

**Ko Taranaki te Maunga**, by Rachel Buchanan, Bridget Williams Books, Wellington, 2018, iv + 152 pp., \$NZD 14.99 (paperback); \$NZD 4.99 (ebook), ISBN 9781988545288, DOI 10.7810/9781988545288

‘Keeping records is a subversive thing to do, a political act, a shout out to the future’ (p. 16)

‘Forgetting is rarely innocent. People have to work hard not to know, recall, not to see, and to be truly ignorant’ (p. 82)

The rhyme ‘remember, remember the 5th of November’ is commonly associated with Guy Fawkes fireworks displays, and all the excitement that ensues, including distressed pets and fire-cracker disrupted sleeps. For many in New Zealand though ‘remember, remember ...’ can recall other meanings. The phrase may speak less to stories of 17th Century England and more to histories created closer to home in the province of Taranaki. On 5 November 1881, army troops entered the rural Māori village of Parihaka to arrest its leaders for crimes of sedition. They, Tohu Kākahi and Te Whiti o Rongomai, openly contested the government’s right to confiscate Māori lands. Their protests were a culmination of struggles that had begun decades earlier and lie very much at the heart of Buchanan’s *Ko Taranaki te Maunga*.

The Parihaka invasion of 1881 was preceded by forty years of colonialism in which Māori society experienced drastic changes. Perhaps the most significant of these occurred in 1840 when the British Crown formally declared sovereignty over New Zealand. Although British rule of law might not have been felt immediately, over time the influence of the Crown extended further and further into Māori affairs. Māori found control of their lives and lands seriously eroded, compounded by pressures from large-scale settlement. As with other colonies around the world, these tensions culminated into conflicts; the era spanning from 1845 to 1872 is now known as the New Zealand Wars.

For Taranaki Māori, the 1860s was an especially turbulent time. A series of brutal battles, in which Māori participated on both sides, were fought up and down the Taranaki coast. In the late 60s, this turbulence included a government scorched-earth policy instigated to quell Māori resistance that resulted in the destruction of Māori villages and cultivations. In the aftermath, Parihaka became a refuge for Māori from Taranaki and further afield and evolved into a Māori community unique from other settlements. Guided by the spiritual visions of Tohu Kākahi and a desire for self-determination, Parihaka adherents deployed non-violent tactics for rejecting State control; they removed survey pegs, destroyed fences partitioning land and ploughed soil designated for roads. When government troops entered the village in 1881, they weren’t met with protest or violence, but instead children singing and dancing. Mahatma Gandhi is said to have taken inspiration from their non-violent approach.

Situated a short distance from the Tasman Sea, Parihaka sits on the southern foothills of Mount Taranaki, which stands proudly over the surrounding settlements. On a good day the mountain can be seen from Wellington (a 5-hour drive south), but even when obscured by cloud the mountain’s conical form somehow still dominates the region. Mount Taranaki is a site of national significance, and for those familiar with Māori language the book’s title will also trigger other associations.

## Ko Taranaki te Maunga/Taranaki is the mountain

Just as provenance helps build archival context, in the Māori world a simple phrase about a mountain (or river, or tract of forest) can reveal a lot about a person. We can learn of their tribal affiliations and who their family might be. It tells us what past they could be connected to and, more importantly, how we might connect with that person. I am not from Taranaki, but from the title's four words I can tell that Buchanan is. She is of Taranaki Te Atiawa descent and has a connection to colonial dispossession that occurred in the Taranaki region.

Published in 2018, *Ko Taranaki Te Maunga* is a new-ish addition to the Bridget Williams Books series of 'short books on big subjects'. At just 152 pages in length, Buchanan's contribution is not only well written and researched, it's also incredibly brave and refreshing. Unlike so many other published works written about Parihaka and Taranaki, Buchanan presents an indigenous perspective (which unfortunately is rare) that goes against the personal detachment so often associated with historical scholarship. The writing is interfused with personal narratives. A personal story is being told, one that enables readers to feel an emotional connection with events and hopefully gain a deeper understanding of the traumas experienced in Taranaki and Parihaka. Death, grief, family; *Ko Taranaki te Maunga* is at times deeply personal and there were moments when I felt like an intruder, a voyeur of sorts. Despite the occasional uncomfatableness, it is this refusal to separate the personal from the political that elevates the text from other comparable works. *Ko Taranaki te Maunga* is more than another revisionist historical re-telling. And although Parihaka is very much a New Zealand story, the content is introduced in such a way that readers without previous knowledge will still be able to connect with the stories being told.

As with her earlier publication, *Parihaka Album: Lest we forget* (2009), the subject material can be a confronting read. We know historical truths are not always comfortable, but we, societies, are often less ready to accept that injustices of the past live on. In *Ko Taranaki te Maunga*, Buchanan successfully links the Parihaka invasion of 1881 to emotional and cultural traumas being lived out today. This is achieved through recollections, both personal memories and those found in archives. While not a trained archivist, in *Ko Taranaki te Maunga*, Buchanan references archival theory throughout. Whether it be the personal papers of her parents or the records of government, archives – their power and silences – become a post for other stories to hang from. For those familiar with her previous work, this archival focus will come as no surprise. Between 2015 and 2018, Buchanan worked as a curator for the Germaine Greer Archives in Melbourne and was also the 2016 ASA Mander Jones award recipient for her essay 'How Shakespeare helped shape Germaine Greer's feminist masterpiece'<sup>1</sup>.

Even though I handle archives and Māori material on a daily basis, *Ko Taranaki te Maunga* was a powerful reminder of just how powerful archives can be, whatever their form. Science now tells how trauma has the power to alter and embed itself within the strands of our DNA. The intergenerational trauma of colonialism, like archives, are a form of remembering – it literally lives in our bones. We are not simply a representation of past lives, we ourselves are the archive. With *Ko Taranaki te Maunga*, Buchanan has given permission for us to access a part of hers.

**Note**

1. <<https://www.archivists.org.au/learning-publications/mander-jones-awards-recipients-1996-2018>>.

Katrina Tamaira  
*Archives New Zealand*

✉ [Katrina.Tamaira@dia.govt.nz](mailto:Katrina.Tamaira@dia.govt.nz)

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