, and iwi levels. This connection to tikanga enhances community cohesion as individuals rally around shared values of land sovereignty and intergenerational responsibilities to protect the whenua. For example, Te Ao Māori News reporting the visible support of Kīngi Tūheitia at Ihumātao not only signifies solidarity but also exemplifies how traditional roles can catalyse collective action by symbolising Māori unity and continuity across generations. Durie (1998b) further emphasises that Māori governance frameworks, such as the Kīngitanga, embody tino rangatiratanga principles vital for Māori activism. Māori leaders link historical resistance to current struggles by using these structures to support the validity of their activities as natural manifestations of their rights to land and cultural survival.

Cultural Expressions and Solidarity

Modern Māori activism strengthens and legitimises itself by integrating historical authority and traditional governance, reflecting a continuity that reinforces Māori identity and sovereignty in each generation's struggle to protect our land and rights. Cultural expressions, mainly through music, amplify this work further. For example, Te Ao Māori News reporting on Hoani Kake, filming his music video at Ihumātao, drives awareness and advocates for solidarity over land issues (HAZ "HAZADUZ" BRO, 2020). International solidarity, like that shared by Hawaiian activist Dr Emalani Case, is essential too. Te Ao Māori News also covered how Dr Case ties together the Indigenous movements across the Pacific when he says, "Mauna Kea[7] and Ihumātao are not isolated moments, they are movements that speak to each other across oceans... from Mauna Kea, we recognise the struggle at Ihumātao because we know it, we've felt it. From Mauna Kea, too, we have felt the Māori acknowledgement of our struggle, felt the prayers, been inspired by the actions and empowered by the solidarity" (Haimona-Riki, 2019b,

[7] The Protect Mauna Kea movement opposes the construction of the Thirty Meter Telescope (TMT) on Mauna Kea, a sacred site central to Native Hawaiian identity and the concept of *aloha 'āina*—the deep connection between people and land (Kahanamoku et al., 2020). Opponents argue that the project continues colonial injustices, marginalises Native Hawaiian voices, and threatens both cultural traditions and the mountain's fragile ecosystem (Prescod-Weinstein et al., 2020). Despite facing arrests and state repression, *kia'i* (protectors), including *kūpuna* (elders), have led peaceful resistance, drawing global attention (Watson, 2019). Their efforts underscore the broader struggle for Indigenous sovereignty and environmental justice as they challenge scientific expansion that disregards Indigenous rights (Cuby et al., 2024). Through legal battles, protests, and international solidarity, the movement calls for a future where scientific pursuits respect Indigenous self-determination (Kahanamoku et al., 2020; Prescod-Weinstein et al., 2020).

para. 3). Recent events, which include the potential purchase of the disputed land by Waikato-Tainui, also reflect adaptive strategies that iwi use in land retrieval and reconfirm interactions between the grassroots and political processes. This reporting illustrates the complexity of contemporary Māori activism and the diverse ways in which various initiatives and voices support the ongoing struggle for land rights and the preservation of cultural identity. Additionally, they convey a sense of determinism and resilience inherent in contemporary Māori advocacy, portraying ongoing activism as a key component of the continuity that sustains a movement. With such contemporary voices in the reporting by Te Ao Māori News, the media narrative of Māori activism takes shape and form, showcasing how current leaders adapt and innovate on the bedrock of their cultural heritage, instilling a sense of the evolution and adaptability of Māori activism. This reporting underscores the dynamism of contemporary Māori activism that its modern leaders carry on with restless vigour to keep the movement fresh.

Community Resilience and Collective Solidarity

Te Ao Māori News reporting on Ihumātao conveyed the resilience and determination of the Māori community, a testament to the celebration of our collective efforts regarding land and heritage as different Māori voices come forward (Ross, 2023). Because inclusive representation intensifies a protest that addresses collective action, solidarity, and common purpose, it ensures that the perspective of the larger community is understood and recognised. Te Ao Māori News covered the Ihumātao protest from various viewpoints, adding complexity and subtlety and reflecting the complex web of relationships and interests that shaped it (Ross, 2023). This variety empowers and unites the protesters while highlighting the importance of group action. Readers can view the Ihumātao protest as a worldwide issue connected to the ongoing battles for Indigenous rights, rather than just a local one, as Te Ao Māori News portrays it as a powerful manifestation of community solidarity (Wilson & Stewart, 2008). By including a wide variety of community voices, Te Ao Māori News legitimises the Ihumātao protest in the reader's eyes (Hancock et al., 2020).

The diversity of Māori voices represented in Te Ao Māori News reporting of the Ihumātao protest reinforces the cultural significance of speaking 'kanohi ki te kanohi' (face-to-face) to resolve disputes using personal interaction. Coverage in a protest led by Kīngi Tūheitia at Ihumātao, Te Ao Māori News showed hundreds of people participating in a show of unity in response to an eviction notice served on the land protectors. The whaikōrero (formal speech)

at the event emphasised face-to-face conversation and a collective wish for solutions through hui (meeting or gathering). By reporting this, Te Ao Māori News promotes the call for direct communication, emphasising its role in bridging gaps and fostering understanding, reiterating that sustained dialogue is the key to iwi finding their way out of difficulties amicably. Te Ao Māori News reported Newton, stating: "What the Kīngitanga and what Waikato-Tainui demonstrated today was a brave and bold position of leadership. They've come and they've said that they want to hear from the people and to see the people, and that's the kind of leadership that I hope we would follow in the future" (Te Ao – Māori News, 2019a, para. 4). Newton highlights how the Kīngitanga demonstrates their rangatiratanga by engaging directly with the concerns of the protectors.

The multifaceted representation of Māori voices in the Ihumātao protest enriches the media narrative and affirms the protest's legitimacy and significance. From young activists demanding environmental sustainability and a living future to Kīngitanga supporters emphasising the cultural and historical values of the land, such a broad spectrum of views captures the breadth and complexity of the cause that the narrative presents. Whereas the younger campaigners generally frame their arguments within a contemporary environmental context, their arguments may fall back upon the ancient tales of ancestral connection and land stewardship. However, despite all this, all parties have sworn to safeguard the land and culture at whatever cost. Acknowledging joint endeavour recognises the survival and determination of Te Ao Māori. The variety of voices makes the Ihumātao protest both a display of subtle differences in opinion and camaraderie, and a powerful testament to the resilient spirit of Māori action and solidarity.

4.1.1. Positivity

Te Ao Māori News distinguishes itself from the NZ Herald by consistently using affirming language in its extensive coverage of the Ihumātao protest. Rather than depicting Māori as agitators, its reporting positions them as kaitiaki—guardians acting with purpose and cultural responsibility. By contrast, the NZ Herald casts protesters in a delegitimising light. For example, the outlet gave a voice to National Party leader Simon Bridges, who described kaitiki as "a rent-a-crowd that's come from far and wide … they want a cause, and frankly they've got nothing better to do" (Cheng, 2019). It also gave a voice to columnist Mike Hosking, who urged the Prime Minister to "tell them to go home, get the police involved, and … not touch the thing with a barge pole" (Hosking, 2019). Phrases like 'resolution,' 'protector,' and 'generation rising' are frequently used to frame the kaupapa (purpose) in terms of unity, hope,

and intergenerational resilience. This reporting contributes to a narrative that emphasises unity over division, one that provokes public sympathy and promotes a more informed appreciation of the protest's significance. This section critically examines how such linguistic choices impact public opinion and contribute to broader debates on Indigenous resistance and land rights in Aotearoa New Zealand. Te Ao Māori News presents the protest as a respectable and forward-thinking movement by using language that expresses tenacity, hope, and unity and contrasting phrases like 'protector' with 'protestor.' This study seeks to demonstrate the broader significance of these positive linguistic decisions by telling a story of non-violent resistance and cultural preservation.

Protector vs. Protester

By purposefully using the word 'protector' rather than 'protester,' Te Ao Māori News changes the public's perspective on the Ihumātao protest and shifts the narrative framing from resistance to care. This language use indicates a tendency in Indigenous activism where specific terminologies influence the public perception of the legitimacy and moral standing of these movements (Godin, 2021; Grote & Johnson, 2021). The terms 'protector' and 'protestor' may characterise individuals involved in causes of activism, yet they carry varying meanings that affect the audience's reception of what they do and why. While a protestor is more likely to suggest opposition to something that already is and typically evokes images of disruption or disturbance, a protector conveys an obligation to maintain something vulnerable or sacred (Godin, 2021). In their analysis of the DAPL protests, Grote and Johnson (2021) reveal how framing Indigenous activists as protectors rather than protestors emphasises their roles as guardians of the environment and defenders of culturally significant lands. This terminology shifts the onus away from conflict by highlighting Indigenous values and deep cultural connection to land and water. Framing activists as defenders rather than opponents shifts the framing away from apparent disruption to the moral and cultural rationale of the cause. By emphasising their role as defenders, Te Ao Māori News promotes empathy and compassion among the public rather than fear or resistance (Popham & VanEvery, 2024).

Similarly, Godin (2021) investigates how the title 'land defenders,' which aligns with the collective right to safeguard natural and cultural resources, has been used by Canadian media instead of 'protestors.' 'Land defenders' shifts the focus from Indigenous activists as a danger to widely accepted norms of behaviour to heritage guards, highlighting their legitimacy and moral authority. This rebranding is part of a more significant trend in Indigenous

movements where preservation-and stewardship-centred terminology, rather than one of confrontation, elicits more public solidarity. As has also occurred within the Mauna Kea movement, terms like protector have connoted implications of Indigenous stewardship and responsibility for sacred lands, amplifying both the legitimacy and cultural reverence associated with these causes (Grote & Johnson, 2021). Protector in Te Ao Māori News aligns with this trend by bringing the story into line with values of care, preservation, and cultural respect. The reporting uses language that invites the public to view such actions as integral to heritage protection and to empathise with and support Indigenous rights rather than perceiving those rights as a threat to social order. The deliberate language used by Te Ao Māori News fosters more public solidarity and awareness of the activists' cultural and environmental obligations, transforming Indigenous activists into caring protectors.

Solidarity, Peace, and Youth Rising

Through the use of positive terms like 'support,' 'solidarity,' 'peaceful,' and 'unity,' Te Ao Māori News may strategically influence its portrayal of the Ihumātao protest to promote perceptions of collective efficacy and resilience. Such messages about cooperation and hope demonstrated that the protectors were not just agitators and encouraged their pursuit of justice to be achieved through peaceful collaboration rather than violence. Van Dijk (1993) suggests, however, that such language is deliberate; for him, word choices are key instruments in media discourse for shaping social representations, and they are often purposefully used to convey certain representations of social groups. The positive reporting from Te Ao Māori News echoes Rojo's (2001) view of discourse as a social practice, whereby linguistic choices are viewed as not neutral but driven by wider social and political purposes. It suggests an effort by Te Ao Māori News to depict the Ihumātao protectors as dignified and constructive actors. Te Ao Māori News likely aims to present a powerful and uplifting image of the protectors by emphasising terms like 'peaceful protest' and 'peaceful negotiations,' which demonstrate their solidarity and collective strength. This reporting is consistent with Hall's (1980) concept of 'encoding and decoding,' in which media outlets employ specific language choices to convey messages that shape audience perceptions. Viewers are encouraged to view the protest as a cooperative effort toward justice and reconciliation rather than an aggressive one. Similarly, Droogendyk and Wright (2017) emphasise the importance of empowering language in Indigenous movements, as it strengthens community members' internal and external solidarity and fosters a durable, unified identity.

Additionally, as Galta (2018) discusses in her work on 'subaltern counterpublics,' marginalised groups often reclaim their narratives in ways that challenge dominant stereotypes. In this context, Te Ao Māori News strategically uses positive language to create a counter-narrative that challenges traditional portrayals of protests as antagonistic or disruptive. Droogendyk and Wright (2017) corroborate this view, arguing that such language choices allow Indigenous people to strengthen communal resilience and cohesion by revising public conceptions and exercising agency. Through this empowering and carefully chosen discourse, Te Ao Māori News shifts the focus from historical trauma toward one of resilience, strength, and agency, portraying the Ihumātao protest as a dignified movement toward resolution and reconciliation.

The phrase 'generation rising' is another example of how Te Ao Māori News uses positive language to frame the participation of rangatahi (youth) in the Ihumātao protest (Martin, 2019, para. 7). The word 'rising' creates an image of upward movement, growth, and progress, thus serving as a metaphor for strengthening this generation through its powers of survival. Rangatahi actively shapes change in this reporting by envisioning futures together rather than remaining passive bystanders. According to Nünning et al. (2009), metaphors are not merely linguistic devices; they shape how people understand the world. The 'rising' metaphor further enacts the idea of young people as leaders in the struggle for social justice and cultural preservation and, thus, as a source of hope and agency. It also resonates with Māori understandings of kaitiakitanga, or the concept of generational responsibility and continuity (Royal, 2007). In Te Ao Māori News coverage, rangatahi actively promotes pride and hope among Māori and our supporters. To safeguard the survival and flourishing of Māori culture, the discourse around rangatahi emphasises their involvement in broader themes of resilience and the pursuit of justice.

Resolution and Constructive Engagement

The term 'resolution' itself evokes the prime meanings of commitment to amicable conflict settlement and progressive problem-solving. It forms the core of Te Ao Māori New's portrayal of the Ihumātao protest and greatly emphasises communication, collaboration, and compromise in dealing with land disputes, especially those involving Māori. 'Resolution' implies that all parties are working toward a favourable resolution rather than portraying the protest as an unending battle with no end. According to O'Carroll (2013) and McCreanor et al. (2014), such language reflects a forward-thinking Māori attitude that values direct communication and seeks

to bridge the gaps between various groups. The notion of resolution also underscores the importance of fairness, compromise, and transparency in negotiations of issues like Ihumātao, which pertain to a land of significant cultural importance. The framing of the resolution enables Te Ao Māori News to offer a hopeful perspective on the protest, presenting an opportunity for reconciliation and healing. The fact that such pragmatism and inclusiveness essentially correspond to the Māori principles of power sharing and respect means setting the protectors not only in resistance but also in seeking solutions that pay respect to both our cultural heritage and relevant legal frameworks (Love & Tilley, 2014).

Despite using positive framing, Te Ao Māori News does not shy away from the issues the Ihumātao protest has raised. Using words such as 'conflict,' 'controversial social issues,' and 'unrest' frames the land dispute as complex and divisive. Even in describing those problematic subjects, the reporting remains anchored in proactive conflict management and resolution. However, it is important to note that Te Ao Māori News may replicate conventional news values. Indigenous-led media are not entirely outside mass media logics. Te Ao Māori News may also use such negative terms to adopt familiar frames like conflict for the sake of readership and engagement. Still, the platform uses words like 'de-escalation' and 'dialogue' to emphasise the protectors' commitment to peaceful solutions. Te Ao Māori News balances the acknowledgement of conflict with a focus on constructive engagement. This framing approach gives due respect to the seriousness of the situation but puts forward the protectors as resilient and solution-focused. The language is also optimistic, as it emphasises that there is still hope despite the conflict and may inspire the protectors to continue working towards a fair and peaceful conclusion. Given that the protest offers a path toward longer-term healing and cultural preservation, the complexity of this framing demands more widespread public support.

Overall, Te Ao Māori News employs positive language in framing the public perception of the Ihumātao protest. The narrative is one of hope, resilience, and peaceful resistance, conceptualising the activists as protectors, resolution and unity, and the rising generation of rangatahi. Not only does this portray the protest in a culturally and historically significant light, but such portrayals also support a broader sense of empathy and solidarity. In this act of careful linguistic illustrating, Te Ao Māori News constructs the Ihumātao protest as a movement of progressive thought that incorporates constructive solutions to complex land disputes.

4.1.2. Grounded in Being Māori

This section analyses the unique manner in which Te Ao Māori News uses kupu Māori in its framing of the Ihumātao protests. This approach foregrounds the spiritual, cultural, and

political aspects of the protest, providing an essential window into Māori aspirations for sovereignty. By incorporating te reo Māori into its reporting, the coverage situates Māori identity and values, encouraging audiences to think more deeply about the broader significance of the movement. The decision to employ kupu Māori is not just a linguistic one but a clear cultural and political statement – one that validates Māori autonomy, artistic resilience, and the authority of Indigenous knowledge. In this, Te Ao Māori News separates itself from mainstream media by fundamentally situating its reporting in whakapapa, whenua and wairua. This style of storytelling is not just a recounting of history but a way of being in the kaupapa and holding onto the stories, values, and mana motuhake (autonomy) of tangata whenua.

Words such as whenua (8), mana whenua (2) and tupuna maunga (ancestral mountain) root the narrative in a relational ontology. Whenua reiterates the sanctity of the life-giving relationship between people and land. It is this repetition that suggests, in its coverage, that the land is not an object of legal dispute but a living ancestor, who is hurt, grieved, and defended. There is an acknowledgement by mana whenua that hau kāinga (home people) are the correct kaitiaki, and tupuna maunga recall to us that these hills and mountains are more than mere lumps of rock; they are ancestors in stone.

Ritual, Spirituality, and Sacred Space

Karakia (prayer) (6) is featured throughout the reporting as a daily rhythm of grounding, protection, and connection. Waerea, a spiritual incantation for clearing tapu, and tuku te karakia, the offering of prayer, reinforced the protest as a sacred gathering. Karanga (ceremonial call), with its ceremonial cadence, invited not only people but spirits and histories onto the whenua. These elements shaped the site not as a battleground but as a marae ātea (open space), where dialogue with ancestors and atua was ongoing.

Principles of Sovereignty and Intergenerational Responsibility

Te Ao Māori News also foregrounded the principles of tino rangatiratanga, mana motuhake (3) and mana mokopuna (intergenerational responsibility to future generations) in their coverage of the protest. They are not abstract political concepts but tangible demonstrations of Māori insight, independence, and intergenerational authority. As Anderson (2018) observes, these notions address a more general desire for Māori self-determination and the ongoing battle for political, cultural, and legal self-sovereignty. The coverage recognised this by allowing the kupu to speak for themselves, untranslated. Mana mokopuna, in particular, positioned the

protectors not as protestors but as caretakers of future generations, linking resistance to whakapapa and survival.

This reporting style stands in stark contrast to that of the mainstream media, which often misrepresents Māori activism as disruptive or irrational (Hokowhitu & Devadas, 2013). Te Ao Māori News offers an alternative, as described by Kaire-Melbourne (2019) and Middleton (2020), as a culturally framed media space that informs and affirms Māori values. The use of kaupapa (6), meaning not just topic but a planned and shared purpose, anchors the reporting in collective ethics. Phrases such as 'mō te whenua te take' (this is for the land) signal how, for many of the participants, the protest was a spiritual and genealogical imperative, not the dimension of politics that reactionary politics would make of it.

Additionally, tautoko (3), haka (ceremonial dance or challenge) (3), and waiata (song/sing) (3) were employed to underpin the value of community support and embodied resistance. Tautoko reflected widespread solidarity by iwi, artists, kaumātua (elders), and rangatahi alike. Haka and waiata, performed on-site and in media spaces, acted as expressions of unity, memory, and defiance. Visual and physical signs, such as moko kauae (an imprint on the skin that represents life stories, experiences, events and lineage) and moko (traditional marking for Māori females that represents lineage, identity and status), conveyed pride, genealogical connections, and the endurance of identity.

Through all of this, Te Ao Māori News demonstrated respect for Māori cultural traditions that were not about virtue signalling but about doing journalism properly. These kupu carried cultural weight, not as demographic descriptors but as expressions of intergenerational activism. The reporting modelled what Saft (2014) describes as a contrast to Western individualism, where elders and youth move together in action, connected by shared values and the transmission of tikanga. The protest was shown as non-violent, purpose-driven, and future-focused—an act of care, not confrontation.

Emotion, Diplomacy, and Cultural Continuity

The coverage also gave space to culturally significant gatherings such as hui (6), Koroneihana (the anniversary of the anointing of the King or Queen) (2), and taumata (summit or high-level position) (1), linking the protest to the broader political landscape of the Kīngitanga. These moments positioned Ihumātao not as an isolated event but as part of a long continuum of Māori political resistance and ceremonial diplomacy.

Finally, the tone of the reporting was emotive. Phrases like pōuri te ngākau (the heart is disheartened and sad) honoured grief without sensationalising it. Throughout all this, Te Ao Māori News demonstrated a genuine care to reflect Māori culture, not as a symbolic veneer, but as a foundation for authentic storytelling. As Hokowhitu and Devadas (2013) argue, such representations provide a crucial corrective to dominant media framings. The result is a form of journalism that prioritises environmental and cultural guardianship. It validates Māori worldviews and insists that any resolution must reflect the values of those most affected.

By letting kupu Māori lead the way in its storytelling and by being unwilling to simplify meanings so that the mainstream can consume them, Te Ao Māori News creates the ground for Māori to have our say, to act, and to remember in our own terms. The protest at Ihumātao is therefore discursively constructed, not just as a political issue but as a locus of cultural revival: tino rangatiratanga, mana motuhake, and mana mokopuna in action. The deliberate inclusion of kupu Māori goes some way to taking the storytelling beyond news journalism and immersing the reader in the spiritual and cultural domain in which it exists. It is a vibrant and immersive approach that persuasively captures the multifaceted nature of Māori identity as it amplifies Indigenous voices and stories. This aligns with Te Ao Māori News' overall objective to produce content that fosters and advances Māori identity, guided by integrity, professionalism, and empathy (Whakaata Māori, 2024). In this way, Ihumātao is not merely a news story; it is a cultural articulation of Māori resistance. It is the unique and intricate web of identity, resilience, and revival that is etched in the language and shaped at the core of Māori storytelling.

4.1.3. Self-determination: Solidarity, Rangatiratanga, and Advocacy

Solidarity has long been a cornerstone of Indigenous resistance. The Te Ao Māori News coverage of the Ihumātao protest highlights that solidarity is not only a theme but a lived and layered reality—expressed through symbolic actions, grassroots initiatives, intergenerational leadership, and cultural unity. The narratives connect Māori resistance to a global Indigenous resistance, threading their acts of defiance within a terrain of commitment to land, whakapapa, and justice (Locke, 2014).

Acts of solidarity shown in Te Ao Māori News reporting expand the scope of the protest beyond the whenua, such as TJ Perenara stepping up and leading a haka, as well as wearing wristbands that read "Ihumātao" while playing for the All Blacks. Such gestures, as Wouters and Walgrave (2017) suggest, help validate a movement's goals and mobilise support by embodying its values. Perenara and his stance echo what Hunt and Benford (2007) describe as identity affirmation through public performance, aligning the personal with the political. His

haka is more than a performance—it is a challenge, a call to action, and a reaffirmation of cultural continuity. Penney (2015) adds that symbolic actions by public figures can elevate grassroots causes to national or global prominence, reinforcing the power of visible allyship. According to O'Neill et al. (2023) and Lundy et al. (2024), athletes like Perenara are increasingly using their platforms to advocate for Indigenous rights, thereby extending awareness through cultural and political participation.

Grassroots Initiatives and Care as Resistance

Beyond individual figures, the Hotty Station initiative at Ihumātao offers a powerful example of care as resistance. Started by whānau to provide hot water bottles to protectors during cold winter nights, it quickly became more than a comfort—it became a symbol of aroha (love), kotahitanga (unity), and resilience (Paranihi, 2019; Te Ao – Māori News, 2019b). Entirely sustained by community contributions, the Hotty Station embodies the spirit of protest. Te Ao Māori News reports these instances of resistance not as a confrontation but as care—extending manaakitanga (care) to those on the whenua and offering a model of grassroots innovation rooted in Māori values. By drawing attention to physical and emotional hauora (Berning, 2023; Durie, 1998a), Te Ao Māori News affirms the significance of sustained well-being in activist spaces. As Houkamau et al. (2020) note, inclusive initiatives such as this are indicative of shared values and work to solidify solidarity by meeting a range of the community's social needs. By focusing on warmth — both literal and metaphorical — the action highlights the way the movement's strength lies in the depths of its relationships and its continued dedication to the collective well-being of its people.

Art, Leadership, and Historical Continuity

Just as care-based initiatives ground the protest in lived expressions of kotahitanga, the reporting by Te Ao Māori News of artistic expressions such as the song Ka Mānu, elevate its emotional and spiritual dimensions, connecting local resistance to global Indigenous movements. With over 3.8 million views, its music video links Ihumātao to struggles in Mauna Kea, Standing Rock, and beyond. Rob "Cilla" Ruha (2019) reflects on the role of faith as a stabiliser, linking music to moral courage and shared purpose. Though mentioned only briefly by Te Ao Māori News, Ka Mānu exemplifies how art can carry the mauri of resistance, turning sorrow into strength and song into strategy. Heta-Lensen and Wrightson (2019) describe such artistic efforts as essential to maintaining cultural integrity while amplifying justice-based

movements. Bautista (2018) similarly recognises the interconnectedness between individual creativity and collective political action in moments of cultural resurgence.

Leadership also plays a crucial role. Te Ao Māori News reporting on the presence of Kīngi Tūheitia, warmly welcomed by protectors, underscores a tikanga-based model of leadership rooted in listening and collective vision. Likewise, Te Ao Māori News also showcased that when Meng Foon visited the whenua and acknowledged its mauri, he reinforced the protest's spiritual and political significance (Te Ao – Māori News, 2019c). As the newly appointed Race Relations Commissioner, Foon brought national-level credibility to the movement. His commitment to get a feel for the mauri of the whenua signalled a culturally respectful approach to understanding land-based protest and affirmed the importance of Māori values within official responses to Indigenous activism (Hancock et al., 2020).

Te Ao Māori News' portrayal of 'protectors' rather than 'protesters' speaks volumes (Royal, 2007; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2017; Grote & Johnson, 2021). It situates those at Ihumātao within a genealogy of guardianship—tracing back to figures like Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi at Parihaka. In the late 19th century, following the Crown's confiscation of Taranaki lands, Te Whiti and Tohu led one of the most significant non-violent resistance movements in Aotearoa New Zealand (Belich, 2013; O'Malley, 2016). Rather than respond with warfare, they and their followers engaged in passive resistance—ploughing confiscated land, building fences, and occupying whenua that had been unjustly taken (Ioane & Scott, 1976). These peaceful acts were met with violent retaliation: in 1881, Crown troops invaded Parihaka, destroyed homes, detained hundreds without trial, and committed widespread abuse. However, the moral authority of Te Whiti and Tohu endured. Their tikanga-based and mana motuhake-based philosophy of non-violent resistance epitomised resistance to colonial injustice (Durie, 1998b; Walker, 2004). In evoking this lineage through language like 'protectors,' Te Ao Māori News reimagines the protest as part of an extended whakapapa of Māori resistance—dignified, principled, and with deep roots in cultural and spiritual values. As Hanna et al. (2016) state, media representations affirming the non-violent nature of protest can shape discourse by situating Indigenous resistance in a morally compelling story. Hanna et al. (2016) note that the media's portrayal of peaceful protest can significantly influence public discourse by situating Indigenous movements within a morally compelling narrative.

Intergenerational Guardianship and Future Vision

Among the younger voices amplified by Te Ao Māori News is Tawha—a young Māori warden at Ihumātao. At just seven or eight years old, Tawha was formally acknowledged for his role as the site's youngest warden, contributing to daily operations and welcoming visitors to the whenua (Paranihi, 2019). His presence demonstrates how the protest embodied intergenerational responsibility: not only elders but tamariki (children) were also entrusted with guardianship. Showing this intergenerational responsibility through Tawha, Te Ao Māori News' portrayal of the narrative at Ihumātao becomes one of continuity—of stepping into roles shaped by whakapapa and kaitiakitanga. McCallum et al. (2012) suggest that media representations of Indigenous youth leadership play a critical role in fostering collective optimism. By showcasing Tawha, Te Ao Māori News signals that guardianship is both inherited and lived by all ages, reinforcing a vision of collective identity and hope for the future.

Te Ao Māori News not only reports on these events but also elevates them. Their coverage honours Indigenous leadership, affirms collective care, and makes visible the ongoing work of decolonisation. This narrative reminds readers that the struggle for Ihumātao is not a single event but part of a wider whakapapa of resistance—past, present, and future.

4.2. NZ Herald

The NZ Herald's reporting on the Ihumātao land protests had a noticeably different tone than Te Ao Māori News. Negative language appeared 257 times, while positive words appeared only 158 times, creating a conflict narrative. This focus connects to themes such as power struggles (83), political accountability (17), and law enforcement (16). By highlighting the government's response, including the use of police, and the underlying tensions, the coverage presented a perspective that deserves closer attention and deeper analysis.

4.2.1. Negativity

The NZ Herald's coverage of the Ihumātao protest constructs a narrative dominated by conflict, disorder, and sensationalism. Rather than engaging with the protest's underlying kaupapa—the protection of whenua, whakapapa, and tino rangatiratanga—the coverage centres tension and resistance to resolution. Entman (1993) describes framing as the act of making certain aspects of a story more salient to promote particular interpretations. In this instance, the NZ Herald emphasises the altercation while downplaying the protest's cultural and historical undertones. Words like 'disputed,' 'deadlock,' 'dramatic stand-off,' and 'controversial' minimise the

protesters' role as kaitiaki protecting ancestral land and instead portray the protest as a spectacle.

Such language is not benign. As Fairclough (2010) and McCreanor and Nairn (2002) argue, language is a material expression of ideology—it positions actors, defines meaning, and either reinforces or challenges dominant narratives. Terms like 'ongoing occupation,' 'backroom deals,' and 'threatening to re-litigate' do more than describe events—they delegitimise Māori resistance by suggesting disruption, irrationality, and illegitimacy. The NZ Herald's portrayal contributes to the protest paradigm, which Papaioannou (2022) critiques for prioritising depictions of deviance and conflict over the political and historical grievances that motivate protest actions. Chen (2017) similarly notes that media coverage becomes a site of discursive struggle, where public meaning is forged and contested.

The NZ Herald's approach does not merely simplify the story—it distorts it. The repeated use of inflammatory language— 'rent-a-crowd,' 'shambolic,' 'mess,' 'ridiculous,' 'costly,' 'panicked'—undermines the mana of protectors, casting them as nuisances rather than political actors with valid, unresolved grievances. In the NZ Herald's reporting, Hosking's (2019) dismissal of the protest as "a distraction" and his warning that "by indulging the protest, you raise hopes" (para. 10) signal a more profound discomfort with Māori aspirations for justice. His suggestion to "find a bit of land… park yourself and wait for the ministerial limousine with the bootload of cash" (Hosking, 2019, para. 10) reduces whenua to a commodity and whakapapa to opportunism. These remarks, shared by the NZ Herald, play into colonial ideology that ignores the close ties between tangata whenua and whenua, and they belittle Indigenous struggle.

The NZ Herald's portrayal of police encounters feeds a narrative of chaos. The NZ Herald used words like 'manhandled,' 'rammed,' 'physical and verbal abuse' and 'arrested' to create a sense of chaos, maintaining the idea of the protectors being aggressive or dangerous. Succar et al. (2024) argue that the visibility of police brutality can prompt popular discontent, but the focus on dramatic instances can also risk obscuring the moral claims of the protest. Kilgo and Mourão (2021) note that the media's demand for confrontational news frames serves to delegitimise protest movements and refocus attention from the larger systemic problems onto individual confrontations. Such framing might elicit sympathy from some readers. Still, more often than not, it reinforces binaries of law and disorder, victim, and criminal, with the Crown and the police as peacekeepers rather than the aggressors.

Political dynamics are also presented by the NZ Herald in terms of suspicion and distrust, with allusions to 'backroom deals' depicting the Crown as either inactive or corrupt.

Abel (2006) notes that these depictions foster cynicism about democratic processes and may erode the Crown's treaty responsibilities. By doing so, it frames the protest into a context dominated by the failure of Te Tiriti and Treaty-based redress as a theme for addressing grievances. Criticism of local government, the Resource Management Act, and political indecision reinforces a sense that meaningful resolution is impossible within current structures, thus undermining public confidence in restorative justice.

Even moments of solidarity are recast by the NZ Herald as controversial. When All Black TJ Perenara wore a wristband reading "Ihumātao," the backlash he received—claims that he "got this one wrong" (NZ Herald, 2019b, para. 5)—revealed an unwillingness to accept Indigenous issues in the national spotlight. This criticism reflects what McCreanor and Nairn (2002) identify as discursive strategies that marginalise Māori when they enter public discourse outside of 'cultural' or 'acceptable' domains. In the NZ Herald's reporting, the All-Blacks jersey, a symbol of national pride, is often perceived as incompatible with protest, reinforcing the notion that Māori resistance is unwelcome in mainstream spaces.

In sum, the NZ Herald's coverage of Ihumātao constructs a narrative that privileges disorder, delegitimises protest and reaffirms colonial hierarchies. It emphasises confrontation over kaupapa, sensationalism over substance, and political division over Treaty responsibility. As Piazza (2022) and Kalmoe (2014) argue, the strategic use of emotionally charged language does not merely reflect public sentiment—it shapes it, reinforcing polarisation and obstructing collective pathways toward resolution. In this way, the NZ Herald's reporting sustains a harmful discourse that misrepresents Māori activism, normalises power imbalances, and narrows the public's understanding of what is, in essence, a struggle for justice and enduring connection to whenua.

4.2.2. Power Dynamics

The protest at Ihumātao was not simply an act of dissent—it was a constitutional challenge to the power of the Crown and an unyielding assertion of tino rangatiratanga. Born of whakapapa and whenua, it demanded that the state reckon with its colonial heritage that lives within its institutions. The coverage by the NZ Herald is a particularly nuanced depiction of the government's response – a tension between the symbolic and the fundamental. They cast a spotlight on Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, whose deliberate absence and cautious messaging were the foundation of the government's public strategy. Consequently, strategic neutrality, blame avoidance, and performative deference are also prevalent in the NZ Herald's coverage,

resulting in a government that appears to prioritise its image over its obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

The NZ Herald's reporting on Ardern's elision of the whenua in the face of constant invitations and hīkoi to her Mount Albert office was not a policy of neutrality but rather, persistent evasion. The NZ Herald reported her statements that "visiting doesn't get us closer to a resolution" (Jancic, 2019a, para. 6) and that "sometimes leadership means recognising when you need to create space for others" (Jancic, 2019b, para. 7) were framed as acts of strategic restraint. However, they exemplified what Hinterleitner (2022) refers to as blame-avoidance strategies: overtly political disengagement meant to convey respect. Porumbescu et al. (2022) note that these rhetorical tactics enable evasion of responsibility, as they prevent government officials from having to address contested questions and openly manage public sentiment. That distance of calculation allowed Ardern to play the role of an empathetic national healer without actually challenging the power relations at stake in the conflict.

The quotes above allowed the NZ Herald to present Ardern's broader approach to governance as one of engaging only when it suited her and remaining quiet when accountability became difficult. For, as Yair and Sulitzeanu-Kenan (2018) contend, silence here is not passive but political, entrenching the status quo. Ardern's words delineated the limits of symbolic leadership in the context of systemic injustice, but they also enhanced coalition and political capital. For her government to temporarily halt the development did not resolve the far deeper conflict. Instead, it was a performance — a symbolic act of calming unrest, but one that evades the intergenerational trauma of land theft.

Public reaction comments echoed this disenchantment. The NZ Herald shared that one commentator grieved, "They have nothing to offer, no plan, no ideas, no decisions, no action—just wordy slogans" (Hosking, 2019, para. 12) as a common expression of frustration with static governments. The NZ Herald reported the development halt issued by Ardern not as a testament to justice but as a stalling tactic — another iteration of the government's practice of rhetorical inclusion lacking in structural redistribution. According to Sullivan (2023) and Hall et al. (2015), these symbolic acts function as a form of control for dissent but do not eliminate the causes of conflict. The government's delegation of decision-making to mana whenua was portrayed by the NZ Herald as a respect for tino rangatiratanga; however, it also became a retreat from responsibility. This strategy invites the potential for the instrumentalisation of Indigenous autonomy as a means of government avoidance. O'Sullivan (2024) and Coleman and Rosenow (2025) note this dynamic in which the Crown repackages its authority and places another burden on Māori to do the labour of resolving the wrongs it has committed. Without

structural transformation, land return, legislative change, and resource redistribution, consultation becomes containment. Dialogue becomes deferral.

However, this shifting of responsibility went beyond Ardern. Māori leaders based inside Crown institutions also managed tensions with party loyalty as well as whakapapa commitments. The NZ Herald identified this contradiction. Peeni Henare and his alignment with Labour's stance, as well as Willie Jackson's comment— "We're just watching from afar and hoping some of the groups can come together" (NZ Herald, 2019b, para. 17)—illustrate how silence can be weaponised. As Mearsheimer (2011) and Noelle-Neumann (1974) argue, silence in political leadership is not neutral—it is a passive-avoidant strategy that maintains the illusion of unity while distancing actors from the kaupapa. In these moments, Māori leaders within the government risk becoming complicit in the structures their community resist.

This silence was not limited to party lines. It was part of a broader mode of governance—what Leitch and Davenport (2003) refer to as strategic ambiguity. Ardern's repeated deferrals reported by NZ Herald, such as her refusal to rule out a future visit to the whenua, exemplify this communicative strategy: saying enough to appear engaged but never enough to commit. Eisenberg (1984) describes this as unified diversity—a language broad enough to be interpreted differently by different audiences yet ultimately devoid of concrete obligation. In a context like Ihumātao, where Māori protectors stand grounded in whakapapa, wairua, and the pain of generations, such ambiguity is not inclusive—it is evasive. It sustains the performance of leadership while evading the demands of justice.

The NZ Herald portrayed the government's emphasis on mediation, while appearing collaborative, often functioned as a tool of delay. Sullivan (2023) and Stephan (2020) argue that symbolic engagement—when not accompanied by material change—serves settler-colonial interests by managing dissent rather than transforming it. At Ihumātao, the reality on the whenua told a different story: protectors remained, exposed to the elements, while formal negotiations occurred behind closed doors. As Saint-Martin and Allison (2011) warn, symbolic actions, such as political apologies or gestures, only foster genuine transformation when accompanied by substantive policy change or institutional reform; without such follow-through, they risk becoming hollow performances that obscure rather than resolve injustice.

Moreover, the government's strategy of pushing responsibility onto mana whenua—without resourcing or legal change—mirrors what Rask (2024) and Bauder and Mueller (2023) identify as settler-colonial tactics: invoking Indigenous sovereignty only within state-controlled parameters. This practice reinforces colonial hierarchies while absolving the Crown of responsibility.

The consequences of this approach extend beyond policy. Keane (2010), Reid et al. (2016), and Thom (2022) remind us that land loss is not merely material—it is spiritual, psychological, and intergenerational. The Crown's refusal to confront these harms undermines trust and deepens trauma. Reconciliation cannot be built on silence or symbolism. It must be rooted in return, redress, and recognition of the mana that never left the whenua.

The NZ Herald's coverage laid bare this architecture of avoidance. It revealed how Crown actors—through language, performance, and institutional distance—preserved their legitimacy while evading accountability. The analysis published by the NZ Herald exposes the strategic silences and rhetorical acrobatics that define the response of Aotearoa New Zealand to Indigenous resistance. It challenges readers to confront a brutal truth: the government speaks of partnership while refusing to share power. Tino rangatiratanga is not a metaphor. It is a constitutional imperative—one that demands not deference but transformation.

4.2.3. Law Enforcement

The Ihumātao events sparked a national dialogue, revealing complex yet important power dynamics between the state and those who protect the whenua. The NZ Herald's tendency to depict police actions as reactive necessities, rather than deliberate strategic decisions, exemplifies how media language can obscure state agency and uphold dominant narratives. For example, when protectors hinted they might take action, one article said, "police were forced to take action when it was indicated that the protesters were about to make a move of their own" (NZ Herald, 2019c, para. 11; NZ Herald, 2019d, para. 8). The word 'forced' is ideologically charged. It redefines the police not as instigators of conflict but as reluctant players countering an inevitable threat. This is a rhetorical strategy that reimagines authority as bereft of power, thus concealing the asymmetry between state power and the unarmed Māori kaitiaki. It implies that Māori being on their whenua is threatening enough to necessitate the use of force, pushing the onus of blame from the Crown onto protectors, who are armed only with their mana.

However, the NZ Herald's assertion that the police were 'forced' to act does not fully capture the tactical dynamics: the officers were deployed in force, well-coordinated, and prepared to use force. Their preparedness undermines claims that police announcements—portrayed in NZ Herald as neutral warnings to protectors—were impartial communications. Rather, the reporting of these announcements as 'warnings' reveals a calculated deployment of state power. Within this framing, protest signs and karakia were depicted as cries of warning rather than as expressions of mourning, defiance, and tikanga. Such representations reflect a

broader colonial script in which Māori assertions of tino rangatiratanga are routinely cast as destabilising. In this context, media language functions as more than a descriptor—it becomes a mechanism of control that insulates the state and delegitimises the presence of tangata whenua.

At Ihumātao, the protectors intervened from the point of aroha—for their tūpuna, for their whenua, and their mokopuna yet to come. However, the prevalent reporting from the NZ Herald precluded that motivation. Rather than exploring the cultural and historical reasons behind the protest, the focus of the NZ Herald's coverage was on the issue of public order. The NZ Herald's reporting of police as keepers of the peace ignored power relations and erased the kaupapa at the heart of the occupation. As Gauthier and Graziano (2018) contend, media portrayals form trust in the police as much as lived experiences do. Pitts (2022) adds that digital media has challenged traditional state narratives by enabling protectors to document and distribute their own truths. Despite this, mainstream journalism continues to grant narrative primacy to official voices. Ziems and Yang (2021) show that police are regularly positioned as the default authoritative source, legitimising their actions and suppressing dissenting accounts. This narrative practice reframes enforcement as order and occupation by police—not Māori—as a form of peacekeeping.

Even when the NZ Herald acknowledged criticism of police conduct, it often softened the implications of the criticism. One article notes that "no arrests were made" (NZ Herald, 2019c, para. 16) as if to suggest restraint. Yet the decision not to arrest anyone underscores the non-violent nature of the protest and raises questions about the necessity of such a significant police presence. The scale of law enforcement mobilised to confront peaceful protectors reflects a long-standing pattern of disproportionate surveillance and response to Māori resistance. Comments shared by the NZ Herald from members of the public, such as "Especially given the entirely peaceful process working towards a resolution, it was all very over the top" (Neilson, 2019a, para. 7), reflect discomfort with the mismatch between the protesters' conduct and the force marshalled against them.

Some NZ Herald journalists and commentators further undermined the legitimacy of the protest by invoking dismissive tropes. Referring to protectors as a 'rent-a-crowd' and describing the situation as a 'mess' reframed principled dissent as chaos. This rhetoric legitimised law enforcement as protectors of national stability and painted Māori protest as obstructionist. For instance, in his commentary with the NZ Herald, Hosking (2019) criticised the government's prolonged dialogue-based approach, stating, "Their go-to position is talk, let's talk, and talk, and talk some more" (para. 12), which reinforces the idea that Māori protest

is an unreasonably delaying progress. These portrayals echo long-standing colonial stereotypes that position Indigenous activism as a barrier to development rather than as a fight for justice.

Public responses to figures like All Black TJ Perenara further demonstrated the deeply polarised views surrounding the protest. In the NZ Herald's reporting, his visible support for Ihumātao—wearing a wristband bearing its name during a haka—was celebrated by some and condemned by others as an inappropriate politicisation of sport. The backlash he faced illustrates how Māori expressions of solidarity, even in symbolic form, are scrutinised and policed in public discourse.

The NZ Herald's coverage frequently employed sensational language to dramatise the situation. Descriptions such as "30 police cars driving at breakneck speed" (NZ Herald, 2019d, para. 29) and characterisations of the scene as 'crazy' or 'ridiculous' contributed to a climate of alarm that overshadowed the protest's peaceful intentions. Although some articles included perspectives critical of police tactics—such as allegations that officers struck Pania Newton with a gate and used physical force against wāhine Māori—these details were often portrayed as isolated incidents rather than systemic patterns. Yet these accounts were crucial in shifting public sentiment and revealing the emotional and physical costs borne by the protectors.

Ultimately, the NZ Herald's coverage reveals a tension between reporting and reframing. While some articles sought balance by noting the peaceful nature of the protest and the absence of arrests, the dominant narrative still reinforced the legitimacy of police intervention. By foregrounding police interpretations and framing Māori resistance as a threat, the NZ Herald's coverage helped sustain a colonial order in which legality is mistaken for justice. As McCreanor et al. (2014) note, such portrayals are not accidental—they reflect deeper cultural patterns that marginalise Indigenous voices and distort their motivations.

4.3. Overall Discussion

Depending on the viewpoint of the media outlets covering it, activism—a dynamic force for social change—can take many different forms. The public's understanding and perception of social movements are significantly influenced by the media, which often reflects its editorial priorities and targets specific audiences (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Colonial power structures have historically influenced media coverage of activism in Aotearoa New Zealand, giving Pākehā narratives precedence over Māori voices (Rankine et al., 2014). This study examines how Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald, two prominent Aotearoa New Zealand media outlets, portray activism in distinct ways. Comparing and contrasting their coverage

reveals how each platform focuses on distinctive aspects of the activism, from the characters of the movements to their broader social effects. Te Ao Māori News, operating through a kaupapa Māori model, grounded the disruption within a broader narrative of Māori resistance and agency (Ross, 2023). Their coverage is framed by a larger project of decolonising journalism through the incorporation of Māori tikanga, the centring of Māori voices, and the challenging of dominant Western-centred news values (Ross, 2023).

Conversely, the NZ Herald and other mainstream media have consistently situated Māori activism within a hegemonic discourse that characterises Māori activism as a disruption (Rankine et al., 2014). Research has demonstrated that Pākehā-dominated media institutions systematically underrepresent Māori perspectives, even in stories explicitly concerning Māori issues (Rankine et al., 2014). By analysing these differences, this study reveals how Te Ao Māori News constructs activism as a legitimate form of resistance against historical injustices and a means of reclaiming Māori sovereignty, whereas the NZ Herald continues to engage in practices that reinforce existing power imbalances in media representation (Ross, 2023; Rankine et al., 2014).

In contrast, the NZ Herald, as a mainstream news source, might approach activism from a broader, frequently more generalised perspective, representing a wider variety of political and societal issues. The scope of the movements, the reactions of different stakeholders, and the overall effect on public opinion and national policy may be the main topics of its reporting. Analysis of these frames enables an examination of how media depictions mediate the public understanding of activism and how activism contributes to the process of social change within these frames (Gregory et al., 2011; McCreanor et al., 2014). It demonstrates the importance of diversity in media for understanding activism. It emphasises the importance of reporting with nuance, respecting and acknowledging the many facets of social movements.

4.3.1. Māori vs. Western Worldviews

Te Ao Māori News grounds its reporting in a Te Ao Māori worldview, interweaving cultural, spiritual, and communal values into its storytelling. This approach privileges the land not as a commodity but as a living ancestor, imbued with sacred meaning and bound to whakapapa (Anderson, 2018). Nowhere is this clearer than in its coverage of the Ihumātao protest, where whenua is portrayed as both a site of contest and a source of identity. The phrase “they gift it back to the tangata whenua” (Hemi, 2019, para. 2) reframes land return not as a transaction but as a restorative act that reasserts cultural integrity. Similarly, stories of musicians who “banded together to record a song in support of the Ihumātao land protectors” (Black, 2019b, para. 1)

foreground the power of collective expression and the centrality of kaitiakitanga and mana motuhake in Māori responses to land injustice.

This framing consistently shifts focus from protest to protection. Te Ao Māori News uses terms like 'land protectors' instead of 'protesters,' evoking a sense of stewardship over dissent. This choice is not semantic—it is a deliberate assertion of values. It reframes the kaupapa as an act of care and obligation rather than defiance. As one musician noted, the protest speaks to "this issue that has suppressed our Māori people and essentially Indigenous people right across the globe" (Black, 2019b, para. 4), situating Ihumātao within a global lineage of Indigenous resistance. Likewise, protectors emphasised their spiritual motivations, declaring, "We're just here for our whenua" (Black, 2019a, para. 2), affirming that the protest is not driven by spectacle but by tikanga.

Te Ao Māori News elevates themes of community care, cultural guardianship, and intergenerational obligation. This is evident in the platform's inclusion of figures like Moana Jackson, whose presence signified not just support but also whakapapa authority. One observer reflected, "I believe they will get what they want in the end" (Black, 2019b, para. 8), a statement that affirms belief in collective justice rather than political compromise. The platform consistently communicates that Māori well-being is inseparable from the health of their environment, language, and cultural practices.

The call to involve the Kīngitanga in the resolution process illustrates how tikanga—not state processes—sets the moral terms of engagement. As reported, "the group says that the Kīngitanga and Waikato-Tainui are beginning a tikanga process" (Te Ao – Māori News, 2019a, para. 5), honouring the customary authority embedded in whakapapa and intertribal relationships. This is more than a procedural step; it is a reaffirmation of mana whenua and an assertion that disputes on Māori land must be resolved through Māori processes. Tikanga is shown not as a relic of the past but as a living, adaptive system of ethics. Peaceful resistance at Ihumātao reflected this, with Māori wardens like Korus Tawha helping to maintain calm and manaaki whānau, demonstrating the strength of tikanga even under surveillance and threat.

Rather than portraying protest as confrontation, Te Ao Māori News depicts it as a reaffirmation of collective sovereignty. Land protectors engaged in whakawhanaungatanga (relationship building) to de-escalate tensions, with one report noting that dialogue led to the removal of police arms from the site. In contrast to adversarial frameworks, the Māori model of non-violent resistance is shown to be relational, restorative, and anchored in whakapapa. "Our whānau are energised and encouraged by the visit today" (Te Ao – Māori News, 2019a, para. 2), one report stated, suggesting that the strength of the movement lies not in conflict but

in unity. The protest became a platform for Māori resurgence, symbolised by the release of "Ka Mānu," a waiata that connected Ihumātao to other global Indigenous struggles.

Language is central to this cultural framing. Te Ao Māori News uses kupu Māori not as ornamentation but as epistemology—language as a way of seeing. Stories such as the Pipi Mā premiere at Ihumātao carry a clear message: "If we lose the land here, we also lose our Māoritanga [Māori culture], we lose our identity" (Haimona-Riki, 2019c, para. 3). Here, whenua and reo are inextricable, and the coverage positions both as critical to survival and continuity. Performances of waiata like "Toitū Te Whenua" celebrate mana motuhake and affirm the protest as both a cultural ceremony and a political stance. The reporting not only informs—it embodies and performs Māori ways of knowing.

Through this lens, Te Ao Māori News amplifies the global dimensions of Indigenous solidarity. Whether covering support from Kanaka Maoli in Hawai'i or haka performed by Māori abroad, the platform reveals the shared stakes in land protection and cultural continuity. "The protest #ProtectIhumātao has seen ethnicities from many nations and religions across the world arrive at the site" (Black, 2019c, para. 7), it reports, positioning Ihumātao as part of a broader resistance to colonial dispossession. The presence of figures like TJ Perenara reinforces this, not as celebrity activism but as acts of whanaungatanga (kinship ties) and kaupapa support that echo across iwi and borders.

By contrast, the NZ Herald approaches the Ihumātao protest from a Western worldview steeped in individualism, conflict, and state authority (Abel, 2006). Its framing tends to centre personal responsibility and legal processes over structural injustice and collective memory. The use of conflict-laden language— "disputed," "standoff," "protester rammed"—repositions the kaupapa as disruption rather than resistance. This reduction of systemic grievances into moments of drama prioritises spectacle over substance, obscuring the long arc of Māori land struggles.

Individual figures dominate the NZ Herald's reporting, whether through the voice of MP Peeni Henare calling for leadership accountability (Keall, 2019, para. 8) or through the personal anguish of protest leader Pania Newton, stating, "I did fall to the ground" (NZ Herald, 2019d, para. 3). While such perspectives humanise the conflict, they also displace collective narratives, which are central to Māori modes of resistance. Even expressions of solidarity by public figures like TJ Perenara and Sonny Bill Williams are often reduced to isolated gestures, disconnected from the deeper whakapapa and cultural context that informed them.

The NZ Herald's emphasis on law enforcement responses reinforces this individualistic lens. The assertion that "police were forced to take action" (NZ Herald, 2019d, para. 8) implies

neutrality and necessity, casting police as reluctant actors rather than instruments of state power. This framing diminishes the historical context of Crown violence and deflects attention from the power asymmetries at play. Meanwhile, political leaders like Simon Bridges position themselves through blunt directives— "tell the protesters to go home" (Cheng, 2019, para. 1)—evoking settler-state authority over Indigenous claims to whenua.

At times, the Herald acknowledges the broader significance of the land, referencing the sacredness of Ihumātao (Austin, 2019, para. 3) and the role of Kīngi Tūheitia. However, these elements are often secondary to conflict narratives and bureaucratic negotiations. Even when systemic issues are mentioned—such as the possibility of Fletcher gifting the land to iwi to maintain its "social licence to operate" (Neilson, 2019b, para. 5)—the focus remains on strategic considerations rather than cultural obligations or ancestral restoration.

The result is a portrayal shaped by rationality, objectivity, and political pragmatism—values that underpin mainstream news conventions but often fail to grasp the spiritual and communal imperatives that drive Māori action. While some articles cite Moana Jackson to acknowledge historical injustices (Neilson, 2019b, para. 11), such acknowledgements exist within a broader narrative that privileges decision-makers, experts, and politicians over whānau, hapū, and iwi.

In sum, the contrast between Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald is not simply stylistic—it is epistemological. One reflects a living worldview rooted in tikanga, collective memory, and cultural continuity. The other operates within a framework of conflict, individual agency, and political strategy. Where Te Ao Māori News uplifts protectors as kaitiaki and mobilises solidarity through whakapapa and art, the NZ Herald often positions them as disruptors navigating a political controversy. These diverging frameworks ultimately shape how the public perceives the struggle at Ihumātao—either as a sacred stand for Indigenous sovereignty or as a legal and political issue to be resolved.

4.3.2. Positivity vs. Negativity

Te Ao Māori News adopts a supportive and affirming framing of activism, positioning it as a culturally grounded, community-driven force for justice and transformation. Its coverage emphasises that activism is not reactionary. However, it is a proactive expression of tikanga, whakapapa, and collective responsibility. Rather than framing protest as a disorder; Te Ao Māori News presents it as a necessary assertion of mana and a pathway to societal progress. Activism is portrayed as a unifying force—rooted in ethical conviction and cultural continuity—that mobilises communities to protect their heritage and address systemic

injustice. This framing reflects Te Ao Māori News' broader kaupapa: to uplift Māori voices, preserve cultural identity, and promote the collective well-being of tangata whenua. By doing so, it legitimises activism as not only valid but vital to the pursuit of equity and tino rangatiratanga.

In contrast, the NZ Herald adopts a more critical and conflict-oriented framing of activism. Its coverage frequently centres on confrontation, tension, and disruption, drawing attention to power struggles between protectors and state institutions. This focus on dissent and discord frames activism as contentious, casting protectors as instigators rather than protectors. By emphasising clashes with authority and describing activism in terms of disruption, the NZ Herald risks reinforcing narratives that delegitimise protest and obscure its deeper cultural and historical motivations. This perspective positions activism through a lens of separatism and scepticism, contributing to a public discourse that is more likely to question the legitimacy of Indigenous resistance than to understand its roots.

4.3.3. Cultural vs. Political

Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald offer divergent portrayals of activism, shaped by their distinct editorial orientations and underlying worldviews. Te Ao Māori News frames activism as a culturally grounded and community-driven responsibility, whereas the NZ Herald emphasises political strategy, power dynamics, and government response. These conflicting lenses reflect broader differences in each outlet's perception and characterisation of the purpose, legitimacy, and impact of protest, particularly around Indigenous rights, and social justice. This analysis illustrates the mechanisms by which media framing influence's public opinion, either supporting or undercutting dominant narratives about activism and its role in society.

Te Ao Māori News presents activism as an expression of Māori identity and intergenerational responsibility. Rather than framing protest through the lens of confrontation or political gain, its coverage centres on tikanga, whakapapa, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Activism is positioned not as a reaction but as a proactive and ethical obligation to uphold Māori values and protect whenua. Upon reporting solidarity, cultural vitality, and community resistance, the Te Ao Māori News reverberates with action as a praxis of tino rangatiratanga and as a means of empowerment for one's community. Coverage like this contributes to the platform's kaupapa of ensuring the future of Māori and their well-being, empowering them to be healthy together.

While the NZ Herald views activism as a political phenomenon and focuses on conflict, strategy, and power relations, it sees little beyond its own editorials. Its reporting regularly questions the legitimacy, efficacy, and social effect of protest movements, placing them in the context of political debate. This lens highlights tensions between activists and the government, portraying activism as a disruptive but sometimes necessary force within a contested democratic landscape. By emphasising the political stakes and systemic challenges involved, the NZ Herald provides a more critical and detached analysis—one that privileges political discourse over cultural meaning.

While both media sources acknowledge the importance of activism, their accounts differ in tone, focus, and intent. Te Ao Māori News focuses on cultural resilience, moral responsibility, and collective strength, framing activism as a healing and empowering process. The NZ Herald focuses on political tension, providing an explanatory account of activism that is at times cynical and often rooted in institutional thinking. These different representations are not merely stylistic but are markers of more entrenched ideological commitments and reflect the values that each platform wants to affirm. Comparing these platforms provides insight into how media shapes the public perception of social movements and the role of activism in promoting justice, equity, and Indigenous self-determination.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has followed the distinct threads of two media worlds—Te Ao Māori News and the NZ Herald—to reveal how each reflects and reinforces the worldview it originated from. Through comparative analysis, it becomes clear that journalism is never neutral. News platforms do not merely report events; they actively shape the meaning of those events. They amplify some voices while muting others, and in doing so, they mould collective memory, public perception, and cultural direction in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Te Ao Māori News, grounded in a Māori worldview, adopts a relational and holistic approach to reporting. Its storytelling is woven through whakapapa, carried by wairua, and held in the embrace of whānau, hapū, and iwi. It centres our responsibilities to one another and the whenua, framed through whanaungatanga and kaitiakitanga. Activism is not depicted as an interruption but as a continuation—a ceremony of remembrance, a practice of care, and an act of intergenerational resistance. Under this framework, socio-political tensions are not individual front-page stories but expressions of extended relationships with land, ancestors, and generations yet to come. This journalism shows what it means to be Māori: to work under the leadership of our tūpuna behind us and the aspirations of our mokopuna in front of us.

By contrast, the NZ Herald draws upon politics and a vision of individualism. Its tales centre upon parliament, policy, and politicians, simplifying complex collective struggles into questions of strategy or legality. In these narratives, whenua is not an ancestor but a contested place—property, not a special location. Accountability is upwards to institutions, not outwards to individuals or downwards into the ground. The tone is empirical, factual, and largely devoid of spirituality or cultural depth. Though this can offer analytical precision, it fails to capture the lived, multi-layered realities of Indigenous resistance. It flattens Kaupapa Māori into political unrest and renders whakapapa invisible.

This is not a neutral divergence—it is a structural imbalance. When mainstream media dominates the narrative, Māori perspectives are reframed, marginalised, or erased. Indigenous protest is depicted as a disruption, while government action is normalised. But when Māori media occupies space, the story changes: we are not protesters, we are defenders. We are not threats, we are the kaitiaki of tikanga. We are not the problem. We are the pulse of Aotearoa New Zealand.

These findings demonstrate that an equitable media landscape must do more than reflect a voice for Māori—it must be accountable to them. Tangata whenua has the right not only to

be heard but to be heard on our terms, in our language, and through our values. A media system that honours this can help restore balance, cultivate understanding, and uphold the dignity of all who call this land home.

In closing, this thesis asserts that media is not a passive mirror—it is an active site of power. How we are represented as Māori shapes how we are treated, funded, policed, and believed. It shapes policy. It shapes public sympathy. It sets what is 'truth.' If Aotearoa New Zealand is to develop integrity, its media must reflect not only the state of the nation but the mauri of the whenua, the mana of the iwi, and the ancestral tides below them. Indigenous narratives do not subvert democracy—they restore it to its rightful foundation. Justice, according to tikanga, does not undermine the law—it strengthens it. And a nation that honours those realities is not made weaker—it becomes whole.

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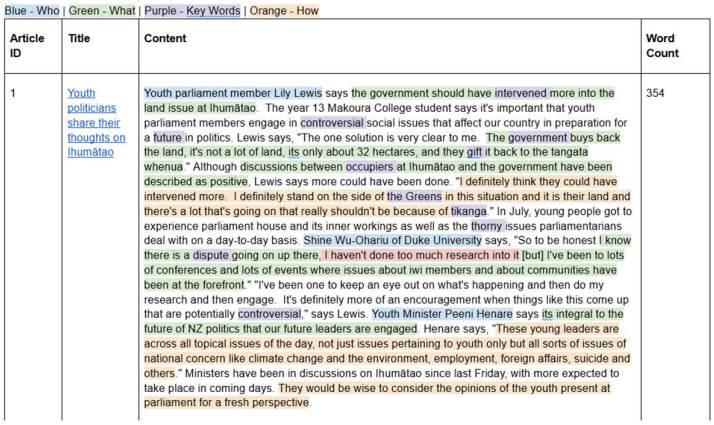
Appendix A: Screenshots of Data Collection Process

A1. Google Docs – Highlighted Te Ao Māori News Articles for Thematic Coding



Blue - Who | Green - What | Purple - Key Words | Orange - How

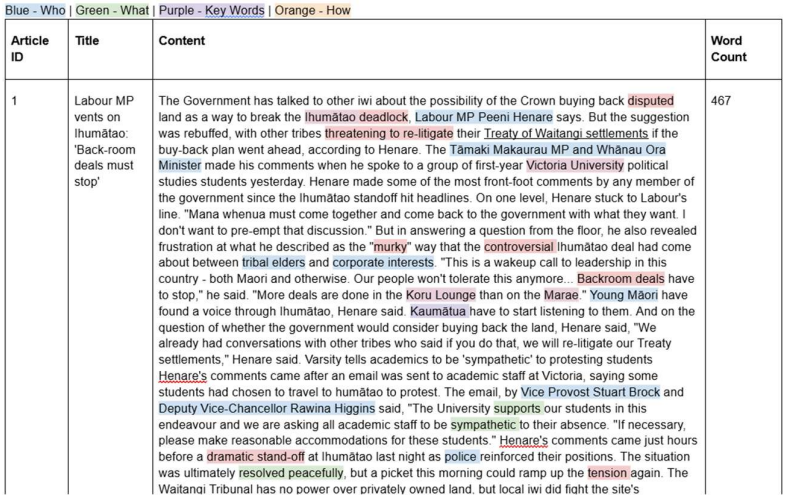
Article ID	Title	Content	Word Count
1	Youth politicians share their thoughts on Ihumātao	Youth parliament member Lily Lewis says the government should have intervened more into the land issue at Ihumātao. The year 13 Makoura College student says it's important that youth parliament members engage in controversial social issues that affect our country in preparation for a future in politics. Lewis says, "The one solution is very clear to me. The government buys back the land, it's not a lot of land, its only about 32 hectares, and they gift it back to the tangata whenua." Although discussions between occupiers at Ihumātao and the government have been described as positive, Lewis says more could have been done. "I definitely think they could have intervened more. I definitely stand on the side of the Greens in this situation and it is their land and there's a lot that's going on that really shouldn't be because of tikanga." In July, young people got to experience parliament house and its inner workings as well as the thorny issues parliamentarians deal with on a day-to-day basis. Shine Wu-Oharu of Duke University says, "So to be honest I know there is a dispute going on up there, I haven't done too much research into it [but] I've been to lots of conferences and lots of events where issues about iwi members and about communities have been at the forefront." "I've been one to keep an eye out on what's happening and then do my research and then engage. It's definitely more of an encouragement when things like this come up that are potentially controversial," says Lewis. Youth Minister Peeni Henare says its integral to the future of NZ politics that our future leaders are engaged. Henare says, "These young leaders are across all topical issues of the day, not just issues pertaining to youth only but all sorts of issues of national concern like climate change and the environment, employment, foreign affairs, suicide and others." Ministers have been in discussions on Ihumātao since last Friday, with more expected to take place in coming days. They would be wise to consider the opinions of the youth present at parliament for a fresh perspective.	354

4.4. Figure A1

Google Docs screenshot showing highlighted segments from Te Ao Māori News articles.

Source: Author's highlighting, October 2023 to January 2024.

A2. Google Docs – Highlighted NZ Herald Articles for Thematic Coding



Blue - Who | Green - What | Purple - Key Words | Orange - How

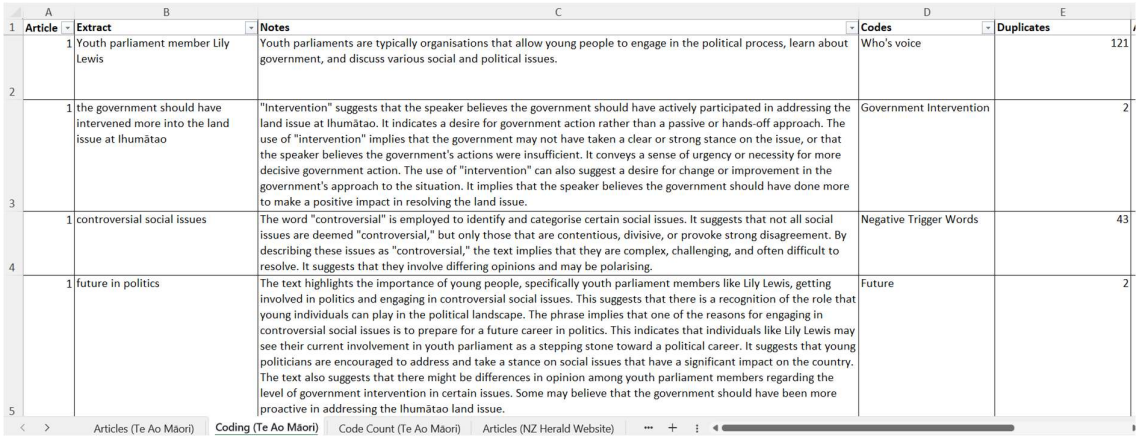
Article ID	Title	Content	Word Count
1	Labour MP vents on Ihumātao: 'Back-room deals must stop'	The Government has talked to other iwi about the possibility of the Crown buying back disputed land as a way to break the Ihumātao deadlock, Labour MP Peeni Henare says. But the suggestion was rebuffed, with other tribes threatening to re-litigate their Treaty of Waitangi settlements if the buy-back plan went ahead, according to Henare. The Tāmaki Makaurau MP and Whānau Ora Minister made his comments when he spoke to a group of first-year Victoria University political studies students yesterday. Henare made some of the most front-foot comments by any member of the government since the Ihumātao standoff hit headlines. On one level, Henare stuck to Labour's line. "Mana whenua must come together and come back to the government with what they want. I don't want to pre-empt that discussion." But in answering a question from the floor, he also revealed frustration at what he described as the "murky" way that the controversial Ihumātao deal had come about between tribal elders and corporate interests. "This is a wakeup call to leadership in this country - both Maori and otherwise. Our people won't tolerate this anymore... Backroom deals have to stop," he said. "More deals are done in the Koru Lounge than on the Marae." Young Māori have found a voice through Ihumātao, Henare said. Kaumātua have to start listening to them. And on the question of whether the government would consider buying back the land, Henare said, "We already had conversations with other tribes who said if you do that, we will re-litigate our Treaty settlements," Henare said. Varsity tells academics to be 'sympathetic' to protesting students Henare's comments came after an email was sent to academic staff at Victoria, saying some students had chosen to travel to humātao to protest. The email, by Vice Provost Stuart Brock and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Rawina Higgins said, "The University supports our students in this endeavour and we are asking all academic staff to be sympathetic to their absence. "If necessary, please make reasonable accommodations for these students." Henare's comments came just hours before a dramatic stand-off at Ihumātao last night as police reinforced their positions. The situation was ultimately resolved peacefully, but a picket this morning could ramp up the tension again. The Waitangi Tribunal has no power over privately owned land, but local iwi did fight the site's	467

4.5. Figure A2

Google Docs screenshot showing highlighted segments from NZ Herald articles.

Source: Author's highlighting, January 2024 to May 2024.

A3. Te Ao Māori News – Coding in Excel



Article	Extract	Notes	Codes	Duplicates
1	Youth parliament member Lily Lewis	Youth parliaments are typically organisations that allow young people to engage in the political process, learn about government, and discuss various social and political issues.	Who's voice	121
1	the government should have intervened more into the land issue at Ihumātao	"Intervention" suggests that the speaker believes the government should have actively participated in addressing the land issue at Ihumātao. It indicates a desire for government action rather than a passive or hands-off approach. The use of "intervention" implies that the government may not have taken a clear or strong stance on the issue, or that the speaker believes the government's actions were insufficient. It conveys a sense of urgency or necessity for more decisive government action. The use of "intervention" can also suggest a desire for change or improvement in the government's approach to the situation. It implies that the speaker believes the government should have done more to make a positive impact in resolving the land issue.	Government Intervention	2
1	controversial social issues	The word "controversial" is employed to identify and categorise certain social issues. It suggests that not all social issues are deemed "controversial," but only those that are contentious, divisive, or provoke strong disagreement. By describing these issues as "controversial," the text implies that they are complex, challenging, and often difficult to resolve. It suggests that they involve differing opinions and may be polarising.	Negative Trigger Words	43
1	future in politics	The text highlights the importance of young people, specifically youth parliament members like Lily Lewis, getting involved in politics and engaging in controversial social issues. This suggests that there is a recognition of the role that young individuals can play in the political landscape. The phrase implies that one of the reasons for engaging in controversial social issues is to prepare for a future career in politics. This indicates that individuals like Lily Lewis may see their current involvement in youth parliament as a stepping stone toward a political career. It suggests that young politicians are encouraged to address and take a stance on social issues that have a significant impact on the country. The text also suggests that there might be differences in opinion among youth parliament members regarding the level of government intervention in certain issues. Some may believe that the government should have been more proactive in addressing the Ihumātao land issue.	Future	2

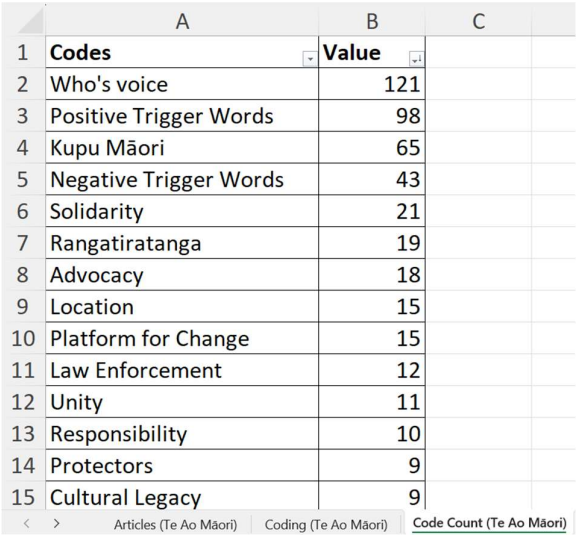
Articles (Te Ao Māori) | Coding (Te Ao Māori) | Code Count (Te Ao Māori) | Articles (NZ Herald Website)

Figure A3

Excel sheet showing extracts and codes from Te Ao Māori News articles. Notes interpret tone, framing, and meaning within a kaupapa Māori lens.

Source: Author's coding matrix.

A4. Code Frequency – Te Ao Māori News



Codes	Value
Who's voice	121
Positive Trigger Words	98
Kupu Māori	65
Negative Trigger Words	43
Solidarity	21
Rangatiratanga	19
Advocacy	18
Location	15
Platform for Change	15
Law Enforcement	12
Unity	11
Responsibility	10
Protectors	9
Cultural Legacy	9

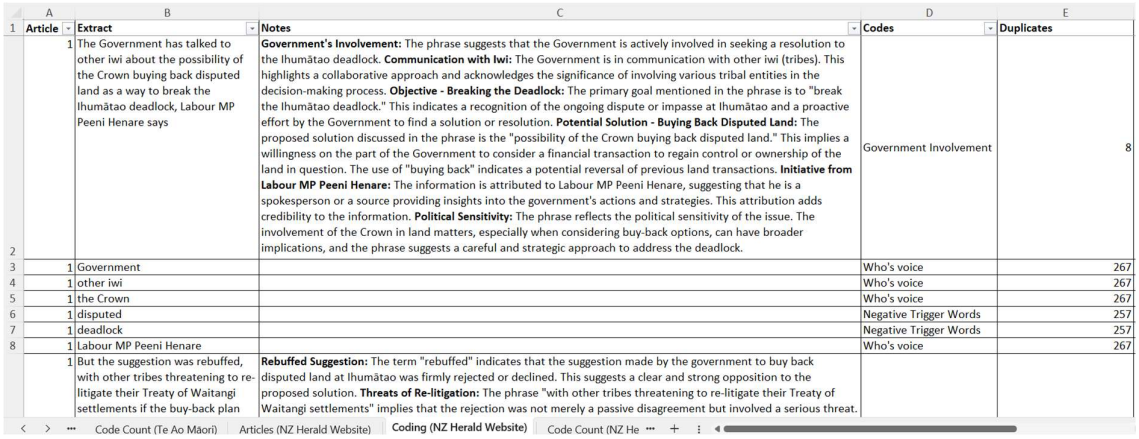
Articles (Te Ao Māori) | Coding (Te Ao Māori) | Code Count (Te Ao Māori)

Figure A4

Table summarising how often key themes appeared in the Te Ao Māori News dataset, including "Who's voice," "Positive Trigger Words," and "Kupu Māori."

Source: Author's thematic count summary.

A5. NZ Herald – Coding in Excel



	A	B	C	D	E
1	Article	Extract	Notes	Codes	Duplicates
2	1	The Government has talked to other iwi about the possibility of the Crown buying back disputed land as a way to break the Ihumātao deadlock, Labour MP Peeni Henare says	**Government's Involvement:** The phrase suggests that the Government is actively involved in seeking a resolution to the Ihumātao deadlock. **Communication with Iwi:** The Government is in communication with other iwi (tribes). This highlights a collaborative approach and acknowledges the significance of involving various tribal entities in the decision-making process. **Objective - Breaking the Deadlock:** The primary goal mentioned in the phrase is to "break the Ihumātao deadlock." This indicates a recognition of the ongoing dispute or impasse at Ihumātao and a proactive effort by the Government to find a solution or resolution. **Potential Solution - Buying Back Disputed Land:** The proposed solution discussed in the phrase is the "possibility of the Crown buying back disputed land." This implies a willingness on the part of the Government to consider a financial transaction to regain control or ownership of the land in question. The use of "buying back" indicates a potential reversal of previous land transactions. **Initiative from Labour MP Peeni Henare:** The information is attributed to Labour MP Peeni Henare, suggesting that he is a spokesperson or a source providing insights into the government's actions and strategies. This attribution adds credibility to the information. **Political Sensitivity:** The phrase reflects the political sensitivity of the issue. The involvement of the Crown in land matters, especially when considering buy-back options, can have broader implications, and the phrase suggests a careful and strategic approach to address the deadlock.	Government Involvement	8
3	1	Government		Who's voice	267
4	1	other iwi		Who's voice	267
5	1	the Crown		Who's voice	267
6	1	disputed		Negative Trigger Words	257
7	1	deadlock		Negative Trigger Words	257
8	1	Labour MP Peeni Henare		Who's voice	267
	1	But the suggestion was rebuffed, with other tribes threatening to re-litigate their Treaty of Waitangi settlements if the buy-back plan	**Rebuffed Suggestion:** The term "rebuffed" indicates that the suggestion made by the government to buy back disputed land at Ihumātao was firmly rejected or declined. This suggests a clear and strong opposition to the proposed solution. **Threats of Re-litigation:** The phrase "with other tribes threatening to re-litigate their Treaty of Waitangi settlements" implies that the rejection was not merely a passive disagreement but involved a serious threat.		

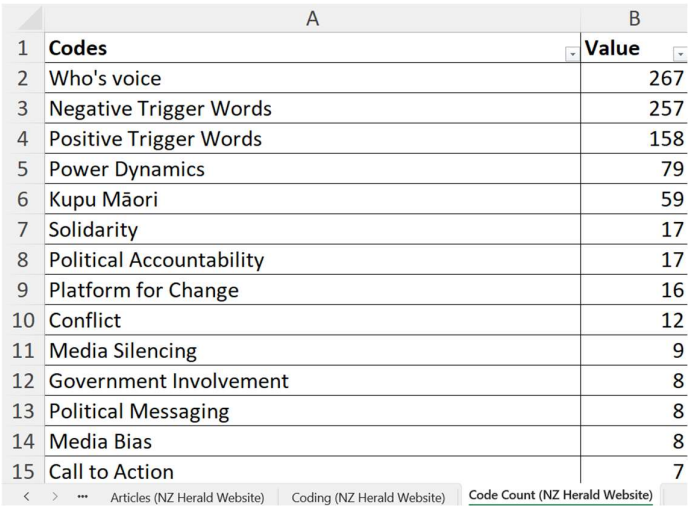
Code Count (Te Ao Māori) | Articles (NZ Herald Website) | Coding (NZ Herald Website) | Code Count (NZ He

Figure A5

Excel coding table for NZ Herald articles.

Source: Author's coding matrix.

A6. Code Frequency – NZ Herald



	A	B
1	Codes	Value
2	Who's voice	267
3	Negative Trigger Words	257
4	Positive Trigger Words	158
5	Power Dynamics	79
6	Kupu Māori	59
7	Solidarity	17
8	Political Accountability	17
9	Platform for Change	16
10	Conflict	12
11	Media Silencing	9
12	Government Involvement	8
13	Political Messaging	8
14	Media Bias	8
15	Call to Action	7

Articles (NZ Herald Website) | Coding (NZ Herald Website) | Code Count (NZ Herald Website)

Figure A6

Summary table of code frequency in NZ Herald articles, including "Who's voice," "Negative Trigger Words," and "Positive Trigger Words."

Source: Author's thematic count summary.