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Urupā Tautaiao: Natural Burials and Māori Environmental Stewardship

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Abstract

This study considers how adopting natural green burial practices can create pathways to a more sustainable future strongly rooted in Māori culture and ethics. Interviews were conducted with twenty-five Māori participants from diverse iwi (tribal) affiliations to investigate the feasibility of environmentally sustainable Māori mortuary and burial practices. Thematic analysis of the interviews highlighted three main areas of concern; impact of modern burials on environmental degradation framed through kaitiakitanga, (environmental guardianship), revival of pre-colonial practices and unaffordability of contemporary tangihanga (customary funerals). Urupā tautaiao (natural burials) emerge as a model reimagining precolonial death burial practices for the modern world. In doing so, it challenges the extractive logics of the post-colonial death industry and reactivates the moral, spiritual, and communal frameworks of environment care.

Keywords

death practices, environmental sustainability, indigeneity, decolonisation

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Introduction

Māori understandings of death are genealogical, spiritual, and relational, shaped by cosmological narratives that connect all living things (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Marsden & Henare, 1992; McNeill, 2016). As the descendants of the primeval parents Papatuanuku (earth) and Ranginui (sky), in death Māori return to te taiao (natural environment), spiritually dominated by atua (gods), the descendants of Papatūānuku and Ranginui (Harmsworth & Awatere, 2013; Royal, 2003; Williams et al., 2004). Whenua means both land and afterbirth reflecting the duality of life and death in Māori thought. In whaikōrero (ritual speeches) the deceased is often farewelled with the refrain: "Hoki koe ki te kōpū o Papatūānuku," (return to the womb of Papatūānuku).

Within this framework, burial is not simply the disposal of a body, but a culturally and spiritually significant process through which the dead are returned to the earth in ways consistent with tikanga (customary practices) and ancestral obligation. This orientation is critical to understanding urupā tautaiao, which should not be conflated with the Western notion of "green burials." Although both may engage ecological concerns, urupā tautaiao refers to a specifically Māori approach to death and burial in which environmental care is inseparable from spiritual meaning, cultural continuity, and the recognition of the environment as whakapapa (genealogy).

Traditional Burial Practices

Prior to European contact, Māori practised a variety of mortuary customs that differed across the tribes but were united by the absence of toxic and non-biodegradable burial materials (Among the most commonly documented practices was the suspension of tūpāpaku (deceased) in trees to enable natural decomposition before bones were deposited in caves, tree hollows, or other wāhi tapu (scared sites)Best, 1905, 1934; Chapman & Rock, 1888; Mair, 1923; Oppenheim, 1973). In some cases, bodies were placed in swamps, later retrieved, and then interred. Cremation and in-ground burial occurred less frequently. These practices demonstrate that traditional Māori mortuary customs enabled the dead to return to Papatūānuku without introducing persistent or harmful materials into the environment. However, their significance was not merely ecological in a contemporary environmental sense. Rather, these practices reflected a wider Māori ontology in which land was not an inert burial site.

Adoption of West-European Burial Practices

The disruption of Māori relationships with whenua has been described as producing profound emotional and cultural consequences, including grief, sadness, anger, erosion of identity, and damage to cultural continuity (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019). Therefore, the shift in contemporary mortuary traditions must be understood in the context of colonisation and the increasing normalisation of European funerary practices within Māori communities. Post-colonial tangihanga (funerals) commonly incorporate both Māori and Christian ritual forms while retaining core Māori values

that sustain social cohesion, kinship obligations, and tribal identity (Dansey, 1975; Higgins & Moorfield, 2004; Matengā-Kohu & Roberts, 2006; Nikora & Te Awekotuku, 2013). This ritual syncretism is a recognised feature of Indigenous post-colonial experience more broadly (Ackermann, 2011; Franklin & Lyons, 2004; Kingsbury & Chesnut, 2011; Stewart, 2011). Yet the effects of colonisation extend beyond cultural ceremonial adaptation. They are also evident in the material practices that increasingly define Māori burial in the present.

Contemporary conventional funerary practices commonly involve toxic embalming fluids, lacquered or treated coffins, synthetic or non-biodegradable materials, concrete headstones, and cemetery infrastructures that require extensive land use and ongoing maintenance (Chipelli, 2008; Keijzer, 2017; Pachecho et al., 1991; Stowe et al., 2001). Such practices can contaminate the environment, impede natural decomposition, and perpetuate a model of burial that prioritises preservation, containment, and permanence over ecological return. More importantly they are environmentally unsustainable and culturally incongruent with Māori understandings of death and relationships with Papatūānuku. The significance of European burial practices are not limited to environmental harm alone as they unsettle the spiritual and genealogical relationship between the deceased and the earth. Tangihanga (customary funerals) are often mediated through systems that are not only inherited from colonial institutions, but are misaligned with Māori values concerning death, land, and environmental stewardship.

Importance of the Study

Westernised green burial has emerged as an alternative within the broader funeral sector. Such approaches generally seek to minimise environmental damage by avoiding embalming, using biodegradable materials, and reducing the ecological footprint of burial. Although these developments are important, they do not fully address the concept of urupā tautaiao. Western green burial models are principally framed as an environmental reform within an existing funerary paradigm. By contrast, urupā tautaiao is grounded in Māori cosmology and in the relational obligations that bind the deceased, the living, the ancestors, and the earth. To describe urupā tautaiao simply as green burial risks reducing a Māori mortuary framework to a technical or ecological choice, thereby obscuring the cultural and spiritual dimensions that distinguish it from Western natural burial models. Even where Westernised green burial appear to be environmentally compatible, it may remain inadequate if it fails to restore the Maori epistemological foundations that give Māori burial practice its meaning. Despite increasing scholarly and public interest in sustainable burial, limited attention has been given to how Māori mortuary knowledge might inform contemporary alternatives to environmentally harmful European funerary practices.

Therefore, this study is situated within a decolonising Kaupapa Māori (Māori epistemological framework) and examines how principles associated with urupā tautaiao may contribute to culturally grounded and environmentally responsible approaches to death and burial. The study proceeds from the proposition that Māori

mortuary knowledge and pre-colonial burial principles provide an important basis for rethinking contemporary burial practice in ways that are spiritually meaningful, culturally affirming, ecologically sustainable, and potentially more affordable than dominant conventional models. In doing so, this research contributes to scholarship on death, indigeneity, and environmental justice by demonstrating that sustainable burial for Māori cannot be understood solely as a matter of environmental reform but must also be approached as a question of cultural reclamation and decolonisation.

Research design

KMR (Kaupapa Māori Research) is embedded in Māori epistemology, a unique way of knowing and experiencing the world (Henry & Pene, 2001; Marsden & Henare 1992; Reed & Calman, 2021). The project was designed to revitalise ancient practices, adapted to contemporary lifeways, accentuating the interdependency between people and the natural environment arguably disrupted by the colonial experience (Cram, 2001; Pihama, 2015; Smith, 2017). This project embraces Smith's (2021) critique:

> Research is implicated in the production of Western knowledge, in the nature of academic work, in the production of theories that have dehumanised Māori and in practices that have continued to privilege Western ways of knowing, while denying the validity for Māori of Māori knowledge, language and culture. (p. 239)

A mixed-methods approach, predicated on Māori epistemology, tests the hypothesis that urupā tautaiao are affordable, culturally empowering, and environmentally sustainable. The qualitative methods and procedures centred tikanga (cultural protocols), relational ethics, and community benefit. Interviews were offered in Māori or English (depending on participant preference). Death is tapu (sacred) therefore karakia (incantations), particularly for protection, were integral to the interview process (either recited or as personal invocation).

Recruitment

Ethical protocols aligned with KMR and tikanga were observed in recruitment, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant-led decisions, and sensitive cultural narratives. Participants were required to provide written consent to their participation. The research team relied on extensive tribal networks and community connections to recruit participants. Inclusion criteria for eligible participants were Māori adults aged 18–60+ who were interested in Māori cultural burial practices. Exclusion criteria were non-Māori and Māori under 18.

Within a KMR framework, the adequacy of participant numbers is determined not by scale but by the depth, consistency, and relational integrity of the knowledge shared. Twenty-five participants were interviewed from the original cohort of forty (Table 1). The strong homogeneity across participant narratives supports the methodological validity of presenting an amalgamated Māori perspective. Additionally, nearly all

Table 1. Iwi, Gender, Age and Rural/Urban Location of Research Participants

Code	Iwi	Gender	Location	Age range
P1	Ngāti Pikiao	Female	Rural	18–25
P2	Ngāti Awa	Female	Rural	
P3	Ngāti Tūwharetoa	Female	Rural	
P4	Ngāti Tūwharetoa	Female	Urban	
P5	Tapuika/Te Rarawa	Female	Urban	
P6	Ngāti Tūwharetoa	Male	Urban	
P7	Ngāti Raukawa	Male	Urban	
P8	Ngāti Kahungunu	Male	Urban	
P9	Ngāpuhi	Male	Urban	
P10	Ngāti Porou	Male	Urban	25–35
P11	Ngāpuhi	Male	Rural	
P12	Tapuika/Ngāti Hine	Female	Urban	
P13	Tapuika	Female	Rural	
P14	Tapuika	Female	Urban	35–55
P15	Tapuika	Female	Urban	
P16	Tapuika	Female	Rural	
P17	Te Rarawa	Female	Rural	
P18	Ngāti Porou	Male	Urban	
P19	Te Rarawa	Female	Rural	55+
P20	Te Rarawa	Female	Rural	
P21	Tapuika	Female	Rural	
P22	Tapuika	Female	Urban	
P23	Tapuika	Female	Rural	
P24	Te Rarawa	Male	Rural	
P25	Te Rarawa	Male	Urban	

participants called for wānanga (tribal workshops) as a preferred collective forum for knowledge exchange. In keeping with Kaupapa Māori principles of responsiveness and reciprocity, project funding was reallocated to support these wānanga. The interviews that form the kaupapa (topic) of this paper represent seven iwi and include participants from both rural and urban contexts, reflecting diverse yet interconnected Māori realities. This rationale also explains why purposeful sampling was not used; however, the gender mix included 16 female and 9 male, aged 18–60+.

Data Collection

Qualitative in-depth interviews were undertaken through a Kaupapa Māori lens to ensure that the research privileged Māori voices, experiences, and ancestral knowledge (. This approach was adopted in order to explore how contemporary burial practices might better reflect tikanga (customs), uphold kaitiakitanga (environmental stewardship), and enable reconnection with ancestral knowledge.

Māori rituals and practices were observed to ensure cultural safety for participants and researchers, including kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) interviews. The most culturally appropriate form of engagement for Māori. We incorporated core Māori values throughout the process:

(a) Aroha ki te tangata (mutual respect);
(b) Manaakitanga (caring);
(c) Tika (acting with integrity).

In recognition of the tapu (sanctity) associated with Māori death and burials, each interview commenced with karakia (incantations) and ended with a customary whakanoa (lifting tapu) which involved sharing food. The interviews took place in private homes and were audio recorded with the participants' consent. Prior to the interview, participants signed consent forms. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Although Māori language was an option, all of the participants chose to respond in English. The fact that the questions were bilingual could explain why participants did not ask for clarification about concepts such as natural burials (Table 2).

Data Analysis

Participants' voices were recorded and the analysis used codes for each participant as shown in Table 1. Consistent with Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR), an inductive thematic approach was applied to the interview transcripts, involving organising

Table 2. Semi-structured Interview Question Guide

1. He aha au whakaaro e pa ana ki te whakatū urupā tautaiao? What are your thoughts about natural burials?
2. Ko te mahi urupā tautaiao tiaki ai te whenua. E tika tēnā? Are natural burials environmentally responsible. Why? Do you think that's correct?
3. E mōhio an koe ki ngā tūmomo mahi nō neherā e pa ana ki te mahi tupāpāku? Do you know anything about how the dead were prepared in ancient times?
4. Ka taea te whakahokinga mai ērā atu mahi tupāpāku nō neherā ki tēnei ao? How can we bring the past mortuary practices into the modern world?
5. I tēnei wā e hau ai te rongo o te kawhena harakeke. Pēhea au whakaaro? Today, flax coffins are becoming more popular. What are your thoughts?
6. He pai ake te nehu tautaiao mōu? Would you want to be buried in a natural cemetery?
7. Nui hoki te utu o ngā tangihanga ne? He aha ai? Do you agree tangihanga are becoming unaffordable. What are the reasons?
8. He kōrero anō au? Have you anything else you want to add?

themes, meanings as illustrations of participants' lived experiences (Schneider et al., 2001). The data was manually analysed to support excavation of deeper meanings and accentuate variations and nuances across participants' accounts (Braun & Clarke, 2002).

Results & Discussion

Three key themes emerged from the interviews: environmental degradation, re-vitalising pre-colonial death practices, and funeral affordability:

Theme One: Kaitiakitanga

Participants grounded their concerns in whakapapa, emphasising an intrinsic, genealogical relationship with te taiao and a duty of kaitiakitanga. As already stated in the introduction, ontologically, Māori are the descendants of the earth mother, Papatūānuku, and the sky father, Ranginui. This approach frames environmental decline as both cultural and moral agency with associated imperatives for change.

> "We are killing Papatūānuku and urupā tautaiao is a part of the whole re-evaluation of our practices." (P10)

Participants expressed a call for change, arising from responsibility to the whenua (earth) across generations. As one participant put it,

> "Our relationship with the environment is inextricably linked to whakapapa - whenua ki te whenua." (P19)

This response reflects the holism of Māori thought, alluding to our genealogical links to Papatūānuku. "Whenua ki te whenua" refers to the pre-colonial custom of returning the placenta to the earth. In post-colonial Aotearoa many whānau continue the practice as it reinforces the Māori understanding of the enduring relationship between human life and the land (Berryman et al., 2022; Morris, 2020; Williams et al., 2004). The shared meaning of the word *whenua*, representing both land and placenta, conveys the interdependence of people and environment. This concept links birth, identity, ancestry, and guardianship of the environment. Therefore the "whenua ki te whenua" ritual can be understood as affirming belonging, and a duty of care for the natural world.

We acknowledge that it could be argued that sustainability is more challenging with larger populations. Notwithstanding, most participants critiqued post-European contact practices, noting how contemporary represent departures from more sustainable pre-contact customs. In precontact Aotearoa, New Zealand materials used in the death and burial process were biodegradable. Several participants advocated explicitly for decolonisation to protect Papatūānuku:

> "Old burial practices used natural processes out of necessity and so were inherently environmentally sustainable. It's the Christian and Pākehā influences that shape how tūpāpaku are presented and buried in modern tangi." (P13)

> "We need to decolonise our practices to protect Papatūānuku. Expensive coffins and embalming are not necessary." (P11)

Some of the participants contextualised urupā tautaiao within broader global developments connecting these local realities to wider systemic issues and climate impacts. The tone was often raw and urgent, anchored in lived observations of harm.

> "We need to remember that the wider scope of Papatūānuku isn't just the earth itself, it's the entire natural world. What happens is that in damaging the land, we are damaging our food supply, and the land..." (P10)

> "…rubbish holes, non-biodegradable waste, poor recycling practices… toxins seeping into our waterways." (P20)

> "It's shit. Her well-being is definitely getting worse, not better…The decline and devastation of whenua is saddening and frightening." (P6)

Despite the urgency, there was openness to learning and adaptive change. Participants supported a transition to urupā tautaiao but emphasised practical education and staged shifts. Others proposed a more nuanced debate about what counts as sustainable, acknowledging constraints such as space.

> "Cultures evolve… environmentally conscious Māori might choose alternatives to whole-body burial, like cremation, to leave room in the urupā for future generations." (P19)

> "Power, running water, cars. impacts on the whenua have intensified… as things have gotten better for us (tangata), things high key get worse for the whenua… we need essentials to survive (power, running water, cars), which still affect the whenua." (P8)

> "The environment is critical to our wellbeing and kaitiakitanga is what we as Māori have been charged with. We are doing a terrible job in life and in death." (P22).

These conversations also grappled with the tension between modern necessities and kaitiakitanga (environmental care). Participants recognised that as aspects of life have improved for people there is an environmental cost. Yet, amidst these complexities, the core commitment remained clear. The voices collectively see environmental impact tightly linked with Māori wellbeing and identity.

One unexpected finding was some of the most reflective and critical insights came from urban participants, rather than rural, demonstrating that Māori environmental awareness persists and adapts across spatial and social boundaries. Urban life, far from erasing whakapapa (genealogy), provided new contexts in which to reinterpret and express cultural identity in the death space.

Theme Two: Revitalising Ancient Death and Burial Practices

All participants except two had in-depth knowledge of past burial practices. More common ancient cross-tribal have already been described at the beginning of this article. However, surprising findings included tupāpāku placed in wāhi tapu (sacred spaces) such as swamps and suspending the dead in groves of trees that were traditionally food sources, such as tī kōuka (cabbage tree). The rationale was that food neutralises tapu (the sacred). If a person inadvertently strayed onto the interment site, the consequence would be illness rather than death.

For the most part participants shared an articulated a clear, shared vision: to decolonise end-of-life practices and protect Papatūānuku by revitalising tikanga (cultural protocols) that are sustainable and true to the relational heart of tangihanga (Māori customary funerals). However, there was also a call to retain the relational and ceremonial heart of tangihanga.

> "Tangihanga are so important to us. I am thinking of koro Manu's tangi and the way the whānau, hapū and iwi came together. In the sadness there was so much bonding." (P14)

> "Tangi bring whānau together if we can take care of our tupāpāku ourselves in death by washing, anointing with rongoā it helps the grieving process." (P16)

> I think the challenge is to revitalise our past practices in a way that keeps the, what's the word for it, uniqueness of tangihanga. But we have to change the way we deal with our dead to protect Papatūānuku." (P15)

There was strong consensus that expensive Western embalming and caskets aren't necessary. Some framed the reclamation of past practices as a decolonising act, criticising modern practices as over-sanitisation of death.

> "Reclamation of traditional practices actively resists and challenges colonisation and the racist narrative that negates mātauranga Māori. Anyway, we should embrace death care as a whānau experience. Getting more confident with tupāpāku sanitation. Coffins don't like them overpriced and ugly like buying a house to die in. The natural cycle of life is to nourish the whenua taiao – imaging coffin body stew." (P11)

The final word in this section, eloquently recognises the reality of revitalising ancient practices in a modern world. "The goal is not a return to the past unchanged, but a living tikanga that nourishes the whenua, uplifts whānau, and honours tūpāpaku with integrity." (R10)

Theme Three: Tangihanga Affordability

Participants consistently highlighted affordability as a pressing concern intertwined with decolonisation, environmental care, and whānau (family) wellbeing. High costs associated with conventional, Western-influenced practices, particularly embalming,

commercially manufactured coffins, and ancillary funeral expenses, were viewed as financially burdensome and culturally misaligned.

> "Expensive Western embalming and caskets aren't necessary." (P5)
>
> "Coffins… overpriced and ugly, like buying a house to die in." (P11).
>
> "Coffins are usually expensive…so having a green burial option which is culturally appropriate will help elevate some of the financial pressure." (P1)
>
> "Today our burial tangihanga is expensive $8K starting just to get the body ready without taking into consideration tangi costs. Let alone what we are doing to the whenua." (P22)

Tangihanga affordability and sustainability was a recurring theme. The 'traditional' duration of tangihanga (normally 3 days) was identified as a key contributor to costs.

> "Tangihanga aren't just expensive because of the burial costs. Hosting, accommodating, and feeding whānau and manuhiri are a big part of the cost. Changes to burial practices won't necessarily reduce those expenses unless the size and duration of tangihanga are also reduced." (R18)

Urupā tautaiao were widely perceived as more affordable, provided there is clear guidance and community capability-building. Whānau care was identified as a way to avoid some commercial costs, as were using locally sourced, biodegradable materials. Whānau-led processes included creating whāriki (flax mats) and shrouds from environmentally sustainable resources. This pragmatic balance, lower cost, culturally aligned, and compliant, was clearly embraced as part of living tikanga (customary protocols). However, when time, fuel for harvesting harakeke (flax), and the requisite weaving expertise are considered, a cost analysis suggests whāriki production is only superficially more affordable, as only the direct costs are lower.

> "Whāriki weaving is more traditional, more Māori. It's not as expensive… it takes time to make the whāriki – others prefer to go the lazy ways 'and build the coffins'." (R2)
>
> "It took us about a week to fully finish weaving our nan's whāriki tangi… coffins are already made, but it is not healthy for the environment." (R2)

While many promoted reducing costs, there was also recognition practices must still meet hygiene and regulatory standards.

> "Research and development of how tūpāpaku can be prepared for tangi while meeting hygiene/public health standards." (P12)
>
> "I also suspect there will need to be research and development of how tupāpāku can be prepared for tangi while meeting hygiene and public standards. No good if the puku pops on the porch." (P18)

The majority of participants called for wānanga (cultural workshops) to demystify natural burial processes for whānau.

> "We need to hui and workshop to come up with solutions, ensuring burials honour tūpāpaku, uplift whānau, protect Papatūānuku, and remain financially sustainable" (R9)

> "I think natural burials are more affordable options, but we need more education about how they work." (P12)

> "Wānanga to learn more about green burials, good, clear information provided for whānau to consider green burials." (P20)

> "Yeah, If we get this knowledge, we can be prepared and make it happen. It will help with affordability and will protect Papa, it's a win, win." (P4).

There were clear indications participants in general were favour of culturally grounded, low-impact alternatives to current death and burial practices, seeking a pragmatic balance between affordability, cultural integrity, and wellbeing. To that end urupā tautaiao was commonly framed as a cost-conscious alternative that aligns with kaitiakitanga and is also decolonising.

Conclusions

Participants strongly endorsed the revitalisation of traditional Māori death and burial practices as a pathway to decolonisation, kaitiakitanga (environmental care), honouring of whakapapa, whānau-led healing, and affordability. However, their overarching stance was also pragmatic: restore what is tūturu (authentic) while adapting to contemporary realities, public health standards, and diverse community capacities. Participants also expressed a need and willingness to relearn ancient practices, thereby positioning urupā tautaiao within a broader decolonising project and inviting informed, culturally grounded adaptation in burial practices. Hence seeking pathways that honour whakapapa, uphold kaitiakitanga, and respond to the urgent realities of environmental harm. Care for the environment, people and deceased are inseparable acts of ecological and cultural balance.

Participants also consistently expressed a deep sense of responsibility toward Papatūānuku, identifying her declining wellbeing as a shared concern and moral obligation. The reflections challenge the notion that environmental consciousness is a modern or imported idea. Instead, they demonstrate Māori ecological thought remains embodied in cultural beliefs and values. Although fragmented by colonisation, environmental sustainability, when positioned through a Māori lens, extends beyond policy and technology; it is a living philosophy that encompasses ritual, memory, and the ethics of death. In this way, urupā tautaiao emerges as a contemporary manifestation of ancestral ecological knowledge carrying a deeply cultural and philosophical proposition. Urupā tautaiao is a model that reconnects burial practices to natural cycles and challenges the extractive logics of the colonial death industry. Māori

are not simply conserving the environment; they are reactivating the moral, spiritual and communal architectures that sustain it.

In summary, Māori perspectives on urupā tautaiao can contribute meaningfully to wider environmental sustainability discourse, not by fitting into existing frameworks but by expanding them. Through Māori voices, sustainability becomes redefined as a continuum of life, death, and renewal, ethically grounded in whakapapa. In this way, urupā tautaiao transcends its material form to stand as both a political and spiritual statement: a return to Papatūānuku that embodies ecological justice, cultural resurgence, and the enduring vitality of Māori knowledge.

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Ethical Considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Auckland University of Technology (AUTEC) on 4 February 2022. The reference number is AUTEC 22/6.

Participants provided written consent to voluntary participation. They were provided with a comprehensive information sheet (IF) to ensure informed consent. Included in the IF is the clause: *The findings will also be published in journals."*

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared the following potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This kaupapa Māori research is conducted from an insider position, with the authors sharing whakapapa (genealogy) with participants. This positionality ensures attentiveness to community protocols, facilitates trust, and supports research that is accountable, relevant, and beneficial to the communities involved, rather than extractive in nature.

Data Availability Statement

Our AUTEC 22/6, (Section H) application explicitly states that there is no provision for third-party access to the data. All the data collected is only accessible to the research team. The rationale is cultural data sovereignty.

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Author Biographies

Hinematau McNeill's principal tribe is Tapuika which is located in the Bay of Plenty, New Zealand. She is a Professor at Auckland University of Technology in the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development. An experienced post graduate supervisor, more recently, her interest in artistic practice-led research has helped emerging

scholars operate creatively in a way that values indigenous epistemologies and ways of working. Hinematau continues to be actively involved in tribal affairs and believes that when indigenous knowledge is truly valued it will invigorate and enrich the learning experience of everyone.

Sonia Mehana is affiliated to the northern tribes including, Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Kuri and Ngāti Whātua. She is the Strategic Manager at the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Development at Auckland University of Technology (AUT). Her PhD research explores the economic viability of green burials for whānau (family) Māori. The premise is that Urupā Tautaiao (natural burials) make a significant contribution to alleviating tangihanga (customary funerals) costs which can be financially crippling. Her research is intent on producing evidence to support this claim. She will also be focusing on opportunities for Māori in grassroots businesses to support tangihanga.

Kathleen Frewen is a descendant of the Whanau-ā-Apanui and Whakatōhea tribes. As a young Indigenous researcher dedicated to exploring Indigenous epistemologies and traditional knowledge within Indigenous communities. Her work emphasises collaborative approaches which aim to uplift the well-being of current generations while enhancing the lived realities of future generations. Her research engages with young indigenous community members to ensure that their voices are heard, fostering resilience and empowerment within Indigenous populations.