

matters because it helps people understand the world they inhabit. I remain to be convinced that this book, a good read as it is, will, either directly or indirectly, assist in that purpose.

*Encircled Lands: Te Urewera 1820-1921*

by Judith Binney. Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2009; x, 670pp.  
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Reviewed by Maria Bargh

In contemplating constitutional change in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand, much could be learnt from considering the different emphasis that some Maori and non-Maori communities place on historical events and political concepts associated with these events. Ask many New Zealanders if there has ever been an area where iwi have held authority, with the recognition and sanction of the Crown, and many will answer in the negative. Which is one of the reasons why *Encircled Lands* is such an important book. Questions around New Zealand's constitutional arrangements continue to be debated, often without an adequate appreciation of the boundaries and arrangements that have already been experimented with.

*Encircled Lands* provides an intricate picture of Tuhoe attempts to retain self-governance between 1820 and 1921. From 1820 until 1896 Tuhoe experienced, amongst other things, invasions, land confiscations, uneasy peace, political divisions and survey disputes. In that time also Tuhoe continued with pre-existing, and established new, governing institutions. Notably in 1872 Te Whitu Tekau, the self-governing body for Te Urewera was established. However, by the 1890s these political institutions were under intense pressure.

In 1896 the Crown recognized the Urewera district in the Urewera District Native Reserve Act: to 'make Provision as to the ownership and Local Government of the Native Lands in the Urewera District'.(p.398) Binney describes how:

Despite the conditions of poverty, the existence of the Urewera as an autonomous region in the later nineteenth century offered the possibility of creating a new form of political partnership. This is clearly what Tuhoe hoped . . . The Act was presented in Parliament as an experiment in tribal self-government. It thus allowed for possibilities other than the common discourse of 'one nation, one law'. (pp.609-10)

The Urewera District Native Reserve Act survived over the next 26 years in the background as Te Urewera came further under the scrutiny of the Crown and their pursuit of land and other resources. The Crown also increased the political, philosophical and cultural pressure regarding land management and use, challenging the ways that Tuhoe sought to govern their

own lands. Binney describes the rise of Rua Kenana during these years, as well as tensions and divisions amongst Tuhoe as the Crown continued to chip away at more land and Tuhoe unity.

In 1922 the Urewera District Native Reserve Act was abolished as the Urewera Lands Act passed facilitating the ‘settlement’ of the lands and transferring to the Crown much of the Urewera title. The new Act abolished an Act which had been hugely significant, extensively debated and considered over decades. Binney points out that no one in the 1922 Parliament remembered the ‘long campaign between 1871 and 1896 to establish the legal foundations for the real ‘treaty’ that had been negotiated between Tuhoe and the Crown’ (p.602). The Urewera Lands Act was passed without even a discussion of ‘the implication of removing Tuhoe’s rangatiratanga’. (p.602)

The fact that *Encircled Lands* presents a part of Aotearoa New Zealand’s history that is largely unknown, including to many currently debating constitutional amendments, despite its incredible significance, raises a number of issues. It hints that particular versions of history are remembered in different ways by different communities. These particular versions of history in turn are entangled with particular political concepts and used to justify specific kinds of political arrangements. *Encircled Lands* demonstrates that even though separate sovereignties have existed, including under Pakeha law, in the political history of this country, once that accommodation, which was seen to ‘contradict the principle of uniformity’ (p.609) was abandoned, it was also buried deeply.

These kinds of difficulties with untangling and writing history presents a challenge for historians Binney suggests. She argues:

If a society that evolved from a divided past attempts to become bicultural . . . its historians must also become consciously ‘bihistorical’ This involves recognising not simply that there are ‘alternative accounts of the same events, but alternative cultural codes which give conflicting accounts of what authority is’. (p.viii)

Historians then, Binney says, must ‘mediate between radically different perceptions – and experiences – in history’ (p.viii). Binney makes an outstanding job of such an approach and politicians, alongside others, have much to learn from *Encircled Lands*.

*Encircled Lands* is an outstanding piece of academic work and a riveting read. Binney has utilized interviews and archival research to produce an intricate history which is scrupulously referenced.

The Urewera autonomous region may have been a fleeting experiment. Having its existence presented to a wide audience however, could give hope that other constitutional experiments in the future, which support rather than quash Maori rights, might not be quite so fleeting.