

Whakakautoro—Reaching Out

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In July 1989 I was approached by Mrs Kopu Kaa, of Ngati Porou, who asked if I could travel to her tribal area, Tai Rawhiti, and talk about the Turnbull's facilities and services. I was to take part in the annual Ngata Lecture roadshow, in which members of Ngati Porou gather to present papers and discuss issues that are of particular interest to them. Before discussing my experience on the East Coast, it would be best to clarify my beliefs and motives for going. I was motivated both by the invitation, and by my own social and political philosophy and its relation to the Turnbull and its services to the Maori people.

I believe that Maori people have become alienated from the writings by Maori which are held in public collections. These collections were written, collected and donated for a variety of reasons. Maori people wrote for both private and public consumption, and a number of gradations between these extremes. They wrote with an expectation that their writing would be read by an appropriate audience.

When this material entered public institutions, it was usually given by Pakeha collectors, rather than the authors or tribal owners. The content and arrangement of these collections often reveals much about the collector or donor. For example, the Grey New Zealand Maori Manuscripts have very little material by or about the Waikato tribes who fought against the British during the Land Wars. Yet at the time these tribes were literate, used their literacy extensively, and lived near Auckland where Grey was resident.

In this way, Maori were being alienated from what was rightfully their intellectual property, as they were from their land. It was being locked up effectively in Pakeha fortresses, physical and intellectual. Over time, the majority of Maori forgot the existence of such written material. If they knew about it, where it was held remained a mystery. If by some slim chance they knew of its whereabouts, investigation could be stymied by the formalised systems of access used in libraries.

Pakeha academics and librarians oversaw the use and maintenance of Maori material. They published learned tomes and articles in publications such as the *Journal of the Polynesian Society*. This was mainly for an academic readership. Thus while Maori society was becoming more isolated from the primary sources, secondary sources were being produced that were unintelligible to them. Occasionally a Maori would break through the barriers but those occasions were rare. Often, when they did, what was produced was geared to Pakeha scholarship.