

Dancing with the King

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The Waikato conflict 1863-64 ended with Rewi Maniapoto's famous stand at Ōrākau and his celebrated reply to the British call for his surrender, 'E hoa mā, ka whawhai tonu mātou, ake! ake! ake!' [Friends, we shall fight you forever and ever]. Rather than give in, Rewi and his supporters made their escape across the Puniu River back into the heart of Ngāti Maniapoto territory. The British halted at Ōtawhao and Kihikihi and carried out a wholesale raupatu (confiscation) of the lands of Waikato through to the Puniu river. Rewi and others had come to the aid of the Māori king, Tawhiao. The King's whare rūnanga (council house) at Ngaruawahia was plundered and he and his Waikato followers were forced to seek refuge across the river with their Ngāti Maniapoto relatives. A stalemate ensued after the war. Kihikihi became a frontier township, and the Puniu River took on a new significance as an aukati (border) marking the prohibited area to the south for Europeans who did not have permission to cross. Ngāti Maniapoto called the large part of their lands Te Nehenehenui, however, the presence of King Tawhiao generated a new name for the area among Pākehā, namely the King Country (Te Rohe Pōtae). For some twenty years from 1864-1885, Te Nehehenui/King Country operated effectively as an independent state while both sides negotiated a relationship going forth amidst the occasional act or threat of violence.

It is this period of the King Country that is the primary focus of Michael Belgrave's award-winning *Dancing with the King*, which he describes as a 'Diplomatic History'. This book is the story of the manoeuvrings, political posturing and negotiations across a series of hui (meetings) and exchanges where sometimes Māori tikanga and kawa (practices and protocols) dominated and, in other instances, European customs and protocols came to the fore. The choice of etiquette is one of several aspects of Māori-Pākehā encounter history highlighted in this book. Belgrave himself was intent on focussing on Māori and Pākehā efforts to understand each other and to come to common understandings.

On one side of the Puniu river was the settler government, who were seeking a peaceful resolution to this 'cold war' and later on the lifting of the aukati to allow the main trunk line to be constructed through the territory, which was effectively a prelude to European settlement. The cast of characters from this side included such colonial political heavyweights as George Grey, Donald Mclean, John Bryce, and John Ballance, their agents William Gilbert Mair, William Henry Grace and Charles Hursthouse, the 'murdered' Richard Toll and Timothy Sullivan and Mary Rolleston, 'who showed no sympathy for the Māori world' (p. 246).

On the other side there was Tawhiao, to a large extent the centre piece of this book, and the Ngāti Maniapoto leaders of the day such as Wahanui, Rewi Maniapoto, Taonui Hikaka and the Mōkau chief Te Rerenga Wetere. Tawhiao's cause célèbre was the restoration of the confiscated Waikato lands. The Ngāti Maniapoto rangatira were themselves strong supporters of the Kingitanga but also intent on maintaining their substantive mana over their lands.

Belgrave narrates the complexity of the personalities, the relationships and the encounters between this cast of characters as they try to find a way forward. What he does very well is give the reader a sense of both the collective and the broad array of individual stories and

situations, their trials and efforts. In doing so, he gives Tawhiao and those Ngāti Maniapoto leaders agency in their confronting and mediating the colonial apparatus and its hierarchies. Of course, the danger of investigating Māori-Pākehā relations in colonial New Zealand is falling into the trap of wholly reducing such relations to a simple coloniser/colonised dichotomy, characterised as ‘black and white’, ‘cardboard’ characters. The coloniser is purported to exhibit oppressive behaviour. The Māori is often portrayed as the ingenuous victim. This is the history that claimant lawyers involved in the Waitangi Tribunal process would have us espouse. That such behaviour occurred, and that many Māori were victims, is undeniable. Tawhiao never saw most of his Waikato lands restored and Ngāti Maniapoto suffered broken promises, rapid land loss and tribal fragmentation. But there are many factors that contribute to historical episodes. Belgrave then reminds us in this book that our history is more complex, more nuanced and not always so bifurcated. For example, Belgrave reveals through his account of Tawhiao’s Waikato tour and visit to Auckland, that while the Crown did not want to acknowledge the King’s legitimacy, the colonial government and the settlers nonetheless treated Tawhiao as a sovereign, according him the respect and formality of such status (chapter 6). Belgrave notes that the former Chief Land Purchaser and then Native Minister, Donald Mclean, at one point even made Tawhiao an offer that came very close to recognising his sovereign authority over the King Country (p. 88).

Belgrave initially does give the reader the impression that the land on the other side of the Puniu was governed now by the Māori King. Belgrave, himself, states this in the inside cover. However such a statement misrepresents the position of the King and the complex inter-relationship with Maniapoto leadership, something which Belgrave eventually goes on to discuss. Ngāti Maniapoto’s loyalty to Tawhiao and the Kingitanga did not, however, usurp its own traditional tribal leadership and mana over their lands. The King Country was still Te Nehenehenui and Tawhiao, furthermore, did not have unfettered rule nor occupation of Ngāti Maniapoto lands. For example, Wahanui, Rewi and others opposed a proposal by the Maniapoto hapū, Ngāti Matakore, place 400,000 acres under Tawhiao (*Hawera & Normanby Star*, 7 December 1885, p. 2). Increasingly Ngāti Maniapoto leaders were keen to see the return of their Waikato relatives to their traditional homelands.

I am starting to display my Ngāti Maniapoto bias here and as such should make some personal disclaimers. This history that Belgrave writes about is, for me, both familiar and personal and I can’t help but situate my reading of his work in that context. For me, these characters are all known names from a relatively young age. Those aforementioned Pākehā colonial patricians are names of streets in Kihikihi where I lived for part of my childhood. The Māori names I associate with my Ngāti Maniapoto heritage, and in particular that of Rewi Maniapoto who is buried at Kihikihi at the foot of his monument there. The ‘hero of Orakau’ belongs to my hapū through his mother’s Ngāti Kaputuhi whakapapa. Belgrave refers also to another prominent figure during the negotiations, namely William Henry Grace and his wife Mrs Grace. The latter was actually Makereti Hinewai, my great, great, great grandmother. My grandmother and other family members still occupy land from their original homestead in Kihikihi on Rolleston St. Makereti Hinewai was a niece of Rewi Maniapoto and facilitated his interactions with Grace, as described by Belgrave. Belgrave actually highlights Grace’s letter-book in the Alexander Turnbull Library as an informative source. At the request of the late Dame Evelyn Stokes, I deposited some of Grace’s papers in the Turnbull after discovering them in my grandmother’s garage in Kihikihi. Dame Evelyn herself had already deposited other papers authored by Grace (see Alexander Turnbull Library, MS-Group-0676).

I was also heavily involved for Ngāti Maniapoto in the Waitangi Tribunal's Rohe Pōtae hearings as a researcher and iwi witness and am currently drafting the Historical Account with Office of the Treaty Settlement historians for the Maniapoto Treaty Settlement.

To some extent then, I read this narrative as an 'insider' and while I am well aware of a lot of the historical content of this book, there were things that I did learn. For example, myself and others have long thought that a particular hui did not take place at Totoro before Wahanui and others met with Bryce at Alexandra (present day Pirongia) in March 1883. We were relying on a telegram from George Wilkinson (see p. 254 and Wilkinson to Bryce, 1 March 1883, MA23/5, Arcives New Zealand, Wellington). In fact, Belgrave's meticulous research of the newspapers of the time revealed that the meeting did take place. I was pleasantly surprised and had to correct the draft Historical Account.

Belgrave substantially tells this narrative through newspaper and official European reports published in the AJHRs. Belgrave rightly points out that their digitisation and the website Papers Past has made access that much easier to these important sources of historical record. Papers Past is indeed a treasure trove and incorporates niupepa Māori (the historical Māori newspapers of the day) that were already available through the old Niupepa Māori site.¹ The Māori newspapers have been described as 'unprecedented as witness to Maori activities and opinion during those years' as Māori writers write in their 'cultural present' Curnow, Jenifer, Ngapare Hopa & Jane McRae (ed) *Rere atu, taku manu!: discovering history, language, and politics in the Maori-language newspapers*, 2002, p. ix). The same could be said of the European newspapers and the AHJRs as well, which contain a number of important and rich records of hui even if they have been filtered by European sensibilities.

I do, however, want to join Martin Fisher, who also reviewed this work, and support his point that there were other readily available sources that could have been called on (Martin Fisher, *Reviews in History*, review no. 2267, accessed 11 November, 2018). For example, I was very surprised that Belgrave, in his chapter on Tawhiao's trip to London (which I still thoroughly enjoyed) made no reference to Roger Blackley's excellent article 'King Tawhiao's Big O. E.' published in a relatively recent issue of the *Turnbull Library Record* (vol. 44, 2012, pp. 37-52).

There is, of course, a large amount of material on public record as a result of the relevant WAI 898 Rohe Pōtae Inquiry. Belgrave is no stranger to the Waitangi Tribunal, as both a former research manager and an author of numerous research reports. He does make, for example, good use Cathy Marr's seminal report, *Te Rohe Pōtae Political Engagement 1864-1886* and rightly acknowledges drawing on her extensive document bank (see Waitangi Tribunal, Wai 898 #A78). However I thought there were other works he could have drawn on, albeit with some effort, to add to the narrative and in some instances give a louder Māori voice. I was excited by the early parts of the book where Belgrave cited quotes in te reo Māori. However, this seemed to diminish during the course of the book despite the fact that the WAI 898 Rohe Pōtae Inquiry contains some useful and relevant Māori language material. For example, there is an excellent contemporary record in Māori of the topics that Wahanui sought to discuss with the Government while he was in Wellington in 1884 ((see Waitangi Tribunal, Wai 898 #110a).

Sometimes, I thought the lack of attention to other sources meant the story was actually incomplete. For example, in discussing Te Heuheu's decision to put part of the Taupo lands within the Rohe Pōtae through the Native Land Court (the Tauponuiatōa case), Belgrave notes that Rewi gave 'tacit acceptance' to which a reader might infer Ngāti Maniapoto's

acquiescence (p. 363). Nowhere does Belgrave mention the fact that Taonui (who was as prominent within the tribe as Rewi) was incensed at Te Heuheu's actions and became embroiled in a dispute with Tuwharetoa. Taonui spoke of Te Heuheu crucifying them with his treatment of Tauponuiatia (see 'Te Heuheu Tukino - Claim to have his children's names inserted in the Rohe Potae list', Alexander Turnbull Library, MS Papers 4760-5, p. 45). There was a petition, a Supreme Court investigation and eventually a Royal Commission. Ngāti Maniapoto thus remember this historical episode quite differently to Belgrave's commentary. Another example is the turning of the sod where Belgrave merely notes that Wahanui and Rewi were right to do it. In fact, the issue about who should turn the first sod was the subject of some debate leading up to the ceremony. At Wahanui's house at Alexandra, Hote Tamehana, of Ngāti Haua, a son of Wiremu Tamehana te Waharoa, the Kingmaker, suggested that as Tawhiao had not given his consent, and was not present, that they should adjourn the ceremony until some future time. Taonui quickly rebuffed Hote's suggestion. Ngāti Maniapoto was determined that this honour belonged to Wahanui. Again, this is important historical narrative for a Waikato-Maniapoto reader.

At times, a more thorough review of the literature could have also added to the narrative and further highlighted the complex relationships that these historical figures enjoyed. For example, Rewi at his meeting with Grey at Waitara in 1878 gave Maniapoto whakapapa or genealogy to the then Premier. Grey is well known for his collection and publication of mātauranga Māori. A reader might also find it interesting that Rewi went with Ballance out to Ōrākau at the time of his meeting in Kihikihi in 1885 and gave him an account of the battle itself. This account was reported in a newspaper so I was interested that Belgrave did not cite it (*Otago Daily Times*, 10 September 1888, p. 4).

As an 'insider' I also had some difficulty with reading certain portrayals, particularly of Tawhiao, and sometimes I was not sure from the referencing when it was Belgrave talking or whether he was paraphrasing a newspaper report. For example, Belgrave makes several references to Tawhiao's propensity for liquor although strongly observing his steadfast abstinence during his trip to England in 1884. I found such comments as 'given Tawhiao's often embarrassing liking for drink ... the likelihood of a drunk monarch (p. 298)' hard to read, not because I am necessarily challenging the validity of the statement but perhaps as a Waikato-Maniapoto reader, I am more sensitive to descriptions of our tūpuna (ancestor) and in particular of one of our celebrated Māori Kings. I personally would have been less blunt and couched this aspect quite differently. It is a dilemma that Māori and iwi historians must contend with given that at the very least we have to live with our people post-publication. This is something that Belgrave, as an 'outsider', does not seemingly need to concern himself with. I also found myself questioning Belgrave giving credence to a description of Tawhiao which, while acknowledging his ability to maintain power, questions his capability in areas associated with Māori leadership (p. 304). In Waikato-Maniapoto tradition, King Tawhiao is remembered as a great Māori leader whose famous tongi (prophetic sayings) are still recounted. I would argue that those tongi actually demonstrate a certain level of intellectual competence, certainly at the very least within the bounds of mātauranga Māori (Carmen Kirkwood, *Tāwhiao: King or Prophet*, Huntly: MAI Systems, 2000). Clearly our historical senses and lenses privilege various aspects and interpretations of our history.

This is also illustrated in Martin Fisher's assessment of Belgrave's treatment of Rangiaowhia in 1864 where a lightly armed and defenceless village was attacked and a whare set alight killing civilians inside (Fisher, *Reviews in History*, review no. 2267, accessed 11 November, 2018).

Fisher states that ‘The defenceless inhabitants sought refuge in a church, and after short volleys of fire from both sides the church was set alight. Those escaping the church were shot and those who remained inside were burnt to death.’ Local Māori history recalls that the village was occupied mostly by old people, women and children. Fisher, in his review, considered Belgrave to have somewhat downplayed the attack by claiming that we cannot apply the standards of the present to the past and that prior to the adoption of Christianity the killing of women and children captured in warfare was ‘commonplace: it was simply part of tikanga’ (see p. 19). I am not comfortable with the use of the term ‘tikanga’ here where there is no associated discussion of the complexity of that ‘customary law’. It is often not that simple. Take, for example, Rongo-ā-whare, a party of women sent as emissaries during warfare. To capture and kill them was not considered tika (right) according to tikanga. That said, I do have some sympathy with Belgrave’s position on Rangiaowhia where he is essentially warning us against interpreting Māori-Pākehā historical episodes within a simple dichotomy of Crown versus Māori, in the quest for the moral high ground without investigating its wider complexity. I have always felt that ‘both sides’ can be accused of selective historical amnesia at times. Belgrave’s response to Fisher, which sets out the historiography of Rangiaowhia, is as worthy a read as is the book itself.² Of course, still from the iwi’s experience and perspective, Rangiaowhia and the invasion and confiscation of the Waikato generally was an atrocity. It was an outrage, it was brutal; but I am not sure if Rewi and others would have considered it to be barbaric. What would have been interesting was a record of the conversations and war reminiscences of the exchange between ‘some Maori rebels, some loyalist veterans, some imperial soldiers and militia men,’ the second Hikurangi meeting in May 1878 between Tawhiao and Grey (see p. 109).

Like Fisher, I did note several minor editorial mistakes but I can hardly claim my own writings to be free of such blemishes and merely note these to add to the factual record. At page 299, ‘Ngāti Kuhungunu’ from ‘Pōrongohau’ should be ‘Ngāti Kahungunu’ from ‘Porangahau’. Perhaps the more important one that requires correction is at page 370 where Belgrave refers to Rewi’s granddaughter being centre stage in a photo at the turning of the sod ceremony for the Main Trunk Line to continue on through the King Country. This is a well-known photo. The girl is, in fact, Rewi’s only biological child, a daughter. Her name was Te Kore. She died still in her teens and had no issue. This may not be so important in the scheme of this work but it is for Ngāti Maniapoto’s whakapapa annals where you have several tribal claims to ‘next of kin’ status to Rewi.

I do not want to appear overly critical, as there is a lot to like about this book. Arguably, if Belgrave was to have drawn on a wider range of sources, he may have produced something akin to a dense 1000-plus page Waitangi Tribunal reports. That is not what is needed here. Instead, we have an impressive retelling of this unique episode in our history, largely through contemporary accounts recorded in newspapers of the day and official reports. While this book is not the definitive work on the subject, it is a significant contribution to the history of the ‘King Country’, of Tawhiao and of Ngāti Maniapoto.

¹<https://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/newspapers;http://www.nzdl.org/cgi-bin/library?a=p&p=about&c=niupepa>

² See response at <https://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/2267>, accessed 11 November, 2018.