

Ko Tautoro te Pito o Tōku Ao: A Ngāpuhi Narrative

Hōne Sadler

Auckland University Press (2014)

ISBN 978 1 86940 814 5

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This book is a revelation. Iwi history, traditions and philosophy told in the parlance of the people, utilising te reo Māori and Māori literary forms including karakia, waiata, whakapapa and kōrero paki. *Ko Tautoro te Pito o Tōku Ao: A Ngāpuhi Narrative* presents a richly detailed and intricately woven narrative which draws the reader in to the places and people who are Ngāpuhi nui tonu. Author Hōne Sadler takes the reader on a journey into the intellectual history of Ngāpuhi which, though based on evidence the author presented to the Waitangi Tribunal in support of the WAI 1040 Te Paparahi o Te Raki claim, in book format reads more as a tribal manifesto. Indeed, Sadler's work aligns with Muskogee Creek and Cherokee literary scholar Craig Womack's assertion that, 'To exist as a nation, the community needs a perception of nationhood, that is, stories...that help them imagine who they are as a people, how they came to be, and what cultural values they wish to preserve.'¹ Accordingly, this book plants a stake firmly, deliberately and articulately in the ground by drawing together multiple narrative strands in a complex introductory account poised at this moment in Ngāpuhi history.

The reader is initially welcomed to the work via the striking dustcover designed by Johnson Witehira featuring the flag of the United Tribes of New Zealand, the first official flag of Aotearoa New Zealand and a powerful symbol of the North, inlaid upon an extended kōkōwai palette and symmetric patterning drawn from kōwhaiwhai and tukutuku. This stimulating yet highly structured design invites readers to approach the work with due respect and care and hints at the dense exposition of form, style and content which lies within. The title, *Ko Tautoro te Pito o Tōku Ao: A Ngāpuhi Narrative* reiterates these signals and foregrounds the deeply personal connection of the author to the work. The title furthermore anchors the book in what Standing Rock Sioux activist, writer and lawyer Vine Deloria Jr refers to as 'sacred geography', that is, a combining of history and geography wherein place rather than time is the primary referent for all formulations of meaning and value.² Sadler's history of Ngāpuhi is told from his geographic center of the Ngāpuhi tribalscape, Tautoro. As with Te Whare Tapu o Ngāpuhi itself, the narrative is predicated upon Papatūānuku as the foundation and Ranginui as the overarching crown (p. 9) thus the geographic and intellectual boundaries of Ngāpuhi align with and are defined by specific places. As Deloria points out in the Native American context it is our lands – places – which hold the highest possible meaning and all our statements are made with this reference point in mind.³ Tautoro is the center of Sadler's universe, where the world begins and from which position his narrative history is told.

Language is a further dimension of this book through which an invitation into the history of Ngāpuhi is extended. As a Māori-language reader, it is so refreshing reading a text written in the distinctive 'patois' of Ngāpuhi, the language in which the voices of Ngāpuhi are most clearly and unreservedly articulated. Regional language features, which are so frequently expunged from written texts, are preserved in this book, one particularly prominent example of this being Ngāpuhi speakers' use of /h/ (represented orthographically as 'h') as an allophone of what is commonly /f/ (represented orthographically as 'wh') in standard spoken Māori.⁴ Hence 'kupu hakataki' (p. 8) where we would usually see 'kupu whakataki' and 'hakataukītia' (p. 8) where we normally expect 'whakataukītia'. This alignment of the spoken language with the written text poses no particular difficulty in terms of comprehension and moreover serves to constantly and consistently remind the reader into whose territory they have entered.

Needless to say, this dimension of the book is only open to readers who read the Māori-language text of this bi-lingual te reo Māori and English language work.

Language has of course been and continues to remain key in discussion and debate involving our ‘founding document’, Te Tiriti o Waitangi. Sadler makes a number of strong claims in regards to how language has been variously manipulated to advance certain agendas and used against Māori. Interestingly though, Sadler shows in his own careful writing that languages themselves are not at fault; he demonstrates in his writing that the English language, when deftly employed, can match the depth and complexity if not the singular beauty of te reo Māori, even if he himself takes a somewhat ambivalent stance on the matter. While Sadler asserts on p. 53, for example, that ‘English words are not able to accurately express and translate all nuances’ regarding Te Korekore (‘E kore e taea te kupu Pākehā te mau i ngā ariā katoa e pā ana ki tēnā āhuatanga [mō Te Korekore]’ (p. 52)), he demonstrates earlier in his choices of ‘terrestrial waters’ and ‘celestial waters’ as translations of ‘Wai-o-Nuku’ and ‘Wai-o-Rangi’ respectively, that the English language is at least in some instances capable of closely approximating the tone and sentiment of the original (pp. 26-27). Within his writing Sadler points to the notion that where deceit and duplicity are evident in the act of interpretation or translation, it is the interpreters and translators, in short, it is the people and not the languages which are at fault, an issue explored in-depth in Hazel Petrie and Hohipere Tarau’s article, ‘Māori Texts and Official Ventriloquism’.⁵ Sadler gestures towards the crux of the matter where he notes, ‘Kīhai i hakaaro ai ki tā te hakaaro a te Māori’ (p. 52), that ‘they [ie Pākehā], did not heed the viewpoints of Māori’ (p. 53).

In a similar vein, one of the ways this book can be read is as a template for how more generative discussions regarding such weighty words as ‘mana’, ‘rangatiratanga’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘autonomy’ might take shape. Sadler makes much less use, for example, of the Māori word ‘rangatiratanga’ and variants for ‘sovereignty’ preferring instead the word and phrases centered around the concept of ‘mana’. On p. 12 Sadler uses ‘mana’ for ‘sovereignty’, ‘mana rangatiratanga’ for ‘sovereign authority’ and on the following page ‘mana Māori’ for ‘Māori sovereignty’. Sadler does use ‘rangatiratanga’ for ‘sovereignty’ on p. 17 but his use of the term here relates to the more localised argument he makes here, that Ngāpuhi exercised their sovereignty in everyday living. The subtle differences between Sadler’s use of both the Māori words ‘mana’ and ‘rangatiratanga’ for the English ‘sovereignty’ suggests, unsurprisingly, that ‘mana’ carries much more weight than ‘rangatiratanga’ as a signifier of ‘authority’. Correspondingly, as Ngāti Maniapoto scholar Bruce Biggs pointed out, the acclaimed Ngāti Porou politician, leader and scholar Apirana Ngata used ‘te mana te rangatiratanga’ rather than simply Williams’ ‘rangatiratanga’ as the equivalent of ‘full exclusive and undisturbed possession of’ in the second article of Te Tiriti.⁶ In her seminal article, ‘Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Texts and Translations’, Ruth Ross also argued that the word ‘mana’ would have more accurately conveyed the concept of sovereignty and identifies its glaring omission from the Tiriti text given that the phrase, ‘ko te Kingitanga ko te mana o te wenua o te wakaminenga’ was the translation used for, ‘all sovereign power and authority within the territories of the United Tribes’ in He Wakaputanga, the 1835 Declaration of Independence drawn up by British Resident James Busby.⁷ This highlights one of the many advantages in producing this book bi-lingually, more specifically, in the way that Sadler has written it bi-lingually whereby readers adept in both the Māori and English languages are in a position to fully engage with this work and experience it in a multiplicity of highly nuanced ways.

While I have dwelt for some time here on language, I need to emphasize that this book offers so much more. From explanation of the origins of the name Ngāpuhi, to the spiritual structures of the world, Ngāpuhi deities, ancestors, and movers and shakers from the beginning of time such as the supernatural-sized Te Kiripūte to the more recent prophetic tohunga Iraia Kūao and his struggle to prevent the alienation of his tribal lands, this book is an absolute treasure trove of historical storytelling. The section on ‘noble women’ (pp. 140-141), though small, is responsive to calls for the greater recognition of Māori women in New Zealand history and the brief exploration of haka as a tool of analysis (pp. 152-157) illustrates how a traditional Māori framework can be put to work in explaining and working towards addressing contemporary issues. In summary, this book is complex yet accessible, beautifully presented, anchored in the landscape of the places and people about whom it is written, and artfully, powerfully argued in a voice of the people.

¹ Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Nationalism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, p. 26.

² Deloria cited in Martin W. Ball, “‘People Speaking Silently to Themselves’: An Examination of Keith Basso’s Philosophical Speculations on “Sense of Place” in Apache Cultures’. p. 643. *American Indian Quarterly*, Summer, 26, 3, 2002, pp. 460-478.

³ Vine Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*: 30th Anniversary Edition, Fulcrum Publishing, Golden, 2003, p. 121.

⁴ Linguistic explanation kindly supplied by Maraea Hunia, 16 October 2015, personal communication.

⁵ Hazel Petrie and Hohipere Tarau, ‘Māori Texts and Official Ventriloquism’, *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 46, 2, 2012, pp. 129-141.

⁶ B. Biggs, ‘Humpty-Dumpty and the Treaty of Waitangi’, in I. H. Kawharu (ed.), *Waitangi: Māori and Pākehā Perspectives of the Treaty of Waitangi*, Oxford University Press, Auckland, 1989, pp. 309-310. Cited in Richard Benton, Alex Frame and Paul Meredith (eds.), *Te Mātāpunenga: A Compendium of References to the Concepts and Institutions of Māori Customary Law*, Victoria University Press, Wellington, 2013, p. 334.

⁷ Ruth Ross, ‘Te Tiriti o Waitangi: Texts and Translations’, *New Zealand Journal of History* (NZJH), 6, 2, 1972, p. 141.