

Maori people speak out on land

No matter which way we look at it, every Maori cultural aspect revolves around one thing — land. The Treaty is no different.

Maori land has been widely researched by Maori and non-Maori alike. Mr E.M.K. Douglas, is presently exploring the relationship between Maori identity and land at Waikato University. This article contains extracts from his report.

The comments are made by Maori landowners, trustees, and even landless people. Whoever they may be, they comment strongly on the importance of land to Maori people, and in some cases, why it is so important to them.

"We proclaim a unique relationship with the land as 'Tangata whenua' (the original inhabitants). Our forebears discovered it... claimed it by right of discovery, settled the land and marked out its tribal boundaries. Each tribe held the land as a corporate group and was responsible for its collective defence. The forests, mountains, rivers and lakes of this land are sacred to the memory of our people. They have been hallowed by the bones of our ancestors and the glorious traditions of a warrior race. They stand today as the enduring symbols of the tribe. The land is Papa-tua-nuku, our earth mother. We love her as a mother is loved. It is through her, the portal of Hine-ahu-one (earth formed maid) that we entered this world. We will return to the bosom of Papa-tua-nuku through the portal of Hine-nui-te-po (maiden of darkness)."

(Male, 50s, landowner)



"I'm only taking an example from where we are, part of Mangere that came under military land confiscation after the Waikato War. Part of the area confiscated is urupa. Out of consideration (this is what they told us), the Crown at that time gave us a verbal assurance that we could retain one part of that urupa. We only retained just under half an acre. The greater part of the urupa, together with the papakainga, something like 25 acres, the Crown retained despite their assurances, and eventually sold. It is a market garden at the present time, under cabbages. For the last 40 years, since my parents tried, we have fought to get the title back. Our feeling for our papakainga is still as strong as it was and we have tried to encourage it in our children. No doubt there are bodies buried there, under the cabbages, but you can't do much about it. Well, I don't think our feelings for the urupa are any greater than for the rest of the land. Well, yes, we do have a greater feeling for urupa because urupa is urupa, it is tapu, sacred.

"I come from a people who fought a war over land, and the land was lost, it was confiscated. Of course I'm sad, I'm bitter about that injustice, but I have a greater feeling of sadness for the people who retained their land after the war and then sold it, because the decision was theirs, rather than that was forced upon them."

(Male, trustee, 50s, landowner)

"Without any land we are cut adrift, and although we may survive as individuals, and our group identity may survive in the memories of our old people, as time passes we are obliterated. Look, there are lots of hapu, subtribes, that have gone that way. Their lands were confiscated or sold, and their marae destroyed or abandoned, their memories have been obliterated. If we want to survive as Maoris, we can only do so as a group, unified by our land."

(Female, 50s, landowner)

"Look, as one of those whose land has been confiscated, I think we look to, I do anyway, we look to the only remnant quotation by the people who own the land, who did own the land prior to confiscation. I concentrate on our Taupiri, the mountain, Waikato, the river. Taupiri signifies for me the land that was confiscated. That quotation is a prophecy for the future. I look at this land it has been a hundred years or more out of our hands, I have no direct affiliation to that land itself, only to that little piece that is left to me, to us as a tribe. Apart from that, I look to the river itself.

"I see Taupiri the mountain and Waikato the river as the symbols of our identity as Waikato. They are the only things that I have got to hold onto because they took the land."

(Male, trustee, 40s, landless)

"I am reminded of King Tawhiao, when he suffered the confiscation of the land. Because of the disaster of the land being stolen, he united his people. The same thing may be said of Te Puea — she did everything and she achieved everything because through utter material poverty, she was able to unite the people."

(Male, trustee, 40s, landless)