

# Ihumātao protest, colonization, and cultural voice

*Christine Elers & Prof. Mohan J. Dutta*



CENTRE FOR CULTURE-CENTRED APPROACH  
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# Ihumātao protest, colonization, and cultural voice

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## ABSTRACT

The erasure of indigenous voice goes hand-in-hand with the occupation of indigenous land. What we witness over the past seven years at Ihumātao, as an extension of over a century of colonialism in Aotearoa, is the deployment of colonial tactics to erase and silence the voices of indigenous Māori peoples. Through a variety of tactics the controls over which are held by the colonizers, Māori voices resisting colonialism are silenced. The very uses of communicative strategies of indigenous participation are deployed in logics established by the colonizer to prop up and perpetuate the colonial-capitalist structure, with the state making claims to having created opportunities for participation. The capitalist interests, served through naturalized logics of the market, reflect the oppressive nature of colonialism, all the while working to erase through the very performance of tools of participation and engagement. In this backdrop, drawing from the ongoing protests at Ihumātao, in this white paper, we attend to the organizing role of indigenous voice as the basis for dismantling colonial capitalism. The Māori voice of resistance in Ihumātao, resounds with indigenous voices in Hawaii, who are protecting their sacred land – Mauna Kea from the construction and intrusion of a giant telescope on the summit. Elsewhere across the globe the plurivocality of resistance offer pathways for addressing the very challenges that have been brought on by the accelerated corporate-colonialism of neoliberal governmentality.

## Historical context of Ihumātao & Colonisation

Te Ihu o Mataho, also known as Ihumātao is sacred, ancestral land. It is also Auckland's oldest settlement. Tribal history records Hape as the first ancestor that occupied this area prior to the arrival of the Tainui waka. The Waitangi Tribunal report on the Manukau Claim in 1985 cites a 1000 year history of occupation. The Ōtuataua Stonefields historic reserve borders land designated as Special Housing Area 62 by the Special Housing Areas Act 2013, in Ihumātao. This is the land that is currently under occupation by a group called SOUL (Save Our Unique Landscape), who are protecting the land from development and its archaeological sites from further desecration. Both Ōtuataua and SHA 62 are sited at Ihumātao.

Ōtuataua Stonefields historic reserve preserves archaeological and large scale stonework remains that evidence how Māori lived and worked the land. Every rock was placed there by human hand according to archaeologist Dave Veart. The remaining stones also indicate that by mid-15th century Māori had established large scale gardens spreading out over to what is now Auckland city. It has been described as a palimpsest terrain, retaining traces of first settlement, despite the concerted colonial and contemporary attempts at erasing its history.

When Pākehā arrived, Māori had been living and gardening there for centuries. Māori began supplying food to the growing Pākehā settlement in Auckland and extended their food trade to Australia.

### New Zealand Settlement Act 1863

This all dramatically changed with the enactment of the New Zealand Settlement Act 1863. Ihumātao also housed Potatau Te Wherowhero before he became the first Māori King in 1858. A number of hapū and iwi were living in the Manukau district. The Crown

saw the Kiingitanga as a threat to their dominance and incompatible with British sovereignty, so in 1863 they unleashed a war of invasion and land conquest in the Waikato and anyone who stood in allegiance with the Kiingitanga.

On 9 July 1863, the Crown issued a proclamation to the people of Ihumātao and other areas to pledge an oath of allegiance to the Queen of England and give up their arms, in return for the Crown's protection. Māori who did not comply, were warned to retreat into Waikato or face ejection from their lands. Three days later, the Crown invaded. In true British imperial fashion, the Crown abrogated its pact to protect the few that joined the Crown and instead used military force to eject hapū and iwi from their lands, looted and destroyed their papa kāinga and confiscated the land for themselves. The flourishing economy of the hapū and iwi was literally destroyed overnight. Ihumātao was the gate way to Waikato and its lush, fertile plains. The Crown continued its rampage of colonial destruction and parasitic extension into Waikato, with two main motives – confiscate the land and destroy the Kiingitanga

In 1869 the Wallace family obtained the land via a Crown grant. They farmed the land, using Māori labour from the neighbouring areas. In about 2001, the Wallace family sold 32 hectares of the land to Manukau City Council, who set it aside as the Ōtuataua Stonefields historic reserve.

The rest of the land remained with the Wallace family descendants until 2016, when Fletcher Residential, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Fletcher Building purchased it for \$28 million.

### Development and silencing

In 2012, the Environment Court directed Auckland City Council to re-zone the land from rural to public, using the special provisions in the Resource Management Act 1991 designed to protect Māori sites of cultural and historical significance, as a reason to open up the land for further development because the adjacent Ōtuataua Stonefields historic reserve was protection enough.

The colonial mythography wrapped up in legal fiction continued, serving to silence and deny hapū and iwi of Ihumātao access and decision making over their ancestral lands.

Te Kawerau ā Maki also claim ancestral links to Ihumātao. They have made numerous attempts to reclaim the land.

Fletcher Building manufactured their consent by offering Te Kawerau ā Maki 40 out of the 480 houses. In a housing crisis, it is understandable that this offer would tempt them, especially when they envisioned their people returning to live on land they were once barbarically removed from.

Fletcher Building have over a century of business experience in housing and development nationally and globally. It is fair to say that the acquisition of land and quick housing turnover build resulting in massive profits is not a new phenomenon for Fletchers. At 20 February 2019, Fletchers announced a net profit of \$89 million for the six months ending 31 December 2018. Fletcher sold Formica Group for NZ \$1,227 million in December 2018 in order to exit its non-core businesses and re-focus its interests in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Australia. Fletchers offer to reserve just over 10 percent of houses for descendants of Te Kawerau ā Maki has been heavily criticised by SOUL and Te Wai-o-hua because they were left out of the negotiating process.

### **SOUL and resisting colonisation**

SOUL leadership comprises iwi descendants, also known as mana whenua. They trace their genealogy to Te Wai-o-hua of Makaurau marae at Ihumātao.

Comprised of young people and supported by their own kaumātua, both Te Wai-o-hua and Te Kawerau ā Maki and no doubt whānau in both iwi, have different views about Fletchers and their housing development.

This scene of colonial divide was set in motion back in 1863. Nevertheless, thousands of supporters have

flocked to Ihumātao since SOUL was evicted by the Police on 23 July 2019 to stand in solidarity as protectors of the last remnants of archaeologically significant ancestral land.

### **Communicative erasures and inversions**

The erasure of the story of colonization is integral to the formulation of the market logic as the solution to land ownership. The very erasure of Māori imaginaries of land forms the basis of the universals that are put up by the colonial structure as the natural universalized solution.

In this instance, the land as a market commodity forms the imaginary of the colonial structure that simultaneously erases the fundamental theft that underlies its commoditization.

Simultaneously, the projection of Māori difference as the basis for consolidation of colonial control over land reflects the tried and tested “divide-and-rule” strategy of the Empire. Colonialism operates through its production of conflict. Setting up the conflict becomes a way for the colonial interests to be perpetuated.

The transformation of land into a commodity to be exchanged at a market price forms the organizing logic of the colonial enterprise. Interrogating this very logic with notions of land as sacred, land as ancestral and inter-generational, and land as the hope for the future offers different rationalities for organizing land.

Indigenous cultural voices emerging in the protests in SOUL and across the globe, point to the many possibilities for dismantling colonialism.

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