

## The Māori in Me: How colonisation has impacted on Māori identity

The ramifications of colonisation on Māori and other indigenous people around the world continue to this day, hundreds of years after their lands were first settled by Europeans.

On this episode of *Herald* podcast *The Māori in Me*, host Myjanne Jensen talks to renowned Māori academic and rights activist Professor Margaret Mutu about what life was like in Te Hiku o Te Ika at the start of the 20th century and the impact of colonisation on the region.

“Every whānau has their own story to tell, but the overall effect of colonisation is the same,” Mutu said. “For us at Karikari Peninsular, it was ok until the government came in and wanted to use our lands for dairy farming. A lot of our whānau were driven off the land because of those farm development schemes ... the Department of Māori Affairs ran up huge debts against those farms ... and confiscated the land. .”

She says it led to many of her whānau moving to Auckland to try to earn money to pay off those debts. Dire poverty and hunger were also factors which drove Māori to the cities, in the hope of a better life.

This, while also being actively recruited by the government, Mutu says, to get Māori into the cities to be factory workers and effectively “servants” to the state. She says this all relates back to the Doctrine of Discovery which the British brought with them to Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Doctrine of Discovery is a legal and religious concept that was used for centuries to justify Christian colonial conquest. It advanced the idea that European peoples, culture and religion were superior to all others, which meant they could effectively go into other countries, take over their lands and resources, and either exterminate or permanently enslave the people.

Mutu says despite a lot of headway in recent years, the impacts of colonisation can still be felt by Māori today. Intergenerational trauma, poor health outcomes and poverty are just some of the ongoing issues as a result of colonisation.

“It pushes you down to the lowest possible social economic level,” Mutu said. “Nothing will spark off divisions, fights, poverty, marginalisation and deprivation than when you feel you are not worth anything.”

Mutu says a lot of the disconnect whānau feel generations after their parents or grandparents left their whenua was another remnant of colonisation, as people attempt to find their way back to their homelands after years of living away. Even that can be difficult, Mutu says, and has often witnessed clashes between the ahikaa (people keeping the home fires burning) and those coming home to connect.

She says this type of behaviour is typical of colonisation’s “divide and rule” tactic, which she describes as a deliberate mechanism imposed on the people whose lands, resources and lives were taken.

“I have seen some horrible cases of that, where people go home, they go to their marae and are encouraged to get up and speak and then get attacked,” Mutu said. “Then you won’t see that person for 10, 20 years because they’re so hurt. It’s the realities of colonisation and that’s something our people don’t recognise. Our people don’t see it - they it is as themselves as being at fault.”

Myjanne Jensen, *NZ Herald*, 18 Jul, 2024