

Book Reviews

Ko Taranaki Te Maunga

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Dr Rachel Buchanan (Taranaki, Te Atiawa) is a historian and archivist who has worked for several years on the Germaine Greer archives at the University of Melbourne Archives. She is affiliated with 8 Taranaki iwi through her father, and these three insider perspectives (historian, archivist, Taranaki iwi) have led to a rich and insightful analysis of the impact of the invasion of Parihaka and the confiscation of Taranaki land, the subsequent apologies and settlements, and the many ways in which different modes of recordkeeping have played a significant role.

A few weeks ago I was idly listening to the radio and happened to hear a discussion about the invasion of Parihaka between Rachel Buchanan and Mahara Okeroa, talking with Maria Bargh with an audience in attendance. (If you want to hear the discussion and don't mind typing URLs, it is here: <https://www.radionz.co.nz/stories/2018671315/the-legacy-of-parihaka-dr-rachel-buchanan-and-mahara-okeroa-in-conversation>). Near the end of the recording, an audience member asked a provocative question, saying "When I look at that whole Parihaka thing, I actually see failure because it was historically significant but it didn't work". I thought Buchanan's reply was perceptive and enlightening, when she said that the fact they were still there talking about it showed it was still working. She said, "They were visionary people, who looked forward and said 'We don't know when Parihaka will work'. It's still working ... at that bigger level of an engine of power and creative activity and political energy, I think it's really successful".

This discussion was so intriguing I decided to seek out Buchanan's book to find out more about how she saw this action echoing on down the years, and the book provides a clear argument grounded in her personal experiences with her own whanau and from her professional knowledge.

Buchanan comments on parallels between Germaine Greer and

her own father, Leo, who kept lifelong records relating to Taranaki iwi, including Parihaka. She said “Most significantly, both were meticulous record keepers. They had arranged and rearranged their papers many times over the years, each demonstrating a keen grasp of a fact too often overlooked: that keeping records is a subversive thing to do, a political act...” She writes of looking through her father’s papers after his death, and finding records kept by her grandmother and great-grandmother; 80 year of records of non-violent protest against colonisation. “This was our whanau’s passive resistance. These records documented their dispossession, but with time had become a force for the exact opposite”. Buchanan describes this recordkeeping as an act of deep love both for their descendants and for their ancestors.

Buchanan tells the story of Parihaka and the times leading to it, and then discusses the many subsequent apologies from the Crown, which until recently for many reasons seemed to magnify the grievance at Parihaka, while the injustice generated both shame and anger. She observed that this shame, or whakamā, often prevented the passing on of information to new generations, as forgetting can be a way of avoiding suffering. However, Buchanan writes, “The past is not an event that can be boxed up, labelled and put away. The past seeps, unfurls, radiates.” The unfurling and radiation of the past can be seen in Buchanan’s reflections on her action of writing this book, when she writes “This is what I am now doing, listening and thinking, translating and interpreting, witnessing, taking notes, creating this new record that you are now holding in your hands. Not a straight line, a koru.”

She observes that Taranaki iwi have been working to turn around the pain of historical events by “acts of determined, creative and provocative remembrance”, quoting Linda Tuhiwai Smith: “revisiting history, coming to know the past, is a crucial part of decolonisation”. Buchanan notes that “the post-1970 rejuvenation of Parihaka hinged on the revival of poi and haka”. Individual women and men remembered the words and movements composed immediately after the events at Parihaka which told the story of the events from the perspective of those who were there, recording them in their minds and bodies and passing them on when the time was right. She writes “These works of art are primary sources for what happened in the nineteenth century and how Taranaki Māori interpreted these happenings”. These records were central to Treaty claims and settlements processes, performed at signing events, quoted in oratory and published, in Māori and English, in deeds. Some of these songs were kept as “closed records” – that is, not performed in

public – until it was considered appropriate.

She notes also there is still a need to close the gap between the Crown apologies and what non-Māori people say about it in private. Although the Crown makes sweeping apologies on behalf of “the Nation”, ordinary non-Māori people don’t get exposed to the ideas in the claims and the settlement documents, and often resent being reminded of the conflict that upset our images of our ancestors and past. Buchanan says everyone needs to start engaging with the “extraordinary history-making work of Tribunal reports and settlements” so the apologies of the Crown can have the lasting impact they need to.

This is a small gem of a book, insightful and thought-provoking for anyone who is interested in the ongoing impacts of archives, records, recordkeeping, record creators and keepers. It provides a valuable insider’s perspective on Parihaka and the Taranaki confiscations and their ongoing impact, as well as revealing insights into the potential within records for understanding and healing.

Belinda Battley