

BEFORE THE WAITANGI TRIBUNAL

WAI 2700

WAI 2872

IN THE MATTER OF

the Treaty of Waitangi Act
1975

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

the Mana Wāhine Kaupapa
Inquiry

AND

IN THE MATTER OF

a claim by **Dr Leonie
Pihama, Angeline
Greensill, Te Ringahua
Hata and Mereana Pitman
(Wai 2872)**

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE OF MEREANA PITMAN

Dated this 20th day of January 2021



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Waitangi Tribunal

21 Jan 2021

Ministry of Justice
WELLINGTON

MAY IT PLEASE THE TRIBUNAL

1. Tēnā koe, e te rangatira. Tēnā koutou katoa, ngā rangatira o ngā hapū, me te Karauna hoki. Ko Mereana Pitman tōku ingoa, Nō Ngāti Kahungunu me Ngāi Tāmanuhiri, Ngāti Wai me Ngāti Porou hoki.
2. I have been working in Treaty and decolonisation work, here and overseas for over 50 years. The impacts of colonisation here in Aotearoa in terms of Christianity and capitalism have had devastating impacts on our tupuna whāea who were all Rangatira in their own right long before this land was colonised.
3. I have also worked with our men incarcerated for all sorts of reasons, to help them to work through the myriad of issues they have faced in their lives, and find some eternal peace within themselves so they can restore faith and belief and begin to rebuild their whānau base when they are released. I have worked in the Prisons for many years and still do today. I believe that working with our men is healing our women and whānau, and this work is highly important in mending the societal issues Māori wāhine face everyday at home and in their lives.
4. I am also a proud Māori activist and have been to every single land occupation, hiko and protest since the 1970s and walked alongside all the greatest wāhine Māori activists of our time, Eva Rickard, Hana & Syd Jackson, Nga Tamatoa. I will keep going until I can no longer walk because direct action, protest and occupation are the only forms Māori have to challenge the status quo and make transformative change – we don't talk, we don't negotiate, we don't compromise – we just do.
5. That is why I struggle with this kind of forum I am not used to, however I understand the importance of documenting our herstories for the generations to come, as much of the kōrero we have in each of us – needs to be shared, documented and written about from our own mouths while we are still here.

Wāhine Rangatira status reduced by Christianity

6. I have mentioned previously in this Inquiry that many of our nannies were staunch Christians and Mihinare, especially on the East Coast. However, the roles they played in the church were ones of hand-maidens; collecting flowers; retrieving dishware from the cabinets when the ministers came.
7. It is my view that the churches marginalised the Anglican Church when Marsden came which led to the interpretation of Pākehā views into the Bible and when Māori men went to the East Coast to preach Christianity, the role of women had been marginalised to that of second class citizens and maidens of men. Māori men who stood next to Pākehā men, who stood next to God, while the women did everything to support them. Our women were rendered as subservient to that of the men in the church which played a pivotal role in rendering their role as wāhine with mana, in every other facet of society.
8. The conversion of the Bible from English into Māori inserted the whole concept of dualist thinking – the good and the bad, the rebels and the friendlies, the believers and the non-believers, the creation of the “Other”, the marginalisation of our people once more.
9. Māori thought became confused, clouded, and colonised into thinking that they as women, were mere subservient to their men and their church and any opposition, challenge of outspoken ideas labelled them as rebellious, sinners and criminals if they did not comply. The punishment on women was severe, domestic violence rose, women could not leave their marriages easily as it was frowned upon by society if you did. For those women who did leave, the prospects of raising your children on your own were grim, and more often than not your children were taken from you by social welfare if you struggled.
10. For this reason, many of our tupuna whaea lost their lands that they once owned and transferred into the names of their husband’s, and this is how a lot of whenua Māori got into Pākehā hands. Through strategic marriages with wāhine Māori in order to acquire their lands. Ngāti Kahungunu have a lot of cases like this which I won’t go into here.

Capitalism

11. I was born in the 1950s in Wairoa, to a fairly strong group of women, my mother and my aunts, who were all land owners and income earners. However, I remember for many years my mother struggling to buy us a house. My Pākehā step-father was an alcoholic, so the burdens of raising and providing for our whānau fell on my mother.
12. She was 55 years old when she bought her first house because up until then, she had to have my Pākehā alcoholic step-father go with her to the bank to give her financial credibility.

De- colonisation

13. I know that in my work in decolonisation as a result of colonisation is extremely important in the outcomes we seek in this Inquiry.
14. This is because addressing issues around the many strands of violence are many-fold, economic and religious violence, cultural violence, state violence by the military, the police ,the Corrections institutions, child welfare and state care institutions – all of which have had a huge impact on the emotional, mental and physical wellbeing of our women and our men.
15. In decolonisation work, we are able to also unravel the inter-generational layers of colonisation that have devalued and diminished our roles as wāhine Rangatira so that we are able to restore our rights that we once enjoyed, and to also be treated as equal partners in this country with the Crown.
16. It is my belief that the status and role of wāhine within the whānau, community and this nation need to be politically recognised and it will bring me great joy to seek remedies in this Inquiry with my co-claimants in this claim who have all worked tirelessly in this space for decades and dedicated their entire lives to the politically betterment of wāhine Māori.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mereana Pitman', is written over a horizontal line.

Mereana Pitman (Ngāti Kahungunu, Ngāi Tāmanuhiri, Ngāti Wai, Ngāti Porou)