

## The Treaty of Waitangi

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The first perspective to analyse is that of Ranginui Walker, a contemporary historian of Maori descent. He agrees very much with the sentiment that the Treaty was a confusing document, that the Maori did not understand when they signed it. He makes several statements in his book "Ko Whawhai Tanu Matou" that lead one to believe he holds these perceptions. In his book he reiterates what writer Ruth Ross stated, agreeing that:

"The outcome of these combined efforts [drafting and translating the Treaty] was four English versions and a translation into Maori which matched none of them." He then goes on to state that the meaning of the Treaty was "obscured" because of Henry Williams' translation, saying that:

"The word kawanatanga did not convey to the Maori a precise definition of sovereignty. Had the word mana been used, no Maori would have any doubt what was being ceded."

Later on he also talks about how the forest and fisheries referenced in the English version are only vaguely-implied in the Maori version. He then notes:

"...this omission is an indication of the lack of precision in the drafting and translation of the Treaty"

The remarks aforementioned show clearly the Ranganui Walker believes strongly that the Treaty was misleading. In his endorsement of earlier remarks made by historian Ruth Ross as well as his own writings he firmly believes that the Maori were wronged in this Treaty.

This is very much the view of many contemporary Maori. They have the benefit of hindsight, so they can subsequently see the disruption and damage caused because of the various 'misleading' elements of the Treaty. Walker now has the ability to see that as a direct consequence of the ambiguity and apparent mistranslation of the Treaty the problems that this has caused, mainly through the land that the British would subsequently purchase off the Maori.

It is quite possible that Walker is likely to be critical of the Treaty overall simply because of the breaches of the Treaty that the British crown was to commit over the next 30 years. Because he is a contemporary historian, it is likely that he knows all of the breaches the Crown was to commit henceforth judging the Crown as to be intentionally deceiving at all times, as he suggests in the aforementioned book Henry Williams is with his translation. This overbearing sense of animosity towards the Crown might have caused bias in his summation of the 'facts'. It is also important to note that Ranganui Walker's tribe, "Te Whakatohea" has made land claims against the Crown for the confiscations during the New Zealand Wars, so he has a predisposed disenfranchisement with the Crown.

The second perspective that has to be examined is that of a New Zealand primary school textbook, ironically named "Our Nations Story". This textbook was written in the 1940s and was aimed at those who were in their last year at primary school. In it we see a story about the Treaty that has been seldom seen since the signing, one that sees it as a reasonable and fair Treaty. We also see it severely understate the consequences that the Maori were going to have because of the Treaty, stating:

"Captain Hobson, they [missionaries] said, had not come to take away New Zealand from the Maoris. All he asked was that the Maori acknowledge the Queen of England as their ruler. If they would do this, the Queen would leave them in possession of their lands, and would protect them against their foes."

Even if this was exactly what the Maori were told, it is still factually inaccurate as to the impact that signing the Treaty with regards to Maori governance was grossly understated, leading one to believe that the Maori didn't actually fully understand what they were signing.

This textbook also summarises the effects of the Treaty, weighing up the advantages with the disadvantages and believes:

"To this day it remains the fairest Treaty ever made between Europeans and a native race; indeed, in many ways, it was much fairer to brown man than to white."

This statement clearly shows that the writer of the textbook believes that the Treaty was more than a fair one, so the Maori must have known about the benefits when they signed it, showing their comprehension of the document. Although the textbook was written over 70 years in the past, we must still consider it to be a modern perspective. The time period this was set in is crucial to understanding why this textbook was written with the stance it had.

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This textbook was written in the 1940s, during which time we were using a mainly British education system. This meant that most of the material was written from a British point of view, with opinions expressed and facts presented being those that would most likely concern the British, as there was very little New Zealand information they could include. Consequently, the writers most likely didn't want to implicate the British and the mistakes that they had made

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The third perspective is taken from the perspective of William Colenso, taken from his book "The Authentic and Genuine Signing of the Treaty of Waitangi". Colenso was a missionary, but more importantly he was the first man to set up a printing press in New Zealand and henceforth printed the original copies of the Treaty of Waitangi. One conversation that he writes about in his book is particularly pertinent. He describes a conversation he had with James Busby on the 5th of February:

"[In response to Busby's determinedness to sign the treaty] I think they ought to know somewhat of it to constitute its legality... I have spoken to some chiefs concerning it, who had no idea whatever as to the purpose of this Treaty"

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This extract alone suggests that Colenso was of the opinion that the Treaty was one that the Maori chiefs didn't understand when they were signing it. He is trying to convince Busby to better explain the meaning behind the Treaty to the Maori, in doing so legitimising the Treaty, because he has heard from the Maori that many don't understand the purpose of the Treaty. Eventually, Busby rejects that claim and the Maori chiefs who were unsure were largely persuaded by Tama Waka Nene to sign.

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This perspective is largely held because of Colenso's position at the time. Colenso was a missionary, so he was in regular contact with the Maori. He even was the man who did most of the recording and the translating during the debate stage of the Treaty's signing. This means that he most likely has a close relationship with many of the Maori chiefs that were at Waitangi to sign, as missionaries often were involved in the lives of most of the Maori at this time, attempting to get them to follow their religion.

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## Conclusion

As there is with such an important, yet controversial, document such as the Treaty of Waitangi, several clear perspectives emerge on the matter. Many commentators, such as Ranganui Walker, are very much supportive of the statement that the Treaty was confusing, and the Maori did not know what they were signing. But we also see the other side of the spectrum, in which we get a textbook written with a pro-governmental bias such as "Our Nation's Story" which believes that the Treaty was simple and fair, and perhaps even benefitted the Maori more than the Europeans.

Despite this, I am of the belief that Ranganui Walker's perspective is the most valid. This view is the one most commonly held by those who can look at the Treaty signing and the subsequent events in hindsight. Walker backs up his views with several key pieces of evidence. The first, which I find especially pertinent, is that the translation of the word meaning sovereignty to "kawanatanga", which loosely translates to governance, meaning that the Maori were giving away more to the British than what they thought. I believe that this is convincing because it shows a clear-cut error on the behalf of Henry Williams, which then meant that many chiefs actually had no idea what they were giving away, something that they did not fully understand.

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