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Translating Ahu Moana into the Local Community: Marine Care and Near-Shore Coastal Co-Management on Waiheke Island, Aotearoa New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This article engages with near-shore coastal co-management in the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana, Aotearoa New Zealand. I analysed various qualitative sources to demonstrate how Ahu Moana (ocean care areas) as a specific form of localism was translated on the side of the local community on Waiheke Island, Auckland. A specific assemblage of marine care emerged alongside a re-conceptualisation of the *local community* and a remapping of the Gulf as a relational care network. The article suggests that the attempt to realise Ahu Moana shows decolonising tendencies and challenges existing power structures. However, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion also emerged.

1 | Introduction

Place is a complex matter. It has, in many popular and academic contexts, been defined by space and scale, and "understood as more localised enactments of social and material practice" (Tuck and McKenzie 2016, p. 30). In this sense, place—the *local scale*—has gained prominence in bringing about socio-ecological transition/transformation (Hölscher et al. 2018; Köhler et al. 2021). Consequently, different forms of localism have emerged as a global trend in spatial planning and governance (Wills 2016; Brownill 2017). However, the *container* as which place is often seen has been dissolved by theorisations of place as open and unbounded (Massey et al. 2009), and Indigenous, decolonising conceptualisations of place/land[1] (Tuck and McKenzie 2016; Larsen and Johnson 2017).

The article examines a case of localised, community-based management of near-shore coastal areas in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ), where conventional and alternative understandings of place and localism are entangled. It explores how a relational perspective on community, place, and localism has emerged linked to ideas and practices of marine guardianship. Ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship[2] were integral to the marine spatial planning process and plan, *Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari* (SCTTTP), which was developed 2013–2016 in the Hauraki Gulf Tīkapa Moana (the Gulf) region on ANZ's North Island/Te Ika-a-Māui. SCTTTP assembled kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a transformative element to change dominant *naturalcultural* imaginaries and relations (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017), and thus the disastrous state of the Gulf's mauri/health (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). This article aims to further investigate the emergence of kaitiakitanga/guardianship and its social and political implications for the Gulf.

SCTTTP introduced localised near-shore co-management areas, called Ahu Moana (AM; Te Reo Māori; ahu = nurture, build up; moana = the ocean), to implement an ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship (Figure 1).[3] AM challenges the *colonised geographies* of the Gulf by highlighting and restoring the critical connection between Māori self-determination, kaitiaki responsibilities,

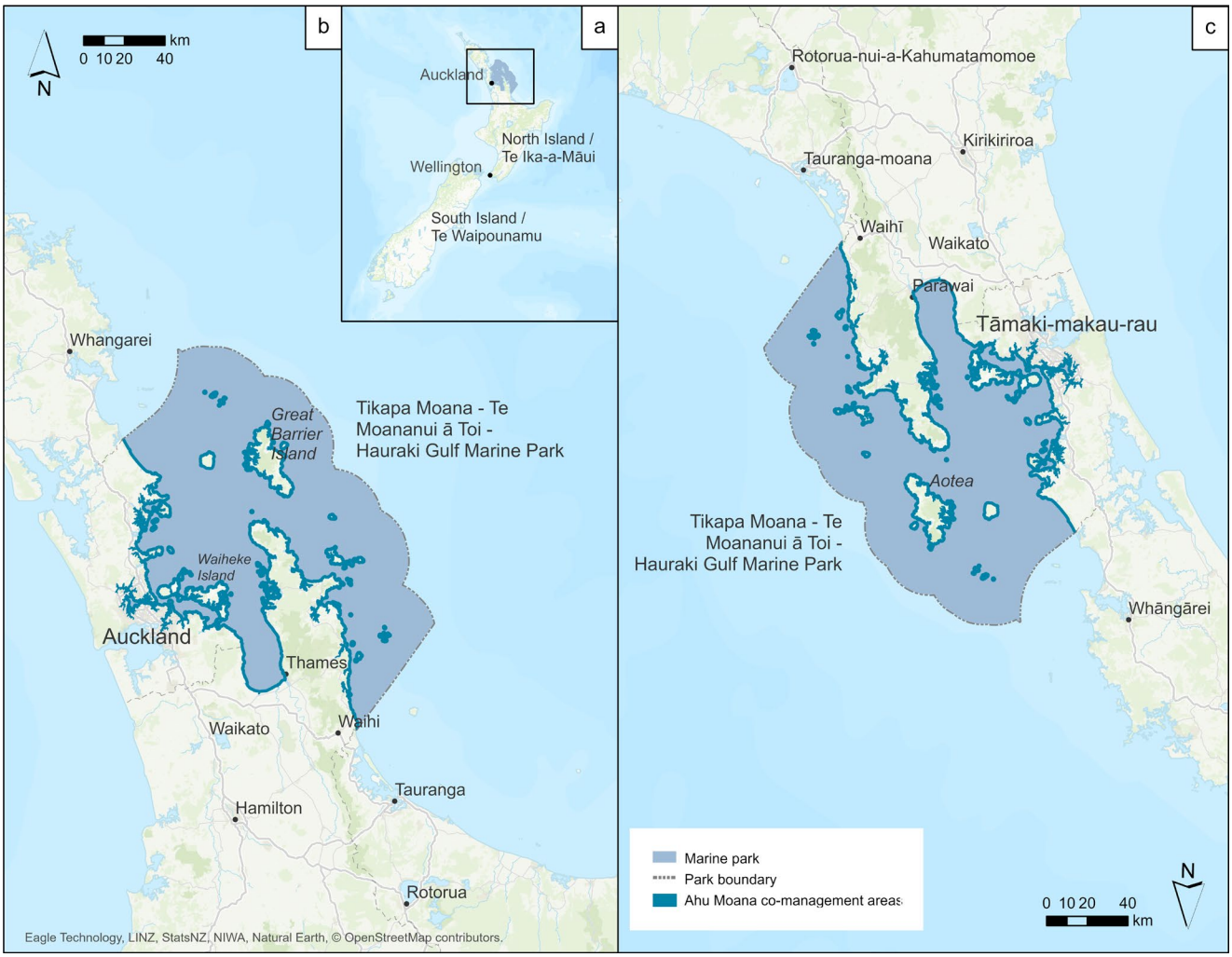

FIGURE 1 | The marine spatial plan Sea Change Tai Timu Tai Pari identifies AM, near-shore coastal co-management areas within the Tīkapa Moana Hauraki Gulf Marine Park, Aotearoa New Zealand. Waiheke Island is the second largest island in the Gulf. The map shows the Gulf according to a Western (b) and Māori worldview (c).

and the land (Hauraki Gulf Forum [HGF] et al. 2016; Yates 2021; Aschenbrenner 2023b). They represent a form of *Indigenous localism* with the potential to reclaim and strengthen Māori values, practices, and authority (Coulthard 2014; Kapoor 2024).[4] Through their co-management framework, which sees Mana Whenua—Māori with authority from the land—and local communities in close partnership to co-manage *their* marine areas, AM translates localism into community practice.

Different rationalities shape the roles of local communities and Mana Whenua in coastal management. For Mana Whenua, genealogical ties are fundamental, whereas SCTTTP implicitly bases local community management on the principle of residence (HGF et al. 2016). Māori cultural practices and values are also not easily transferred to local communities. SCTTTP delegates the implementation of Ahu Moana to "Mana Whenua and communities to find the best ways" (HGF et al. 2016, p. 52), creating space for the potential emergence of "well-being networks [and practices] that are grounded in [their] own places" (Yates 2021, p. 103).

The article examines how localism is conceptualised in the context of local communities. SCTTTP's understanding of *local communities* remains ambiguous, appearing to rely "on a [conventional] spatial imaginary that sees [them] as homogeneous, persuadable and consensual, [and] assembled [as] to achieve certain ends" (Brownill 2017, p. 34). This raises critical questions about actual empowerment, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance practices (Rose 1996; Bradley 2017). While these questions are highly relevant and speak to current concerns about marine management and governance (Tafon 2018; Flannery et al. 2020), they risk reinforcing a view of place as bounded and static, and of thinking in dichotomies (e.g., neoliberal/alternative, political/post-political) (Brownill 2017). The article, however, seeks to acknowledge the complexity of establishing co-management and translating kaitiakitanga in a governmental and planning system that is radically other-to-Indigenous (Coulthard 2014; Yates 2021). The aim is to offer a differentiated yet critical view on community-based management which, in this context, is constructed to give effect to a partnership approach and a decolonising, place-based co-management framework. The central question is how a specific, relational form of localism emerges in the complex, ontologically diverse context of the Gulf. How is marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship

assembled in the Gulf? And how does this contribute to a re-imaging of community, localism, and the marine space itself? Acknowledging the potential pitfalls of *government through community* (Rose 1996, p. 332), the article will consistently address issues of inclusion/exclusion, power dynamics, and neoliberal governmental practices.

The article focuses on Waiheke Island, located in the Gulf and part of Auckland City. In response to SCTTTP, a group of island dwellers identified a gap in the plan concerning the protection of the Waiheke marine environment and sought to implement AM on and around the island. The *Waiheke Marine Project* (WMP) was formed in 2019 and has since multiplied its relations and activities, continually refining its goals and narratives. While the WMP positions itself as facilitating community engagement to "help marine conservation and protection" (WMP 2023a), it also represents a field of ethics, where the notion of living rightly in and with the Gulf is problematised, claimed and negotiated. This encompasses the coexistence of human and non-human, Indigenous Māori and settler-descended Pākehā peoples, as well as governance, urban-island relations, and the surrounding geographies (Aschenbrenner 2023b).

After establishing the theoretical framework in the next section, the third section outlines the situation on Waiheke Island and the emergence of the WMP. Section four describes the methodology used in the research. Sections five through seven present the findings, while sections eight and nine critically discuss the results and provide a conclusion.

2 | Emergent Togetherness in Place

Place is often undertheorized in Western-European theorisations of ethics. The research underpinning this article began with an interest in examining the role of *ethics* in urban coastal, socio-ecological transformations. Adopting an urban ethics perspective (Dürr et al. 2020),[5] my research focuses on how actors or groups of actors within and around the coastal environment of the Gulf in Auckland problematise and claim certain forms of *ethical* living. As demonstrated in the context of SCTTTP, this must take into account matters of ontological pluralism in the settler-state environment of Auckland. Urban ethics thus emerges as a field of contestation, where claims for individual, *responsible* ethical conduct—rooted in a neoliberal governmentality and ideas of environmental subject formation—intersect with efforts to (re)centre Māori ethicalities[6] that foreground connection, genealogy, mutually embedded relationships, and a dialogical approach between humans and non-humans. While place is addressed in conventional planning and marine conservation discourses as a site for ethical reflection, transformation, and practice, in relational Māori ethicalities, place plays a more powerful and active role (Makey 2022; Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). "Guardianship [for instance] is founded within the *mana whenua*, or authority from the land, and maintained through a 'reciprocal appropriation' (Momaday 1976) that reinvests mana from the people into the land and back again" (Larsen and Johnson 2017, p. 145). As one interviewee emphasised in a different context in 2019, responsibility is inherently linked to the call of the land and the ancestral, reciprocal care between people and the land.

Reading through Larsen and Johnson (2017) and their decolonising perspectives on negotiating coexistence in liberal, democratic settler-states, AM recognise the agency of place in bringing Mana Whenua and others into dialogue, relationships, and action. They enable negotiations of coexistence: *productively agonistic* dialogue, struggle, and relationships among "the more-than-human communities whose autonomies are entangled in place" (ibid., p. 5).[7] In Te Ao Māori (the Māori world), "reality is generated as arrays of open-ended, continuously reproducing networks of relations" (Salmond 2012, p. 124). This relational perspective challenges conventional imaginaries of *local communities* as territorially bounded and with a fixed identity (Massey 2005; Bradley 2017). Thus, this article adopts a view of community as emergent through the dialogues, struggles, and practices of (coastal) coexistence. The focus is on the togetherness, the interrelatedness, that emerges and is negotiated as the question of "how to care for this place" (Larsen and Johnson 2017, p. 125) is addressed. It centres on the substance of this togetherness, specifically marine care as an "ethical and moral act that engages in the interrelated reciprocities of place" (ibid., p. 120; Zigon 2021). For Indigenous peoples, including Māori, communities are not limited to the human; the more-than-human transcends the human/non-human binary. This perspective recognises human and non-human entities as interconnected in an ethic of care and reciprocity, collectively "compos[ing] the livingness of this world" (Yates 2021, p. 102).

However, negotiations in Auckland occur within a settler-state environment, shaped by established power dynamics, hegemonic ontological assumptions, and rationalities. These factors must be considered, raising questions about inclusion, exclusion, and the possibility of open, non-oppressive collective negotiation and transformation. The term *local community* also holds significant power in conventional transition governance and planning discourse, as it can provide access to resources and relationships but may also serve as a means of governance.[8] From this perspective, I aim to critically assess the relationships and rights claimed when a group defines itself as the local AM community, as well as how this may contribute to community mobilisation for governmental tasks.

3 | Waiheke Island and the WMP

Conventional planning and conservation discourses often reinforce Western European notions of the *local*, also in ANZ, where local communities (or neighbourhoods) are primarily defined by residence, physical presence, and property (Brownill 2017). In contrast, "place and practice are inextricably linked in traditional Māori narratives; a connection [that is] constructed through [...] creation stories [...] and the concept of whakapapa (genealogy)" (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2). These traditional relationships to land were challenged, though not erased, by the colonial dispossession of iwi (tribes) and the enforcement of settler colonial rationalities (Tuck and McKenzie 2016). While several iwi have ties to Waiheke, Ngāti Paoa is recognised as Mana Whenua on the island. Colonial confiscations, land alienations, and the individualisation of land titles have "left Ngāti Paoa virtually

landless and undermined the iwi's economic, social, and cultural development" (New Zealand Government 2021).

The migration of people into urban areas and the urban environment itself have further challenged "traditional relationships to the environment, whakapapa, and the practice of kaitiakitanga" (Walker et al. 2019, p. 2). Dean Olgivie and Lucy Tukua, both descendants of Ngāti Paoa, note in a podcast how a disconnect has occurred between whenua (land) and whānau (family, extended family) as their people have left the island. However, Lucy Tukua emphasises the ongoing relationship with Waiheke ("I never left"), maintained through, for instance, the burial of tūpuna (ancestors, grandparents) on the island. Also protests, such as the successful opposition to marina development plans at Matiatia on Waiheke, continue and renew mana whenua relationships (Logie 2016; HGF 2021).

Waiheke Island is often described as "notoriously political and fiercely independent" (Logie 2016, p. 220). Many on the island support an image of an independent, alternative, politically and environmentally activist island community distinguishing themselves from Waiheke's *outside* or *invaders* (e.g., 'urban Auckland', investors and new money, wealthy second homeowners). However, multiple *ontological styles*—presuppositions about how the world works (or should work)—and imaginaries are present on Waiheke, and are vibrantly discussed in debates such as Matiatia (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Salmond 2012; Logie 2016). The idea of a homogenous, autonomous island community is also challenged by the island's connections to the mainland, such as the 35-minute ferry service, regular commuting between Waiheke and Auckland's CBD, political and administrative city-island connections, and the influx of international and domestic tourists to the island (Oliver et al. 2023).

Increased tourism, gentrification, infrastructure developments, and other changes have significantly impacted Waiheke, its people, and the exercise of kaitiakitanga over the past decade (Oliver et al. 2023). These developments have been reflected in struggles of coexistence, also concerning the coastal and marine environment. During the fieldwork for this article, interviewees repeatedly mentioned two key struggles besides Matiatia: the unsuccessful 2013 initiative to establish a marine reserve off northern Waiheke and the 2020 protests against a marina development at Pūtiki Bay/Kennedy Point. The 2013 marine reserve proposal by the conservation group *Friends of the Hauraki Gulf* (FOHG) faced opposition, particularly from a group of residents called *Keep our Beaches*, whose properties were near the proposed reserve, highlighting the contentious issue of non-use reserves on the island. The Pūtiki Bay/Kennedy Point case not only divided islanders from developers and city planners but also revealed tensions among islander dwellers and Mana Whenua (Davis 2018; Weiss 2022).

The WMP was established in 2019 as a subgroup of the *Waiheke Collective*, an environmental stewardship network that began with land-based pest control. The Waiheke Collective describes itself as "a united network that works with Mana Whenua to activate and amplify efforts to restore and sustain a healthy and thriving natural environment on Waiheke" (Waiheke Collective 2018). The WMP was formed through the collaboration of individuals involved in the 2013 marine reserve initiative (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020), discussions around the implementation of SCTTTP, available funding opportunities and a growing awareness of the need for greater marine protection and kaitiakitanga. The WMP organised itself into three working groups. The Mana Whenua workstream aimed to ensure a strong Mātauranga Māori voice and that the WMP was genuinely co-managed (WMP 2022a). A second group focused on organising a Future Search (FS) event, designed to bring together 70–80 island voices to explore stories and future perspectives for Waiheke's marine environment (WMP 2021a). The third group organised marine experiences and publicly informed about the FS event and the WMP.

The WMP engaged island dwellers through formats like a public meeting at Morra Hall in August 2019. Funding came from various sources such as the Waiheke Local Board, The Working Together More Fund, the Foundation North's Gulf Innovation Fund Together, and smaller grants and donations. The Department of Conservation (DOC) played a key role as a project partner, supporting the Mana Whenua and FS workstreams through its Pou Manutataki/Partnerships Manager (WMP 2023e).

4 | Methods

The article draws on multiple data sources: (1) interview and participant observation data collected during a 3-month research stay on Waiheke Island from January to April 2020 and (2) newsletters, media, and project reports gathered on-site and remotely between February 2020 and April 2024 (Table 1 and Figure 2a).

The narrative interviews were conducted with people met at WMP meetings and those recommended by interviewees. Participants included Anne Jackson, Robyn Watts, Sarah Gardner, Andrew Williams, and Joshua Watson, who were involved in the WMP from its inception. Jack Snapper, who attended some meetings, provided a recreational fishing perspective. Rose Muna, who is Māori, attended the FS event, contrasted with others who identified as Pākehā. Ben Hill, approached by the WMP for a recreational fishing perspective, declined involvement and was interviewed for his potentially controversial views on the WMP. In addition to the main interviews, four other interviews and several informal discussions provided valuable background information. Six participant observation protocols, recorded after events organised or attended by the WMP, were included. The interview transcripts and observation protocols offered insights into narratives surrounding coastal issues on and around Waiheke Island and the WMP. They also helped identify struggles, disagreements, and ruptures within and between these narratives and (public) discourses.

Newsletters, media, and project reports offered insights into the symbolic and material components of the WMP and their evolution over time. This enabled me to trace the emerging narratives, imaginaries, practices, and relationships, by creating a list of the WMP's activities and a visual overview of its relationships. While integrating the data sources expanded the dataset,

TABLE 1 | Data sources used in the analysis, by type, including pseudonyms for interview partners.

Document set	Type/name	Time/date	Pieces analysed
WMP newsletters and updates	WMP newsletters and updates	May–Nov 2020	5
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan–Dec 2021	14
	WMP newsletters and updates	Jan–Dec 2022	15
	WMP newsletters and updates	Feb–Nov 2023	3
	WMP newsletter and updates	Jan 2024	1
Media reports	Radio Broadcast WMP	Aug 19	1
	Gulf news	Feb–Mar 2020	6
	Hauraki Gulf Forum Podcast	Mar 2021	1
Documents and reports	Waiheke Collective Charter	2018	1
	WMP Inaugural Report	2021	1
	WMP Project Plan	2022	1
	WMP Annual Report	2022	1
Interviews	Anne Jackson[a]	Feb 20	1
	Jack Snapper[a]	Feb 20	1
	Rose Muna	Feb 20	1
	Robyn Watts[a]	Mar 2020	1
	Sarah Gardner[a]	Mar 2020	1
	Andrew Williams[a]	Mar 2020	1
	Joshua Watson[a]	Mar 2020	1
	Ben Hill	Mar 2020	1
Participant observations[b]		Jan–Apr 2020	6
Total			61

Note: For reasons of anonymity, all information that could lead to the identification of participants or interviewees is omitted from this article. Interviewee names are fictitious.

[a]Interviewees met at WMP meetings.

[b]Participant observations were made at Waiheke Waitangi Day celebrations at Piritahi Marae, the Hauraki Gulf Marine Park 20th-year celebrations at the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron on Auckland's waterfront, an information event at Waiheke Ostend Market organised by the WMP, an information and community event at Little Oneroa beach attended by the WMP, a coastal walk at Te Matuku Marine Reserve organised by the WMP, and an evening film presentation and discussion of *The map to paradise* at Waiheke Community Cinema organised by the film's producers.

careful attention was given to the epistemological and methodological differences between them. There is a tension between the dataset and a relational view of coexistence. I approached my research from a poststructuralist perspective, which led to an underrepresentation of non-human actors. Upon reflecting on the narratives of relationality, coexistence, and emergence that emerged from the findings, I recognised a tension between my analysis and a relational perspective, which would challenge such a detached viewpoint. Therefore, I see the need to develop more innovative methods in the future that extend beyond process and actant tracing. Nonetheless, poststructuralist analysis has been valuable in assessing social realities and power structures, particularly in examining different understandings of localism in this study.

All materials were analysed using a grounded theory approach (Mey 2011), which involved an open and interpretive analysis of the texts. Using MAXQDA, the data analysis process included iterative rounds of memo writing, open coding, and selective coding (Figure 2b). The coding process initially did not distinguish between data sources. In the first round, all text was coded by summarising paragraphs and assigning content-related headings. Codes were merged, abstracted, and reorganised in several rounds. Finally, MAXQDA's *Creative Coding* tool was used to organise the code system and create hierarchical code structures. Code memos linked the final codes. The codes and codings were interpreted in relation to the research questions. Indigenous scholars, alongside those in the constructivist research tradition, emphasise that knowledge and theorisation are "inextricable from context and the people who [...] create it" (Artelle et al. 2021, p. 289; Charmaz 2016). As such, the findings should be viewed as one possible interpretation, influenced by my positionality and chosen perspective.

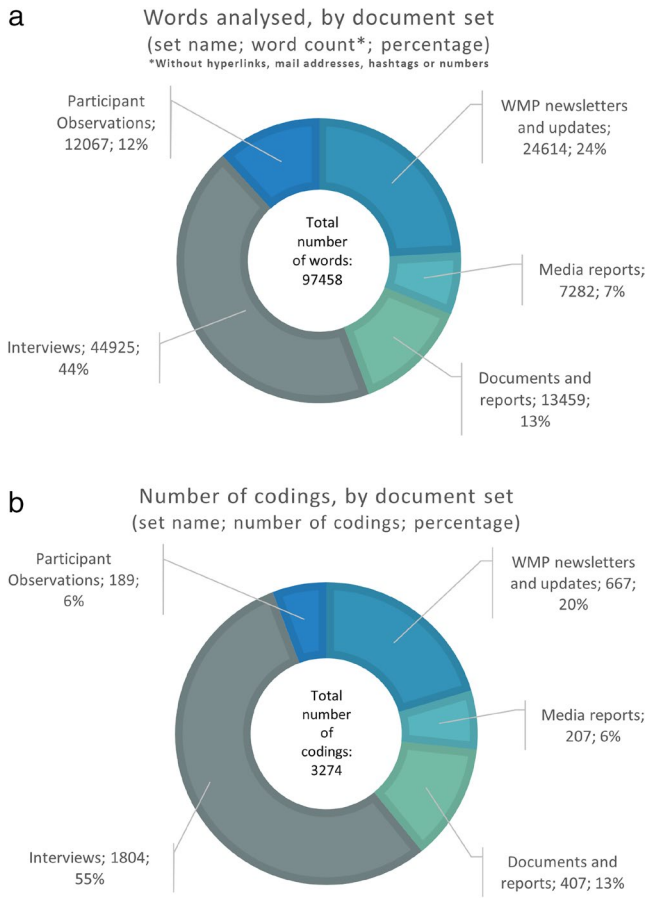

FIGURE 2 | (a) The total number of words analysed in the research and their distribution by document sets. (b) The total number of codings and their distribution by document set.

I became aware of several limitations during the research, analysis, and writing process, particularly related to my internalised individualism and anthropocentric worldview (Charmaz 2016). I only began to try to find the way out of the "hall of mirrors" (Larsen and Johnson 2017), facilitated by the generous, more-than-human relationships I experienced. Limitations also stem from my *evolving* reflexivity, as I navigated the research process while adhering to a preconceived timeline. There is valuable thinking and research on Ahu Moana on Waiheke, including from the *Enabling kaitiakitanga and EBM project* of the *Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge* (Taylor and Hikuroa 2022). My intention in this article is to contribute to the theorisation of *urban ethics* from a Gulf perspective while exploring how an urban ethics focus can enrich our understanding of coastal community-based management practices.

5 | Marine Kaitiakitanga/Guardianship

Kaitiakitanga and ocean care have long been practised locally, particularly among Mana Whenua. As the WMP aims to formalise marine environmental care, ethics of kaitiakitanga/guardianship for the ocean have been (re)assembled and imagined. The following subsections highlight seven themes that emerge from the central data—either explicitly or implicitly—to the practice, work, and communication of the WMP, serving as foundational elements of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship.

5.1 | Relationality

Relationality is intrinsic to the more-than-human coexistence on Waiheke, continually emerging and being reproduced through care activities. It also features prominently at a discursive level in the WMP's conceptualisation of reality. *Relationality* is evident in both the texts produced by the WMP and the activities it (co-)organises, such as the Conscious Swim Kaukau Orangā events—guided swims aimed at "building the connection to the ocean" (WMP 2023b). In 2022, FOHG resubmitted a proposal for a marine reserve off Waiheke's coast, independently of the WMP. The WMP's response highlights relationality and connectedness as an alternative and "better way" (WMP 2022b) to frame marine conservation. This approach incorporates mechanisms like marine protected areas or rāhui (Māori practices that restrict access or use) (WMP 2023c). The WMP emphasises that "legal tools alone do not *reconnect* people and the moana. [Instead] it is the actions that people take and the changes of behaviour" (WMP 2022b, emphasis added) that drive the long-term regeneration of Waiheke's marine environment.

5.2 | Collaboration and Consensus

Larsen and Johnson's (2017) understanding of coexistence, along with the struggles of Matiatia or Pūtiki Bay, highlight the ongoing presence of agonistic relationships and negotiations into which Waiheke and the Gulf call their more-than-human actors. Within the WMP, however, a narrative emphasising *consensus* and *overcoming conflict* has developed. In 2020, Anne Jackson expressed the hope that the WMP would mirror the Waiheke Collective model, where "all [are] on an equal footing with each other, and the voices all being in the room from the beginning". The Collective's charter defines consensus as a process of negotiating and careful consideration of diverse opinions, ideas, and concerns (Waiheke Collective 2018). However, WMP communications often frame collaboration as a unified effort for Waiheke's marine environment, emphasising a shared commitment and slogans like "Eco over Ego" and "common ground & future NOT problems & conflict" (WMP 2022a). This framing suggests that active marine protection work should transcend differences, problems, and conflicts, as reflected in WMP reports and its partnerships with other organisations that are committed to a similar understanding of collaboration (Weave 2023; Sustainable Business Network 2024). This emphasis on common ground has faced criticism. Some FS participants observed that "focus[ing] on common ground prohibited deep exploration of contentious projects such as the Kennedy Point marina" (WMP 2021a, 2022a). Despite efforts to avoid disagreements and agonistic relationships, dissenting voices have surfaced elsewhere, as seen in the 2022 FOHG reserve proposal.

5.3 | Action

In line with the Waiheke Collective Charter, the WMP emphasised *action-based* kaitiakitanga/guardianship (Waiheke

Radio 2019). *Action* was viewed as a key vehicle for relationship building, driving behaviour change, and fostering overall transformation. Initially focused on coastal experiences, education, information, and communication, the WMP has increasingly shifted toward *tangible actions* such as citizen science initiatives and stewardship practices, including beach clean-ups and kelp gardening (WMP 2022a).

5.4 | Treaty Partnership

The WMP has embraced a commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi as a core ethical principle guiding its work (HGF 2021; WMP 2021a). The relationship between the WMP and Ngāti Paoa has evolved over time, reflecting diverse and complex interactions. Initially, Ngāti Paoa's involvement was sought as part of the Mana Whenua Workstream, aiming for co-management and collaboration. Over time, Ngāti Paoa's role as a *partner* has been solidified and became more prominent, especially during and following the FS event. With the start of the second phase of the WMP in October 2021, iwi members joined the steering group. Additionally, workshops were organised to enhance Treaty literacy among non-Māori members, further underlining the WMP's partnership commitment (WMP newsletter, Feb 2023).

5.5 | Emergence

The WMP's communications reflect an understanding of kaitiakitanga/guardianship and its elements, including Treaty partnership, as part of an ongoing *journey* and learning process. The framing is encapsulated in the statement: "The WMP is a verb itself. It is an evolutionary process" (WMP newsletter, Feb 2022). This notion of emergence is associated with a relational framing. It also seems to relate to a broader discourse in the Gulf as the project plan suggests:

> In line with Foundation North and GIFT's commitment to system change, the WMP has leaned into the diverse energy that is already in and around Waiheke Island. Rather than take a normative approach by allocating money to pre-agreed solutions, the WMP applies an emergent and collaborative approach to the complexity that exists around marine care in Aotearoa/New Zealand (WMP 2021b).

5.6 | Future Generations

Youth/rangatahi are seen as vital voices and key agents of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship on Waiheke. They were included as one of the "nine categories [...] comprising the Waiheke marine environment system" (WMP 2021a) and represented in the FS. Phase one and two of the WMP explicitly aimed to build "youth capacity for sustainable environmental care" (WMP 2021b). Activities involving youth included youth meetings, school engagement, a youth snorkelling club, and beach clean-ups and citizen science events organised and led by a youth coordinator (WMP 2023d).

5.7 | Moral Economies

The WMP envisioned a *moral fishing economy* focused on subsistence fishing, small-scale sustainable practices, and values like sharing, gifting, and minimising waste. Positive references were made to photo-based sport fishing competitions where fish were returned to the sea (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020). A project to collect and up-cycle fishing gear further supported waste reduction efforts. The WMP also worked toward creating a *moral circular economy* on Waiheke, emphasising waste reduction, reusable systems, and behaviour change (WMP 2021a, 2022a; WMP newsletter, Feb 2022).

6 | A Relational Ahu Moana Community

While the SCTTTP concept of AM seems to understand the local community conventionally, based on dwelling locally, the WMP fostered a relational understanding of community. This view emerged from interviews and observations (Observation, Feb 2020; Anne Jackson, Feb 2020; Joshua Watson, March 2020), where Anne Jackson, for instance, linked community to an ethics of care and the integration of "Māori ways of seeing the world" (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). She saw community as togetherness formed through interrelationships and responsible caregiving (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). In other instances, community was imagined as a network united by the aim to achieve ecological benefits through a particular way of caring—namely the outlined values of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship (WMP 2021a; WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022).

Ethics, particularly marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, appear to be understood as the substance but also boundary of the community. A relational concept of community, based on consensual ethics, becomes significant when it replaces conventional participation models in local governance and resource management. Although not yet realised on Waiheke Island, the WMP applied to be recognised as an AM prototype by the institutions implementing SCTTTP.[9] The WMP justified its suitability as AM prototype by its "credible way of embodying the Ahu Moana concept" (WMP 2024b), namely Treaty partnership and marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This demonstrates how conventional notions of localism are being challenged and negotiated in the implementation of the AM concept.

Conventional understandings of the local community were not entirely erased. The WMP's communications differentiate between *their* community and the *wider or larger community*, which includes all residents and workers on the island (WMP 2021a). The wider community was invited to public meetings and other informational and educational activities. While conventional notions of localism often exclude non-residents or those unable to afford to live in a place, the reimagined community, based on a shared ethic of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, raised new questions about legitimate participation, inclusion, and exclusion.

Marine reserves have been contested due to the rise of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship ethics. The WMP opposed the FOHG's proposed marine reserve, arguing that it reflected exclusive Western ontological assumptions. Instead, the WMP advocated for relational and communal approaches to

"caregiving", which they believed were more effective, aligned with Treaty partnership, and more progressive and legitimate than centralised measures of "control dominance" (Anne Jackson, Feb 2020). The WMP argued that "contemporary communities are seeking better ways to achieve [...] ecological benefits that are more aligned with Tiriti partnership, active connection, and regeneration, and to be effective over a wider area" (WMP answer on MPA, Jan 2022). These communities committed to marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship were positioned in opposition to those holding on to reactionary marine conservation values. This argument is also situated within the broader national discourse on co-governance and Indigenous rights over natural resources, including the foreshore and seabed (Sullivan 2017).

By framing community as emerging from active marine protection work, common ground and consensus were prioritised, while protests and conflicts were delegitimised. Kaitiakitanga/guardianship was imagined as the substance of *relationship-building*, in contrast to narratives that defined Waiheke's identity through opposition and protest. For instance, the marina conflict at Pūtiki Bay, which divided islanders, Mana Whenua, and the WMP, was deliberately excluded from the FS event. Issues of class and social justice raised in this and other protests were marginalised and largely absent from WMP discussions (Rose Muna, Feb 2020; Robyn Watts, March 2020; Ben Hill, March 2020).

Finally, new dynamics of inclusion and exclusion emerged around recreational fishing within the WMP. A moral fishing economy and *responsible* fishing practices were emphasised, with certain fishermen and groups celebrated as role models (Robyn Watts, March 2020). In contrast, some recreational fishermen were seen as "middle aged Pākehā blokes" showing dismissive and uncooperative behaviour (Andrew Williams, March 2020). While not formally excluded, some fishermen felt the WMP had a hidden agenda and perceived it as imposing its values, leading to self-exclusion from project spaces (Ben Hill, March 2020). Participation was further complicated by concerns about being judged by their fishing community (Jack Snapper, Feb 2020).

7 | The Gulf as Relational Care Network

Although a new form of localism centred on marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship was not formalised as an AM prototype, the WMP reimagined and reshaped relationships in the Gulf, offering a renewed vision of its governance and geography (Affolderbach et al. 2012).

A vision of Waiheke Island and the wider Gulf as a relational network of marine caregivers emerged. Aligned with its relational community understanding, the WMP saw itself as "part of a bigger system in [the] context of regional (Tīkapa Moana) and national marine management [...] taking a deeply relational approach that includes forming conscious allyship with other parts of the system to enable collective action" (WMP 2022a). The WMP has built diverse relationships with iwi, civil society (e.g., owners of neighbouring islands, NGOs, trusts), the private sector (e.g., dive operators, underwater ROV services), research institutions (e.g., University of Auckland, Sustainable Seas), and public agencies (e.g., Auckland Council, Biosecurity NZ). These horizontal networks address shared concerns, such as managing exotic caulerpa seaweeds, fostering new non-statutory governance arrangements that transcend formal boundaries and planning levels (Metzger and Schmitt 2012, p. 266; Haughton et al. 2013).

The role of civil society has changed as relationships with state and municipal agencies were reimagined within relational care networks. Civil society acted as (co-)initiator, partner, or participant in urban care projects. Active citizenship is exemplified by the WMP's nominations for the Mayoral Conservation Awards (Collaboration and Innovation) and the Sustainable Business Network's Outstanding Collaboration Award (Auckland Council 2022; Sustainable Business Network 2024). The WMP described itself as an "*urban* island [co-managing] its land and seascapes" (WMP 2021a, emphasis added), challenging prevalent perceptions of urban-island boundaries and relationships.

The vision of the Gulf as a relational network of care remaps its geography, shifting from a Euclidean view of bounded zones to one emphasising relationality and open, emergent space/place. Administrative boundaries, such as those of the Marine Park, were transcended by interconnections and alternative frameworks like rāhui. This relational approach challenges traditional territorial notions of community and localism, promoting flexible conservation ethics over rigid spatial designations. While not formally recognised, the WMP's relationships, governance and spatial visions change, complement, and challenge existing norms and structures.

8 | Discussion

The Gulf is a contested space where diverse ontological systems, interests, and ideas about how to live (interact, behave) coexist, interact, overlap, and compete. The SCTTTP non-statutory plan proposed initiatives to restore the Gulf's "mauri, environmental quality and abundance of resources" (HGF et al. 2016). Among these measures is kaitiakitanga/guardianship, implemented through AM, coastal co-management areas led by Mana Whenua and local communities. AM, as envisioned in the plan, represents a form of localism that decentralises political power to local institutions and communities (Wills 2016, p. 7). They seek to decolonise the Gulf's geography by remapping its coast based on reciprocal care, self-determination, and Treaty partnership (Aschenbrenner 2023b, p. 13). Unlike top-down devolution of responsibility or bottom-up civic engagement (Wills 2016), AM recentres Indigenous relationships with place, challenging conventional notions of localism tied to Western concepts of place and scale (Tuck and McKenzie 2016).

The article examined how AM was realised and translated by Waiheke Island's *local community*. It highlighted how the WMP emerged as a group that gradually identified as an AM community. Within this framework, the local community and Mana Whenua were seen as distinct AM entities collaborating as co-managing partners, transitioning to joint leadership of the

WMP steering group (WMP 2021a). The WMP also acknowledged a broader Mana Whenua whānau and a wider local community encompassing those "who over many years have called [Waiheke] home" (WMP 2024a).

At the same time, an understanding of the *local community* emerged, defined not by location but by an ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship. This concept was understood to encompass *relationality*, *action*, *collaboration and consensus*, *Treaty partnership*, *emergence*, centring of *future generations*, and *moral economies*. Reflecting decolonisation efforts, it integrates Māori values while also incorporating neoliberal planning imperatives and ethics of collaboration seen in SCTTTP and similar institutions (Aschenbrenner 2023a, 2023b). The community is framed as relational and defined by its members' shared commitment to coastal and marine care. Marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship serves as the substance of interrelationships, forming the basis for a broader relational care network and alliances across the Gulf and ANZ.

How can these findings be understood in terms of power, inclusion/exclusion, and neoliberal governance? The call for AM reflects efforts to decolonise Gulf geographies and assert treaty rights. Treaty partnership is central to the bicultural framework of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship assembled in the context of the WMP. Concepts like marine conservation areas were treated as tools for ecological benefit rather than norms. While Rose Muna felt like "the odd Māori person thrown in for good books [and the WMP being] fronted up by middle class Pākehā" (Feb 2020) after the first town hall meeting, a partnership has since become a core focus, reflected in steering group composition and recent communications (WMP newsletter, May 2023). I therefore interpret the emergence of ethics and practices of marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship as a challenge to and incipient shift in dominant power structures. At the same time, new patterns of inclusion and exclusion arose.

Wills (2016) emphasises the need for "sufficient local interest and capacity to engage" (p. 12), such as time and skills, for liberal localism. A Gulf care network will likely be uneven, requiring further research in less active neighbourhoods than Waiheke. Ethics also influence who can engage with the WMP and be considered part of the local community. Exclusion occurred when individuals or groups did not align with marine kaitiakitanga/guardianship, Treaty partnership principles, consensus ideals, or moral economies.

The exclusion of agonistic voices enabled structural change by making Treaty partnership a baseline. However, the moralised discourse excluded *unethical* subjects and depoliticised collaboration, limiting the expression of systemic critique, also on issues like class, privatisation, and social justice (Dürr et al. 2020; Aschenbrenner 2023b). Changing relationships between agencies and civil society complicated opposition and critique, highlighting depoliticising dynamics and neoliberal governmentality. While decision-making power was not formally transferred to civil society (Rose 2000; Smits 2014), bottom-up empowerment was evident in actions like controlling exotic caulerpa seaweed spread (WMP newsletter, Nov 2023). Yet, formal decision-making power remains uncertain for the future (Brownill 2017).

Decolonising perspectives, like those of Larsen and Johnson (2017), view struggle and agonistic voices as inherent to coexistence, contrasting with the WMP's more unified concept of togetherness. This perspective could address issues of exclusion and depoliticisation within the WMP, as well as offer a more inclusive view of collaboration, similar to the Waiheke Collective's approach. The article focused on the discursive formation of care within the WMP context, and future research could explore the practical, life-sustaining aspects of care in a broader, more inclusive way.

9 | Conclusion

This article examined a form of localism introduced by AM, which created an ontologically pluralist and decolonised map of the Gulf, incorporating Mana Whenua areas based on Māori ethical systems. On Waiheke Island, Māori perspectives were integrated into the co-managing community, envisioning local self-management rooted in an ethics of care. This new map redefines the Gulf, emphasising relational, open, and emergent understandings of place and *ethical* localism.

The article highlights ethics as a key dimension alongside politics, economics, and law in place-based coastal management (Dürr et al. 2020). Ethics, encompassing both hegemonic and non-hegemonic Māori ethicalities, is inseparable from politics. Non-hegemonic ethical systems challenge colonial power structures and facilitate decolonisation. Ethical claims promote contestation and legitimacy but also risk delegitimising agonistic views and causing exclusion. These dynamics are challenging and critical to consider for all institutions in the Gulf. Lastly, the article emphasised the importance of place in fostering ethical living, urging more nuanced attention to place and its agency in future urban ethics theories.

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Ethics Statement

Ethical approval was not obtained, as there was no ethics committee or institutional review board at the researcher's institution at the time the study was conducted and the article was written. Informed consent was sought from and provided by the research subjects in the form of written informed consent (including consent to the publication of results in anonymised form).

Data Availability Statement

Publications and newsletters analysed in the research are openly accessible. The interview and participant observation data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the author, after prior review and as far as the anonymity of interviewees and participants can

be preserved. The data are not publicly available as they may contain information that could compromise the privacy of participants.

Endnotes

[1] Tuck and McKenzie (2016) provide a nuanced overview of the differences between *place* and *land*. The paper uses the term *place* in line with Larsen and Johnson (2017), while recognising ontological differences and adopting a perspective of ontological pluralism and openness.

[2] An *ethic of kaitiakitanga/guardianship* refers at this point to the ethical narrative developed in SCTTTP (Aschenbrenner 2023a; HGF et al. 2016, p. 27).

[3] In the text, Ahu Moana refers to the concept and areas identified in SCTTTP.

[4] Kapoor (2024) criticises Indigenous localism for its limited critique and inability to challenge underlying systems. Other critics warn against the risk of instrumentalising "Māori extended kin groups [as] a kind of ready-made Indigenous NGO" (McCormack 2016, p. 235) to which responsibility can be shifted.

[5] The approach focuses on "what is problematized as (un)ethical in what ways and by what means" (Dürr et al. 2020, p. 2). Ethics here refers to "a field of interaction in which a range of actors in cities negotiate moral and social ideals, principles and norms" (ibid.) while also addressing what is considered (un)ethical within this context. *Urban* may point to (1) the place of ethical negotiation, the city, (2) the object of ethical negotiation, e.g. housing, (3) the urban conditions under which ethical negotiations take place, or (4) ethical postulations that are linked to views of what it means to be emphatically urban.

[6] Maria Puig de la Bellacasa (2017) uses the term *ethicalities* to capture the ontological plurality of ethics.

[7] Larsen and Johnson (2017) argue that conflicts and struggles are inevitable due to interdependencies of human and non-human others, as well as the "cacophony of human and nonhuman ontological styles" (p. 9). Place teaches coexistence, not consensus or the flattening out of differences. This includes the building and emergence of alliances "motivated by mutual albeit dissimilar concerns for places" (p. 8). See also Massey (2005) for the inevitability of negotiation and conflict when 'throwntogether' in place.

[8] Nikolas Rose (1996, p. 335) describes "government through community" as strategies that create and use community ties to support regulation, reform, or mobilisation. These strategies aim to promote local participation, empowerment, and decision-making, reactivating self-motivation, responsibility, and active citizenship within a self-governing community, aligning with neoliberal governmentality.

[9] Becoming an AM pilot project could offer benefits such as formal recognition, local governance involvement, and resource allocation from DOC and the Ministry of Primary Industries/Fisheries New Zealand. This may include a dedicated project team, subject matter experts, policy staff to review legislative processes, and financial support during the planning stages with Mana Whenua and local communities (DOC et al. 2021).

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