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COVER IMAGE

Leafa Wilson/Olga Krause *Ich Heisse Olga Krause, Deutsche Kuenstlerin* 2005
Poster print (detail). Image reproduced in full below.



The life-long work of performance artist Leafa Wilson/Olga Krause began in 2005. These propagandist poster-styled works are loosely based around the Russian Constructivist design aesthetic adopted by the German band 'Kraftwerk'. With both Samoan and German ancestry, the artist reconciles their past and present by creating utopic race relations in the site of their body: I am Olga Krause, German artist (Ich Heisse Olga Krause, Deutsche Kuenstlerin)

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STREET TALK: HISTORY, MYTH AND MEMORY ON THE WAIKATO FRONTIER.

Vincent O'Malley.

Kihikihi is a small Aotearoa New Zealand town — a population of 1974 according to the 2013 census — on the outskirts of Te Awamutu in the Waikato region.¹ According to that same census, the residents of Kihikihi are quite a bit poorer than the rest of the population of the district. Not unrelatedly, perhaps, the town also has a greater percentage of Māori (34% of the population, compared with 13% across the Waipā region as a whole).² But as a recent Google Maps exercise highlights, those Māori live in a town whose street signs pay silent homage to the Pākehā politicians and soldiers responsible for its conquest and later confiscation in the Waikato War of 1863–64.³ Grey, Cameron, Carey, Whitaker and other streets taunt those Māori residents with daily reminders of the devastating effects and consequences of that conflict felt over many generations. Kihikihi is a few kilometres west of Ōrākau, the site of the final battle in the Waikato War. And travelling in the other direction, just a few kilometres south of the town, is the Pūniu River that many Māori retreated across after the siege of Ōrākau ended on 2 April 1864.

The Pūniu River became the new frontier separating the Kīngitanga (the Māori King movement) from the newly confiscated lands to its north, while the unconquered lands south of the Pūniu remained beyond the writ of English law for the best part of the next two decades. The King Country, as James Belich famously described it, was effectively 'an independent Maori state nearly two-thirds the size of Belgium'.⁴ Meanwhile, Kihikihi became a military settlement and frontier post, highlighting the partial and incomplete nature of the Crown's victory in the Waikato War. The Crown hadn't gone to war to teach the Māori King movement a lesson but to destroy it and it had failed in that objective. The aukati, the Pūniu River boundary, marked the limits of its accomplishment.

¹ This paper was prepared as part of the project 'He Taonga te Wareware? Remembering and Forgetting Difficult Histories in Aotearoa/New Zealand', <<https://www.difficulthistories.nz/>>, supported by a grant from the Marsden Fund, Royal Society of New Zealand. An earlier version was delivered to the Garrison Towns in the Nineteenth-Century Empire Symposium, Victoria University of Wellington, December 2017.

² Statistics New Zealand, *Quick Stats About Kihikihi* (Wellington: Statistics New Zealand, 2013), pp.1, 4, 8.

³ *Kihikihi Street Names: A Tangata Whenua Perspective*, Google MyMaps, <<https://tinyurl.com/y4hhfz6c>> [accessed 22 July 2019].

⁴ James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1986), p.306.

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Kihikihi was home to Ngāti Paretekawa, a hapū of Ngāti Maniapoto. Their leading rangatira at the time was Rewi Manga Maniapoto. Although he came to be unfairly branded by Europeans as a warmonger, Rewi's main focus before the Crown's invasion of the Waikato in July 1863 was on the economic development of his people.⁵

Throughout the 1850s the Waikato tribes were among the most prosperous in Aotearoa New Zealand, not only feeding the settlers of Auckland but also contributing a significant chunk of the country's export earnings through wheat sold to the gold miners of Victoria and California. Produce from Kihikihi and elsewhere would be conveyed overland to Te Rore by dray road, and from there taken up the Waipā and Waikato Rivers by canoe. A portage at Awaroa in the Waiuku district provided access to the Manukau Harbour and from there produce could be carried across another portage at Otahuhu into the Waitemata Harbour or transported overland. Produce not conveyed to market by canoe might also be ferried on Tainui's own cutter, the *Harry Bluff*. In the 1840s, the *Southern Cross* newspaper observed that Auckland's European residents would have been 'literally starved out of the country' but for the food supplied to them from Waikato and elsewhere.⁶ And although wheat proved a mainstay of the economy, detailed returns of Māori produce imported into Auckland through the mid-1850s reveal that a vast array of livestock and crops were also being supplied by Tainui.⁷

In 1863 the Tainui tribes stood accused of planning an imminent attack on the settlement of Auckland, and rumours circulated of their intention to massacre the town's European residents, supposedly forcing the government's hand and paving the way for a pre-emptive invasion of Waikato to save the settlers. Those allegations were not only entirely unfounded but also illogical. Destroying the key outlet for their produce would have been suicidal for Tainui. Their wealth, and therefore their power, depended to a large degree on Auckland's ongoing wellbeing.

⁵ Vincent O'Malley, 'A Tale of Two Rangatira: Rewi Maniapoto, Wiremu Tamihana and the Waikato War', *Journal of the Polynesian Society*, 124, 4 (December 2016), pp.341–57.

⁶ *Southern Cross*, 20 April 1844.

⁷ 'Return of Native Produce Imported into the Ports of Auckland and Onehunga', *Appendices to the Journals of the House of Representatives (AJHR)*, 1865, E-12.

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What followed was a predetermined war of conquest and invasion on the Crown's part. The story of that conflict, commencing with the crossing of the Mangatāwhiri River by Imperial soldiers on 12 July 1863, has been told elsewhere.⁸ Less widely known is that on 23 February 1864 British troops entered, occupied, looted and destroyed Ngāti Paretekawa's own settlement of Kihikihi. Rather than take a stand, Rewi and his supporters had made the heart-breaking decision to cross over to the other side of the Pūniu River, where they watched the destruction of their village unfold from a slope at Tokanui overlooking their old homes.⁹ In the space of a few short hours the entire settlement had been destroyed and huge quantities of livestock and produce carted away by the soldiers.

A correspondent for the *Southern Cross* who witnessed the sacking reported that Kihikihi, 'taken in conjunction with Rangiwahia [sic] and neighbouring districts, may truly be called "the garden of New Zealand" from its highly productive character of ground'. He added that 'When the immense tract of country devoted to the growth of wheat, potatoes, and maize is taken into consideration, no wonder can be felt that the rebels have succeeded in keeping up a good commissariat supply, with abundance to spare, so far'.¹⁰ The reporter described hundreds of acres in wheat, maize, potatoes, kumara, peaches and apples. One of the soldiers thought Kihikihi the largest village they had yet come across and described festive scenes back at their Te Awamutu camp as the troops roasted, boiled and baked their looted goods for dinner.¹¹

If there was arguably some kind of military rationale for the raid on Kihikihi, it is difficult to discern the same for the deliberate torching and destruction of the famed meeting house Hui Te Rangiora that was the heart of the community. Kihikihi may well have come in for special attention and treatment on account of it being identified as the home of supposedly

⁸ Vincent O'Malley, *The Great War for New Zealand: Waikato, 1800–2000* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2016).

⁹ James Cowan, *The New Zealand Wars: A History of the Maori Campaigns and the Pioneering Period* (Wellington: Government Printer, 1983), I, p.362.

¹⁰ 'Another Engagement with the Rebels at Rangiwahia', *Daily Southern Cross*, 25 February 1864, p.3.

¹¹ Edward Tedder, 22 February 1864 [sic – 23 February 1864], Diary, MS-Papers-8104, Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL). Wellington.

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'obstinate' and notorious 'rebels' Ngāti Maniapoto and their famous leader, Rewi Maniapoto.

The loss of Kihikihi, Rangiaowhia and Te Awamutu would be a crippling blow for the Tainui tribes. After the battle at Ōrākau ended in April with nearly half of the Māori occupants of the pā killed, many fleeing for their lives on foot while being hunted down by cavalry, survivors made their way across the Pūniu River. Overnight the population of the area south of the river doubled, placing acute strains on the ability of the host tribes to feed and accommodate the war refugees, especially as the most productive lands had been seized. The cramped and unsanitary living conditions gave rise to regular outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid, while in the first few years after 1864 there were also reports of people dying from starvation.¹²

The loss of those lands was no afterthought. In fact, confiscation of the lands of those attacked was an integral component of the Crown's invasion plans. Self-funded expansion based on seizing the lands of those in the firing line had a long precedent in British Imperial practice, most notably in seventeenth-century Ireland. In this respect, the Waikato War was entered into as something of a business venture and a mighty profit of £3 million predicted. In essence, the scheme involved confiscating the lands of those who offered resistance to the Crown's invasion, allocating some to military settlers recruited to occupy in return for three years' service, while selling the balance at a considerable profit. In this way, the war would pay for itself, and confiscation would be followed up with immediate occupation, thereby consolidating the Crown's victory and asserting military and demographic dominance over the vanquished tribes.

By December 1863 the New Zealand Settlements Act enabling confiscation under certain circumstances had been passed into law, but it was not until 1865 that a series of proclamations under it saw 1.2 million acres of Waikato land formally confiscated. The Pūniu River, the southern limit of the area taken possession of by troops also marked the confiscation boundary. Just north of the river runs a road between Te Awamutu and Pirongia that today is still called Frontier Road. The intention was to plant most of the military

¹² O'Malley, *Great War for New Zealand*, pp.374–78.

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settlers along that frontier, providing insurance against future attacks from the south.

By June 1864 a party of 400 men of the 2nd Waikato Regiment had occupied Alexandra (today's Pirongia) and Kihikihi. Surveys were completed by September. But whereas Alexandra was laid out as a military township, consisting of 1400 one-acre lots, Kihikihi was classed as a military village, consisting of just 404 one-acre sections. Rural sections surrounding both settlements were surveyed in 50-acre lots as far south as the Pūniu River.¹³ Pirongia's population is today just 1400, fewer than Kihikihi, and hopes that it would one day become a major settlement quickly faded. So too did hopes that the Crown would make a quick profit on the confiscated lands. As it turned out, few people wanted to live in the middle of an active war zone.

Most of the men had no farming experience, little capital with which to buy tools or livestock and were located far from their potential markets. Ongoing Māori resistance meant that many never made it onto their rural sections, preferring to huddle in the townships, close to the redoubts that they retreated to at times of rumoured unrest. A few who made it onto their lands recalled receiving deputations of Māori, often at night. Told to pack up their belongings and leave the area immediately, few families ignored such warnings. Those who remained lived in constant fear. In 1870 the Ōrākau military settler William Cowan (father of historian and journalist James) wrote that 'whenever there is a panic with our wives and children we have to abandon our homes leaving them to the mercy of the Natives'.¹⁴

In July 1865 74 military settlers based at Kihikihi petitioned the government, complaining that they had been struck off pay as their lands were allotted to them but were 'not feeling themselves in a position to cultivate it with safety', especially as some of the rural sections were up to 16 miles from the town.¹⁵ Their fears were compounded as news reached the area that British troops would soon be withdrawn from the Waikato (the last left in 1867).

¹³ Peter Allen, 'Military Settlement in the Middle Waikato Basin', M. Phil thesis, University of Waikato, 1969, pp.51–52.

¹⁴ William A. Cowan to J. Williamson, 7 March 1870, McLean Papers, MS-Papers-0032-0232, ATL, Wellington.

¹⁵ Petition of 2nd Waikato Militia and Forest Rangers, 8 September 1865, IA 14/26, Archives New Zealand (ANZ), Wellington.

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Most of the men of the 2nd and 3rd Waikato regiments had been recruited between August and December 1863, meaning they became eligible for their grants in those same months in 1866. Some pleaded in vain to receive their grants early. Once legal titles had been issued, there was an immediate rush to sell the lands. By the end of 1867 a remarkable 43% of the rural lands had been sold. By 1880 just one-tenth of these remained unsold.¹⁶ Many of the 50-acre sections were flogged off for as little as £5, some for a bottle of grog. Most of the military settlers could not wait to leave the area as soon as possible. But the buyers were not intending settlers. Most sections were snapped up by Auckland speculators, including men like Frederick Whitaker and Thomas Russell (both architects of the confiscation policy when in government in 1863–64).¹⁷ They could afford to sit on their investments, waiting on the inevitable recovery in land values as the wars drew to an end after 1872 and speculation heightened as to the planned route of a North Island Main Trunk Railway line.

Visitors to the Waikato district through the late 1860s and 1870s were frequently struck by the deserted nature of the region. Thousands of acres of high quality land formerly cultivated by and supporting a large Māori population lay idle. Many of the new owners had little incentive to develop their lands: a speculator who bought a fifty-acre section for £20 in 1866 might expect to sell it for as much as £300 in 1880, the equivalent of a 107% per annum return on investment.¹⁸ The war may have bankrupted the government, produced untold misery for Māori on the receiving end of British bullets, and been no bed of roses for most of the military settlers, but a small handful of people did very well out of it all.

And so what became of the frontier towns like Te Awamutu and Kihikihi? In time the settlers returned, especially once the railway reached the area in 1880. The district became one of the leading centres for New Zealand's emerging dairy industry. It was an industry that Māori were largely shut out of, their ongoing campaign for the return of the confiscated lands falling on deaf ears.

¹⁶ Ross B. Hamilton, 'Military Vision and Economic Reality: The Failure of the Military Settlements Scheme in the Waikato, 1863–1880', MA thesis, University of Auckland, 1968, pp.83–85.

¹⁷ R.C.J. Stone, *Makers of Fortune: A Colonial Business Community and its Fall* (Auckland: Auckland University Press/Oxford University Press, 1973), p.17.

¹⁸ Hamilton, 'Military Vision and Economic Reality', p.88.

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As for Rewi Maniapoto, in May 1879 he returned to Kihikihi for the first time since the war. The following year the government agreed to build a cottage for him there — part of its plans to entice Ngāti Maniapoto to put their lands through the Native Land Court and allow the railway through the King Country. In June 1881 he invited local settlers to the housewarming of his new home in Kihikihi, sited on a one-acre section beside what is now State Highway 3, the main road through the town. In April 1894 a monument to Rewi that had been donated by George Grey was unveiled next to his Kihikihi home. When Rewi died two months later he was buried at the foot of it.

Rewi Maniapoto reserve sits on the corner of Whitmore Street, leading on to Arapuni Road, down which about four kilometres lies the site of the Ōrākau battle. There, on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle in April 1914 a monument was unveiled that includes an inscription dedicated to Rewi. In Pākehā minds, Ōrākau was the site of 'Rewi's Last Stand', a chivalrous and noble battle in which both sides gained huge respect for their foe and afterwards settled down to enjoy fifty years of unblemished peace and 'the greatest race relations' in the world. The reality was quite different, of course. But that hardly mattered to the huge crowd of Pākehā who turned up to 'celebrate' Ōrākau in 1914 and for many decades thereafter.¹⁹

Today, we know enough about the gruesome reality of what really took place at Ōrākau to reject such myth-making. Even so, the legacy of the war is everywhere, not just in the names of Kihikihi's streets but also arguably in the socio-economic status of many of the region's Māori residents. And as we enter a post-settlement phase in our history and we contemplate how best to remember and commemorate this history, it's worth pondering what this might mean for former garrison towns like Kihikihi. That requires more than a change of street signs. A wholesale shift is needed in the way that Pākehā New Zealand engages with the history of the wars fought on our own shores.

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¹⁹ Vincent O'Malley, "Recording the Incident with a Monument": The Waikato War in Historical Memory', *Journal of New Zealand Studies*, 19 (2015), pp.79–97.