

**Nairn, K., Sligo, J., Showden, C. R., Matthews, K. R.,
& Kidman, J. (2022). *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism
in Aotearoa*. Bridget Williams Books, 300 pages.
ISBN 9781990046681**

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Hope is a tool, a defence against giving up. And hope itself is produced through action. Rather than naivety, critical hope is both a weapon and balm.

(Nairn et al., 2022, p. 212)

Fierce Hope provides a multifaceted account of hope as a driving force for youth activism in Aotearoa between 2018 and 2020. Borne out of curiosity at what “motivates young people raised under neoliberalism to act collectively” in the face of multiple crises—including but not limited to White supremacist violence, climate dangers and the COVID-19 pandemic—Nairn et al. (2022) asked six youth-led and/or youth-majority activist groups to share their experiences with activism towards “enacting a vision for a socially just Aotearoa” (p. 3). The six groups whose stories feature in *Fierce Hope* are Protect Ihumātao, JustSpeak, ActionStation, InsideOUT Kōaro, Thursdays in Black (University of Auckland), and Generation Zero (Auckland). In dialogue with members from these groups, the authors powerfully counter the idea that youth in Aotearoa are politically apathetic and individually oriented.

In this review, I focus on three intertwined threads that Nairn et al. (2022) continuously return to in conversation with their participants: hoping critically, collectivity, and care. These shape the life force of each group’s fight for a socially just Aotearoa: through reclaiming stolen Indigenous land, fighting colonisation, abolishing prisons, eliminating sexual violence and gender-based violence, fighting for LGBTQIA+ liberation, and implementing a zero-carbon future. *Fierce Hope* illuminates how hoping critically, engaging collectively, and enacting care might strengthen solidarities between different groups working towards common goals of social justice and transformation.

Chapter One establishes the context for *Fierce Hope*, engaging with the questions “Are [youth activist] visions grounded in hope? Determination? Joy? A search for community? What is the ultimate point of activism? In the context of a bleak present, what does it take to imagine—and work for—a brighter future?” (p. 2). The authors also acknowledge that while applying the ‘youth’ label to a social movement can risk reducing it to being an age- or generation-specific issue, it is still useful to privilege youth perspectives across each of the activist groups which are “addressing a wide range of structural injustices” and wanting to “make the world a better place for everyone” (pp. 6–7). Indeed, many of the groups’ visions build on those of earlier movements while simultaneously being future oriented.

Chapter Two focuses on the first of the six groups, Protect Ihumātao, a campaign to reclaim and protect Ihumātao from Fletcher Building’s proposed development to build 480 high-price houses on the whenua. Protect Ihumātao, led by six cousins who share ancestral connections to the land, is connected to an ongoing fight for tino rangatiratanga and a history of Māori-led resistance to colonisation (cf. Harris,

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2004). They spearheaded a diverse political movement comprised of Māori groups and tauwiwi groups working together under the kaupapa of peaceful occupation, a vision set by mana whenua.

Chapter Three details the strategic shift from lobbying to community engagement of JustSpeak, a group which also emerged in part due to a “breakdown of the Treaty relationship, and the impact of colonisation” on the justice system in Aotearoa (Julia, JustSpeak, quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 58). By focusing on connecting with young people in Aotearoa, particularly rangatahi Māori, JustSpeak aims to change dominant discourse about incarceration, a step towards their long-term goal to see the last prisons close by 2040, at the bicentenary of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This chapter focuses on challenges facing the group as they experience this shift in direction towards meeting their longer-term goals, such as how, as a group, they may work effectively as Treaty partners given that the majority of JustSpeak members are Pākehā: “People are where the power is ... but it takes a bit of shepherding to get everyone to ... focus and concentrate their power ... and [discover] what pressure we can apply when we get together” (Tamatha, JustSpeak, in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 68).

Chapter Four further explores collaboratively focusing and concentrating people power through looking to ActionStation’s use of a mixture of online campaigning and real-time actions to respond to diverse and interconnected social justice issues. The Tauwiwi Tautoko project, among other examples, is detailed in this chapter as part of ActionStation’s wider core campaigns to dismantle racism. Beginning as a pilot in late 2018, the Tauwiwi Tautoko project trained groups of tauwiwi (people who are not Māori) to combat racism and colonial rhetoric online over a two-month programme, as a response to the disproportionate emotional toll of this work on tangata whenua activists. It serves as a potent example of how ActionStation enacts a participatory democratic model in a way that speaks to constitutional transformation in Aotearoa through directing tauwiwi efforts towards reconciliation and restoration, so that tangata whenua are “free to be able to do the work ... to re-indigenise...” (Laura, ActionStation, quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 106). By noting how Tauwiwi Tautoko training evolved since its inception (for example, new training was introduced in 2019 to tackle Islamophobia online in response to the Christchurch mosque killings), and describing concurrent actions and initiatives, Nairn et al. (2022) trace how the Tauwiwi Tautoko project realises “multiple actions and campaigns [that] contribute to ActionStation’s goals”, primarily to “address racism and honour Te Tiriti of Waitangi” (p. 109).

Chapter Five introduces the journey of InsideOUT Kōaro, an influential nationwide organisation which seeks to create safer spaces for young rainbow people through educational outreach as well as wider community engagement by holding events for youth, such as the annual Shift hui. Shift hui is a three-day event held at Horouta Marae in Porirua where “rangatahi participate in a range of workshops and activities designed to help them understand themselves and rainbow issues in Aotearoa” (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 131). By cultivating spaces for rainbow young people to freely explore who they are in a caring, safe and empowering environment, “InsideOUT Kōaro’s modelling of the world it envisioned has inspired rainbow young people that such a world is possible” (Nairn et al., 2022, p.117; cf. Pottinger, 2017).

Nairn et al. (2022) also emphasise how InsideOUT Kōaro embodies care for its rangatahi and members through its organisational structure and relationships, as described by group member Abby: “The whole self-care thing ... they look after you and make sure that you’re looking after yourself, because that can be so much easier said than done” (quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 134). Drawing on Abby’s insights and other members’ experiences of Shift Hui, as well as field notes from the event, the authors highlight self-care as integral and integrated into collective care. They build space for growing conversations within and beyond Aotearoa on politicising care, crucial to the flourishing and maintaining of relationships of solidarity (see Forster, 2022; Hadi, 2020; Lorde & Sanchez, 2017).

Chapter Six is about the work of Thursdays in Black at Waipapa Taumata Rau | the University of Auckland, the only university-based group in the study. Thursdays in Black faced difficulty sustaining its membership, due to the high turnover of students, as well as having fewer resources at their disposal. This

chapter focuses on how, in spite of these challenges, the group works towards their goal of tackling rape culture and patriarchy through engaging in the university structure and making change at the policy level to increase community responsibility for preventing sexual violence: “While the institutional work has been less visible, it is nonetheless another teaspoon of water out of the ocean of rape culture and victim-blaming” (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 171). The authors illustrate that the community and visibility of the group on campus also has substantive impact, showing the importance of change happening at multiple levels: “Every conversation started, every survivor supported, every student served by the new campus support system is one more teaspoon removed from the ocean” (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 172).

The story of Generation Zero in Chapter Seven also exemplifies a plurality of approaches to making change. The group self-identify “pretty openly [as] lobbyists” as well as and in addition to “activists” for targeted political change to climate issues, as summed up by member Hamish:

If our actions on a certain matter are largely done internally ... submitting on council plans or meeting with officials, I can say that’s lobbying. Whereas when we try to empower the public and get people to vote or sign a petition, or get the public to submit on the same thing, it’s shifting from lobbying to activism. (quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 181)

Taking myriad approaches, from lobbying to activism, is how the group seeks to create structural change. One of the biggest wins for Generation Zero was their work towards the Zero Carbon Bill, passed into law in 2019. Nairn et al. (2022, p. 189) also focus on how Generation Zero seeks to deepen their approach to effectively tackle colonisation as the root of the climate crisis.

Chapters Eight and Nine bring the authors’ learnings from all of the groups together in conversation. Chapter Eight focuses on the emotional work of activism, community and of sustaining hope, while Chapter Nine analyses the complexity of sustaining collective action through *ahi kā*—the work of tending a fire to keep the embers burning (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 230; cf. Harris, 2004). This final chapter also explores how each group approaches building solidarity and highlights the centrality of strong female leadership across each of the six groups—who tend to face “extra pressure and critique” yet inspire others with their *mana* and effectively “guide a collective through the process of social change” (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 254).

In these final chapters, the authors introduce the concept of “hoping critically”, which situates hope as entangled with other emotions, such as despair, or generative anger which “fuels” activists’ continued action: “Every news story ... it just fuels me ... anytime I see news about all of these injustices, I just want to fight back more” (Jemima, InsideOUT Kōaro, quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 222). In weaving together voices from Protect Ihumātao, JustSpeak, ActionStation, InsideOUT Kōaro, Thursdays in Black and Generation Zero, the authors illuminate how each group’s practices of activism resonate myriad forms of critical hope, both against the dangers of cruel optimism—such as burnout—as well as avoiding naive hope by setting unattainable goals (Berlant, 2011; McGeer, 2004).

We argue that hoping critically can be helpful in reducing the tension produced by the duelling emotions of urgency and futility. This is because it can hold them in equilibrium, by explicitly acknowledging the various obstacles (such as government inaction) as well as the incremental victories (such as the protection of Ihumātao, the Zero Carbon Act, more cycleways, and the growth of climate activism). (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 220)

Nairn et al. (2022) show that hoping critically is about affirming collective commitment to movements for change by celebrating progress already made while simultaneously paying attention to the challenges that lie ahead—and addressing these step by step while “keeping an eye on the prize” (p. 212; cf. Harris, 2004; Elkington et al., 2020).

Hoping critically aligns well with Freire's (2015) conceptualisation of hope as a humanising force to respond to oppression because it exemplifies the simultaneously affective and intellectual nature of hope in youth activism across these six groups in Aotearoa. It also interconnects with earlier writing from Kidman et al. (2018) on the usefulness of an "educated hope" in Indigenous resistance (p. 235). Quiane, from Protect Ihumātao, described that while hope is collectively experienced in waves—sometimes thin on the shore and other times coming in big swells—it provides new ways for her extended whānau to speak back to colonialism. For example, through becoming "so empowered in their own mana motuhake", during the second week of occupation, fifteen wāhine and two tāne received moko kanohi (facial tatoos):

Some of my aunties [had] believed that you had to be really old or do something to 'deserve' a moko kauae, without actually just accepting that having Māori whakapapa is enough. And on that second week, they were content that being wāhine Māori is enough. And they used this as an opportunity to cement this movement into who they are. (Quiane, Protect Ihumātao, quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 212).

Hoping critically engages directly with the scale of emotional work involved in activism, enabling activists to see transformation already in action as well as living the values they wish to see in the world, as members of InsideOUT Kōaro do. It also fosters collectivity in multiple ways, as hoping critically centrally involves building and sustaining groups, communities and relationships.

One way in which collectivity dovetails with critical hope is through place, and the importance of both local and international relationships. Each group's "theory of change" is multifaceted and embedded in the global as well as and in tandem with the local, as they are informed by "the histories and legacies of indigenous, feminist and queer resistance" (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 23). For example, the cousins of Protect Ihumātao situate their struggles as sharing a "kaupapa of peaceful [community] resistance ... against the forces of the state" with earlier movements like Parihaka and Takaparawhau (Bastion Point) (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 234). Some actions that sustained their protest reflected their relationships with and connection to the practices of contemporary Indigenous protests outside of Aotearoa, such as Standing Rock and Mauna Kea. Indigenous Hawaiian members of Mauna Kea gifted a tree to Ihumātao to show their solidarity with the reclamation of land, affirming the collectivity and local-global resonance of Protect Ihumātao:

Once they [the tamariki] planted that plant, that signified, I think, especially to the police ... "Okay, we've got to let this paddock go." ... [We now] have this paddock for people to come to, and just being able to sit there and touch the grass, take their shoes off and put their feet in the whenua ... I'm so grateful to our tamariki for reclaiming that paddock on the second day. (Tongaporutu, Protect Ihumātao, quoted in Nairn et al., 2022, p. 236).

Much of the work carried out by activists from other groups was also driven by shared hopes for a better world, enacted in ways that resonate with constitutional transformation values of Aotearoa: "ActionStation, JustSpeak, and InsideOUT Kōaro tried to integrate te reo Māori in non-appropriative ways to describe the values that guide their work, as one step towards being more rooted in the culture of, and their responsibilities to, *this place*" (Nairn et al., 2022, p. 268; italics in original). Further to this, each of the groups' enactments of care, for self, each other, the whenua and wider communities, are important to sustaining collectivity—building and strengthening relationships being as much at the heart of organising as achieving political goals (Garza, 2020, p. xii; Nairn et al., 2022, p. 245). Future scholarship that may build on *Fierce Hope* could focus on how youth activists in Aotearoa are sustaining relationships of care in ways that may be mutually mana-enhancing, honouring the relational possibilities within He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti (Forster, 2022). Not only would this branch of conversation build on nuanced discussion of self- and collective care as intertwined, but it also potentially could deepen both activists' and scholars' understandings of how relations of care drive collective capacity to hope critically in Aotearoa.

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