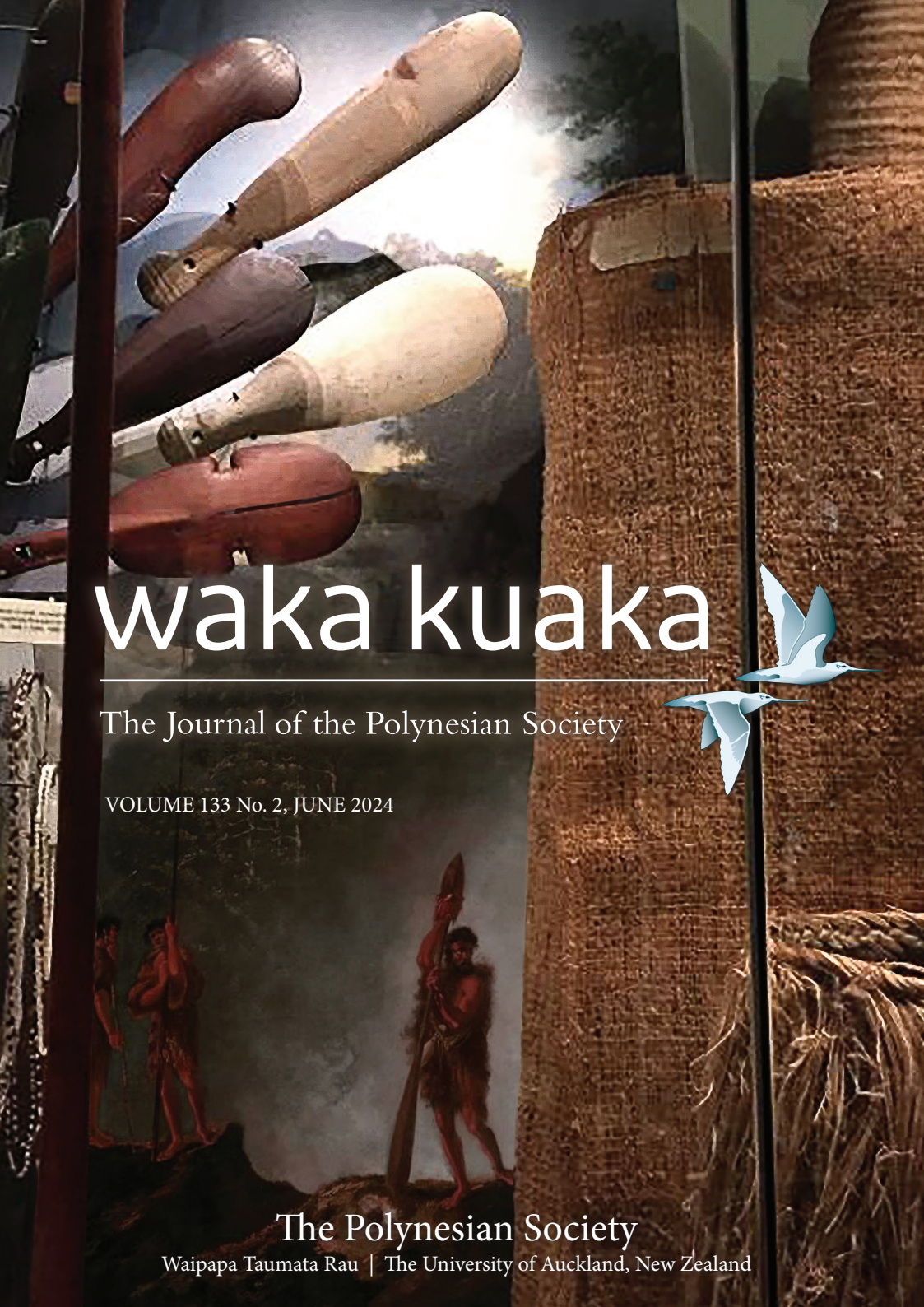




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RISEBOROUGH, Hazel: *Days of Darkness: Taranaki, 1878–1884*. 3rd edition. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2023. 300 pp., bib., index, notes. NZ\$49.99 (softcover).

AMY STEWART

Tāmaki Paenga Hira | Auckland War Memorial Museum

Hazel Riseborough's *Days of Darkness: Taranaki, 1878–1884* is an incisive, meticulously researched account of the build-up to and aftermath of the invasion of Parihaka, in Aotearoa New Zealand, in 1881. Most importantly, at 234 core pages it is a well-edited and highly readable account, punctuated by the author's shrewd summaries and, occasionally, her acerbic commentary. Recounting the suppression of official documents, for example, Riseborough remarks that "[t]he ministers' memories a year or two later were as convenient as their consciences at the time" (p. 166).

Riseborough was a wool classer and agricultural researcher as well as a historian and lecturer. The text is based on her PhD thesis, completed in 1987 and originally titled "Policies and Prophets: Aspects of Government Native Policy in Taranaki, 1878–1884". In his obituary for her published by *Stuff*, fellow historian Danny Keenan (Ngāti Te Whiti, Te Āti Awa) noted that Riseborough chose her topic after attending the 1981 centenary of the Parihaka invasion. Incensed by the loose facts cited by Pākehā (New Zealand European) speakers and frustrated by the one-dimensional version of events, her remedy was to produce a text with the documentary thoroughness of pre-trial legal discovery. To create a text dense with quotations but not made heavy by them, Riseborough sorts these receipts—taken from legislation, parliamentary debates, telegrams, Crown correspondence and newspapers—and arranges them into a timeline that is not just comprehensible but dramatic too. The episode describing the passage of the government's infamous proclamation-ultimatum hours before then-governor Arthur Hamilton Gordon's return from Fiji has all the pace and tension of a TV drama (pp. 160–80).

This 2023 edition, published two years after Riseborough's death, is bookended by a new introduction from the Parihaka community at the front, and the preface to the 1989 edition and the introduction to the 2002 edition at the back. All the better to trace the utility of this book through the changing—or is that unchanging?—times. Her 2002 introduction sets her goal out in more detail: “In late 1984 when I began the study on which this book is based, I hoped that in writing about government action that impinged on the people of Parihaka in the 1880s, I might forge a weapon that those of the 1980s could wield in presenting yet another petition to Parliament in their endless search for justice” (p. 239). She succeeded in that aim, but not before earning herself a degree of censure.

The 2023 introduction ends with a *tautoko* (expression of appreciation) from the community: “Ka tā Hazel e kī nei, kia kaua māna ngā kōrero a te iwi Māori e tātari, e tuhituhi. Mā ngā uri, mā ngā reanga e tuhi” (Hazel has resolutely maintained that it is not her role to analyse and communicate tribal histories. These are for descendants and generations to write) (p. xiv). Riseborough was Pākehā, and it was her decision (p. 235) to leave certain stories to “those who have a right to tell [them]” that earned her the rebuke of some of her prominent peers. In their respective contemporaneous reviews, both Dame Judith Binney (1989: 202) and Ian Wards (1990: 74) regretted Riseborough's position, and they both mischaracterised her very deliberate stance as “inhibition”. Wards went further, alleging a lack of objectivity, reminding Riseborough of the challenges that faced the settlers of “forming stable governments” and, in a tone that is difficult not to read as mocking, asks whether “Dr Riseborough made her goodies, all Maori, too good and her baddies, all politicians and those in government service, too bad?” (1990: 74).

In his essay “How Racism Shaped My Critical Eye”, British journalist and professor Gary Younge says he doesn't “believe in objectivity”; growing up black in 1970s Stevenage taught him to doubt any official narrative. He writes, “The emotional labour of empathy, as always, fell primarily to those of us with the least power. We had to see things from other people's point of view, even if we didn't like them, because otherwise it was impossible to fathom what was going on” (Younge 2023: n.d.). At times, *Days of Darkness* becomes a bit like a broken record, but the fault is not with Riseborough; it's with history. The evidence of government representatives' opportunism, inconsistency, hysteria and reluctance to adhere even to their own rules is relentless (for example, in his haste to throw the ploughmen in jail, native minister John Bryce declared that the “Magna Carta and *habeas corpus* were ‘mere legal technicalities’” (p. 92). What makes *Days of Darkness* so valuable is that Riseborough *does* give credit where it is due. Gordon, Bell, Grey and a handful of reporters all have their protestations noted in

Riseborough's record. But what she refrains from doing is contextualising the government's duplicity to the point of equivocation—a common mode of history written by victors. It is not editorialising to square the constancy of Te Whiti against the scheming of Bryce and the government. Te Whiti's "words of 1881 were those of 1871" (p. 158).

There is a phrase Riseborough scatters through *Days of Darkness* that is also the title of her last chapter: "It was a question of mana [spiritual power, prestige]." Her thesis is that Europeans simply could and would not understand or acknowledge mana tangata (the authority of the people). "Victorian notions of racial and cultural superiority meant that a partnership between Māori and European was an impossibility: it was domination or nothing" (p. 224). In her 1989 preface Riseborough wrote, "The present is offspring of the past and the story [of Parihaka] needed re-examining a hundred years later, as a reminder of the issues which lie behind today's attitudes and actions" (p. 237). In these present dark days, it's a story that bears rereading.

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