

# David versus Goliath: Justice for the people of Ihumātao

Ihumātao is the site of one of the earliest human settlements and the site of longest continuous human habitation in Aotearoa New Zealand (Science Learning Hub, n.d.). Originally settled in the thirteenth century (Common Era) by descendants of the Tainui waka (the Turehu and Patupaiarehe peoples' prior habitation of this area is beyond the scope of this article), who have occupied the land for over twenty generations.

Ihumātao, a small peninsula of land jutting out from the inner coast of the Manukau Harbour, is a place of enormous cultural significance. Ihumātao literally translates as Te Ihu o Mataaoho, the nose of Mataaoho, the elemental being responsible for the volcanic activity around Tāmaki Makarau (Maki of a Hundred Lovers, the original name for Auckland city).

The rich volcanic fields of Ihumātao were the site of bountiful gardens and are once again a site of volcanic social unrest. In the early to mid-1800s the area was the food bowl for the newly emerging city of Auckland. The *mana whenua* (local indigenous people) grew vegetables in the rich volcanic soils and harvested plentiful *kaimoana* (seafood) from the Manukau harbour. The word *whenua* refers to the placenta, and the term *tangata whenua* is usually translated as “people of the land”; both emphasise the inextricable relationship between people and land, and the health and well-being of both land and its people.

In the mid-1800s Māori commerce was at its peak: Māori dominated coastal shipping, supporting the local economy, and supplying the needs of newly created Pākehā (non-Māori) towns and settlements. Māori also had a heavy investment in inter/multinational trade. Auckland/Waikato Māori were a shining example of this prosperity, and between 1846 and 1860 Māori owned 37 flourmills in Auckland province alone (Hazel, 2007). Understanding Māori dominance of trade, the colony's dependence on Māori prosperity as well as the resentment of that prosperity on the part of non-Māori is important to appreciating what happened next.

In 1863, and as a precursor to the invasion of the Waikato during the land wars (O'Malley, 2016), the settler government threatened to evict *mana whenua* from the land forcibly unless they pledged their allegiance to the Queen of England. They didn't, and the subsequent eviction impoverished them; their land was sold to a local family who farmed it for some generations. More recently the land was sold to Fletchers, a multinational corporation, for a massive housing development.

In 1840 Māori *rangatira* (chiefs) had negotiated a binding treaty—te Tiriti o Waitangi—with the British Crown. Amongst other things, this treaty granted the British limited governorship, reaffirmed Māori sovereignty and offered Māori the same rights and privileges as British subjects. However, before the ink was dry on the parchment of this social contract, and in an act that symbolised the true intent of the British, William Hobson, the new Lieutenant-Governor for the British settlers, had replaced the flag of Te Whakaminenga (the United Tribes of Māori rangatira) with the British Union Jack. Subsequently, the settler government consistently breached te Tiriti o Waitangi through legislation, policies of colonisation and assimilation, and the use of military force.

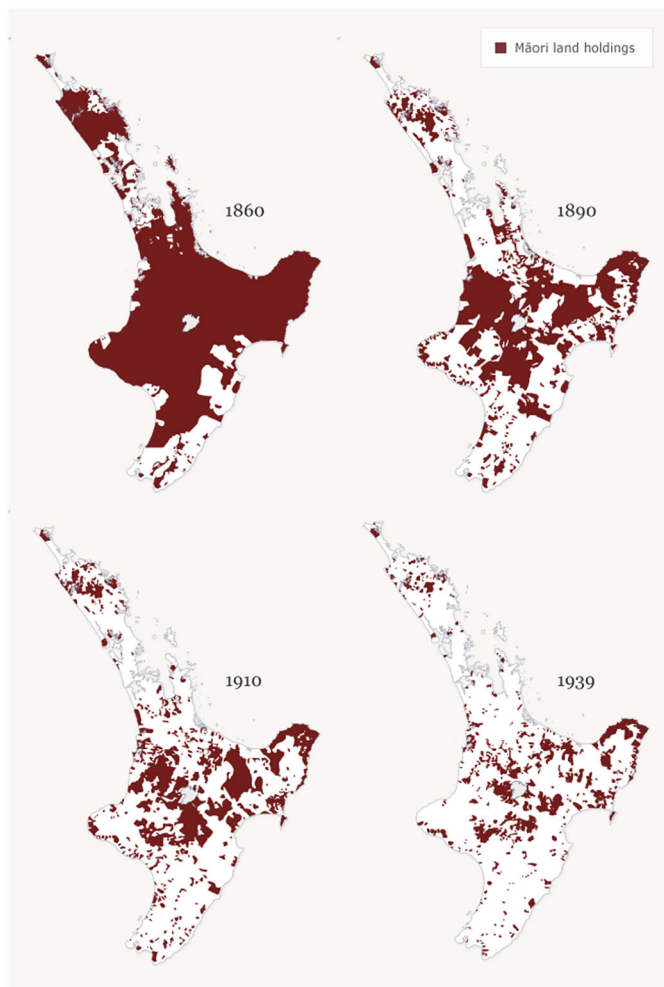
After decades of Māori resistance, the Waitangi Tribunal, a permanent independent commission of inquiry, was established in 1975 to investigate alleged breaches of te Tiriti. The Tribunal hears evidence and then write reports that meticulously document breaches of te Tiriti o Waitangi, following which the Crown negotiates settlements that usually include apologies, money, land and sometimes co-management agreements. The Tribunal is widely upheld as a beacon of justice, showing the maturity of New Zealand society facing up to our colonial past. However, to date, less than 2% of what was taken from Māori nationwide has been returned through the settlement process. In the *Manukau Report*, the Tribunal (1985) found that, at Ihumātao, “the inhabitants [were] attacked, their homes and property destroyed, and their cattle and horses stolen, but then they were punished by confiscation of their lands for a rebellion that never took place.” (p. 18).

In negotiating *full and final* treaty settlements, the New Zealand government has made it consistently clear that the settlement package will not include privately owned land. This has meant the mana whenua of Ihumātao were never going to get justice through the Waitangi Tribunal process because their land was held privately. This is, indeed, a David vs Goliath struggle, though in this case led by women.

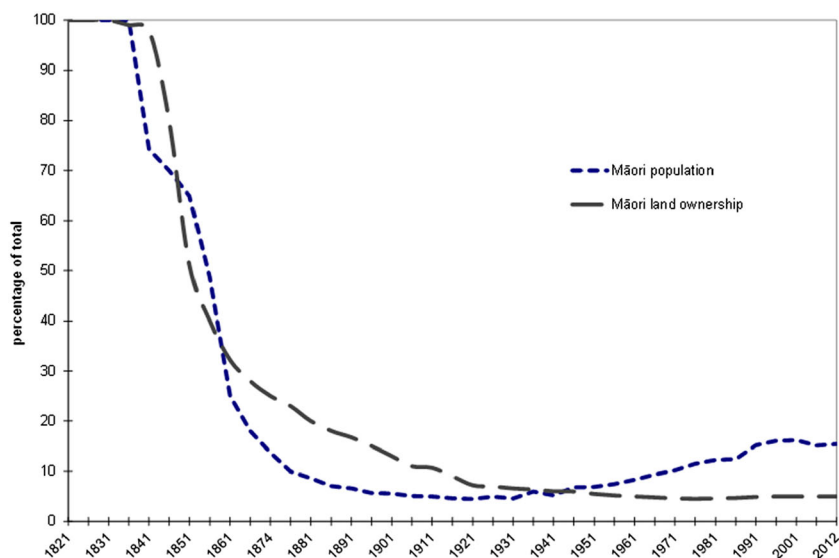
After securing this land, Fletchers used the full resources of their corporation to lobby for Ihumātao to become a special housing area, arguing that Auckland was facing a housing crisis and that their development was critical to alleviating this problem. Consultation with mana whenua was tokenistic, and divide and rule tactics were used to create conflict between key stakeholders.

The grassroots network SOUL, Save Our Unique Landscape, led by six cousins from Ihumātao village, has taken its case to every legal and political forum available to it. SOUL has been to the Auckland Council, the Environment Court, Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga and the United Nations and it is presenting a petition to parliament next week seeking justice. For some months now, members have been occupying the land, hosting educational events, planting gardens, raising chickens and making music.

As an activist scholar, Heather Came stood with the women from SOUL when they went to the United Nations in Geneva to present to the Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. They were articulate and clear in their modest requests for justice: asking for the special housing area to be revoked and for Government



**FIGURE 1** Loss of Māori land, Te Ikaroa-A-Māui (the North Island of New Zealand), 1860–1939 (Ellison, 2010/2019)



**FIGURE 2** Māori population and land ownership, 1821–2012 (Treaty Resource Centre, 2008/2019)

support to create a sustainable future for the confiscated land. The Committee agreed with them and recommended the New Zealand government take action. To date nothing has happened.

Fletchers have recently indicated that they are willing to sell the land. Mana whenua, who have, to date, fundraised their campaign of resistance through running raffles and selling t-shirts, do not have the millions of dollars needed to secure the land. The New Zealand government does and there is a precedent whereby private land of cultural significance has been bought, and the land banked for Waitangi Tribunal settlements.

Through this “Note,” appearing in this specific journal, we are making the point that the connection between people and land is fundamental to both, and to the health and well-being of both. Conversely, alienation from the land (Roy, 1980/1988), has huge and deleterious consequences for both (see Figures 1 and 2).

In this struggle between SOUL and the representatives of the forces of ignorance (philistinism), sadly only the latest in a long history of such struggles, the people of Ihumātao have endured decades of injustice, a cycle that needs to be broken by common sense, creative thinking and a commitment to the Articles and intention of te Tiriti o Waitangi. This land is of enormous cultural significance and was wrongly and illegally confiscated. Let's protect our cultural heritage, return the land, and promote the importance and significance of land, people, and health. *Kia kaha!* (Stay strong.)

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**Heather Came** is a seventh generation Pākehā New Zealander. She has worked for 25 years in health promotion and has a long involvement in social justice activism. Heather is a founding member of STIR: Stop Institutional Racism, a fellow of the Health Promotion Forum, a member of Tāmaki Tiriti Workers and a Senior Lecturer with Taupua Waiora Centre for Māori Health Research at Auckland University of Technology. Her research focuses on critical policy analysis, te Tiriti o Waitangi and institutional racism in health sector.



**Keith Tudor** is professor of psychotherapy and currently head of the School of Public Health & Psychosocial Studies at Auckland University of Technology. He is a certified and teaching and supervising transactional analyst, an associate member of Waka Oranga, a Fellow of The Critical Institute, and current Editor of *Psychotherapy and Politics International*.

**Wiremu Woodard**

Ko Maungapohatu taku maunga  
Ko Ohinemataroa taku awa  
Ko Te Purewa te tangata  
Ko Tuhoe te iwi.

**Wiremu** is an Indigenous therapist, father of four, activist, environmentalist, sometimes contemporary dancer and artist. Wiremu is committed to reducing health disparities for Māori and promoting social justice. He currently works in community practice at Kereru and is a lecturer in the Discipline of Psychotherapy & Counselling at Auckland University of Technology where he is currently the programme leader of the Graduate Diploma in Psychosocial Studies. He is also a founding member of Waka Oranga, a group of dynamic Indigenous Māori practitioners committed to emancipatory freedom.