Te Motunui Epa – making history from the underground
Rachel Buchanan

The following is a transcript of a talk by Rachel Buchanan about her book *Te Motunui Epa*, published by Bridge Williams Books in 2022. It was recorded live at the National Library of New Zealand on 15 May 2023.

The speaker who introduced the talk was Matariki Williams (Pou Matua Mātauranga Māori | Senior Historian, Mātauranga Māori Manatū Taonga).

Matariki Williams:

Ka rongo koe i te tangi o te mapu o tēnei anō nō Taranaki?
Ka rongo koe i te hā ki roto nei, te hā ki waho nā?
Ka rongo kē koe i te tukituki a te manawa?

Ko tō manawa, tōku manawa; ko tōku manawa, tō manawa

Mai i te tau o te ate ki te ao.
Mai i te patopato a ngā kupu ki te aorangi.

Tū te kupu, tū te toi, tū ake te tāngata e.

Tōku mihi tuatahi ki ngā mana whenua o tēnei rohe, Te Ātiawa, Taranaki whānui, nāu i puta mai te kaikōrero o te pō nei, tēnā koutou. Tēnā koutou hoki ki ngā iwi kē o tēnei rohe Ngāti Toa Rangatira, nei rā anō te mihi.

Kia koutou e huihui mai nei i runga i te kaupapa o te pō, tēnā tātou katoa.

Ki ō tātou tini mate, ō tātou whaea matua, koutou kua wehe atu ki te pō, haere haere, okioki atu rā.

Ko Matariki Williams tōku ingoa, nō Ngāi Tūhoe, Ngāti Whakaue, Ngāti Hauiti me Taranaki ahau, he kairauhī, kaituhi me he kaiwāwāhi ahau.

It is my great pleasure to introduce this kōrero tonight with Rachel.

Dr Rachel Buchanan nō Taranaki, Te Ātiawa, he uri hoki nō Te Aro Pā, is a historian, archivist, journalist and curator. (Every time I read that I misread it in my head as activist as well but I think it's because of the work you do. It's acting in spaces that need us to act within them).

Rachel is the author of a few publications including *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget*, *Ko Taranaki Te Maunga* and of course, *Te Motunui Epa*.

The immense history of the Motunui epa is shared by Rachel who has described these epa as the most written about, and most valuable artworks to have emerged from Aotearoa. *Te Motunui Epa* is an epic, in the literary sense of the word, telling the almost unbelievable story of taonga that were hidden in a Taranaki swamp, who then travel across the world before revealing themselves centuries later in a Sotheby's catalogue.

Of the many themes throughout this book, haerenga, journeying is but one. The epa themselves go on a journey and so too does the reader as Rachel deftly navigates screeds of legalese, archival records

spanning across multiple countries, government documentation, and the enduring aspirations of Ngāti Rāhiri for the epa to return home.

Rachel Buchanan is the kind of writer whose prowess with words absolutely befits the epic history she writes about. She presents history as a lived and living experience humanising the people involved (the good, the regretful and the administrative) and giving agency to the epa themselves, koira he tino āhuatanga o te ao Māori.

I opened this mihi with a poem from Hana Buchanan, Rachel's sister. Her poem, her words asks if you can hear the calls of Taranaki uri, can you hear their breaths, the beating of their hearts.

Hear them from the very seat of their emotions, hear the tapping of these words as they reach to the world and beyond, these are living words, this is living art, and through it, we all thrive.

Tēnā hōmai he mihi whakamīharo ki a Rachel. Haere mai.

Rachel Buchanan

I am an uri of Te Aro Pā on Taranaki Street and I am proud to stand here on the papakāinga of my relatives who once lived at Pipitea Pā. I acknowledge our shared tūpuna who occupied the whenua around the harbour from 1820 onwards, making homes at Pipitea, Kumutoto, Te Aro and Tiakiwai. We descendants of Taranaki have maintained ahi kaa in the capital city for 200 years in a multitude of ways. Many of our tūpuna are buried at Waipiro (Bolton Street cemetery). Te Aro Pā rangatira, Hemi Parai, is among those at rest there. His grandson, Taare Warahi, was born at Te Aro Pā and grew up at Ngaraunga. He and his wife Margaret raised their whānau at Johnsonville. Koro used to enjoy a drink at the Thistle Inn, just up the road and would walk these streets with his kete and straw hat.

My aunty, Agnes 'Bubs' Broughton was one of the founders of Ngāti Pōneke Young Māori Club in 1937 – the club now has its headquarters at Pipitea Marae just down the road. Our whangaunga, the great poet J.C. Sturm, was also active in the Young Māori Club. My grandmother, Rawinia, was the secretary of the Wellingon Rugby Football Union and controlled ticketing to test matches at Athletic Park. My father, Leo, founded the Māori health committee of the Royal Australiasian College of Physicians and for many years served as a paediatrican at Hutt Hospital.

To broaden out a little further from my immediate whānau, I mihi to Taranaki tohunga Ruka Broughton, who was an important pou in the establishment of Te Herenga Waka marae at Victoria University. And to Te Huirangi Waikerepuru who established full immersion Māori langauge courses at Kuratini – affiliated with Wellington Polytech. Kuratini was run from prefabs in a car park opposite the National War Memorial at Pukeahu. I acknowledge the work of Maui Pomare, an uri of one of Taranaki's most famous sons, as head of the National Museums Council. Pomare was the first to bring home koiwi, work that Te Papa is rightly famous for.

I further acknowledge the enormous contribution of uri of Taranki – both past and present – to the public service here in Wellington, in the city's libraries and galleries. We people of

Taranaki are still here, even as the capital city continues to shift, grow and evolve around us and I am honoured to acknowledge our often quiet and steadfast efforts as I stand before all of you.

[Kia ora listeners – quick bit of information for you. At this point, Rachel is displaying a photograph of the galaxy cluster SMACS 0723 known as Webb's First Deep Field. This image was taken by the James Webb Space telescope and was unveiled by President Joe Biden on Monday 11 July, 2022.]

I have fulfilled an ambition to stand in front of an image such as this.

Nebula. Star dust. Cosmic seahorse. Stellar nurseries stuffed with massive young stars. Colliding galaxies 290 million light years away. White dwarves. An alien world larger than Jupiter. The constellation of Volans. Green monster. A stellar autopsy. The pillars of creation. Massive columns of hydrogen gas and cosmic dust.

These words are taken from recent news reports about the images made by NASA's new James Webb Telescope. The telescope was launched in late 2021 and the images it captured were so mind-blowing that Joe Biden, the president of the United States, was the one to release them.

This magical telescope, the most powerful ever made, allows us to gaze out into space and back into time...way back to 'some of the earliest galaxies and stars that formed after the Big Bang 13.8 billion years ago'. [ABC 11 July 2022]

The deepest sharpest image of the distant universe covered 'a patch of sky approximately the size of a grain of sand held at arm's length', said NASA administrator Bill Nelson. 'It's just a tiny sliver of the vast universe.' [Webb's First Deep Field]

Te Motunui Epa, went to press around the same time that Joe Biden released Webb's First Deep Field, and as I'll explain, for me the two events will always be related through the universal experience that is a feeling of total and complete awe.

Te Motunui Epa, as Matariki has said, is about the five interconnected carvings that briefly formed the back wall of a pātaka (food store) in north Taranaki. Around 1820, these carvings were placed in a swamp for safekeeping but the inter-tribal wars of that time were followed by the wars of colonisation and the people who hid the carvings were not able to come back and get them. Even if they were, the world that required pātaka, the web of relationships that these structures supported, so much of that had been smashed. Museums in New Zealand and across the British empire were hungry for the left-overs.

In 1971, the taonga-tūpuna emerged from their hiding place when farmers were digging a ditch on land they leased from Ngāti Rāhiri owners. A local man, Melville Manukonga illegally sold the carvings to British art dealer, Lance Entwistle and Entwistle illegally smuggled them out of the country to New York where they were viewed and illegally purchased by George Ortiz, a Swiss-Bolivian collector of what he described as primitive art.

A few years later, George's young daughter was kidnapped and to repay a ransom loan he put the carvings – and hundreds of other taonga – up for auction at Sotheby's in London. The catalogue said a Mr Robert Riggs had purchased the carvings in an American antique shop in the 1930s and Ortiz had then purchased them from Riggs in 1966. None of that was true.

As I document in the book, by a series of quite freakish chances, the New Zealand government found out that the provenance of the carvings was fake. In 1978, the threat of an injunction was enough to force Ortiz and Sotheby's to remove the carvings from the auction and so began a 40-year-battle to get the taonga back. Both National and Labour governments were involved in the intensive legal and diplomatic work to retrieve the stolen taonga tuku iho. Public servants really pulled out all stops. The legal action in the British courts culminated in an appeal to the House of Lords in 1983.

When that failed, the New Zealand Government sought a legal opinion from one of the world's top law firms, Allen & Overy in London, on the possibility of the Māori owners of the land suing Ortiz directly for return of the taonga.

The speculative legal action, an astonishing and rare example of the Crown being prepared to use all its resources to assist a Treaty partner, was one of the many new strands of action that I unearthed while researching this book. The government never discussed these efforts in public and it was not recalled or retained within Te Ātiawa circles either, including by direct descendants of the people involved.

But knowledge of this work *was* retained in records at Crown Law, at Archives New Zealand and at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Paper and born digital archival records retrieved via Official Information Act requests were essential sources for this book. So were two films by Eruera (Ted) Nia in the 1980s, preserved in the collections of Ngā Taonga Sound & Vision, the national film and sound archive. My whanaunga and friend, Honiana Love, the Chief Executive of the Archive, had shared the films with me. I also relied on database research and online kōrero (mostly zoom but also phone calls and emails) with Māori and Pākehā and British people who were involved in the events described above.

As I worked with these records – and thought about our taonga-tūpuna – I was aware of the need to keep myself safe.

The taonga that are now known as the Motunui Epa were made between 1750 and the early 1800s by one or more tohunga whakairo in north Taranaki. The old world. They are not to be taken lightly. The carvings as a collective, their individual makers, the rangatira who were returned to life in the wood, the wood itself, all of these beings demanded respect. A relative reminded me, more than once, of the power of the time in which these carvings were made: 'Remember Rachel, the spells worked back then!' This phrase was uttered in a wicked voice and was always followed by a lot of giggling and coughing but the warning was clear. 'Kia tūpato! Be careful!'

So I greeted the carvings when I began each writing session and I uttered a karakia, given to me by Uncle John Te Wharematangi Baxter, at the end of each day. Whenever I could, I also plunged into the sea. Matua Mahara Okeroa would begin – and end – wānanga with a karakia.

As historian Arini Loader writes in *Te Pouhere Kōrero* volume 10: 'Mātauranga is tapu, Māori knowledge is sacred'.

I understood that I was in a reciprocal relationship with these taonga-tūpuna. They were guiding me to reach for new ways of imagining history. On a practical level, the carvings provided me with purpose and meaning and helped me keep my head above water during the many dark days of the Covid-19 pandemic in Melbourne. But I was helping them too by creating a new avenue for them to speak to their uri and to wider audiences who might read the book. As the Ngāti Pōneke waiata goes...

Awhinatia mai

Arohatia ra

Despite my caution and care and respect, working on this book really took it out of me.

By mid-2022, the exhaustion I felt was extreme. In the final weekend of work, I set my alarm for 6am to prepare for a long day ahead. To proceed, I had to step over another version of myself, a weak and vulnerable person curled up in a ball on the floor next to the bed. I worked steadily, all day, but was unable to shake what I had seen, what seemed like my true self, a frozen woman on the floor, a husk sapped of life.

From my writing room in Melbourne, I had gazed back into the birth of the Taranaki cosmos. These five carvings were my James Webb telescope, a sophisticated and powerful lens that let me glimpse a tiny sliver of the vast universe produced these masterpieces. The awe I feel when I look at these carvings is equivalent to the awe I feel looking at those images of the birth of ancient stars and galaxies.

It's not surprising, I guess, that I was stunned and used up. So much so that when I finally held an advance copy of my book in my hands, I could hardly manage to look at it. I was like a builder who has completed a house. While the clients may be pleased and delighted, the builder finds it hard to see the whole. All the builder can think about is the drama of the individual parts. The wonky chimney, the frame that buckled and had to be rebuilt, the rain that got in through the half-finished roof.

When I did open the book and read it, for the first time as a beautiful three-dimensional object rather than one-dimensional words on paper or a screen, a very clear but alarming thought popped into my head: '*The person who wrote this book is* ***much more*** *intelligent than you!'* Who was this person? I've always like the short Helen Garner essay where she talks about the different selves who write each book, the changing 'I' of the author. The rest of this talk is my attempt to understand the self, the Rachel Buchanan who worked in the darkness and was bold enough to write this book. I think I can learn a lot from her!

Matua Mahara Okeroa, Peter Priest, Damon Ritai, Tom Rennie, my sister Hana and my uncles Dermot and Bill, my husband Mike and our daughters were among the many people who helped launch this book *Te Motunui Epa* at Puke Ariki Museum, New Plymouth, on 21 November 2022. This was a wonderful event for our whānau, for our tūpuna and for Ngāti

Rāhiri and Te Ātiawa people everywhere. We spoke and sung for the book in the large foyer of the museum. The carvings live just upstairs and we could feel them listening and responding to the kōrero. It was so special and uplifting and I felt an unfamiliar sense of satisfaction at all that had been achieved.

This feeling did not last long...as events thrust me back into a way of seeing the world that is more aligned with outlook of comedic American pessimists like Larry David [*Curb Your Enthusiasm*], Harvey Pekar and others.

On 24 December 2022, my mother, Mary Buchanan (nee English) passed away at Village at the Park in Wellington. Mum was 77. For the last 12 years of her life, Mary had lived with dementia. It was this illness, combined with Covid-19 and pneumonia, that had eventually taken her life.

On Christmas Day, I returned to Wellington for Mary's funeral and burial at Opau, the urupā at Makara that was part of the Taranaki Whānui Treaty settlement (1998). In 2017, my Dad, Leo Buchanan, was the first person to be buried there on that hill.

Back in Melbourne in January, the frozen woman from mid-2022 had totally taken over. I was a human Fruju. Walking was one of few things that helped me thaw out. One Saturday, I was in the middle of a 3-hour trek when I saw an optometrist's. My glasses were old. I was sick of them. My eyes hadn't been checked for years. A tall, solid young man with a beard picked out some frames and placed them on a wooden box lined with black velvet. The Fruju was quite interested in all this. The Fruju had planned to go to a budget eyewear place but somehow she was here, in this boutique shop. One pair of glasses was especially appealing. The imaginative possibilities of self-invention is the designer's promise! Several months later, I picked up my new glasses and the optomistrist told me that the lenses had been made in Japan 'by the company that made the lenses for the James Webb telescope'. Shock, delight, wonder...bragging rights! I could see the Japanese characters on the small packets that had once held my lenses. I put my glasses on and looked out onto the street. Although everything was just the same – the cafes, the cars, the queue outside the gelato shop – through my new lenses, the street sparkled.

This book is my third one about Taranaki. Before I wrote *Te Motunui Epa*, I looked at the past mostly through the lens supplied by Western academic training in the Western academic discipline of history. I liked this lens. It was powerful. I began my academic training, in Australia, in the late 1990s at the tail end of postmodernism, and I so enjoyed encountering some of the greats of Western thinking: Foucault, Barthes, Kuhn, Berger, Clifford, Dening, Clendinnen, Joan Scott.

I also loved reading the sub-altern thinkers from India who were challenging the Euro-centric nature of Western humanities scholars, people like Dipesh Chakrabarty, Homi Bhaba, Appadurai, Amin and Said and the scholars who were working on the newer field of 'memory studies', Schama, Novick, Nora, Healy and more.

In 2001, I embarked on my PhD about the historiography of Parihaka, supervised by Andrew Markus (Jewish-Australian) and Bain Attwood (Pākehā Australian) and then by Dr Maria

Nugent (Anglo-Australian). I was studying what Māori and Pākehā people had said about the 1881 invasion and why. I sought out Māori thinkers and sources and read the work of scholars such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Linda's dad Sidney Mead, Aroha Harris, Te Maire Tau, Paul Tapsell, Ranginui Walker, Te Miringa Hohaia, Danny Keenan, Ruakere Hond, Dion Tuuta, Ruka Broughton and the work of Arini Loader, Alice Te Punga Somerville and Melissa Matutina Williams, all colleagues from Te Pouhere Kōrero. And while I'm on that topic I want to mihi to Paul Diamond – Paul is shortlisted for the Ockham National Book Awards, for his book *Downfall*.

I also read all the big-name Pākehā historians as well.

I sought out Taranaki kaumātua, such as Te Huirangi Waikerepuru and Te Miringa Hohaia, to debate the ideas I was trying out.

My training was rigorous and I am grateful for those five years of reading, research, debate and writing about one topic and one topic only – Parihaka.

I had an ambition to write history that honoured different ways of seeing but I did not have the confidence, maturity, skill or self knowledge to do so. Instead, I was full of questions. I was swamped by them.

I recall being puzzled by the notions that to do Māori history (or Indigenous history) a historian had to do oral history. There were no Indigenous historians at Monash University then. It was as if the bodies (and minds) of Indigenous people had to supply the knowledge that was missing from the primary sources created by a colonisaing state and its agenices. Oral history added an extra bit of flavour – like tomoato sauce on chippies – but it didn't change the nature of the dish. Memory was unreliable. Stories changed over time. The 'truth', the best evidence, was still the kind that existed on paper. Words.

A further complication is that Indigenous oral history and tradition, in New Zealand and elsewhere, has been altered, shall we say, by colonisation. The Western academic historical fantasy still seems to be that traditional knowledge can be unlocked if only the scholar finds that right Indigenous body. The right Indigenous body is like a safe. If you have the code – which might be te reo, or it might be whakapapa or it might be research funding and the promise of collaboration or even just a nice smile and pleasant personality – then you can open the safe. Inside, is a treasure trove of traditional knowledge, preserved intact, free from the contamination of war, confiscation, language suppression, forced removals, racism, poverty and all the other unpleasantness that tore whānau, hapū and iwi apart.

In some parts of New Zealand, the notches on the tokotoko stick remain intact and a skilled hand can trace knowledge backwards and forwards, recalling events and people from hundreds of years ago but in other places, like Taranaki, where many of us are from, the wrungs of the ladder were shattered by nearly 100 years of war, beginning with the 'Musket Wars' of the early 19th century and continuing on, unabated, until the 1881 invasion of Parihaka and the military occupation that followed.

In 2010, my mentor and intellectual partner Matua Mahara Okeroa launched my first book, *The Parihaka Album: Lest We Forget*, not far from here – at the Railway Social Hall. That was

how we met. In that book, I skirted around some of the confusion I had about methods of making history and the problems of trying to encompass Māori ideas about knowledge and evidence with the Pākehā ones of my university training. My Pākehā supervisors had encouraged me to 'collect' oral histories from people who lived at Parihaka, as a sort of supplement to the written record. Eager and naive, I had thought that was a good idea too. I visited during Matariki, mid-winter, the time when uri return to Parihaka with photos of loved ones who have passed away in the previous year.

As I wrote in the introduction to *The Parihaka Album*: 'I had a tape recorder, cassettes and spare batteries in my bag, and a pile of consent forms in a folder, pieces of paper that were supposed to reassure all parties concerned that my work was ethical...'

'I planned to collect oral histories from Parihaka residents, histories that would enrich, contradict or unsettle the largely Pākehā-created written record about the place,' I wrote of my visit to Parihaka in 2002. 'I planned to do this in two or three days (in between breastfeeding a sick baby) and then I drive back to Wellington and, from there, fly back to Melbourne.'

SMH as that daughter would say now. Shake my head!

My second Taranaki book, *Ko Taranaki Te Maunga*, was published in 2018 and Matua Mahara and I spoke about it in an event at the National Library on 5 November 2018. With this short book, I had started to widen my perspective. Listening to Matua speak over this period, I learned about the immediate aftermath of te pahuatanga on uri of Parihaka, the crushing impact of poverty and shame, the struggle to keep going and the different views about how to proceed in the new world, the one run by Pākehā. Some old people thought it was best to forget. They did not want to talk about the past, the pain, the fighting. I was able to begin to understand the impact of te pāhutanga and the expansion of Wellington on my own, immediate whānau as well.

I had new skills and knowledge to bring to *Ko Taranaki Te Maunga*. I had spent almost 3 years curating the archive of Australian second-wave feminist, Germaine Greer, a collection held at the University of Melbourne Archives. In this job, I worked alongside archivists, in a major collecting archive, and I learned so much from these colleagues, mostly women. Our desks were in the same building as the records themselves. Those rows of boxes seemed alive to me. They hummed with latent energy. Lawyers, care leavers, Yolngu archivists from the North of Australia, radical lesbian separatist feminists, these were some of the people who visited the archives and set the records alight (not literally, obviously!)

That job gave me a much more sophisticated understanding of the power of archival records as living documents with incredible lifeforce and the ability to shape events and change lives in the here and now. Digitised newspaper articles published on Papers Past revealed that our koro, Taare Warahi (Charles Wallace), had been a translator or interpreter at Parihaka. Some of the words I read when I was doing my PhD research were actually created by my tūpuna!

The diaries of Rigby Allan, a long-time director of Taranaki Museum, revealed new information about the role of Matua Mahara's paternal grandmother as Te Whiti's archivist, if

you like, the one given the responsibility of recording all of the great leader's haka and poi. Most important of all, I had appraised my father, Leo's, remaining personal papers in the days immediately after his tangi and had a flash of insight about the gift of keeping records safe and not throwing them away. This is what I wrote about the carefully preserved Māori Land Court records, many of which documented our whānau's alienation from land, in Taranaki and at Te Aro (Wellington) that had been promised to us 'in perpetuity', what a big promise to make and one that has been broken all over New Zealand.

I summed up the feeling like this: 'Alone in that hot little apartment, I realised that through keeping these records, my grandmothers and father had expressed a deep love not just for me and all their other uri but also for their own tūpuna, even if they did not know their names and where they came from.'

So, by the time I began work on *Te Motunui Epa*, my mindset had shifted. I don't work in a university, archive, gallery or museum. Rather, I support myself and my family by paid employment as a speechwriter in the Victorian public service in Melbourne. In 2019, I received $NZ37,000 in grants from the Ministry for Culture and Heritage and the Judith Binney Trust. This sum allowed me to take 10 months unpaid leave from work. (In March 2021, I had to return to my paid employment, 4 days a week as a speechwriter at Dept of Education, so the rest of this book was funded by that job and written on the weekends and Mondays. I mention this because the economics of writing a book are mostly unremarked upon but they are very important part of the story!)

The Ministry for Culture and Heritage funding was a 'History grant'. The Judith Binney writing award was for 'a project in New Zealand history or related fields'. But what was history? What did that word mean? Public history. Professional history. Academic history. Treaty history. Māori history. Taranaki history. I didn't know what history was anymore.

The Covid-19 pandemic finally pushed me over the edge into a different way of thinking, writing and narrating history. With the borders of New Zealand closed, even to New Zealanders, even to Māori New Zealanders, I was not able to return here, as planned, in 2020 and 2021 to research this book. The only trip I could take was internal. The five members of my household – hubby and three teenaged daugthers – were buried alive by curfews, lockdowns, boredom and fear. I actually found it quite easy to imagine how the carvings felt when they were locked up at Geneva Freeport for decades, or when they were nailed into boxes and shipped around the world. The sun came up each morning but I was often underground, swamped and alone. I would wake up and feel a terrible tension buzzing through my body. Perhaps I would never be able to return to New Zealand? Perhaps I would never see my mother again?

Dreams and fantasies were useless in this time.

There was no ultimate repository of Taranaki knowledge. There was no safe. No all-knowing kaumatua or kuia. But there was a pātaka! Or, at least, there was a back wall of one. And this pātaka would be my source of nourishment and my guide.

[Kia ora anō listeners. Rachel is sharing a photo of an ipu made by Manos Nathan titled ‘Te Aue o Te Ātiawa’. This ipu was gifted to the Ortiz whānau on behalf of all Māori artists. Garry Nicholas presented the ipu to the Ortiz children in Geneva.]

Matua Mahara and I had often discussed the meaning of the phrase ‘ka utu te kino ki te pai’. The bad will be repaid by the good. Matua told me that the old people used to say this to rangatahi at Parihaka, in those hard years of the 1950s and 1960s and beyond. Versions of this phrase – or idea – are contained in Taranaki waiata, such as ‘Te Whakamā’, and in whaikōrero from Parihaka. It is also used in the extremely beautiful conclusion of Te Kawenata ō Rongo, the Deed of Reconciliation that Parihaka made with the Crown in 2017. I am aware that this idea of flipping the script, repaying the bad with the good, is contained in the kōrero of many other iwi. I recall discussing these ideas with Pou Temara at a wānanga at Waikato University in 2010.

These are the words that end my book.

On one level, it’s a Pollyanna statement. A glass-half full. A statement that maybe even verges on toxic positivity. But it is also an instruction. To achieve utu, to rebalance the relationships that were – and still are – catastrophically upended by colonisation, required a new approach to life, whatever your calling might be. My calling is to be a writer, a historian, as hard as this task might be. And it is very hard!

As a historian, ‘ka utu te kino ki te pai’ was an instruction to think differently. How would the evidence I had gathered appear if I viewed it through the lens of ongoing and unbroken Taranaki soverigenty? What story would I tell if I decided to make the main character Taranaki – represented, in this book, by the five carved panels – not the Crown, its agents, or the art seller, not the art dealer or the art collector, not the Minister of Treaty Settlements? What would happen if I let the carvings commentate on events as they unfolded?

The pandemic had buried my dreams and ambitions – as it did for countless other artists and writers – but perhaps it was still possible to speak from the underground, as these carvings had spoken from the underground, and create a different kind of story, one focused on the good things rather than the bad.

[Kia ora anō listeners. Rachel is sharing an image of a feather raukura carved from whalebone by Rangi Kipa. This taonga was made by Rangi at the request of kaumatua Mahau Waru. Mahau presented this taonga to the Ortiz whānau on behalf of the uri of Ngāti Rāhiri.]

By choosing this approach, I could bury the wars of the nineteenth century and the hardships and dislocations that followed. Instead, I could focus on the ongoing mana motuhake of Taranaki, a power and authority embodied in these magnificent carvings.

Sometimes it was easy to be positive. As Matua Mahara said at the book launch, the Crown’s efforts to retrieve our taonga are truly admirable. It is wonderful to dwell in that zone of good vibes, of our Treaty partner actually behaving like a Treaty partner, of bi-partisan, intergenerational work to right a wrong and bring the carvings home. As a public servant

myself, I am deeply impressed by what New Zealand public servants achieved here, of the hard work and tenacity they displayed!

Although the old days and the old world are part of the book, the focus of the narrative is things that occured between 1971 and 2015.

Many of the things that occurred in this period were not good at all. First up, there is the small matter of the identity of the man who decided to sell the carvings to the highest bidder. Then there is the smuggler. Then there is the collector. Then there is the auctioneer. Back home, there was the Crown's disregard for Māori people and expertise, including the expertise of Māori public servants, in its first efforts to retrieve the taonga (1978-1984) and the belated understanding that the Crown did not own the land in which the taonga slept. Māori people did. Therefore, Māori people would probably have a far better chance of winning legal action against Ortiz than the Crown. Then, when Matua Mahara was an Associate Minister of Arts and Culture in Helen Clark's Labour government, the Crown failed to consult its own memory bank as a refresher of previous efforts, including the proposed legal action that involved Matua's mother Ngahina Okeroa.

In 2014, the Crown kept its final repatriation efforts, including the delegation to Geneva, a secret from Te Ātiawa and Ngāti Rāhiri as well. A final indignity was a press release that referred to the panels as being part of the cultural redress part of the Treaty settlement. Te Ātiawa negotiator Liana Poutu wrote an urgent email to the Ministry of Justice: 'I would like some clarification and direction on what it is we are supposed to say to our people given we are in the middle of a ratification process that doesn't disclose or identify this element of redress.'

The mind boggles, it truly does!

[Kia ora anō listeners. Rachel is sharing an image of an artwork by Hemi Sundgren. This work is carved in swamp kauri in the shape of a cream can, the relief referencing the serpentine figures depicted on the Motunui Epa.]

But I made a decision not to focus on all of the above. I would not edit it out or gloss it over but these negatives would not be allowed to over-rule a story of Taranaki power, beauty, influence and success. As befits a book about a pātaka, this would be a story of nourishment, abundance, manaakitanga, growth and possibility not a tale of sorrow, loss, anger and theft.

I have been educated so well by these carvings. I love the fact that the back wall of the pātaka was a mash-up, an assemblage of panels carved at different times. I love the fact that this cobbling together enhanced rather than diminished the mana of the whole. I love that the carvings were made by stone tools and by steel ones. I love the way you can not see a single tūpuna in the panels – only a collective and a pretty crazy one at that!

When I gaze at a photograph of these taonga I see a seething assembly of tūpuna, a bunch of busybodies whose eyes gaze in every direction. They put their feet in their mouths. Their hands also emerge from mouths and heads, to form a chain of connection the runs up and down and across the wood. The interconnected shapes are a paradox. There are individuals reborn here in the wood but there is also a collective. No one stands alone. The boundaries

are blurred between one figure and the next. Head, body, feet, that would be boring. Instead, eyes peep out where you might expect legs. A tongue is as wide as a thigh. A forehead is the summit of a mountain.

As an uri of Taranaki, these carvings give me a message about the interconnectedness of all things. They make me think of movement, hunger, growth, possibility and of the link between individual and collective effort.

I sometimes bemoan the work I do for money, writing speeches for people I have never met – Ministers in the Victorian Parliament – yet this work gave me the skills I needed to put words into the mouths of these carvings.

I sometimes bemoan living in Australia yet that is where I am because that is where my children are. In the first 7 years of my life, I lived in 9 different houses in 5 different towns or cities in New Zealand and Australia. All of our lives were shaped around the training, career and political activism of Dad, a paediatrician. His needs and his career ruled. Like it or lump it. I wanted something different for my children so I have stayed put in Melbourne. Isn't it funny, then, that I was drawn to a story of taonga who also lived away from home for many decades?

In working with these carvings and their contemporary hīkoi, I drew on all the facets of my life and used every scrap of knowledge and insight I could find. I drew on Western academic training and mātauranga Māori ways of knowing. Of course there are flaws and failings in my attempts at synthesis and in my credentials as a Māori historian. Yes, it would be ideal if I spoke beautiful Māori, if I was knowledgable about carving traditions past and present, if I understood more about trees and swamps and soil and if actually lived in New Zealand but I have learned that if you wait for ideal conditions to emerge – or tell yourself you can only do something when you've passed many certain tests – then you will be frozen forever. The Indigenous body I sought was, ultimately, my own.

Questions and Answers section of the event:

Question 1

I just really, really loved your book. One of the things I loved most about it was the act of creativity, and for you to give voice to the epa and how brave that felt, reading it. And how utterly ready we are to hear that way of writing. I'm really interested in the stepping into that creativity, to create that agency- rather than holding back. Like you say- "I could hold back and I could tell this this history", but actually you're really ready. And you know, just even you talking about the stars, the image of when the epa is unearthed and their eyes met the sky again- so gorgeous. I just want to hear more about that.

Rachel Buchanan

Yeah, well, thank you for your question. Thanks for coming with your kids. It's really awesome. I appreciate it. Yeah, I think it's another example of, you know, 'ka utu te kino ki te pai'- that the COVID 19 pandemic was actually really good for me as a writer. That that sense of being so isolated and really sort of given up hope on a lot of things actually helped me.

Because I just thought probably no one will read this and probably it won't be published and probably Bridget Williams Books (there's no one here from Bridget Williams Books), but they are quite a traditional high-end publisher that I really respect the beautiful books they make. They're very scholarly, you know, they published Judith Binney and Vincent O'Malley and many of you will have read *Tangata Whenua,* which is an amazing encyclopaedia, it's a taonga.

And so I didn't really know whether they would, whether they would let it through the gates sort of thing. But I just thought, I just don't care anymore. Of course, I care about what I'm doing. But I just thought I don't care about trying to do the right thing all the time. And you know, I'm not an academic anymore. So it wasn't like I was in a box where I had to do things a certain way.

But I thought I didn't really want to put myself in the book- I was a bit bored of that. But of course, I couldn't resist the urge to commentate. So I had this thought I'd let the carvings make some little asides or just, let's see what would happen. Almost like, I don't know if this is coming to mind, I don't mean any disrespect, but, The Muppet Show, for those of you a certain age, the old men sort of making little comments. It was almost like kaumātua, the little jokes and crack ups. But then when I actually wrote a chapter which was narrated inside the Freeport- that chapter didn't make it- bits of it went everywhere else. But that's when I really started getting into it and was like, "Okay, what would that be like? What would it have been like in that place?" It [the Freeport] is a really shocking facility in Geneva, the tax-free haven with 1000s of artworks from around the world, that wealthy collectors store there to accumulate money. I mean, it's despicable. When you think of that place, then imagine what it must be like being imprisoned in there, and so I started doing that.

And then those films I mentioned by Eruera Nia, I watched them a lot. And I thought, that the voice of those Taranaki kuia including Mahara's mother, I felt that the simplicity of the statements was really powerful. And I felt that that was appropriate. And obviously, I talked with Matua about it. And we discussed (this is all on Zoom or phone) what the words were, what did he think his mother meant? Then we went further and discuss what he thought about it.

So, a lot of the book, if you look at the footnotes, I've been careful to really acknowledge that massive contribution from him. And from his mother. It was incredible to be having that dialogue because it was like he was in dialogue with his mum, too. It was just amazing. So that was a big part of it.

Question 2

Kia ora Rachel, I just wanted to come in on the design of the book. It's just so beautiful. And I wanted to know if there's any meaning behind the choice of the baby blue on the cover, because it's just so iconic in itself.

Rachel Buchanan

Thanks for asking that question. Because there were many debates about the cover. And yes, there were many hard discussions right to the end of the process of getting this ready for press. And there were definitely people at Bridget Williams that wanted something much darker. I was absolutely determined. I said, "you cannot have a black background with this taonga on it I'm not having it". Like

some sort of disembodied sacred voodoo thing". I said "no, I'm not having it". I was really just not going to budge on it. And there was for a while a plan to have the [hardback cover] (it's printed with these records, and I really love it), it was going to be a two-thirds jacket. So you'd have the record showing through. And I thought that was pretty cool. But then, we went off that idea. So there was a lot of thought in the design.

Now that you've asked about it. I would like to point out a few things- so the book is dedicated to the memory of Jacob Myhre, our cousin who passed away in Geneva, in 2021. He died in Geneva where the carvings were all that time. And these open spirals that are there- text break through the book- are from a painting by John Baxter. John Baxter is the son of JC Sturm, whose poem opens the book. So the book opens with John, and our cousin and then a poem by JC Sturm, which is just an absolute masterpiece, and it was so amazing to have permission to use that to open the book. And then so that poem is in English with a few Māori words, but the book closes with 'Kupu Whakakapi', composed by my sister, Hana, in Māori.

So there's a sort of story in there too- in the design of the book around regeneration and growth within our own whanau. And then the images in there, the artists images are all Taranaki artists (barring Brett Graham, but we've sort of he can be one of us, we''ll let him.) So that's also all contemporary Taranaki artists, and that's wanting to say that there's a lineage, you know, from the Epa, all the way through.

Question 3

Kia ora Rachel, I just wanted to connect off the question, which was about the impact of the reader reviews that came in an earlier draft of the book that helped to open up that new approach as well. (It's an insider question whanau- I'm Hana, Rachel's sister and had the privilege of working closely with her). But I can hear the intent of some of the questions about how Rachel got to the place of what happened with the tipuna so maybe a bit of korero around what you alluded to with this indigenous body, but you know, the code around maturanga, and who holds it and where it comes from?

Rachel Buchanan

Yeah, so thanks for that question, Hana. So I wrote the first, like about five chapters of this book in 2020, and then sent them to Bridget Williams Books, and their processes that they would then get scholarly peer reviewers of that their proposal and the work in progress. And I was fortunate to have three peer reviewers all women, all of women of colour. So one was named and two were anonymous. And two of the reader reports were extremely hard to read. Extremely painful is what I would described it as so, you know. One of the reports was saying "where was the knowledge in the book, where was the information on the whakapapa of the carvings? The names of the rangatira and other tupuna reborn there? The iwi and hapu narratives about the time these carvings were made? Iwi and hapu narratives of the time they were placed in the swamp? Iwi and hapu narratives of the 19th century?" on and on. I was really upset because I was really being ticked off. Okay, fair enough, that's good. Robust exchange is part of it. And you know, "who was I, sort of thing, who was to write it, had I spoken to anyone, and stuff like that. But then, once I talked to Mahara, and Hana and John Baxter, and we made a decision. Because I said "where's the safe? Who was it? Is there something? Am I missing something here? Is there some person, some magical person that can unlock all these demands?" And then we just decided that no, we would take the approach. So the preface, it's slightly changed from what the original one was, but it sort of "We don't have answers to your questions. And

we don't know. And knowledge was lost. And we're going to own the fact that knowledge was lost because Taranaki was a disaster zone".

Rachel Buchanan
And, you know, on the weekend at the Featherston Booktown [Festival], it was a really interesting experience. There was a panel on Parihaka, which was incredible. But on the Sunday there was a panel on JC Sturm- her collective works are coming out later in the year. And Professor Paul Miller read out a fragment of unpublished work that JC Sturm had written and she was adopted into a family that were a Maori father and a Pakeha mother, the Sturms. And Jackie was suffering a lot of racist abuse at school. So I think it's easy for New Zealanders and Australians to forget that there was deep, deep racism that impacted every aspect of Māori people's lives, every aspect, so she came home very upset and didn't want to go to school. And her mum was like, said to her husband, who was Māori …said 'what can we do'? And Jacquie Sturm, as an adult, wrote a poem, it is wrenching, and it's in the mind of her father, a brown man who had become totally 'white acting' to survive. He was successful, he ran his own shop, he was supporting his family, he was respected in town, he was sort of a member of Rotary. But once in a blue moon, a relative would come to town, and would "Tena koe" and he would sort of nod but look away. And, I feel that some of those stories are forgotten about that that actually is what happened here.

And for my sister, Hana, or our cousin Jacob to be able to regain the Māori language, that is a journey of beyond climbing Everest. Anyway, I could go on about that, I won't say any more about that. But those reader reports ultimately, were really positive. They actually, I think, spurred us all on and spurred me on to write a much better book, a more honest book, a more courageous book that's not sort of pretending all these all this knowledge but I'm just not telling you. And I encourage if there are relatives and others who want to talk about the names of people reborn in the panels, let's have that conversation. But to me, that wasn't the most important thing. We decided that because you acknowledged the huge loss of knowledge doesn't mean that new knowledge can't be created. And that doesn't mean there's not still so much there. So that's the paradox I guess that is the engine of the book. It's a vulnerable position.

Question 4
I liked in your book how you spoke about utu and that price that was paid for it was almost seen as how we got the panels back. And I was just wondering what your whakaaro was on the whole debate on whether we should be entering the private market to return taonga or not?

Rachel Buchanan
Yeah, that's a really tough one. I mean, I liked the commentary, I read from Swiss academics in Geneva, who had written, it's a really good scholarly paper about this case, because it's the efforts to get the epa back have become part of international case law. And you know, they're referred to quite often. And they said that, you know, paying, paying to retrieve stolen taonga is akin to a ransom, or it's paying a thief to get your car back. Like there was that one comment and the records the pakeha, Bob [?] saying, I'll be blowed if I pay the bloke who stole my car to get it back. So it clearly it is sort of like that. And it was a very high price that the New Zealand government ultimately paid $4.6 million is a lot of money. But I don't think there was any other way. There was no other way without that money being paid. Because I there was no indication... I got there was thousands of pages of records from Te Arawhiti from OIA requests. And some of it was redacted. But there was no indication that the family in Geneva were going to donate the carvings back. No way. Absolutely not. Which I think they should

have done. But okay, I'm not them. It was a negotiation. It's a really challenging one, because no government has the money to, in the private market, buy back all the things that have been taken. I'm really pleased that it did happen in this instance. And it was actually as part of the rewriting on the book, I did do some more work and tracked down Robert Blakely, the founder of Sotheby's Australia and I found that really fascinating, for the second half of the book that private secret world of the art dealer. I really was really happy to get into that, because I think we know a little bit about museums now, but the art world is very, very opaque.

Question 5

Kia ora Rachel, I do have a comment [sent in from a listener] from Zoom: "Kia ora Rachel- Stephanie Lash here. As an archivist, it was so cool to read your korero about the records about the epa being a taonga too. Could you tell us a bit about what it was like trying to extract the information you needed from archives for your research? What do you think we in the archival profession can do to be of more help to researchers have an easier time?"

Rachel Buchanan

Yes, well, I think archives- it's not just Archives New Zealand, but archives around the world- are built to be inaccessible. And I used to joke when I was at University of Melbourne Archives that archivists were sort of happiest when there was no one in there, that they were built for no one, nobody and nothing in any human being entering there was somehow "Whoa, what's going to happen?"

Well, for a start, the interface is impossible to navigate. So Archway, and now there's a new one, which I think has failed, but its really, really hard to search. So if you think I'm someone with a PhD, and my first career was in journalism, and I did a lot of investigative journalism, if I find it difficult, as a English-speaking person who is educated at the highest level, then what hope do people have who might have left school early, who don't speak English, who are actually scared of going into an institution like that, because it's pack your bag in a locker, you've got to use a pencil, you know, you can't talk. And then once, then the whole thing of having to be in a certain place to read the records, then the expense of getting them digitized. So because I couldn't come back, I did get some records digitized.

Now, Taranaki Whānaui Treaty settlement included a clause that is meant to be the Crown working in partnership with us, because we are the landlords of this land. We're meant to have a partnership, which you would hope would mean when a descendant of Taranaki Whānaui or one of the rangatira, living around this harbour needed something that it would be provided for free. No, I had to invoke everything I could, and in the end still paid $500 or $600. Now, $500 or $600 is a prohibitive expense for almost everyone, including me. So that's one thing cost, interface, scariness of the building, descriptors and search terms.

So "Ortiz" is the number one term that's linked with the taonga. So that is something that could be fixed right away, please do not describe our taonga our things with the names of people who have committed violence against us. You can't find the records about the epa by putting in maybe "Taranaki Pataka Panels"- I just used to type in "Ortiz". So that's not good. And then, you know- I could really, really go on and on, then there's the sort of special access if you have to write a little special letter, a begging letter saying why you can have access to something.

I thank the archivists who I worked with, and I thank the Ministry of Culture and Heritage for allowing me to access the records from the London filing cabinets. They were individually really helpful, but it's an extremely exclusionary process. Crown Law, for example- I got access to those records at Crown

Law, but that involved going to a building, several rooms, then someone had to sit in invigilate, then I had to beg to get access to a photocopier. I mean, it's really, really hard. And I've got a PhD.

So, I think it's a major issue. And in terms of access for whanau and people from Ngati Rahiri, say, who might want to actually look at these records- well, where do we start? At the end of the book, you know, I'd really love it if there's some sort of digital repatriation, and that the records could somehow be reunited with the taonga at Puke Ariki. By the way their file about the epa is about five documents. So if you went in to Puke Ariki as an uri and said, "Can I have a look, I want to see something about my nanny who was one of the people who was going to sue Ortiz, the representative owners"- there's nothing. And to get to that material was just so many steps. And the way that series are described, the kind of agency level... Yeah, sorry.

Matariki Williams:
Well now, those people who would go to the archive can go to your book, Rachel. Because within there, there's all of the threads to all of the archives and all of the places because of the immense nature of the work that you've done.