REVIEWS


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This book is a collection of essays on the topic of Māori land confiscation in New Zealand and the international context within which the New Zealand situation exists. The essays included are based on presentations at a conference held by the Stout Centre for New Zealand Studies at the Victoria University of Wellington entitled “Coming to Terms? Raupatu/Confiscation and New Zealand History”. The book has 12 chapters, arranged into six parts; an appendix provides a compilation of Confiscation Legislation in New Zealand.

Land confiscation has played a prominent role in imperial history. The confiscation of land and property was a common punishment for treason. Such traditions were employed in New Zealand during the 1860s as a response to the New Zealand Land Wars. However punishment was not the only motivation for land confiscation. The arrival of settlers to the newly formed colony created pressure to provide land for settlement, land that was, at the time, under the control of Māori. These land confiscations were termed “raupatu” by Māori. Traditionally this term was used to describe land acquisition by conquest. However, during the 1860s, the term raupatu became synonymous with confiscation of land by the Crown.

Part One provides an introduction to the book. The editors begin with contextualising the topic, the confiscation of Māori land, by providing a historiography of confiscation. Bryan Gilling leads on from this in Chapter 2 by providing an overview of the confiscation process. The focus of the chapter is land confiscation in New Zealand and thus provides a brief description of material that is discussed in more detail in other chapters of the book.

Part Two looks at confiscation from an international perspective. This provides a background to the processes that were used in New Zealand. James Belich provides an essay on world history in Chapter 3. This well-researched chapter offers plenty of examples that demonstrate a range of responses from indigenous peoples and a range of impacts imposed by the British Empire, as well as detailing the tactics used to colonise the indigenes. Chapter 4, written by John Weaver, also provides an international context to land confiscation. The expansive framework in which this chapter is written means that there is some difficulty drawing analogies with the occurrences in New Zealand. However, the benefit of this chapter is that it discusses the process of colonisation used to expand the British Empire and the complexity of such a project.
Part Three focuses on confiscation within New Zealand. In Chapter 5, Alan Ward provides an overview of key people, events and issues from the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi right through the New Zealand Land Wars. There is a strong focus on Governors Browne and Grey as key players. This chapter discusses the reasons leading up to the land wars, disputes and confiscations, and offers the perspectives of both Māori and Crown officials. The time period covered by this chapter means there are many historical events that demand discussion; consequently some points of discussion are brief and would require further reading to gain a detailed understanding. Chapter 6 offers a more politically positioned essay. Here Michael Allen offers somewhat of a timeline of key political decisions that instigated tension between Māori and the Crown over land and enforced confiscation. A discussion on the establishment of a guiding framework of confiscation is provided and policies, Acts of Parliament and Courts of Law are brought under scrutiny in the course of this chapter.

Part Four provides two chapters that concentrate on the relationship between raupatu and the law. Chapter 7 deals with the evolution of confiscation law in New Zealand. A brief discussion of the origin of land confiscation leads on to the main focus of the chapter—statutory confiscation. The chapter provides a detailed discussion about the use, impact and effectiveness of legal conventions (including statutes, courts and the government) and is a good starting point for research into land confiscations from a legal or political standpoint. In Chapter 8, Mark Hickford provides a detailed analysis of the political motivations that enabled land confiscation. It is clear that politics was the driver behind the colonial wheel. The law was simply used as a means to a politically motivated end. It was politics that guided the decision to engage with Māori and address their issues, it was politics that encouraged the establishment of the Sim Commission, and it was politics that shaped the terms of engagement between the Crown and Māori.

Part Five offers two case studies that are not previously discussed in other chapters. These case studies take an indepth look at the process of confiscation and the role of the Crown (Chapter 9) and the impact on Māori (Chapter 10). Judith Binney (Chapter 10) provides an informed account of the confiscation from a uniquely Tūhoe perspective. She includes information about the relationship between Tūhoe and the Kingitanga and demonstrates how Tūhoe became threatened with confiscation. Chapter Nine, written by Vincent O’Malley, demonstrates the degree of complexity that was faced by the Crown in regard to confiscation and the law that surrounded it. It provides a unique example that challenges the common perception that land was simply taken by the Crown. Traditional accounts often over-simplify the process of confiscation and the role that the Crown had. However this essay delves into the intricacies surrounding land confiscation and thus demonstrates the complicated role that the Crown played.

Part Six is focused on the legacies of raupatu. Dion Tuuta (Chapter 11) provides an overview of the perpetual leasing system in Taranaki from 1880 to the present day. For Taranaki Māori raupatu is not an historical phenomenon, rather it has ever present consequences that still haunt Māori of the region. One such consequence—the focus of this chapter—is the perpetual lease regime. These leases have been described as “continuing injustice” and have undermined the ability of Māori to generate an
economic return on their land even to the present day. Chapter 12 offers a personal experience looking at the Tainui Claim. It starts with the attempts at settling a claim between Tainui and the Crown during the 1940s and concludes with the negotiations that led to settlement in 1995.

There is no concluding chapter to summarise the whole book, however there is a very useful appendix providing a timeline of confiscation legislation in New Zealand. This appendix summarises all relevant legislation and highlights key sections.

This book provides a well-rounded look into land confiscations on a national and international scale. The editors have selected essays that offer perspectives from all concerned parties and analyses confiscation from all angles. It is a valuable research tool for students and academics, as well as educational for the general reader.


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From the time Kupe first arrived in the Tai Tokerau region, the seed was sown for what would become a distinguished art form unique to Aotearoa. With a need to refit the great ocean-going waka Matahourua, and an abundance of suitable timber from the north and stone from the south, so began the evolution of what we now refer to as Tai Tokerau Whakairo Rākau or Northland Māori Wood Carving.

Deidre Brown has compiled a resource that will inspire descendants of Kupe and stimulate discussion and debate amongst many who share a fascination for the mastery imbued within our whakairo rākau. Having been “greatly encouraged by the recurring comment made by elders, museum professionals and students that more people in academic positions should be working to make tribal knowledge accessible to a Māori audience” (p. 14), the author has made information on the Northland Carving Tradition, which is publicly available, much more accessible. From among its non-academic, non-museum-professional “Māori audience” (which may encompass the majority of the descendants of Kupe) it could prove frustrating—for some. The book does provoke consideration about how we continue to grow our understanding in a realm that still poses many questions and it suggests debatable theories—many of which could be elucidated by casting a wider net when fishing for answers. The lack of input from tohunga whakairo ‘master carvers’ leaves some questions unanswered and debatable theories un-challenged. It need not be a study in the esoteric knowledge of carving, but rather answers to questions that may be best asked of the tohunga of today. One would be hard pressed to find tohunga whakairo who would reiterate the myth that Tai Tokerau art and heritage “…did not exist, or thought it had disappeared and was not retrievable” (p. 6), just as one would not be hard pressed to find carvers and teachers of Māori art who still find the use of the term “decoration”, to describe surface patterns, inappropriate, despite the considerable revision of this