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Paul Tapsell, *Kāinga: People, Land, Belonging*

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Paul Tapsell, *Kāinga: People, Land, Belonging* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2021), 160pp. Paperback. NZ\$17.99. ISBN: 978-1-9885-8758-5.

Kāinga: People, Land, Belonging, addresses the significant and urgent issues of colonisation and environmental degradation. Author, Paul Tapsell, a Māori researcher from the peoples of Te Arawa and Tainui draws on the experiences of his own communities and ancestors to tell a story of social and environmental disruption, and, importantly, to advocate for the restoration of lands and relationships.

Kāinga is part of the 'BWB Texts' series which uses the tagline 'Short books on big subjects by great New Zealand writers'. This series is aimed at making local writing on important issues accessible to a wide readership and *Kāinga* certainly delivers on these objectives, exploring big ideas in an engaging and economical style. Though grounded in research and conceptual thinking, this is, in many ways, a deeply personal account. The inclusion of the experiences of the author, his ancestors, and the communities to which he belongs, helps to ensure that this is no dusty academic tome, but rather an impassioned call to action.

Tapsell covers a lot of ground in short order. The first two chapters of *Kāinga* provide some biographical detail about the author, his family, and community. These introductory chapters give some insight into how Tapsell comes to this work, his personal motivation for engaging with environmental issues, and the way he approaches these issues. It is against this background context that *Kāinga* then turns to explore important aspects of a Māori worldview and understanding of knowledge and knowledge systems, particularly as they relate to the key themes of the book – belonging and connection to place. Chapters 4-6 address some of the strategies and impacts of colonisation, including particularly the impacts for Māori communities on social structures and relationships to land. The concluding chapters (Chapters 7-9) then shift to focus on responses seen over the past thirty years, such as new legal structures for the management of Māori land and the systematic settlement of historical breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi. Tapsell here highlights problematic aspects of the legal and policy framework, pointing to the need to adapt and innovate, to address issues of sovereignty and equality, and to reconnect with place and community if we are going to live in good relationships with each other and the environment.

Central to all of the issues and ideas explored in the book is the concept of *kāinga* itself. 'Kāinga' is defined in *Te Mātāpunenga – a compendium of references to the concepts and institutions of Māori customary law* – as follows:¹ 'A term covering notions of home, and the place where home is located, that is, residence, village, encampment, region or homeland. A related term is *papakāinga*, denoting a home base, a "true home" (the element *papa* refers to a house-site or the earthen floor of a traditional house)....' Tapsell introduces the concept of *kāinga* in this way:

Once, Māori lived in a genealogically interconnected world of environmental accountability during a time when the people (*tangata*) were nourished by the lands - soil, waterways and local climatic characteristics (*whenua*) - on which our ancestors (*tīpuna*) were born, were raised, flourished, fought, reproduced and died, and where we too will be buried. These tribal/hapū communities, or in simplest terms, villages, were and still are called *kāinga*...*Kāinga* represent the fundamental genealogically ordered relationship of belonging – anchoring *tangata* to *whenua* – in a universe organised by a system of ambilineal descent

¹ Richard Benton, Alex Frame, and Paul Meredith, *Te Mātāpunenga – a compendium of references to the concepts and institutions of Māori customary law* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2013), 104.

(whakapapa). Kāinga are not just villages occupied by tangata. They are symbolic statements of mana (ancestral authority) over the surrounding whenua.’ (p 7)

The Waitangi Tribunal, a standing commission of inquiry established to hear Māori claims of breaches of the Treaty of Waitangi, has also recently used the concept of kāinga in its articulation of Māori rights. In an urgent inquiry held in 2020 and reported on in 2021, the Tribunal addressed claims concerning the disproportionate number of Māori children taken into State care by Oranga Tamariki – the Ministry for Children. In its report, the Tribunal identified kāinga as central to understanding the nature of rights involved:²

Kāinga captures a range of meaning, including a village or a home. Continuity of chiefly authority over not just land and resources, but also the people is directly guaranteed in the Māori text of te Tiriti/the Treaty. This is nothing less than a guarantee of the right to continue to organise and live as Māori. Fundamental to that is the right to care for and raise the next generation.

In that same report, Waitangi Tribunal member and Māori elder, Pou Temara described the difference between his kāinga, his tribal homelands of Ruatāhuna, and his place of residence in Hamilton:³

...Hamilton is not my kāinga and it can never be my kāinga I do not have a whakapapa [connection of genealogical descent] to the whenua [lands] of my house in Hamilton...However, in Ruatāhuna there is immediate rapport. It is my kāinga, my ahuru mōwai – my sanctuary; my Pakairiri – my shield; my ururanga tē taka – the place where I can rest and sleep without disturbance and without fear. This rapport is because I have a relationship both physically and spiritually to the whenua through whakapapa. I have an affinity with my whenua because my history is there and the people who made that history are mostly buried there. I have an affinity, because my whenua – my afterbirth, which nurtured me in the kōpū [womb] of my mother for nine months of my being, is buried in that whenua, the land which I call my whenua, my kāinga It is the kāinga that I call my whenua kura, my treasured whenua I’m reminded of our whakataukī [proverb], ‘he kura kāinga e hokia’, a treasured kāinga will be returned to, a treasured kāinga is where one finally returns to – to die.

The Tribunal also addressed the concept of kāinga in its recent report relating to Māori homelessness.⁴ Though 'kāinga' was less prominent in that report. This may seem a little counter-intuitive at first – one might have expected 'kāinga' to be front and centre in a report focused on housing and homelessness. However, the Tribunal's approach illustrates the importance of kāinga as a much broader concept than simply 'home'. 'Kāinga' incorporates ideas of belonging, kinship connections, and relationships to place that extend beyond the immediate and practical housing needs that was the focus of the Tribunal's report.

It is the use of 'kāinga' as a framing and organising concept that is one of the most important and distinctive features of Tapsell's book. This enables a focus on place and the urgent environmental issues that need to be addressed while, at the same time, understanding the role that ideas of connection and belonging can play in restoring balanced relationships for a flourishing environment and healthy communities. *Kāinga: People, Land, Belonging* weaves together personal,

² Waitangi Tribunal *He Pāharakeke, He Rito Whakakīkinga Whāruarua: Oranga Tamariki Urgent Inquiry* (Wai 2915, 2021), 12.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴ Waitangi Tribunal *Kāinga Kore: The Stage One Report of the Housing Policy and Services Kaupapa Inquiry on Māori Homelessness* (Wai 2750, 2023).

community, and environmental history in a reflection of those relationships between people and place and provides a highly readable introduction to Māori thinking about these important and current issues.

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