
RAWIRI TAONUI

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Emeritus Professor Walker of Te Whakatōhea has been the foremost sociocultural political Māori academic of the four decades-long Māori renaissance. *Mata Toa* [Eyes of the Warrior]: *The Life and Times of Ranginui Walker* assesses the impact of his life on our nation. At first reading *Mata Toa* is a curious biography. Posthumous biographies of academics are unusual enough and ones written during the lifetime of the subject almost non-existent; testament to the fact that Walker is a profound scholar. Some will also question why a Pākehā author, Professor Paul Spoonley, and not a Walker family member or Māori historian, especially those who recall the debates that Michael King’s biographies of Te Pūea Hērangī and Whina Cooper were somewhat “Pākehāfied”. At one level, there are still too few Māori academic writers; at another, Spoonley and Walker share an academic kinship. Walker’s has been the most influential Māori pen on Māori-Pākehā relations and Spoonley, who has written and edited 26 books, the most influential Pākehā writer on general New Zealand race relations.

The title reflects that Rangi Walker’s life is both his story and the story of a country as it struggled to more adequately recognise the rights of Māori as the indigenous people of Aotearoa. The book traces Walker’s journey from a child raised by religiously devout Catholic whāngai ‘adoptive’ parents, Wairata and Isaac Walker, in rural Ōpōtiki to an academic and activist with a forthright and vociferous voice for Māori rights under the Treaty of Waitangi.

Walker’s training as a teacher and then University of Auckland academic proved pivotal. He is one of the first Māori PhDs and gifted with a natural astuteness and shrewd analytic skills. His relationship with Deidre—wife and confidante—has helped him navigate the tricky waters of outspokenness. Walker’s mana lies in his pen which has proved mightier than the sword. His *Listener* and *Metro* magazine columns, his books, particularly the seminal *Ka Whāwhai tonu mātou – Struggle Without End* (1990, 2004), and lectures provided Māori with the polemic tools that equipped an emerging and burgeoning indigenous Māori counter-hegemonic and transformative fight-back movement along an ideological pathway into the future.

In the turbulence of massive social and cultural disruptions and dislocations caused by urban migration, the stresses on Māori communities and the many situation where Māori and Pākehā were engaging with each other face to face for the first time since the Land Wars, he was *the* writer who stood up for Māori and carried our battles, our struggles and our issues to Pākehā society. Walker has personified the radical face of the “native” who dared to speak back, one that generated hundreds of letters to the editor against him, exposing a deeply ingrained racism that could not be eradicated unless it was revealed.
Walker was also an activist. He organised the Young Māori Leaders conference at the University of Auckland in 1970, which led to the founding of Ngā Tamatoa (‘Young Warriors’) to confront injustices to Māori under the Treaty of Waitangi. That single moment provided the impetus for 40 years of protest and progress for Māori.

Articulate and forthright, he has also been a major influence in changing how Pākehā viewed Māori and their aspirations. He deciphered the Treaty of Waitangi, Māori land rights, culture and a host of other issues for mainstream Pākehā audiences, garnering the support of many in the struggle for equal Māori rights in a way that has shaken, reshaped and redefined the foundations of life in New Zealand. Walker helped liberate middle class white New Zealand from a colonial mind-set, leading to a deeper understanding and engagement between the partners to the Treaty of Waitangi.

_Mata Toa_ is sometimes descriptive rather than analytic. Walker reflects at times on the reactions of white academic staff to his opinions. Exploring this prejudice in more depth would have been beneficial for the new generations of Māori advocates who face the same reactions in contemporary academic institutions. Similarly beneficial would have been more discussion about the inside politics within and between Māori communities, groupings and academic factions.

Reading _Mata Toa_ will confirm what many already know. Walker is essentially a shy man whose iron courage meant that he never shirked work or leadership when required. Walker is also honest. The everyday language of his childhood was _te reo_ which he nearly lost when he moved away. Walker never forgot his hapū and _iwi_ roots, and he rebuilt his facility in _te reo_ and _tikanga_.

Walker has courage. Prime Minister Robert Muldoon once complained directly to the University of Auckland because of his opinions. Māori tribal leaders opposed him after his comments about their leadership during the Sealords settlement.

Walker has vision. Never a supporter of Māori leadership through modern minority _iwi_ constructs, some decades ago he chose the less popular path of advocating for urban Māori who at 80 percent are the majority of Māori. The issue lingers: for instance, the March 2011 Horizon Research poll showed more than 70 percent of Māori felt left out of _iwi_ affairs.

Walker has grace. He accepted a knighthood but declined use of the title “Sir”. In recent times, he has gone back to contribute to Whakatōhea affairs, where confronting the difficulties of intra-tribal politics and dearth of professional expertise, he sent a copy of his Apirana Ngata biography to former opponent Sir Tipene O’Regan. Acknowledging his own difficulties uniting the _hapū_ of Te Whakatōhea, he complimented the Ngāi Tahu warhorse on his work in bringing together the disparate groups within Ngāi Tahu.

Walker was ahead of his time. As he said in a recent interview: “People’s perceptions have changed as they have become conscientised. They see me now as an elder statesman, and some Pākehā who didn’t like me in the past say ‘You have mellowed in your old age’ and I say ‘No, you have caught up, I’m the same person’” (NZ _Herald_, 29 October 2009: James Ihaka, “Literary award reward for a lot of hard yakka.”).

The epitome of the Gramscian organic intellectual: author, historian, biographer, commentator, activist, organiser, _rangatira_ and dedicated family man; when the sun sets on this life it should do so with an appropriate brilliance, or else.
Mōteatea (sung laments) are at the heart of mātauranga Māori. They are the central strand of Māori poetry and song, a source of knowledge about tribal history and whakapapa, and a living art form. This book introduces Sir Apirana Ngata’s classic four-volume collection of mōteatea, discussing the power and meaning of these traditional Māori songs. With dual text in English and Māori, and illustrated throughout, Ngā Mōteatea: An Introduction He Kupu Arataki provides an accessible entry point into a great Māori art form.

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