Post-Settlement Conflicts within the Tainui Maori Confederation of Tribes

In 1995 the Tainui Maori were the first to sign a major settlement of their historic grievances resulting from the confiscation of their lands and natural resources in 1864. The British Queen specially travelled to New Zealand to sign the act passing into law the agreement signed between the Tainui leadership and the New Zealand government. The deal included a formal apology from the Crown, acknowledging it acted unjustly in dealing with the Tainui Maori in the 1860s, and it provided for the return of 15,790 ha of Crown land, which is about 2% of the lands originally confiscated. The value of the returned lands was estimated at approximately NZ$ 170 million, while the proceeds from their rents and leases amounts to between NZ$ 7 and 14 million a year. Four years later, however, the Tainui lost NZ$ 60 million on their assets. At the same time, newspapers reported almost daily about court cases between different Tainui factions, notably a group of Tainui administrators and accountants versus representatives of the Tainui tribal leadership which has been housed in the Maori King Movement since 1858. This paper will examine what went wrong after the signing of the settlement and the structural causes of the political conflict within the Tainui confederation. It will disentangle the essentialized meaning of ‘traditional’ arguments concerning tribal leadership in a comparative analysis with the plea of the ‘modern’ counterparts for the introduction of democracy within the tribe.

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