

**Living Alongside Mauao:**  
*A Photographic Honouring of the Whenua*

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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, it contains no material previously written or published by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of another degree or diploma or a university or institution of higher learning.

Signed: Heidi Douglas



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And lastly, I would like to acknowledge myself. Thank you to the part of me that was willing to open up and grow on this journey of self-discovery. Without the openness of Heidi-past, the Heidi of the present could not grow into the Heidi of the future. Forever thankful.

# Glossary of Te Reo Māori Words Used Within this Exegesis

Note: Definitions for this glossary are adapted from the online *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*.<sup>1</sup>

**Aotearoa** : (Location) North Island—now used as the Māori name for New Zealand.

**Hoa** : (noun) friend, companion, mate, partner, spouse, ally.

**Iwi** : (noun) extended kinship group, tribe, nation, people, nationality, race—often refers to a large group of people descended from a common ancestor and associated with a distinct territory.

**Kaitiakitanga** : (noun) guardianship, stewardship, trusteeship, trustee.

**Karanga** : (noun) formal call, ceremonial call, welcome call, call - a ceremonial call of welcome to visitors onto a marae, or equivalent venue, at the start of a pōwhiri. The term is also used for the responses from the visiting group to the tangata whenua ceremonial call.

**Mana** : (noun) prestige, authority, control, power, influence, status, spiritual power, charisma—mana is a supernatural force in a person, place or object.

**Manuhiri** : (noun) visitor, guest.

**Mauao** : (location) Mount Maunganui (Tauranga).

**Maunga** : (noun) mountain, mount, peak.

**Pā** : (noun) fortified village, fort, stockade, screen, blockade, city (especially a fortified one).

**Pākehā** : (noun) New Zealander of European descent—probably originally applied to English-speaking Europeans living in Aotearoa New Zealand. Despite the claims of some non-Māori speakers, the term does not normally have negative connotations.

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<sup>1</sup> *Te Aka Māori Dictionary*, accessed December 5, 2022, <https://www.maoridictionary.co.nz/>.

**Pōwhiri** : (noun) invitation, rituals of encounter, welcome ceremony on a marae, welcome. The ceremony used to welcome visitors onto the marae was traditionally a way of finding out whether people were friends or enemies.

**Pūrākau** : (noun) myth, ancient legend, story.

**Rākau** : (noun) tree, stick, timber, wood, spar, mast, plant—not normally used before the names of trees or plants.

**Tangata Tiriti** : “People of the Treaty,” or New Zealanders of non-Māori origin. Initially, the term referred to Europeans who have a right to live in New Zealand under the Treaty of Waitangi, but it now includes people of other ethnic origins who live in New Zealand.

**Tauīwi** : (personal noun) foreigner, European, non-Māori, colonist, person coming from afar.

**Te Moananui-a-Toi** : (place) The Bay of Plenty.

**Tūrangawaewae** : (noun) domicile, standing, place where one has the right to stand - place where one has rights of residence and belonging.

**Whakapapa** : (noun) genealogy, genealogical table, lineage, descent—reciting whakapapa was, and is, an important skill and reflected the importance of genealogies in Māori society in terms of leadership, land and fishing rights, kinship and status. It is central to all Māori institutions.

**Whenua** : (noun) 1. land - often used in the plural. 2. country, land, nation, state.



Figure 1. *Maui From the Shore*, 2022, digital photograph by author.



## Abstract

This research project is an ongoing photographic representation of my deepening relationship with whenua<sup>2</sup> as a first-generation immigrant. Identifying as tauwiwi, or non-Indigenous to Aotearoa New Zealand, I acknowledge the decolonising process that must occur in my mindset to adapt to my adopted homeland. Using the lens as a witnessing device, I examine relationships between myself and the maunga, Mauao, near where I live in Te Moana-a-Toi (the Bay of Plenty). This friendship, of sorts, between myself and Mauao has lent a familiarity and given me immense comfort. Mauao was a stable, omnipresent hoa as I settled and raised a family in Aotearoa New Zealand. I search for and photographically capture the events I recognise as changes on the maunga. These changes either result from colonial interference and long-term damage or are brought about through acts of reparation. Through photographic reportage and written letters, I document the changing relationship I have with the country I have adopted as an immigrant. This project aims to honour Mauao for its friendship over the years by witnessing the process of repairing specific sites on the maunga. The letters and the photographic images represent significant beginnings towards taking care of and valuing the whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand. I privilege the value of healing the past while looking to care for the future and honour the relationship which has grown between me and the maunga; me and my adopted homeland.

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<sup>2</sup> Chicago style referencing suggests italicising terms from a non-English language unless they are commonly used by native English speakers. I have decided not to follow this convention in this exegesis as I feel it privileges English and 'others' te reo Māori. I have provided a glossary of terms for those uncertain of the specific meaning of the terminology used.

22 March 2021

Dear Oak Trees,

You will always hold a very special place in my heart.

I remember when I first discovered the walking trails on Mt. Maunganui when we first met. Mauao, as I now call the maunga, slowly became my best friend - a companion I run to when I need comfort, where I feel safe and sheltered. It didn't happen all at once, but slowly over the years.

And through this relationship which was forming with the maunga I met you - the beautiful grove of English Oak trees standing proud over the trickling stream on the harbour side of Mauao. Maybe it is because you remind me of my childhood in California, which is covered in oak trees, or that I have a nostalgic feeling towards the idyllic English landscape portrayed in my favourite movies.

Being an immigrant is hard. I felt very alone arriving on the shores of a country I'd never been to, and with two small children to raise! It took me years to feel welcomed by the humans who inhabit this place, but Mauao was always there for me, with you tucked into its folds.

How many times over the years have I taken my

children to picnic under your canopy of leaves or watch the birds bathe in the stream? As my children grew, so did my attachment to the whenua and flora. You shaded us in the summer and sheltered us in the winter. I remember one stormy day, my daughter and I got caught in a sudden downpour of freezing rain and we took refuge under your mighty branches.

Today my children are mostly grown and leaving home, but my weekly walks past you remind me of this journey of life and all that I have experienced as an immigrant to New Zealand.

With great sorrow I read the sign the city council erected today. Every last oak tree in your grove will be cut down next month.

My heart is heavy to think of losing you.

With much love and gratitude,

Heidi

Figure 2. *Letter to the Oaks*, 2022, digitised written letter by author.



## Introduction

This project is about my relationship with the maunga, Mauao, where I live in Mount Maunganui, Aotearoa New Zealand. Mount Maunganui is a town on the North Island of New Zealand. It takes its name from the mountain it is built beside. This mountain is named Mount Maunganui in English, but its Māori name is Mauao which is the name I will use throughout this exegesis. I have a deep and abiding love for this mountain. My research involves an ongoing photographic reportage of this relationship and of my journey as an immigrant to understand the colonial history of this place and why the work of decolonisation is a necessary process. I look at the reparation of particular Mauao environments which are pertinent to Indigenous<sup>3</sup> relationships with this whenua. The reparation includes removing colonial introduced flora, such as English oak trees, and replanting native trees. I acknowledge not only how this regeneration is changing the sacred sites identified on the maunga but also how this process of observation and documentation brings awareness to me, which has positively affected and infected my relationship with my chosen place to live.

I acknowledge Mana Whenua who whakapapa to this maunga – Ngāi-Te-Rangi, Ngāti-Ranginui, Ngāti-Pukenga and Waitaha. I also acknowledge Quinton Bidois (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Waitaha) who has guided the use of te reo Māori terms used within this exegesis. Whilst this exegesis does not tell the stories of the iwi who whakapapa to the maunga I have included the pūrākau of Mauao as told by the Tauranga City Council in the footnotes.<sup>4</sup>

This practice-led project has evolved from lens-based imagery to include letters I write to Mauao, which document the evolution of my understanding of the colonial past and its effect on the maunga, and the impact the maunga has had on me. I had several ah-ha moments concerning decolonisation whilst walking on the maunga; these are discussed throughout this exegesis.

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<sup>3</sup> Whilst there is no specific guidance in the Chicago style about capitalisation of the word Indigenous, I felt that it is appropriate to capitalise the word in the same way that 'Western' is capitalised, to give equal importance to both cultures.

<sup>4</sup> The pūrākau of Mauao as told by the Tauranga City Council can be found at this location: [https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/community/tangata\\_whenua/file/legend\\_of\\_mauao.pdf](https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/community/tangata_whenua/file/legend_of_mauao.pdf)

The research project centres around the following question: how might a lens-based practice extend and document my relationship with Mauao as a first-generation immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand while also deepening my understanding of the impacts of colonialism and the current land reparations to care for the future?

Autoethnography is my overarching research methodology. Autoethnography as methodology involves analysing personal experience—specifically, my personal experiences—to understand cultural experience. It enables me to contextualise the cultural context of my immigrant status and initial ignorance of the colonial history of Aotearoa New Zealand. As a method, autoethnography is both a process and a product. The process of writing letters to Mauao approaches this research by describing my personal experience in order to understand my cultural experience as an immigrant. My written letters function as autoethnographic documents of my growing relationship to Mauao over the last two decades. They are a response to my growing knowledge of my 'Pākehā-ness' as well as articulating the relational connection I have with the maunga.

Throughout this research, I have grappled with how I, as Pākehā, can be in a relationship with Mauao when I do not whakapapa to this whenua. I am a first-generation immigrant and realise that my formative years and early adulthood were spent in another culture, absorbing other values and attitudes. This connection to the whenua is different from Māori who whakapapa to the maunga; different in the sense that I have to actively seek and resource myself to understand Indigenous knowledge and colonial history. This act of seeking is part of my own reparation process and respect for the Indigenous people who for centuries were caretakers of the whenua. This relationship formed with Mauao is part of my connecting with my new homeland. My project directly looks at my feelings about the land itself and the landscape of my mental attitudes. This notion of being an immigrant and having to educate myself about my new country is an essential aspect of this project.

My project is informed by theorists Kuni Jenkins and Alison Jones' conception of the indigene-coloniser hyphen. This hyphen space acknowledges cultural distinctions between Aotearoa New Zealand's Indigenous and euro-centric characteristics whilst also allowing for the interwoven nature of the relationship between Indigenous cultures and their colonisers. These two relationships—both Indigenous and European—exist together and are forging a new dynamic space within the Self-Other binary. This hyphen relationship is akin to my journey as

an immigrant; it points to a relationship that has been shaped, albeit differently, by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous positions. Also, this hyphen acts as a bridge between myself and the need to repair whenua, enabling me to recognise the difference between colonial thinking and kaitiakitanga.<sup>5</sup> I can understand my place in the Self-Other binary and accept the differences marked by the hyphen. Past harms cannot be reversed; however, acknowledging them can begin to heal these harms, and a vision for the future can start to take shape: one where whenua is cared for rather than used.

This project embraces the process of decolonising my own mindset. In *Imagining Decolonisation* (2020), scientist Dr. Ocean Ripeka Mercier (Ngāti Porou) suggests that “In a country such as Aotearoa New Zealand, in which Te Tiriti o Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi, 1840) has mediated settler-native relations, we might say that a commitment to making cohabitation work underpins decolonisation.”<sup>6</sup> This concept of dual cultural cohabitation is at the core of my research. My project explores how photographically informed methods such as pinhole photography, drone surveillance images and the strategic use of bokeh<sup>7</sup> may launch and strengthen a connection with land for tauiwi. Specifically, my project aims to develop photographic methods that explore how lens-based images can establish a deeper reflective relationship between humans and the maunga, thereby facilitating decolonising processes of the environment on the maunga. This project has been undertaken over the course of two years, however the project is rooted to the first day I set foot on Mauao as a new immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2004.

One of the pivotal moments in my project was the removal of some old oak trees on Mauao. I used my lens to capture still and moving images of the process. Filming the trees being cut down and my initial pain of losing them enabled a process to begin where I challenged my thinking. I realised that I needed to acknowledge that this sorrow about losing the trees was reflective of my immigrant thinking; I was prioritising my historical, cultural and familiar values rather than an Indigenous conception of whenua. I was wedded to my nostalgic memories: my children picnicked beneath those beautiful oak trees; I hold recollections of similar trees from my childhood in California; and images of idyllic British summer afternoons as portrayed in

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<sup>5</sup> Kaitiakitanga is a way of managing the environment, based on Māori world views. Today there is growing interest in kaitiakitanga. Iwi are restoring their environment and culture, and using traditional ideas in the modern world.

<sup>6</sup> Ocean Ripeka Mercier, “What Is Decolonisation,” in *Imagining Decolonisation*, ed. Rebecca Kiddle et al. (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020), 41.

<sup>7</sup> Bokeh is defined as the effect of a soft out-of-focus background achieved when shooting a subject, using a fast lens at the widest aperture, such as f/2.8 or wider. Simply put, bokeh is the pleasing or aesthetic quality of out-of-focus blur in a photograph. “Bokeh for Beginners,” Nikon, accessed November 29, 2022, <https://www.nikonusa.com/en/learn-and-explore/a/tips-and-techniques/bokeh-for-beginners.html>.

films. Without knowing it, I was putting my point of view at the centre of the event. My sorrow for the loss of the trees and my aesthetics of beauty and history did not consider an Indigenous relationship to this whenua. To begin the process of decolonisation, I had to endure the painful process of re-examining my thinking, which started with my relationship to these trees.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this written exegesis I unfold the journey that I am taking, both autoethnographically and visually, through the practice leading my inquiry. Chapter One, 'An Immigrant's Tale, Walking on the Maunga,' explores my relationship with Mauao and how this site-specific project came about through my daily walks. I focus on the physical and mental backdrop I have inhabited throughout my project. This chapter addresses how I utilise a lens to explore my position as an immigrant and as a responsible Tangata Tiriti in relation to Mauao. Speaking to methodologies of happenstance and walking, I explore how these methods have gifted me moments on the maunga which have altered my thinking and influenced the images that I create. In the book *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: Walking Lab* (2019),<sup>9</sup> researchers and co-directors of the WalkingLab, Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman, discuss the importance of walking research in the humanities as a way to embrace place. These methods of were instrumental in bringing about the project. Walking on Mauao with the lens as an extension of myself allowed me to focus my gaze on the whenua.

Chapter Two, 'Cutting Down the Oaks, an Ah-Ha Moment,' explores the motivational aspect of this project by reflecting on the events surrounding the chopping down of the oak trees on Mauao, which caused a shift in my thinking; an ah-ha moment, as I call it. These moments have become catalysts for shifting my mindset and, therefore, further developing the methods of my project. In this chapter, I reflect on my emotions when I learnt the trees were being cut down and how those feelings prompted me to confront why I was so upset to lose the trees, and how this examination forced me to think differently. I also discuss strategies on how my camera focused my gaze to extract pertinent information whilst experiencing this event.

This chapter also discusses my initial making. Wanting to invoke a feeling of romanticised nostalgia, I explored historical methods of making, such as pinhole imagery. Cutting down these trees affected me and prompted the making of a series of images to pay tribute to those

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that this is an ongoing process, one which will not have an end point.

<sup>9</sup> Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: WalkingLab*, Routledge Advances in Research Methods 24 (London: Routledge, 2019).

trees which brought me such joy over the years. But the gaze of my camera shifted once I read the Mauao Historic Reserve Management Plan.<sup>10</sup> This document helped me see past my immigrant thinking. I examine contemporary artists Kelcy Taratoa (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Raukawa) and Indian born American photographer Subhankar Banerjee and trace their influence on the imagery I produced in relation to the removal of the trees, that of aerial imagery.

Chapter Three, 'But Why? Learning of the Honourable Harvest,' discusses the concept of the 'Honourable Harvest' as explained by botanist and Potawatomi Nation author Robin Wall Kimmerer.<sup>11</sup> The honourable harvest is an Indigenous practice outlining ideas of how to commune with the planet and how to take, use and share resources. The honourable harvest aims to improve relationships with land by viewing it as alive rather than as a commodity. It emphasises awareness of one's actions and contemplates how any relational exchange will affect future generations. Understanding the concept of the honourable harvest was the catalyst to make a shift in thinking and to begin actively photographing the reparation of colonial flora on sacred Māori sites. The gaze of my lens shifted from the removal of the trees to intimate portraits of the new seedlings. The images of the replanting occurring today are discussed in conjunction with the Mauao Historic Preserve Management Plan as it lays out a plan to protect and preserve Mauao for all to use now and for the future. Taken with bokeh, these images are viewing this reparation work as a gift to not only the maunga, but to future generations.

Chapter Four, 'Mauao as My Hoa: Why Decolonisation is Important,' examines the images I have created surrounding my friendship with Mauao, or hoa, 'my friend.' It was only through my making of images throughout this project that the constant return gaze of the maunga became apparent. In my domestic life, the presence of Mauao is always there: when I opened my curtains, when I hung my laundry on the line.

This chapter also examines, both photographically and through writing, my journey of shedding my ignorant immigrant mindset. As the project evolves durationally, so does the framing and reframing of my images. These images vary from soft and idyllic pinhole images, to surveyance-

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<sup>10</sup> The Mauao Historic Reserve Management Plan is a document that outlines the preservation and maintenance of Mauao and was co-written by the Tauranga City Council and the Mauao Trust. This plan allows for parts of Mauao to be decolonised, one of these sections being an old English oak tree grove that was clogging the only freshwater stream on the maunga. Tauranga City Council and Mauao Trust, *Mauao Historic Reserve Management Plan*, 2018, [https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/council/plans/files/mauao\\_reserve\\_management.pdf](https://www.tauranga.govt.nz/Portals/0/data/council/plans/files/mauao_reserve_management.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2020).

style drone images, to a reframing of the baby plants on the maunga with bokeh and the returned gaze of Mauao into every aspect of my domestic life.

As I walk the paths of Mauao and absorb the energy of this Maunga, deepening my relationship with every step and actively seeking to deepen my cultural knowledge, I use this research project to reflect on this journey. To create a more inclusive mindset I privilege the reparation and decolonisation of the external process of decolonising Mauao as well as the internal shift within me.



Figure 3. *Waipatukakahu Stream & Oaks*, 2021, digital photograph by author.

2005 March 30<sup>th</sup>

Dear Mount Maungonui,

After months of travelling around New Zealand with two toddlers and a car packed down with all of our possessions, we have finally settled on a house, and we are here in Mount Maungonui! I cannot see you from our new house, but if I walk out onto the street I can look straight down the road and see you.

I was finally able to be introduced to you properly. I first strolled around your base track. Even with the sheep styles in place I managed to navigate with my stroller to get through. I found a sense of belonging in the old Pohutakawa trees and your volcanic mantle which flows into the sea.

It is interesting how settled I feel when I spend time with you. Everything is unfamiliar in this new country that I have adopted. I am a native English speaker, but the words do not always mean the same thing in New Zealand English. And the people that I have met along the way do not even agree on how things should be pronounced. When we visited Whakatane at the other end of the Bay of Plenty, we were given two extreme opinions on how to say the name of the town. The lady at the local dairy explained that in Maori the 'WH' was pronounced as the English 'F' sound. When I told this to the innkeeper of the motel we were staying in he became very distraught and said that on no account should we be pronouncing it this way.

This is very confusing to me, and sometimes when my little ones are asleep in the stroller - 'pram' in kiwi - I walk around your base track and try to work out this divide that seems to be occurring in the language. It must be significant in the larger picture of what is happening in society. I feel so ignorant as I have no community base yet, but I will do my best to learn. For now I find peace on the land, watch my children play under the Oak trees and the birds' splash in the stream which flows underneath them.

Heke Doulos

Figure 4. Letter to Mauao number 2, 2022, digitised written letter by author.

# Chapter One: An Immigrant's Tale, Happenstance and Walking on the Maunga

The journey of understanding my Pākehā-ness started many years ago when I first immigrated to Aotearoa New Zealand and fell deeply in love with Mauao. I have spent many hours over the years being on-site with this maunga. My relationship with Mauao began with walking. Walking is the best medicine, says Hippocrates,<sup>12</sup> and I agree. Throughout my entire life, walking has played an instrumental role in my relationship with the world I inhabit, and often I walk with my camera as an extension of my gaze.

As a method, walking positions me through the camera to focus my gaze and becomes a preparatory method to making photographs. The very practice of putting one foot in front of the other, the act of taking notice of the movements and rhythms of action involved in just this simple act is so powerful. One foot moves, then the other. Then the other. The rhythmic act of walking puts me into a contemplative spiritual state where I return to the roots of who I am. It is about walking through the world, listening to the sounds of the birds and the streams, and observing life quietly.

My lens has always been an extension of myself, of how I see the world and how I can share my world with those around me. In *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: Walking Lab*, Stephanie Springgay and Sarah Truman discuss the importance of walking as a research method: “As a research method walking has a diverse and extensive history in the social sciences and humanities, underscoring its value for conducting research that is situated, relational, and material.”<sup>13</sup> Walking is a method for knowing the maunga, and is particularly suitable for relational, material and situated research.<sup>14</sup> It also brings attention to place and place making, with place representing a crucial concept in walking research.<sup>15</sup> Walking and being in place—in this case, walking on Mauao—has facilitated a relational shift in my thinking and making from that of immigrant to one of tauiwi. Walking has enabled me to leave the space that I inhabited, to view the world from the point of view of the land itself. Springgay and

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Bergland, “Hippocrates Was Right: ‘Walking Is the Best Medicine’,” *Psychology Today*, June 12, 2015, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-athletes-way/201506/hippocrates-was-right-walking-is-the-best-medicine>.

<sup>13</sup> Springgay and Truman, *Walking Methodologies*, 14.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

Truman argue, “We need to shift from thinking about methods as processes of gathering data towards methods as a becoming entangled in relations.”<sup>16</sup> Walking helps me to bring together the various relations existing between myself and the maunga and the complexity of many of its attributes. My lens combines with the rhythm of my feet to establish connections outside my rushing mind. This act of movement allows me to frame my view through my lens and entangle with my sensory experiences on the maunga.

Primarily, the images I make are, for me, a way of reinterpreting my point of view. My walking on the maunga is no different. I first stepped on Mauao as an immigrant, and only recently have I begun asking myself, when does one go from immigrant to citizen of a country? For Māori, part of the pōwhiri is a formal ceremony that welcomes outsiders onto unfamiliar lands; through the karanga, pōwhiri is an inclusive way of welcoming outsiders onto the whenua. I am negotiating this shift in identity within the kawa<sup>17</sup> of ritual encounter, and my method of formalised walks on the whenua is a large part of my personal experience and growth.

The concept of hapticality<sup>18</sup> as discussed in *Walking Methodologies* relates to a sense of touch. In walking research, hapticality attends to tactile qualities such as the crunch of grass beneath your feet, the way the walker’s muscles respond to the terrain and embodied changes in temperature, and sensory ways of thinking while in movement.<sup>19</sup> Walking is a methodological frame that facilitates my lens to witness my journey. It happens when the wind picks up as I gain altitude, when the sound of the tui birds draws my lens to witness their annual feasting of the spring flowers, or the feeling of salty spray when the waves are crashing on the maunga’s sharp volcanic rocks. I experience these phenomena haptically in the physicality of hiking the trails: when I smell the sea or when the wind pulls my hair out of my ponytail and in front of the lens of my camera. On the maunga I am at one with Mauao and I am breathing in the air from the plants growing on the whenua. Image-making during this research explores and visually represents my entangled relationship with the maunga.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 83-4.

<sup>17</sup> The part of the pōwhiri process where one is being called into the pōwhiri

<sup>18</sup> Springgay and Truman, *Walking Methodologies*, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 41.

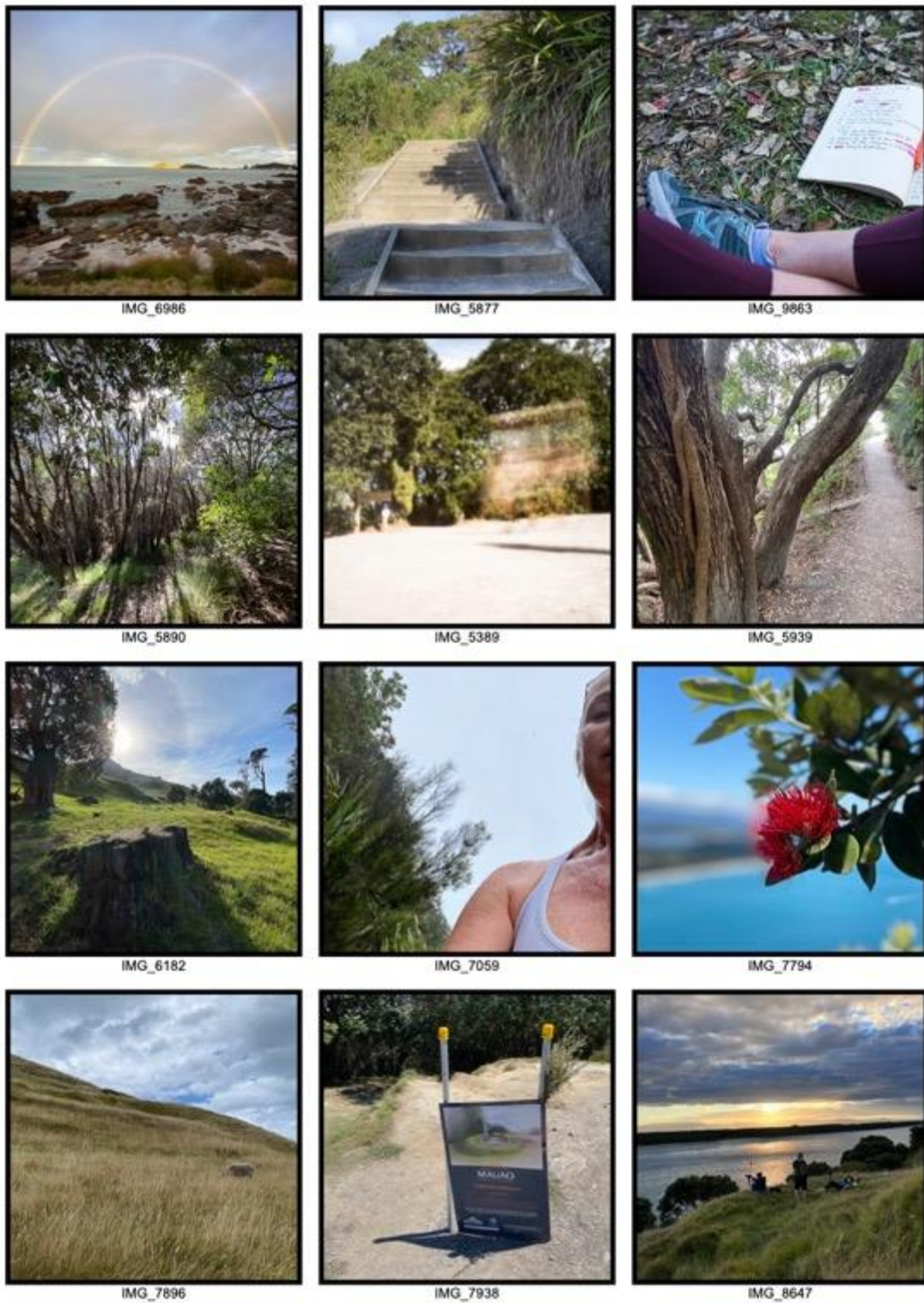


Figure 5. *Contact Sheet on Mauao I, 2021/2022*, digital image by author.

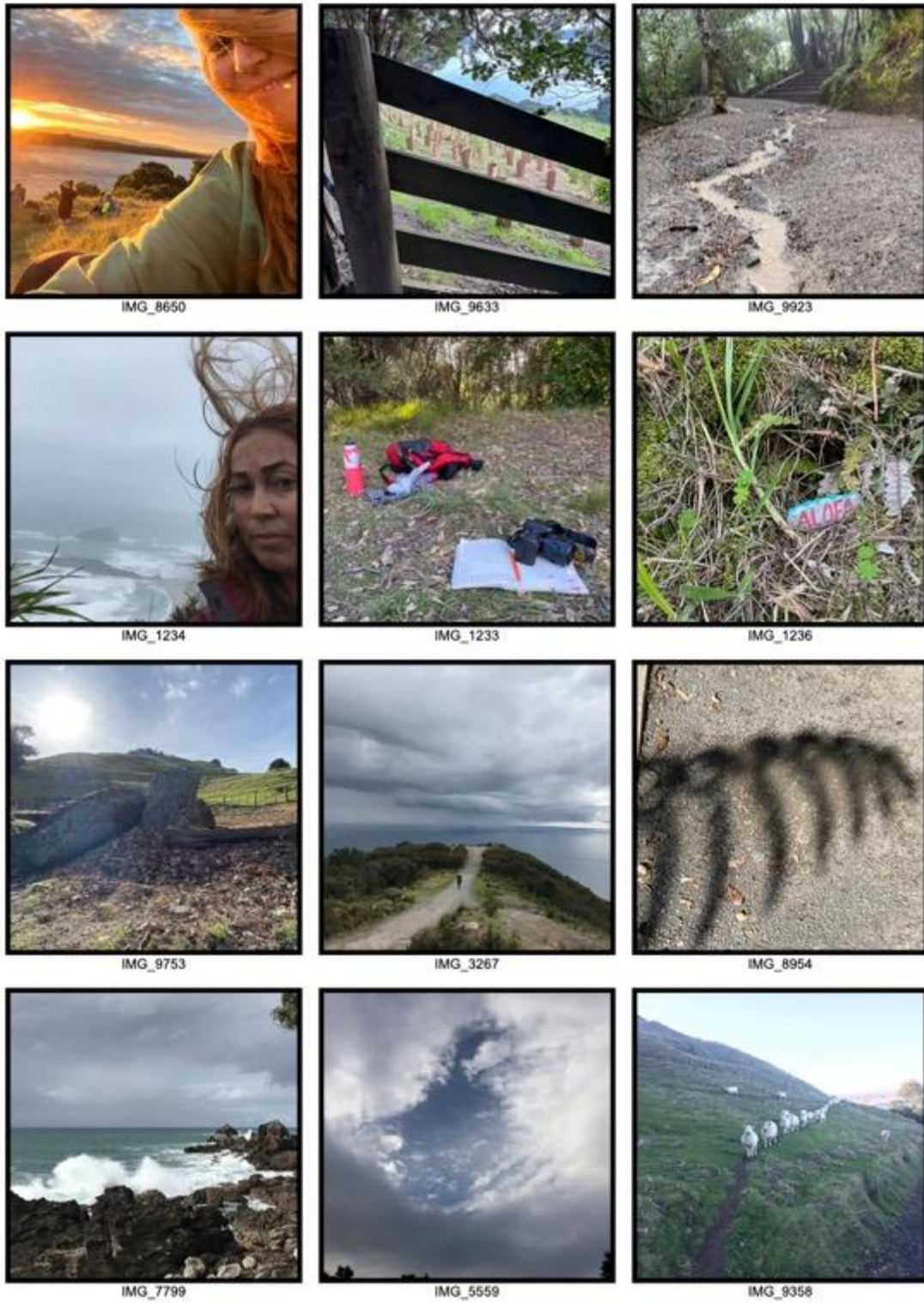


Figure 6. *Contact Sheet on Mauao 2, 2021/2022*, digital image by author.

Hand in hand with this methodological framework of walking come chance encounters. Happenstance is one of my prevailing methods of practice because, through active walking, experiential anecdotes appear with the haptic senses which are alive to the more complex enfolded engagement I have with the maunga. I visit Mauao regularly with my camera, as I would a friend, open to the reciprocal nature of our relationship. I connect with the whenua, and Mauao returns this connection to me as an ever-stable presence in my life; the maunga has taken on the role of friend. Whilst walking on the maunga, it was one of these happenstance moments, the sign stating the oak trees were to be removed, which led to an ah-ha moment, discussed in the next chapter.

20 October 2010

Dear Mount Maunganui,

You have been my daily solace during the past few years, and I wanted to give you a little credit for keeping my sanity during these times. I spend time on your trails many days of the week, usually with my children, but sometimes I can get away alone.

Since I last wrote to, I have given birth to two more children, both little girls, and both born at home which has a view to you. My mother has also been getting dramatically worse with her early-onset dementia. I have been travelling back and forth to California as often as I can. When I am home, your expansive view helps me settle my mind and continues to nurture me.

I haven't stopped thinking about the questions we have previously discussed. I have done all that I can to assimilate into this new country. I have joined the schools board of trustees, been to every parent group I can find, and continue to try to figure out what these new words and traditions are.

My five year old came home the other day and asked me what her mountain is. I was entirely unprepared for this question, being utterly ignorant of what a pepeha is. I did find someone to explain this concept to me, which I think is pretty brilliant. I wish I had something like that for myself. As an immigrant it helps to acknowledge where we come from.

Friends are hard to make here. This town is very cliquey and I do not have the proper accent, but friends and connections are slowly coming. No one is ready to have any deep conversations about the history of the Maori and British settlers and why I get such conflicting opinions as an immigrant. It's as if it just isn't talked about, at least not in the circles I have encountered thus far. The internet is becoming more prevalent, and I hope it will help facilitate more learning and better access to where I can get my questions answered.

Thank you, Heidi Douglas

Figure 7. Letter to Mauao 3, 2022, digitised written letter by author.

## Chapter Two: Cutting Down the Oaks, an Ah-ha Moment

I have shared special moments whilst walking the tracks of Mauao. Although the journey began when I landed in Aotearoa New Zealand, a walk around Mauao in April of 2021 became the spark that ignited this project. On this walk, I noticed a sign announcing the removal of some old English oaks that held many memories for me (figure 8). These hundred-year-old trees were amongst my favourite places to picnic with my children when they were young. Standing in the shady grove, with the birds and the autumn wind blowing through the branches, I had a strong and visceral response to the news of the impending death of this grove. I was at once incensed and frustrated, thinking that the city council was merely cutting these trees down in a capitalistic bid to throw work to their contractors.

This ah-ha moment, as I like to think of it, caused me to rethink my place within the context of colonialism. I had to face painful emotions and realise how attached I am to the trees and my colonial romantic vision of the idyllic English countryside. This realisation initiated a shift in my thinking from ignorant immigrant to one of curious tauiwi and, therefore, how I engaged with my research. The maunga was my subject, but because of these moments of realisation I was compelled to develop a deeper understanding of this whenua in support of its reparation. I became much more aware of my immigrant status and what it means to be an allied tauiwi.



Figure 8. *Waipatukakahu Restoration*, 2021, digital image by author.

Contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand artist Kelcy Taratoa (Ngāi Te Rangi, Ngāti Ranginui, Ngāti Raukawa) speaks of the role of art, not to necessarily take definitive sides of right/wrong in the reparation process happening throughout Aotearoa New Zealand but instead to act as a vehicle to create less charged conversations.<sup>20</sup> He speaks of art's ability to create a grey space between the black and white lines, metaphorically opening a dialogue between two contrasting points of view and giving the viewer space to contemplate. I was drawn to use my lens to witness the removal of Mauao's introduced foreign flora, and the shift of values within me. Through this process of realisation, of shedding the immigrant lens and embracing my tauivi status, I felt that Taratoa's grey space helped me focus my lens. My camera permitted me to transfer my emotions into a grey space which allowed me to develop my view.

Using my lens, I began to document the trees. At first, it felt almost like a last requiem. I felt unable to prevent their death. However, I could preserve this grove of trees photographically. As the days turned into weeks and I spent more and more time on this particular part of the maunga, my emotions subsided somewhat, and I began to recognise an active naivety within my thinking, that it was coming from Western paradigms, such as my inability to recognise the need for decolonising the grove of oak trees. I began to question if there were any other reasons for cutting down these trees other than the first one of corporate greed that cynically came to my mind.

I experimented with pinhole photography. With prolonged exposure and many hours of sitting with this particular grove of trees on the maunga, I produced a series of images (figure 3). The trees are beginning to shed their leaves, and the scene is bathed in the late autumn sun. The long shadows darken the stream that flows beneath the trees. An old fence runs through the scene, and behind the trees and fence stands the remnants of a Māori pa site.

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<sup>20</sup> Owtkast\_Visualz, "Te Kore Te Wiwia by Kelcy Taratoa," December 3, 2019, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXiLiGGhp4I>.



Figure 9. *Oak Grove Pinhole*, 2021, pinhole photograph by author.

This pinhole photograph was captured in response to my hearing about the trees being cut down. I utilised this method of photography because of the soft focus created by the pinhole. This image employs analogue processes, which lend it a historical feel. This pastoral romanticism helped me to navigate the emotions of nostalgia and regret for the removal of the oaks. The light reflecting off the trees creates an image that pays homage to the trees long after their demise. This capturing of the corporeal light enables the trees' future life by contiguity. I felt that rendering the trees in this way helped maintain an authenticity to their existence, a small snippet of their life force to preserve for the future.



Figure 10. *Contact Sheet, Removing the Oaks*, 2021, digital contact sheet by author.

My research approach of spending time on the maunga and allowing events to dictate the images I capture has an affinity with the practice of Aotearoa New Zealand artist Joyce Campbell. Engaging with land and water environments, Campbell challenges the construction of traditional Western landscape representation to interrogate the Western systems of power represented by landscape and nature. Using historical photographic methods allows her to let chance have a role in her processes. Campbell states:

I can't motivate myself to make anything I already understand or can fully predict or control. It is very easy to know too much before the work has a chance to become itself. I don't want too much control. I want to be surprised by my work. I am in dialogue with it. I don't want to make it so much as facilitate its making or becoming.<sup>21</sup>

Using photography methods from the nineteenth century, Campbell relies on chance within the environment she is working in to guide the outcome of her work. Being interested in the connection between nature, philosophy and the care of the sacred landscape, she says that her work *On the Last Afternoon* (2014) is a “mediation on the interdependence of physical systems.”<sup>22</sup> Her work has informed my methods of chance encounters and appreciation for the care of sacred spaces on the maunga.

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<sup>21</sup> “Joyce Campbell,” interview by Kirsty Baker, *Artist Profile*, September 9, 2020, <https://www.artistprofile.com.au/joyce-campbell/>.

<sup>22</sup> Joyce Campbell, quoted in Michael Irwin, “Joyce Campbell: Artist Profile, Exhibitions & Artworks,” *Ocula*, May 31, 2021, <https://ocula.com/artists/joyce-campbell/>.

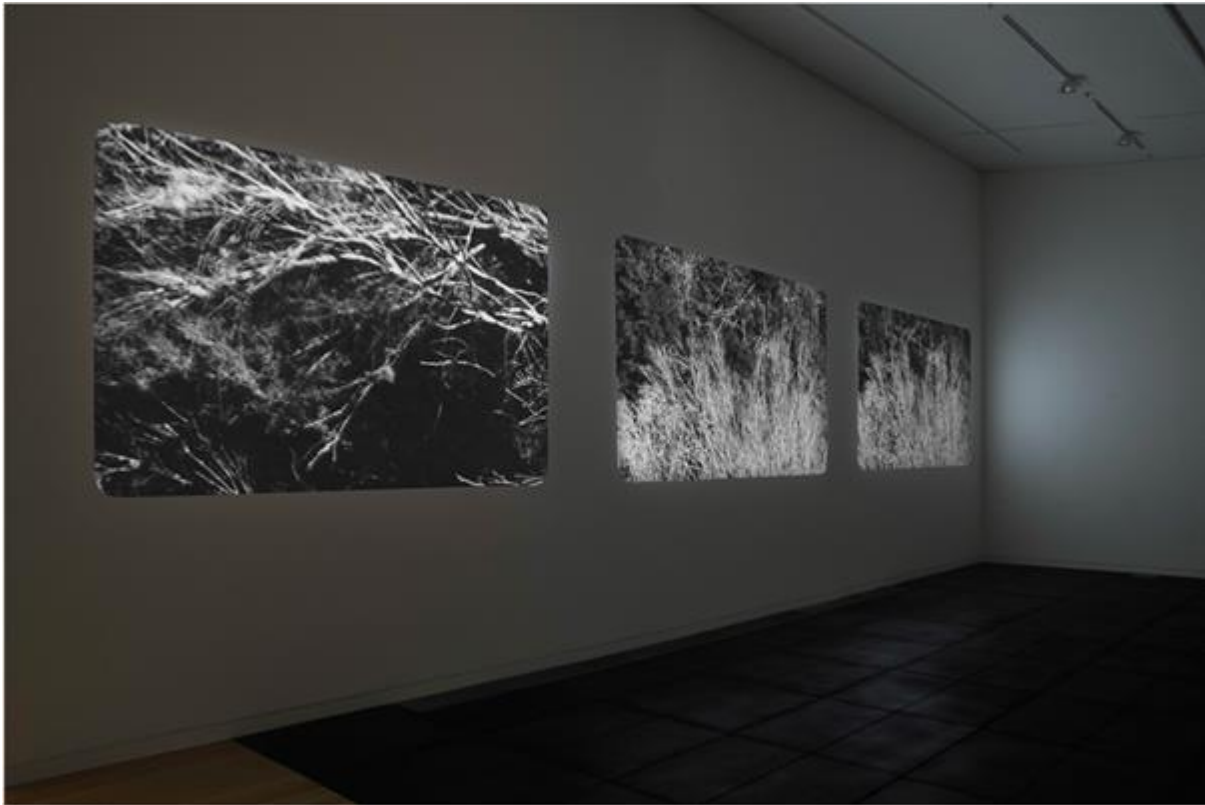


Figure 11. Works by Joyce Campbell. Reproduced from “On the Last Afternoon: Disrupted Ecologies and the Work of Joyce Campbell,” Adam Art Gallery, accessed November 30, 2022, <https://www.adamartgallery.org.nz/past-exhibitions/on-the-last-afternoon/>.

The process of photographing these trees let me spend copious amounts of time on the maunga. Walking on Mauao allowed me to regulate my emotions and start contemplating why it may be important to repair the land from colonial damage. What ensued was a learning experience that helped me understand the Council’s reparation process, which has been in place since 2018.<sup>23</sup> Created in collaboration with iwi and the council, the management plan<sup>24</sup> explicitly addresses the colonial marks made on this maunga. Rather than attempting to restore the entire maunga, specific sites have been prioritised and are actively being repaired. One of the essential sites to restore for local iwi is the freshwater stream, which the oak trees were clustered around. Their deciduous nature was hastening the demise of the stream. On understanding the plight of the stream and the damage the oak trees were causing, I had a second ah-ha moment, one where I realised that my thinking needed to change. I needed to shift from Western ideology to one that begins the process of accounting for other points of view—in this case, Māori ecological methodologies for preserving whenua which is a view that is

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<sup>23</sup> Tauranga City Council and Mauao Trust, *Mauao Historic Reserve Management Plan*.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

not seen through rose lenses. It is seen through that of whakapapa where ones blood is connected to the very environment that we are lucky enough to share<sup>25</sup>.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994), Palestinian theorist Edward Said states that:

Wherever they went, Europeans immediately began to change the local habitat; their conscious aim was to transform territories into images of what they had left behind. The process was never-ending, as a huge number of plants, animals and crops, as well as building methods, gradually turned the colony into a new place, complete with new diseases, environmental imbalances, and traumatic dislocations for the overpowered natives. A changed ecology also introduced a changed political system.<sup>26</sup>

This “changed ecology” represents all that was lost with the sweep of Western influence, and Mauao is no different in regard to the colonial impacts which still can be seen on the maunga. The oak trees were clear reminders of those long-ago colonial settlers who wished to transform the land they were newly inhabiting to resemble England.

I started examining the deep wounds that these oak trees literally and metaphorically represented. I shifted from being angry with the council for removing the trees, and instead focused on the reparation process. I began to look through my lens less romantically and more affectively with purpose. Although I have photographed Mauao for years, I became motivated to use my lens as a means to portray this active decolonisation process, and I began by using aerial photography, as a juxtaposition to the previous, softer images made by pinhole.

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<sup>25</sup> Quintin Bidois, Conversation with Quinton Bidois Bidois (Ngāi Te Rangī, Ngāti Ranginui, Waitaha), Conversation, 31 March 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 225.



Figure 12. *Waipatukakahu & Oaks; Before*, 2021, aerial digital photograph by author.



Figure 13. *Waipatukakahu & Oaks; After*, 2021, aerial digital photograph by author.

Bringing a drone in to survey the trees as they were removed brought a juxtaposition to the work I was creating. This birds eye view provided a contrast to the soft focus pinhole photography used to capture the trees before they were cut down. By viewing the scene remotely and from the air I was removed from my historical and romantic connection with the trees, and could appreciate them more objectively. When Europeans first came here it was with a colonial mapping gaze, one designed to profit from the land, not share the land in the spirit of reciprocity. Using the drone, I took a number of surveyance images looking directly down at the grove of trees during their removal, effectually turning the colonial gaze of my Western surveillance drone back on the decolonisation happening on Mauao.

Indian-born American photographer, writer and conservationist Subhankar Banerjee has worked closely with Indigenous communities of the Arctic Alaska region,<sup>27</sup> using his aerial photographs. His photographs helped to defend significant culturally important areas from oil and gas development by sparking debate in the US courts of law, countering the prevailing propaganda that the far north tundra was merely a wasteland and therefore fair game for oil drilling.<sup>28</sup>

Aerial imagery often represents war, colonial conquest, science and investigation. Banerjee depicts the Arctic environments in this way to give a sense of detached observation, which is precisely what I was going through during this phase of my project. I needed to step back from my raft of emotions evoked by the removal of the oak trees.

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<sup>27</sup> "Eco-Critical Photographer: An Interview With Subhankar Banerjee," interview by Alexandra Tursi, *Identity Theory*, April 12, 2010, <http://www.identitytheory.com/eco-critical-photographer-interview-subhankar-banerjee/>.

<sup>28</sup> "Subhankar Banerjee," U.S. Department of State, accessed November 29, 2022, [https://art.state.gov/personnel/subhankar\\_banerjee/](https://art.state.gov/personnel/subhankar_banerjee/).



Figure 14. Subhankar Banerjee, *Caribou Migration I*, from the series *Oil and the Caribou*, photograph, 2002, 86 x 68 inches. Reproduced from Subhankar Banerjee, "Land-as-Home versus Environmental and Political Imperialism in the American North," *S&F Online* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2008), <https://sfonline.barnard.edu/ice/gallery/banerjee.htm>.

In contrast to the rather stark, clinical images Banerjee creates of Arctic topography, he also photographs Indigenous ways of living *with* the land. He has depicted these from the ground up, gritty and real. The two styles of photography deliberately clash. This intentional juxtaposition of the aesthetically pleasing yet detached aerial and gritty earth-based images shows the Indigenous peoples' land's biological, cultural and spiritual dependence.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 15. Subhankar Banerjee, *Caribou Hunt—Danny Gimmel and Rocky John*, from the series *Gwich'in and the Caribou*, photograph, 2007, 18 x 24 inches. Reproduced from Subhankar Banerjee, "Land-as-Home versus Environmental and Political Imperialism in the American North," *S&F Online* 7, no. 1 (Fall 2008), <https://sfonline.barnard.edu/ice/gallery/banerjee.htm>.

These two ah-ha moments—the first being my moment of rage when reading the sign that the trees were to be removed, and the second when I realised my thinking was one-sided and needed to expand to a broader world view—transpired by happenstance whilst walking on Mauao. This instrumental shift broadened my thinking which was then referenced through my photographic lens, reflecting my transition from thinking of myself as an immigrant to tauiwī. The next step was to reconcile the removal of this grove of trees which to me were like friends, as Mauao had become, to the notion of decolonisation that is repairing the sacred Māori sites on the maunga. I turned my thoughts to an Indigenous practice called the honourable harvest which helped me to fully reconcile these two points of view. This concept honours the plants

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<sup>29</sup> T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 81-99.

and animals who give their lives for the greater good.

20 September 2016

Dear Mauao,

I had a fantastic experience on you today, and this experience has me calling you by the name given to you by the Maori people. Mauao, not Mount Maunganui. I now have a separation in my head over the English name of the town that I live in and the maunga (you) that you are.

I was lucky enough to be invited on a walking tour of you, led by one of the tutors at Tei Ohomai Institute of Technology. He was telling the stories of the area to the students, bringing to life the history and stories of the indigenous people. He imparted some of the knowledge I have been searching for, a connection to the stories of the first humans here. I lapped it up because this was the aspect of connection I have been missing.

I have studied up on your scientific past - geologically an extinct volcano at a harbour entrance, forming a spit of sand that trail out, on which my town was built. I know the western influences, predominately English, who reached these shores in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. I know this has been a sleepy seaside holiday village and now a bustling little tourist town on the cruise ship route, quickly becoming an affluent area. So much has changed since we moved here.

But this walk and talk - korero - is just what I needed to bridge this gap between science, fauna and colonial history. I needed to know the other side. Isn't it strange Mauao that this knowledge isn't readily available to an immigrant like me? The descendants of those who once ate pipis on your shores still live here, shouldn't they be a part of the story?

I feel like the tide is turning, and this information is coming. I mean, they are now being taught in school. Thank goodness. And I am going home tonight to recount what I have learned to my children.

Yours - Heidi

Figure 16. Letter to Mauao number 5, 2022, digitised written letter by author.

## Chapter Three: But Why? On Learning of the Honourable Harvest

In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), scientist and Indigenous author Robin Wall Kimmerer<sup>30</sup> speaks of the Indigenous notion of the honourable harvest as connected to the more-than-human world.<sup>31</sup> Throughout this project, I have become increasingly conscious of how humans and non-humans are inextricably connected. I acknowledge that I live in a world that is not simply human-centric, but one in that I cohabitate with other life forms, all of whom have equal importance. Whilst walking on Mauao, I have begun to cultivate attentiveness to the specific and situated ways in which the fates of multiple species are bound together. There is a natural cycle where things, plants and animals will be harvested; however, Kimmerer suggests this must be done for the benefit of the whole, which is what she calls the honourable harvest. She says:

One of our responsibilities as human people is to find ways to enter reciprocity with the more-than-human world. We can do it through gratitude, through ceremony, through land stewardship, science, art and in everyday acts of practical reverence.<sup>32</sup>

When reading the Mauao Historic Reserve plan and coming to the realization that the oaks are indeed killing the only freshwater source on this maunga, I grasped that the act of removing them falls under this practice of honourable harvest. As Kimmerer points out, “a harvest is made honourable when it sustains the giver as well as the taker.”<sup>33</sup> Using my lens to portray the act of reparation and the honourable harvesting of the oaks helps me find my voice in this act of restoration. The act of image-making allows me to not only focus on the image coming through the lens but also allows me to examine my own gaze. This active harvesting of the colonial trees to restore the well-being of the stream brings about a repairing of the land. The colonial mentality of the last centuries was one of imposition on the land. This reparation makes amends for the influence which colonised the flora on Mauao—and throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. The honourable harvest is a fluid and ongoing concept, just as the act of reparation is ongoing. Kimmerer defines the honourable harvest:

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<sup>30</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

<sup>31</sup> This phrase—more-than-human—refers to the context in which multiple species are taken into account rather than a human-centric point of view.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 189.

*Collectively, the Indigenous canon of principles and practices that govern the exchange of life for life is known as the Honourable Harvest. They are rules of sorts that govern our taking, shape our relationships with the natural world, and rein in our tendency to consume—that the world might be as rich for the seventh generation as it is for our own.*<sup>34</sup>

While photographing this process, I had many conversations with strangers. Most understood why the oaks were inappropriate for this site; some were incensed by their removal. One conversation that stands out was with a young man negotiating with the arborists. When I asked him what he was doing, he told me that he was a mushroom farmer and intended to make mushroom logs from the branches of the oak trees. These logs would be viable to feed a family for years to come.

I spent a day at his farm later that month, where he taught me how to inoculate an oak log with mushroom spores and sent me home with one. Photographing this process allowed me to capture the honourable harvest in action—we were using the harvested log to create food for the family for the future, and in turn I was recording this process to preserve the knowledge of how this was done for future learning (figure 17).

That night, while the mushroom log sat in my bathtub soaking up enough water to sustain the mushrooms, I realised that it embodied the ideas of the honourable harvest (figure 17). The oaks live on, not just in the memories of those of us who picnicked and photographed and enjoyed them, but the wood is now being used to provide food. The oak logs were taken by the farmer who has now seeded the logs with mushroom spores. These logs will be sprouting harvestable mushrooms for the next decade. For years to come, this physical manifestation of food will take the harvesting of these trees from being sacrificed for the act of reparation to being the practical and noble embodiment of food on the table. This process of reusing the fallen oaks continues the long term durational quality of honouring the harvesting of the oaks for the greater good. My images are an attempt to preserve the knowledge of how this process comes about. Kimmerer states, “if we are fully awake, a moral question arises as we extinguish the other lives around us on behalf of our own.”<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 180.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 172.



Figure 17. *Contact Sheet, Making Mushrooms*, 2021, digital photographs by author.



Figure 18. *Mushroom Bath*, 2021, digital photograph by author.

This shift in my thinking resulted in many days spent on Mauao with my lens as a form of witnessing, as I came to terms with and confronted my own point of view.

Aotearoa New Zealand-born artist Natalie Robertson (Ngāti Porou/Clann Dhònmchaidh) works with moving images and photography to explore Māori knowledge, culture and practices. She explores settler/Indigenous connections to land and place, particularly in relationship to whenua where two divergent ways of thinking collide. Referencing her ancestral whenua Robertson explores themes of colonial deforestation and the devastating effects on the environment. Her photographs address current environmental issues of erosion, river well-being and water ecology—something Robinson terms “slow catastrophes”<sup>36</sup>. Robertson's imagery portrays the colonial capitalistic interference with the environment. She employs methods that involve spending time within a place which allows her to connect Indigenous narratives to their geological markers.



Figure 19 Natalie Robertson, *Rangitukia Hikoi 0-14*, 2016;<sup>37</sup>

*Rangitukia Hikoi 0-14* (2016)<sup>38</sup> examines the beaches and shifting whenua that is the result of colonial-inflicted deforestation. In this series, she situates her lens in the same place every day and records the changing erosion of the beach. Robinson pegged out markers along Rangitukia beach, Te Tai Rawhiti, and visited these locations daily to photograph the movements of the beach. This daily process of being with a place resulted in a durational photographic examination of the impact of deforestation on her iwi's whenua. This method of spending extensive time, and repeatedly photographing the same place, enables Robertson to examine what has changed since her ancestors had custodianship of this whenua. The most significant change to this region's ecology has predominantly occurred since 19th Century British colonial settlement. Her images portray skeletal driftwood combined with a stark sandy beach, which gives viewers a bleak outlook on the rapid decline of this whenua. Her images intentionally captures evidence for future generations to experience the state of the land at the time of her

<sup>36</sup> Natalie Robertson, 'Swirling Currents Emerge at the Waiapu River Mouth: Lens-Based Witnessing, Documenting and Storytelling of Slow Catastrophes', *Journal of Environmental Media* 2, no. 1 (1 November 2021): 6.1-6.16, [https://doi.org/10.1386/jem\\_00054\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jem_00054_1).

<sup>37</sup> 'CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki', accessed 15 January 2022, [https://coca.org.nz/exhibitions/precarious\\_nature/rangitukia-hikoi/](https://coca.org.nz/exhibitions/precarious_nature/rangitukia-hikoi/).

<sup>38</sup> 'CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki'.

image-making; her photographs function as a time capsule of sorts.<sup>39</sup> Robertson states: “as an artist, I can give voice to the issues and make images that give form to the slow catastrophes.”<sup>40</sup>

With the foreign tree species removed, I have turned my lens in the same direction as Robertson, to the future, with the idea that what comes next is an integral part of the honourable harvest. Like Robertson, I too have turned my lens towards the future. Moving forward from the removal of the trees, there is a new chapter of the honourable harvest happening on Mauao. The decimated area where the trees have been removed is now being replanted with native rākau, which will not interfere with the natural order of the land. The images that I have taken of the oaks (Figures 20 and 21) after their removal are my final farewell as I refocus my lens towards the future.

One of the stumps of the fallen oaks has been hollowed out and a native tree sapling planted in its centre. The old oak acts as a kind of midwife and sustenance to this new tree which will someday preside over Waipatukakahu stream (Figure 22). This act of reciprocity—the honourably harvested oak giving new life to the seedling—allowed me to examine my images and how they connect to my entangled relationship with the maunga. I constructed images of the sapling and stump to bring together the past, present and future. In this image, both the Indigenous pā site in the background and the colonial introduced tree-stump in the foreground allude to the history of this whenua. However, this image is also future focused, as the new tree grows towards the blue sky. Just as a midwife uses her skills to guide a new life into this realm, so too does this remnant of a colonial tree which fosters reparation.

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<sup>39</sup> ‘CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki’.

<sup>40</sup> Robertson, ‘Swirling Currents Emerge at the Waipau River Mouth’.



Figure 20. *Goodbye Oaks*, 2022, digital photograph by author.



Figure 21. *Goodbye Oaks*, 2022, digital photograph by author.



Figure 22. *Replanting Waipatukakahu Stream, 2022*, digital image by author.



Figure 23. *Replanting Mauao*, 2022, digital image by author.

25 January 2022

Dear Mauao,

You are being replanted.

These days I walk on you at least three times a week. You are my constant companion, despite what life throws at me. Being an immigrant has been challenging. To rebuild everything - my friends, my career, my networks, my family - has been the hardest thing I have ever done. Time has marched on, and now I am well established in the community with friends and a solid family. Can you believe that two of my children who used to climb your trees are now in their twenties?

The last year has been tumultuous in many ways. Coming to terms with the loss of the oak trees and my fledgling understanding of the colonial history of New Zealand. Understanding how the whenua has been abused has been the next step in our relationship, I needed ~~to~~ take this next step of understanding to be a part of the future of Aotearoa.

I understand that you have many facets. Not least, you are a geological being born of fire long before humans roamed the earth. Your shape has remained (more or less) the same over the millenium and will still be standing long after my time on earth is done. Even if humans cause the oceans to rise, pollute the environment and kill their own species, you will still be here.

Despite all of this, I still look at you, and my heart is happy. You, my old friend, have been one of the most constant companions in my life. I see you when I open my curtains in the morning, when I am in my home office working, when I hang my laundry on the line and when I close the curtains at night. I feel you looking at me as well, approving of my journey, silently encouraging me.

When I saw the baby plants all over your hills, I had a visceral, almost maternal reaction. These beautiful native saplings are not just flax in the stream, but other natives repopulating some of the pastures used to farm sheep. I looked at the tiny Pehutukawa sapling in the green field, and I had a happy moment that someday, my descendants would see this baby as a mighty tree. We don't know what the world holds in store for us, but right here, right now, steps are being made to right the wrongs of the past and there is hope for the future.

Thank you again from the bottom of my heart for this friendship we share and your stewardship of my induction into my new homeland.

With love,  
Gleidi

Figure 24. Letter to Mauao number 8, 2022, digitised written letter by author.

## Chapter Four: Mauao as my Hoa, Understanding the Importance of Decolonisation for Everyone

This project explores not just the journey of restoring Mauao but also investigates how a lens is instrumental to decolonising my point of view. In my work, the lens has focused on how I view the restoration process happening on the maunga. My project critically reflects on how the land of Aotearoa New Zealand has been altered and manipulated and how someone of recent immigration status can establish a relational connection. With the removal of non-native flora, there is room to start the work of reparation. Native species are being replanted on many of these open spaces on Mauao.

In *Imagining Decolonisation* Ocean Ripeka Mercier suggests that:

Decolonising actions range from simple, personal day-to-day changes to society-wide collective endeavours; they can be a matter of small subtle choices or loud public protest; they can be back-end research or frontline outcomes; they can be direct actions by citizens or mediated by political parties or other organisations.<sup>11</sup>

My project directly responds to the notion that decolonisation is the work of all of us. My day-to-day walking on the maunga and photographing the decolonisation project of planting native trees has resulted in a reportage of my lived experiences and changing attitudes, while also enabling me to confront my naïve view point. By actively creating images throughout my journey from immigrant to tauwiwi I hope to inspire others to also confront their positionality. As Māori author and educator Bianca Elkington (Ngāti Toa Rangatira) says, “There is much work to do, but when we *know* more we *do* more. That *knowing* to me is an act of decolonisation.”<sup>12</sup>

The relationship that I have formed with Mauao is important to me, but I sometimes still struggle with my immigrant-ness and how I fit in when I do not whakapapa to Mauao. Kimmerer, in *Braiding Sweetgrass*, reflects on what it is to be Indigenous to a place and if that is even possible for someone like me:

I want to envision a way that an immigrant society could become Indigenous to place, but I'm stumbling on the words. Immigrants cannot, by definition, be Indigenous. Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or

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<sup>11</sup> 'CoCA Centre of Contemporary Art Toi Moroki'.

<sup>12</sup> Bianca Elkington, introduction to *Imagining Decolonisation*, ed. Rebecca Kiddle et al. (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2020), 12.

substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land ... But if people do not feel 'Indigenous,' can they nevertheless enter into a deep reciprocity that renews the world?<sup>43</sup>

After the sorrow of watching the trees being removed from Mauao, it was with great joy that I was able to point my lens towards the future and photograph the new plantings that have begun all over the slopes of Mauao. It is this feeling of contribution that Kimmerer talks about, a deep reciprocity, that is creating new life for the future. I cannot be Indigenous, but I care deeply for this maunga, and the replanting is not just for the maunga but for future generations.

Kimmerer's "dream" is that "the revelations of science framed with an Indigenous worldview" will lead to "stories in which matter and spirit are both given voice."<sup>44</sup> In this vein, I have taken portraits of the baby plants wrapped in cardboard cases, with the care that I would take a portrait of a young baby swaddled in a blanket (figures 25 and 26). These images employ a shallow depth of field which symbolically accentuates ideas of care. I look at the images of the replanting hanging on my dining room wall, and they remind me to continue on my decolonial journey. I am interested in how my small act of lovingly photographing the replanting on Mauao may bring forth a better future for generations to come. As Kimmerer suggests: "To become naturalised is to live as if your children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 206-7.

<sup>44</sup> 345-46.

<sup>45</sup> 208.



Figure 25. *Seedlings for the Future 1*, 2022, digital image by author.



Figure 26. *Seedlings for the Future 2*, 2022, digital image by author.

Along the journey of this project, I began to write letters to Mauao. These letters highlight different points throughout my life as an immigrant over the last two decades. They are a response to my growing understanding of the relational connection to my 'Pākehā-ness' and therefore the maunga. Sitting in my lounge, hanging my washing on the line, or opening my curtains in the morning, Mauao is always there—sometimes covered in a blanket of fog and sometimes framed by bright blue sky. The relationship that has formed between us is one of reciprocal friendship. Mauao has been my constant companion, from my first years as a new mother and immigrant to Aotearoa New Zealand, to my current status as I shed my immigrant obliviousness and strive to become connected to my adopted country. Mauao patiently waited until the time was right for me to open my mind and evolve. Framed by the windows of my home, I feel this friendship every day. My lens has allowed me to begin the process of decolonising my mindset and document the acts of decolonisation on the maunga, which honour this friendship.

Taking my lens and looking back to Mauao from my home allowed me to re-frame and define this growing relationship. As an extension of my vision and as a device to retain what can be seen, photography is the archetypal instrument of observation. By looking through the lens, I frame what I see. Throughout this project, I have been adjusting this framing—both physically in the images that I take and in the mental landscape that is running in my brain and body. Through the process of re-framing the oaks through my lens and the replanting of native trees on Mauao, I now observe how the maunga is framed through the windows of my life.

These images reflect the process of decolonising my mindset. I have found a new relationship with the maunga, with my adopted country, and with my understanding of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand. I am attempting to honour Indigenous thinking and the whenua. The images taken from my home, looking back at Mauao, and the written letters (figures 27) are created in the spirit of honouring this new relationship and reflect my expanded mindset. I have used the windows to reframe the maunga, including scenes of domesticity from my everyday life, reflecting the Māori notion of tūrangawaewae. This concept demonstrates that my domicile has transitioned with me from four walls to a place of belonging. My home is where I am connected and have the right to belong, and my house has become an inclusive place for myself, my family, and my friends—including Mauao. (Figures 28, 29, 30)

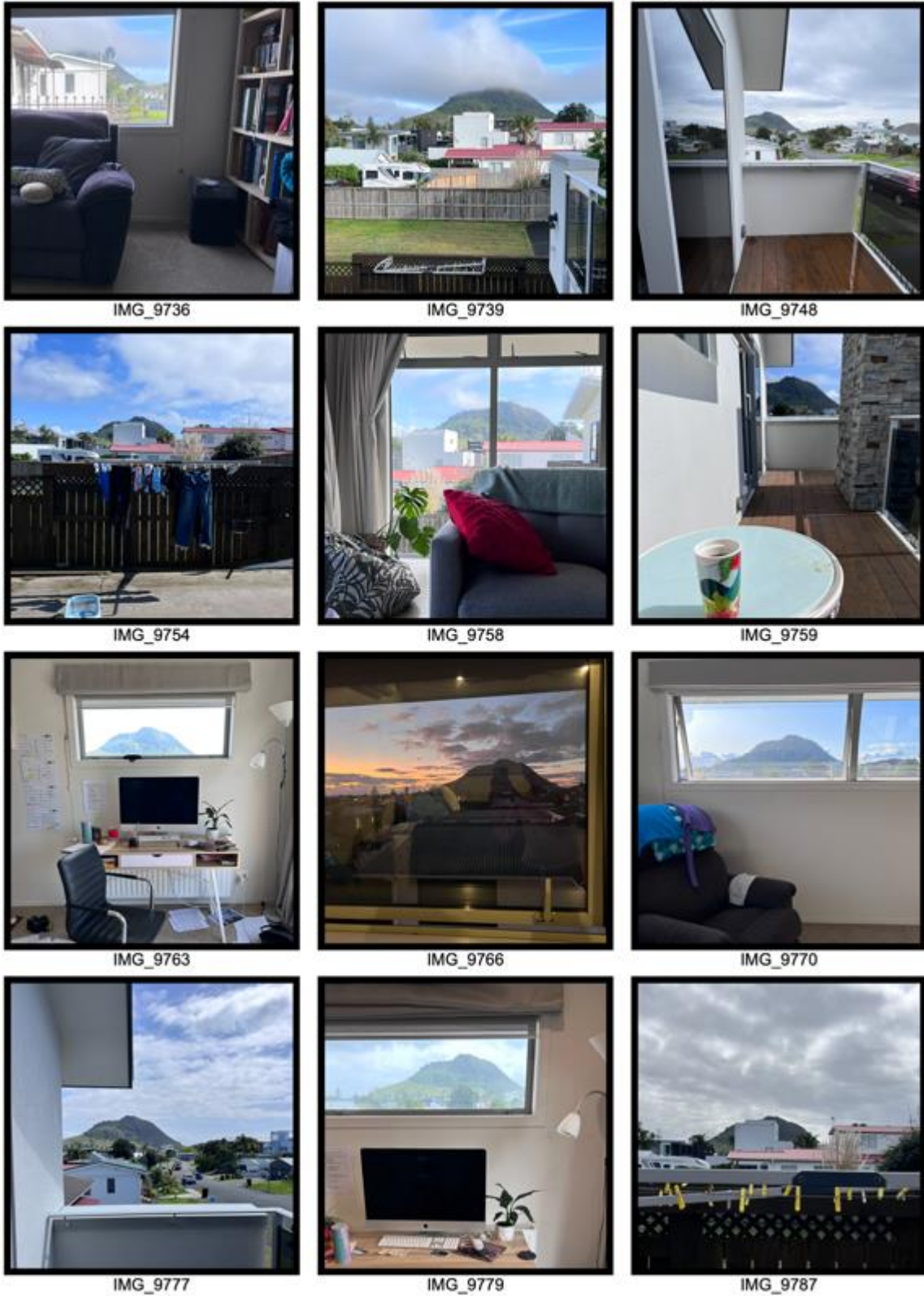


Figure 27. *Contact Sheet of my Hoa*, 2022, digital contact sheet by author.

## Conclusion: Looking to the Future

Coming to the end of this project, different aspects of my making have come together so as to examine my Pākehā-ness. I began this research project by querying how my lens-based practice could extend and document my relationship with Mauao. As a first-generation immigrant, I wanted to understand the impacts of British colonialism on Aotearoa New Zealand, and query land reparations. As I continued on this path, my lens unlocked my gaze from the colonial romanticism I held close when thinking and looking at the oaks. I found that the lens of my mind was influenced by Indigenous methods— the honourable harvest—for honouring the whenua. My lens captured critical moments of my journey and allowed me to examine my gaze.

As the project progressed, I experimented with various forms of photographic image making, such as pinhole and aerial, as well as portraits of the replantings and photographing the maunga looking back at me. I have also experimented with writing letters. Each aspect of this creative journey—with its immigrant to tauwi focus—allowed me to pause and reflect on my inner dialogue and assess where I was standing. My final body of work encapsulates this journey, which will continue past this project and into the future. I am wanting to strengthen for all tauwi a connection to whenua. I am grateful to have been able to engage in the work of understanding what it means to be tauwi. As Kimmerer argues, the world needs a compelling call for what she describes as ‘restorative reciprocity,’ an appreciation of gifts and the responsibilities that come with them, and how gratitude can be medicine for our sick, capitalistic world.<sup>46</sup>

At the end of her book on Indigenous wisdom, Kimmerer reflects on the need for the non-Indigenous peoples to attempt to connect with the Indigenous knowledge of first nation peoples; she suggests that there is a need to move forward into a new world where non-Indigenous play a role:

While our Indigenous stories are rich in wisdom, and we need to hear them, I do not advocate their wholesale appropriation. As the world changes, an immigrant culture

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Robin Wall Kimmerer “People Can’t Understand the World as a Gift Unless Someone Shows Them How,” *The Guardian*, May 23, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/23/robin-wall-kimmerer-people-cant-understand-the-world-as-a-gift-unless-someone-shows-them-how>.

must write its own new stories of relationship to place—a new ilbal, but tempered by the wisdom of those who were old on this land long before we came.<sup>47</sup>

The honourable harvest applies to all the exchanges made between people and the more-than-human world. It is a practice both ancient and urgent, and with my camera I am honouring Mauao, the decolonising work being done, and, above all, our reciprocal friendship. By utilising methods that involved: walking on the maunga with my camera; allowing happenstance to guide my lens to capture images of the removal of introduced flora; and photographically witnessing the replanting of native trees, I have found a sense of belonging to Aotearoa New Zealand. These methods have allowed me to reframe my opinions and re-focus my view on whether my heart and thinking brain are matching in their beliefs. By examining my point of view and visually communicating my very personal journey, I hope that other Pākehā will turn their own lens inwards to scrutinize themselves. My growth is an ongoing part of my psyche. Having a broader mindset puts me in a far better position to understand the culture I have adopted and how I can situate myself, my family and my practice as tauwiwi. I will continue to walk, lens in hand, with my friend Mauao, my hoa, who continues to sustain and inspire me.

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<sup>47</sup> Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 334.



Figure 28. *My Hoa 1*, 2022, digital photograph by author.



Figure 29. *My Hoa 2*, 2022, digital photograph by author.



Figure 30. My Hoa 3, 2022, digital photograph by author.



*Figure 31. At the installation of the MVA Examination, 16/2/2023, St. Paul St Gallery, digital photograph by Marijke de Jong*

## APPENDICES

The build-up to the final exhibition was fraught with unforeseen challenges, which seemed, upon reflection, to fit into my original methodology of happenstance and chance. Between torrential rain, a cyclone closing roads, and the flooding of the AUT campus, it was a near miracle that the show came together.

However, being unable to be on campus to test the installation of my photographs allowed me to spend more time on Mauao. During these hectic weeks, I was gifted an image from my hoā. As I sat on my favourite bench one Saturday evening at sunset, the sun poked out from the cyclone clouds and hit the maunga in the right direction to cast a long shadow onto the ocean. Over the past eighteen years, and hundreds of times watching the sunset from this exact place, I have never seen this dramatic shadowing onto the ocean. It was like a performative act that Mauao gifted me, a re-enactment of the Māori legend of the maunga being dragged to the sea by the patupaiarehe and being caught by the dawn. But in this case, the sunset cast the shadow, as if Mauao was sending me a message of friendship and support. Mauao wasn't dragged to the sea, but still stands proud casting a showdown upon the whenua and offering friendship to those who seek it.

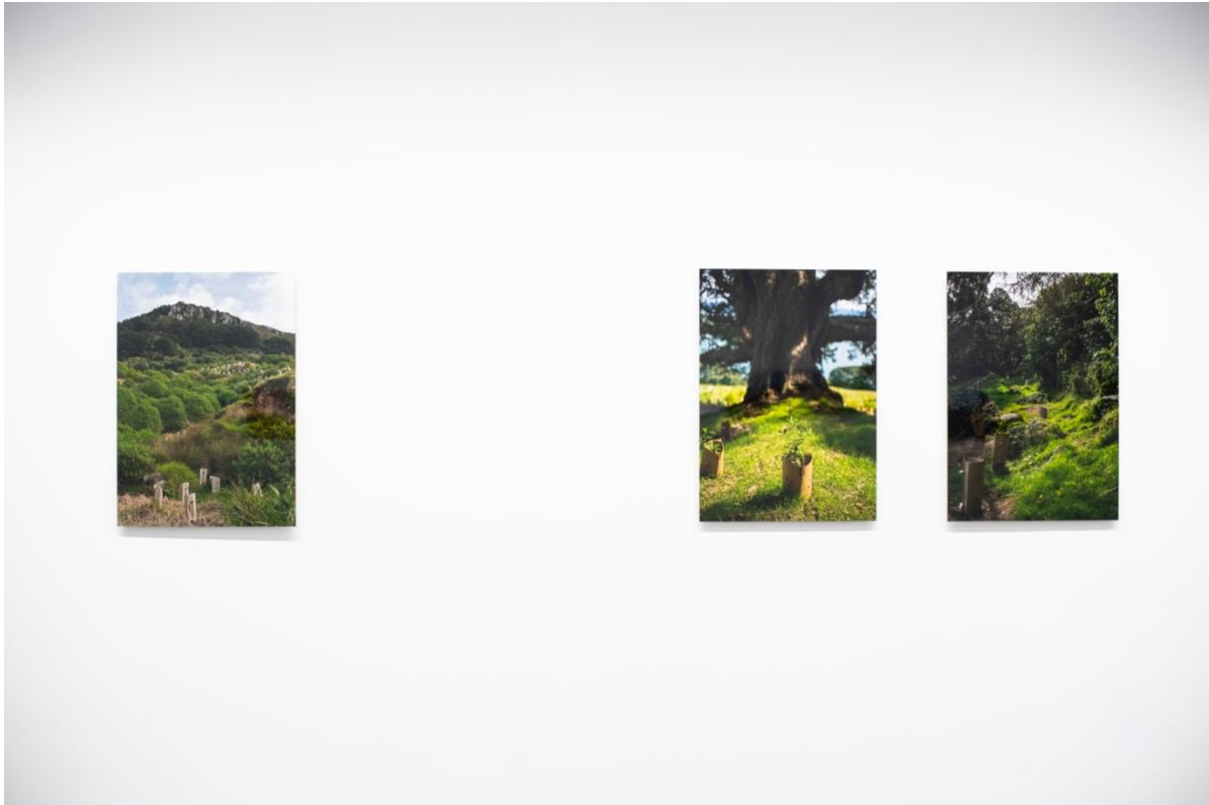


*Figure 32. Shadow of Mauao, 2023, Digital Image by Author*

In the final exhibition, this image was displayed with my earlier image looking up at Mauao from the shore. It was the perfect demonstration of my relationship to the whenua and my place in it. As an immigrant, I had no idea what questions to ask or how to approach my new homeland. But during this journey of connection, I can now sit with the maunga and view outward in the spirit of reciprocity, rather than as a mountain to climb and survey.



*Figure33. Installation at St. Pauls Gallery, 16/2/2023, digital image by author.*



*Figure 34. Installation at St. Pauls St Gallery, 16/2/2023, digital image by author.*

My final exhibition included images of the replanting which looks towards the future. To impart my very personal connection with Mauao I interspersed the letters I had written with the images from my home, in a frieze running through the corner of the gallery. Depicting my daily life through the seasons and my banal daily chores and routines reflects my autoethnographic relationship with my friend Mauao.





*Figure 36. Opening at St. Paul St. Gallery, 16/2/2023, digital image by Marijke de Jong*

And as I write this final appendices, there are workers on Mauao installing the next phase of reparation as per the Mauao Historic Reserve Management Plan. Signs are being installed

which tell the history of Mauao— from the geology, flora and fauna, Indigenous history, colonial history, and present-day history: the information I have been slowly acquiring over decades. Whilst my journey at AUT has ended, this ongoing process of honouring the history of Mauao and preserving the whenua for the future continues for me and the broader scope of people living and visiting here. The next immigrant mother who befriends Mauao will have guidance in her journey to understanding the history and meaning of the whenua, which is her new home.



*Figure 37. Opening at St. Paul St. Gallery, 16/2/2023, digital image by Marijke de Jong*



Figure 38. New signage on Mauao, digital image by author.



Figure 39. New signage on Mauao, digital image by author.



Figure 40. New signage on Mauao, digital image by author.



Figure 41. New signage on Mauao, digital image by author.

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