

Asserting rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga in response to colonialism, capitalism and climate change: the case of Ngāi Tahu

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Aotearoa (New Zealand) is currently up against a global environmental crisis, with hotter days, vanishing glaciers, sea-level rise, and ocean acidification predicted over the coming century. Many of the impacts of climate change will be disproportionately borne by the tangata whenua (Indigenous people/Māori) who call these territories home. While the Pākehā (New Zealander of European descent) environmental paradigm is the dominant lens through which Aotearoa has enacted laws, policies and practices, Māori whānau (extended families), hapū (subtribes) and iwi (tribes) have been at the forefront of climate action, generating their own solutions and lobbying for central and local government to adopt more progressive solutions. This thesis seeks to explore the pursuit of Māori values rangatiratanga (sovereignty, authority, chieftainship) and kaitiakitanga (environmental guardianship) amidst colonialism, capitalism and climate change. To do so, I utilise a literature review and case study approach, including analyses of treaty documents, court settlements, academic literature, and grey literature, much of which were written by Māori authors. Choosing to analyse Ngāi Tahu as my instrumental case, I illustrate the iwi's pursuit of rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga amidst colonialism, capitalism and climate change. Despite being constrained by a limited ability to practise rangatiratanga, a need to operate in a capitalist economy, and a corporate structure forced on them at the time of their 1997 Waitangi Tribunal settlement, I argue that Ngāi Tahu has successfully upheld their values of rangatiratanga and kaitiakitanga, establishing themselves as a climate actor both in their lobbying toward central and local governments (as evidenced by their 2020 statement of claim in the High Court), and in the climate actions they choose to pursue (as evidenced by their 2023 climate strategy Te Kounga Paparangi).

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