

Ihumatāo: A stand for the land

Ko Pukeatua te maunga
Ko Te Whanganui a Tara te moana
Ko Māhina te papakāinga
Ko Rita rāua ko Charles Bagnall ngā tūpuna i heke mai ai
Kua rima ngā whakatupuranga ki a au
Ko Charlotte tōku ingoa¹

If a visitor was to climb to the top of our hill they might see countless native trees, some nice colourful flowers, and many a garden bed. But I for one am not a visitor.

I don't just see a pretty flower, I see the rose that my great great grandmother Rita planted outside my bedroom window. Instead of a green hillside, I see food and flower gardens built by my great great grandparents that we still use today. I see the kōwhai, pūriri, and kauri planted over eighty years ago by my great great grandfather Charles.

Then there are the paths. Countless paths up our bush covered hillside. All thanks to Charles, who took up the task of making the hill treadable. For five generations these paths have been used and cared for. Even now, my dad will go out on a spare weekend to keep these tracks clear, so that my siblings and I (and our chickens) can run about on them. The land here has been cared for and has thrived for five generations.

¹ Thanks to Makaira Waugh from Te Kura Kaupapa Māori o Te Ara Whānui for help with creating my mihi. Translation: Pukeatua is my mountain, Wellington harbour is my ocean, Mahina Bay is my village, my ancestors Rita and Charles came here, I am the fifth generation, my name is Charlotte.

When I stand on our land I get a special feeling.
That feeling tells me to look after the land for the future.

Standing at the top of our hill, looking over the bay, I think of Pania Newton fighting for *her* land. Land that has been in her family since Māori first arrived in Aotearoa, from Polynesia, over six centuries ago. On this land, early Māori warmed their soils and gardens with volcanic stones. Crops thrived and Papatūānuku² was happy and cared for. Kaitiakitanga³. When European settlers first arrived, the food grown at Ihumātao nurtured them⁴.

Then the land was wrongfully taken. Over time it became polluted and uncared for. The treaty did not protect Ihumātao⁵.

But now Papatūānuku is healing the whenua⁶ of Ihumātao, with Pania Newton by her side. Save our Unique Landscape⁷. Not one more acre.

When Pania Newton stands on her land she gets a special feeling.
That feeling tells her to look after the land for the future.

The people at Ihumātao have been asking our prime minister to come and visit the land. Why? Because they say that you have to set foot on the land to feel a connection with it. A spiritual connection. To feel Papatūānuku calling you for help.

² Papatūānuku means earth mother

³ Kaitiakitanga means protection, guardianship and stewardship

⁴ *The Project NZ: Understanding the situation at Ihumātao*. August 9th 2019. Retrieved from: www.facebook.com/TheProjectNZ; *He Kāhao Ahau: Ihumātao*. From Te Ahi Kaa Produced by Frances Morton and presented by Kahu Kutia. 25th of August 2019 Retrieved from www.rnz.co.nz

⁵ *Our Trail of Tears: The story of Ihumātao*. By Vincent O'Malley. July 27 2019. Retrieved from: www.thespinoff.co.nz

⁶ Whenua means land

⁷ *Ihumātao is a watershed moment for this generation, it cannot be ignored*. By Glen McConnell. August 1st 2019. Retrieved from www.stuff.co.nz; Save our Unique Landscape (SOUL) is the name of the occupation campaign at Ihumātao being led by Pania Newton: www.protectihumatao.com

Ihumātao is calling. Drawing people to the land in ways that have never been seen before. Calling strongly through young Māori posting and live-steaming on social media; on Twitter, Facebook and Insta. Ihumātao is also calling through the writing of young Māori all over New Zealand and the world⁸.

The other day I went to the launch of a book dedicated to Ihumātao: *Te Rito o te Harakeke*. I got to meet Tayi Tibble, whose writing I had read, and I heard lots of new inspiring writers who shared their essays and poems. Michelle Rahurahu Scott, a young Māori writer, described what it felt like to cast out her story on social media expecting it not to be noticed. But it *was* noticed and she found that many other Māori writers were casting their stories out in this way too. They found one another's stories and came together to put all their writing into a collection for Ihumātao, 'to stand strong together, to rise to tautoko what we believe to be a pivotal moment in the history of Aotearoa'⁹.

Māori are speaking out for themselves. Many different Māori with many different stories. So many voices responding to the calls of Ihumātao. Images, essays, history and kaupapa¹⁰ reaching Māori all over the world in a matter of seconds. Voices teaching all New Zealanders why Ihumātao means so much, filling in the gaps in our knowledge (we don't seem to learn this stuff in school).

Today we can celebrate the strength of Māori voices. 41 years ago, Merata Mita endured so many challenges to share the stories of Māori land struggles at Bastion Point from a Māori point of view. In an interview she said "it's a spiritual feeling for us....it means our lands, it means our spirits....it's our wairua"¹¹

⁸ *Mana Rangatahi: Young Māori on standing with Ihumātao*. By Tayi Tibble. 15th of August 2019. Retrieved from www.pantograph-punch.com

⁹ In the introduction to *Te Rito o te Harakeke: A collection of writing for Ihumātao*. Book launch 7th of September at Pataka Wellington.

¹⁰ Kaupapa means issue or discussion topic

¹¹ *Merata: How my Mum Decolonised the Screen*. 2018. Directed by Heperi Mita. I watched this with my family on www.netflix.com

When people stand on the land at Ihumātao they get a special feeling.
That feeling tells them to look after the land for the future.

What does Ihumātao symbolise? Some people may think that Ihumātao is just about indigenous Māori taking back land that was wrongfully taken. Not one more acre. I watched and listened to writer Cassandra Barnett read her poem at Te Rito o te Harakeke.

*'Papa-T brooks no boundaries
We can't carve her up
Yet we have
So whose home is at stake?'*¹²

Land ownership is more than tricky. Pakeha and Māori have a history of fighting for the same land, with two very different cultural understandings.

Yes, Ihumātao represents land struggles, but that is not all.

Ihumātao is a symbol of the strength of Māori culture today. Today young Māori are making their grandparents proud. Kuia and koro¹³ who were punished for being Māori and for speaking their language when they were at school. This week I went on a hīkoi¹⁴ with my school to celebrate this progress, Kia Kaha te Reo Māori¹⁵.

Ihumātao symbolises a hope for the future in the face of climate crisis.
Something bigger than 480 new houses. It stands for kaitiakitanga. Kaitiakitanga

¹² *All these pocket handkerchiefs won't staunch my unwept tears: An essay in boundaries.* By Cassandra Barnett. In Te Rito o te Harakeke: A collection of writing for Ihumātao. September 2019.

¹³ Kuia means grandmother and Koro means grandfather

¹⁴ Hīkoi means to walk/march

¹⁵ Strength for Māori language. This was the catchphrase for NZ Māori language week 2019 by Te Taura Whiri i te reo Māori The Māori language commission.

meaning stewardship and sustainability. Tayi Tibble writes that Papatūānuku “calls to us as her descendants, as indigenous people, as kaitiaki”¹⁶

There is hope and potential in Ihumātao. Hope for future kaitiakitanga and possible solutions for the climate crisis. Potential for our lands to thrive for future generations. As Pania Newtown says:

*"We want a liveable city. We need places to breathe, to dream, to connect to our ancestors, and engage with our history. At Ihumātao we can do this"*¹⁷

In the past, Māori have asked tauiwi¹⁸ to stand with them on the right side of history. At the 1975 land hīkoi. At the Raglan Golf Course occupation. At Bastion Point. I have family that stood in support alongside Māori occupying land at Bastion Point. I feel good about that.

Today I believe that Ihumātao should be protected from housing development plans because of everything that this land occupation stands for. I want to tautoko¹⁹ that and stand tall on the right side of history.

¹⁶ *Ihumātao: Everyone was there, e hoa*. By Tayi Tibble. August 6th 2019. Retrieved from www.newsroom.co.nz

¹⁷ Pania Newton. 2019. Retrieved from www.protectihumatao.com

¹⁸ Tauiwi means non-Māori New Zealanders

¹⁹ Tautoko means to support