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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Rāhui and conservation? Māori voices in the nineteenth century niupepa Māori

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## ABSTRACT

In the Māori worldview, humans are linked directly to flora and fauna through whakapapa (ancestry). As such, conservation can be expressed, not in terms of preserving ‘otherness’, but in terms of sustaining ‘us-ness’—our very selfhood, and our relationships and interactions with nature. We investigated the shifting discourse on the use of ‘rāhui’ (prohibition, restriction) and conservation-related words in nineteenth century New Zealand using material from the early Māori newspapers (niupepa). Our search revealed numerous uses of ‘rāhui’ but very few uses of ‘kaitiakitanga’ (guardianship, stewardship) or conservation in discussion of resources. The discourse included concerns around legislation, land alienation and land loss, that all impact rangatiratanga (authority, autonomy, chieftainship) and the kincentric relationship with nature.

## RĀPOPOTONGA

Ko tā Te Ao Māori e herea ā-whakapapa ana te ira tangata ki ngā uri o Tānemahuta. Nō reira ko te atawhai i a Papa-tū-ā-nuku he whakapae ki taua tūmomo tuakiri; he whakatūturu i aua whakanekenekehanga; he manaaki i taua whanaungatanga. Ko tā mātou he tiroiro i ngā whakawhitiwhitinga kōrero o te take nei, te rāhui me ngā kupu pērā o te rautau 19 mō te atawhai rawa, mai i ngā niupepa o te wā. Kei te nui te whakamahinga o te kupu rāhui, ēngari mō te kaitiakitanga, ki ngā whakawhitiwhinga kōrero mō te atawhai rawa. Kei reira te nui o te anipā ki ngā ture, ki te tāpae me te riro o te whenua, katoa he pānga nui ki te rangatiratanga, ki te whanaungatanga hoki ki te taiao.

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## KUPA MATUA

Aotearoa; hitori o te pūtaiao;  
kaitiakitanga; niupepa Māori;  
whakapapa o te taiao;  
whakawhitiwhiti kōrero

## Introduction

Māori environmental worldviews, as with many other indigenous peoples, embrace an ethos that connects worldview, beliefs and practice (Marsden & Royal 2003). Within this worldview, a tapestry of intricate whakapapa relationships, both human and otherwise, is central to the construction of interactions with the natural world. Humans are part of nature and the notion that what affects a part, affects the whole, is strongly embedded within this framework. The use of natural resources, from tree felling to bird

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harvesting, ‘was conducted under strict regimes of tapu (sacredness) and mana (spiritual authority)’ (King & Roa 2015, p. 45). However, although well-established institutions such as wānanga, through which philosophy, traditions and knowledge were transmitted, were an important presence in communities (Mead 2003), practices were not immutable, and societal concerns might change over time.

European arrival in the late eighteenth century brought demographic, political, ecological and societal upheaval (Belich 2001). King (2004) and Belich (2007) provide useful overviews of post-European development and conflict, particularly after the 1840 signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. However, it is evident that environmentally based industry grew rapidly early on, with sealing, whaling, timber and flax trading thriving industries by the beginning of the nineteenth century. Moreover, land disputes ignited conflicts in the nineteenth century South Island, Taranaki, Waikato and the Bay of Plenty as well as other areas (King 2004). The influx of settlers also saw the population re-weight itself from being a mainly Māori population in the late 1850s, to a primarily non-Māori population (Pool 1991).

With land alienation for Pākehā settlement and farming, there was a consequent reduction in access to culturally significant resources for the previous Māori owners (Anderson et al. 2014). In addition, a European conservation ethic that prioritised preservation of ‘pristine’ wilderness areas took hold in the late nineteenth century (Star 2003). Although Māori voices are increasingly well documented in the discourse of nineteenth century land alienation (Paterson 2006), Māori views on this dominant conservation ethic and its effects are less comprehensively known.

Many Māori expressed their opinions, aspirations, displeasure and concerns through a number of avenues such as the *niupepa*. As McRae (2014) notes, the *niupepa* carried ‘editorials, letters, and articles, as well as national, provincial and international news, notices, advertisements and obituaries. They offer a wide-ranging and distinct account of this period of New Zealand history, recording the interaction between Māori and Pākehā’, and are thus an especially valuable record and window to the shifting discourse of encounter history. Here, we investigate nineteenth century *niupepa* that record the voices of Māori to ask how these Māori voices changed with increasing land alienation, the retreat of traditional whakapapa relationships and the rise of a European conservation ethic, and present some snapshots of the discourse in early *niupepa*.

## Materials and methods

### Source material

#### *Niupepa Māori*

Newspapers written in the Māori language went into production shortly after the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840. In total, more than 40 separate *niupepa*, both regional and national, were published between 1842 and 1933 (Curnow et al. 2002). There were three general types of *niupepa*: government sponsored, Māori initiated and religious, all aimed primarily for a Māori audience. Most (70%) of the collection is thus written solely in Māori; 27% is bilingual and about 3% is written in English. The majority of the *niupepa* have been digitised as the *Niupepa Collection ‘1842–1933’* (NP) by the New Zealand Digital Library Project (Apperley et al. 2002). The NP contains more than 17,000 pages from 34

periodicals and these are currently being transferred to the newer Papers Past (PP) collection which has enhanced word search and recognition capabilities ([www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz](http://www.paperspast.natlib.govt.nz)).

## Method

We searched the NP digital collection using English and Māori terms—conservation, *rāhui* and *kaitiakitanga*—that might capture records with contemporary Māori views of environmental use and/or conservation. We added other terms such as *whāomoomo* (‘conservation’) and *whakauka* (‘to be sustained, enduring to conserve’), for comparative purposes. We examined each result and the full article in which each search item appeared, focusing on its overall context, meaning and argument. We excluded records that referred to a named person or place, or was otherwise on a different topic. ‘Articles’ searched included letters to the editor, public announcements and notices, as well as advertisements, obituaries and other material. We cross-referenced the results of the NP with results from the newer PP website to determine the consistency between the two collections (see Table S1 for a comparison of the results for ‘*rahui*’). Finally, because *rāhui* emerged as a central concept, we focused on definitions of *rāhui* in early dictionaries to identify changes in meaning and context across the period.

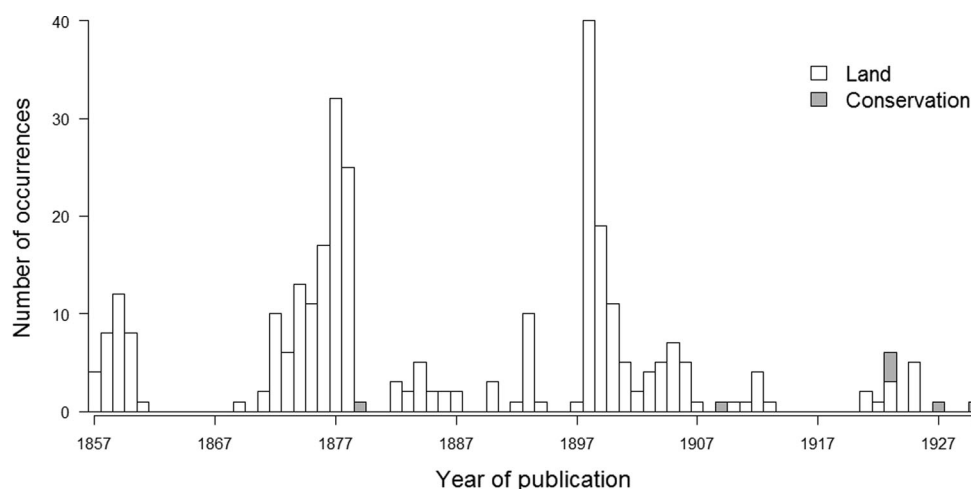
## Results and discussion

The term ‘conservation’ arose rarely ( $n = 6$  occurrences, in a total of six articles for NP and  $n = 8$  occurrences for PP) within the *niupepa* and only after 1870 in relation to flora and fauna. On the other hand, *kaitiakitanga*, referring to a concept of sustainable management of and responsibility for resources did not appear in any of our searches in the context of conservation, despite being frequently used in a biblical context. Similarly, *whakauka* and *whāomoomo* did not occur in either the NP or PP searches, in a conservation context. The lack of references to *kaitiakitanga* in this form is consistent with Forster’s (2013, p. 12), view that the use of *kaitiakitanga* in its broader environmental ethos

[...] began to appear in the popular vernacular with more frequency at the end of 1980s. Prior to this, *kaitiaki* was used to refer to tribal or *whānau* guardians of a spiritual nature or a natural manifestation such as *taniwha* (water spirit) ... rather than a person or group of people.

*Rāhui* occurred 921 times in 483 articles (see Table S2A–C for a summary of topics). However, only 23 (4.96%) of these are immediately relevant to conservation, access to resources and restrictions on harvesting (Figure 1).

A uniting theme was the use of restrictions to protect resources for future use and future generations. For example, influential leader Timi Kara (James Carroll), demanded that Māori should reserve forests as resting places for birdlife to clothe the land: ‘*Me rahui etahi ngahere hei okiokinga mo nga manu hei kakahu mo te whenua*’ (Whenua 1902, pp. 4–5), in a discussion of *Ngā taonga Māori* (Māori treasures, resources including *whakapapa*). One editorial referred to resources, laws and acts and conservation in Rarotonga (Te Puke Ki Hikurangi 1900, pp. 1–2) and a further example discussed the establishment of a *Komiti Māori* to govern and conserve oyster reserves (Te Toa Takitini 1923, pp. 3–4).



**Figure 1.** References to ‘rahui’ from the digital niupepa Māori collection. References were categorised by context. Note that Native Lands Act was passed in 1865, and Maori Lands Administration Act was passed in 1900.

Most references to rāhui ( $n = 295$ , 60%), discuss the impact of the Native Lands Act 1862 and 1865 and its amendments (e.g. appointments, commissioners, explanations, clarifications, complaints, discussions, abolishment, application, court appeals, parliamentary debates, other Acts and Bills, etc.), and the reserving of lands (e.g. establishment, surveying, quarrels, boundaries, rights, ownership, sales, sub-division, queries, payments, claims, parliamentary debates, native reserves, leases, prohibitions, forfeits, confiscations, rates, courts, resources, etc.). The Native Lands Act created the Native Land Court, based largely on the settlers’ legal system, and provided for the conversion of traditional communal landholdings into individual titles, thus accelerating Pākehā purchase of Māori land. Concerns about land loss are clearly articulated in the discourse such as those in a letter sent to the editor of *Te Karere o Poneke*, where Maika Purakau (1858, p. 3) discusses lands reserves, the allotment of land and the effect of placing the Queen’s name on his allotted lands (including food, karaka and harakeke plantations), to ensure they remain in Māori hands. Land loss is also highlighted later, in 1874, in a letter written by Te Pokiha Taranui and other leaders from Maketu (Taranui et al. 1874, p. 101). These writers propose to hand land over to the Under Secretary of the Native Department to prevent its sale or absorption by Ngāti Pikiao. Their letter is titled ‘He Whenua Rahui’ because of their desire to prevent the loss of lands as had previously occurred. In this context the implication is that these lands are set aside under rāhui to remain as a possession for their grandchildren and future generations: ‘Ko tenei whenua kua whakaaturia atu nei ki a koe hai whenua tuturu mo a matou tamariki’. Thus the broader discourse and correspondence of the NP focused primarily on macro-concerns such as land alienation, government legislation and government reserves as opposed to specific issues of conservation of land as such.

Both the Native Lands Act and Premier Julius Vogel’s 1874 speech appeared to have generated discussion about land and conservation in the NP. Snippets of correspondence started to appear in the NP following the publication of Vogel’s impassioned speech in *Te Waka Maori o Niu Tirani* (Vogel 1874), on the conservation and destruction of forests

(e.g. Te Ahuroa 1874, p. 260; Te Wehi 1874, pp. 197–199; Tuhakaraina 1874, p. 270). Te Wehi’s letter to the editor illustrates the depth of engagement with these issues. He supports Vogel’s sentiments about protecting the forests, whilst describing some of the tikanga (cultural protocols) associated with the forest, particularly in relation to burning and the significant consequences of burning someone else’s forest. Te Wehi emphasises the importance of forest resources for Māori. However, he does not stop at a summary of past Māori resource use, attitudes and social controls; he also hypothesises about invasive species’ effects on the environment. Finally, he laments the spiritual loss that accompanies the loss of these connections between humans and the environment: ‘E mihi ana hoki au e pouri ana, ki te ngaronga whakareretanga o nga manu kua kore nei, hei whakahuareka i a tatou ki tona reo pai ina korero ratou i runga i nga rakau’.

Strong temporal shifts in use of the term rāhui in relation to land follow the introduction of land legislation (Figure 1). Rāhui increases in use following the introduction of the Maori Lands Administration Act 1900, in which Timi Kara attempted to reserve remaining land for Māori, and to establish a Māori Land Administration Department and Māori Land Councils that would prevent the sale of specific areas of Māori land. For example, Ihaia Hutana warns Māori to hold steadfast and be wary of the many land Acts. He reflects on the consequences of land loss, land confiscation and the reserving of land from the 1865 Native Land Act, and proposes a reconfiguration of the Act lest Māori lose the remaining 4 million acres of land that remained in Māori possession (Hutana 1905, pp. 7–8).

The changing discourses in the use of rāhui across the period reflect an interesting evolution in meaning that can also be seen in the early Māori dictionaries (Table 1). Early definitions (e.g. Lee & Kendall 1820) emphasise prohibition. Williams (1844, 1852) introduces the concept of sacredness, but also places emphasis on commodification, using examples of commercially important resources such as timber and flax to highlight the meaning of rāhui. Late definitions also introduce the Māori word tapu (Williams & Williams 1871, 1892). However, Tregear’s (1891) definition refers to the contemporaneous issue of the placing of lands under ‘reservation’, a meaning utilised by Vogel with the passing of the State Forests Act of 1884, which allowed for the creation of forest reserves. The notion of tiaki first appears in Williams’ early Māori dictionary (1844).

**Table 1.** Definitions through time for rāhui.

| Source   | Definition  |
|--|---|
| Lee and Kendall (1820)   | Rahúi, s. A prohibition; setting any thing apart: name of a person. v.n. Prohibiting; as, ‘E rahúi ána ra óki ía.’  |
| Williams (1844, 1852)  | Rāhui, s. A mark denoting a sacred spot, as a burial-place; a mark to indicate that shell-fish, timber, flax, or any other commodity in the neighbourhood, is to be preserved. Rāhui, a. Made sacred; preserved. Pass. Rahuítia.      |
| Williams and Williams (1871, 1892)   | Rāhui (i). 1. n. A mark to warn people against trespassing; used in the case of tapu, or for temporary protection of fruit, birds, or fish, &c. Pou rahui is used in some districts for boundary-post.<br>2. v.t. Protect by a rahui. |
| Tregear (1891)   | RAHUI (ràhui), to protect by a rahui, i.e. by a mark set up to prohibit persons from taking fruit, birds, &c., on certain lands, or to prevent them from trespassing on lands, &c., made tapu:<br>3. A. reserve of land (modern).     |
| Williams and Polynesian Society (1921, 1957), Williams and New Zealand Advisory Committee on the Teaching of the Maori Language (1971) | Rāhui (i). 1. n. A mark to warn people against trespassing; used in the case of tapu, or for temporary protection of fruit, birds, or fish, &c. Pou rahui is used in some districts for boundary-post.<br>2. v.t. Protect by a rahui. |

## Conclusion

Current debate on the biodiversity crisis, extinction risk and environmental management in New Zealand and elsewhere focuses on the economic value of biodiversity and ecosystem services. For Māori, however, much more than economic prosperity is at stake. The broader discourse surrounding the kincentric relationship that Māori have to Ranginui, Papatūānuku, the cosmos, land, sky, seas, waterways, mountains, flora and fauna, to our very selfhood, our tino rangatiratanga (self-determination, sovereignty, autonomy), began to change and shift during the nineteenth century as a consequence of colonisation and the introduction of government legislation, land loss and land alienation. The discourses on rāhui from the niupepa provide insight into early Māori concerns and the changing relationship between culture and biodiversity. It is also apparent that some words, such as kaitiakitanga, were unlikely to have been used in a conservation context in the nineteenth century. There is a wealth of other early discourses available (i.e. the Native Land Court Minute Books, the AJHRs, and Māori oral tradition), for those seeking to hear the voices of our ancestors. Perhaps we should take time to listen to the words of our ancestors and their views on the importance of sustaining an intimate relationship with Ranginui and Papatūānuku.

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