



ISSN 2754-5547

<https://doi.org/10.52230/JVON5553>

Karen Nairn, Judith Sligo, Carisa R. Showden, Kyle R. Mathews, Joanna Kidman, *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa*

Ellen Tapsell

To cite this book review: Karen Nairn, Judith Sligo, Carisa R. Showden, Kyle R. Mathews, Joanna Kidman, *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* by Ellen Tapsell, *Journal of Australian, Canadian, and Aotearoa New Zealand Studies* 4 (August 2024): 293-294, <https://doi.org/10.52230/PGCI3010>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

Karen Nairn, Judith Sligo, Carisa R. Showden, Kyle R. Mathews, Joanna Kidman, *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022), 325pp. Paperback. NZ\$39.99. ISBN: 978-1-9900-4668-1.

Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa offers an interesting exploration of six distinct activist groups in Aotearoa New Zealand during a specific period. These groups include Protect Ihumātao, JustSpeak, ActionStation, InsideOUT Kōaro, Thursdays in Black (University of Auckland), and Generation Zero Auckland.

The authors sought to understand why young people are inspired to act and shape the future despite the challenges they may face in the present. The study spanned from 2018 to 2021, during which the authors actively participated in meetings, campaign events, followed social media, attended webinars, and conducted interviews with each group.

While the stories, experiences, and realities of these groups and their members are unique, they are also interconnected through their relationships with the communities and the lands of Aotearoa. As a reader, gaining insights into the activist groups, both as collectives and through personal reflections from interviewees, was valuable. While each group faced its share of struggles and difficulties, there were also numerous accomplishments and successes to learn from.

The book consistently emphasises the significance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi relationships, responsibilities, and obligations. For instance, Protect Ihumātao is led by mana whenua members who were spurred into action because 'Te Tiriti o Waitangi was not upheld' (p. 31).

The other five activist groups also recognised the importance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi to their specific social justice movements. InsideOUT Kōaro members discussed their ongoing engagement with Te Tiriti and te ao Māori as a 'constant journey' (p.130), highlighting the vital role of building relationships with Māori. However, while most of the interviewed groups aspired to be tangata Tiriti or Te Tiriti compliant in their work, it was not always clear how they defined and fulfilled these roles and obligations.

Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa highlights that for many groups and organisations across Aotearoa, working towards better Te Tiriti o Waitangi relationships is a crucial part of transforming our society. Yet, when these groups are predominantly Pākehā or tangata Tiriti, as reflected in this activist study (68 out of 112 interviewees), there is a need for deeper relationships, critical reflection, learning, and action.

Another theme explored in *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* is the challenge of managing activist burnout. The book delves into the emotional toll this work can take on those involved. This emotional aspect is particularly evident in the book's examination of relationships (to identity, land, people, community, place, and issues) and how they shape and motivate activists. Some interviewees expressed their involvement in activism as a response to the belief that their very existence was political, feeling compelled to participate in driving change. Others were motivated by the involvement of their friends, while many cared deeply about the issues and the pursuit of a fairer and more equitable Aotearoa.

It was heartening to hear from all activist groups that, despite the emotional and overwhelming aspects of this work, they held hope for the future. This hope extended to various causes, such as climate change, creating safer communities for Takatāpui and LGBTIQ+, Indigenous rights, and decolonisation, or addressing sexual assault.

Yet, one of the key reflections prompted by *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* led me beyond the book's specific context. It made me wonder: who, what, and how is activism counted? I was reminded of individuals and communities, both young and old, who may not be affiliated with any specific 'activist' group in official capacities or paid positions. Nevertheless, day after day, they persistently challenge the status quo. How can we document and appreciate the contributions of these people whose care and emotional labour have driven significant changes in our society?

In summary, *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* not only instilled hope in me but also reinforced the idea that we all need to cultivate strong, caring relationships with those around us. We must be open to learning from others, willing to challenge ourselves and our communities, and courageous in our pursuit of what we believe in.

It is consistently inspiring to witness people in Aotearoa coming together to advocate for justice and to harbor hope and joy for the future. *Fierce Hope: Youth Activism in Aotearoa* offers a focused exploration into six groups where this positive change is taking place.

Ellen (Ellie) Tapsell, Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington