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## Remembering Makereti

*Transcript of unwritten speech, opening the Centre for Women's Studies,  
University of Waikato, 1986.*

E rau rangatira ma, wahine ma, tena ra koutou. Nau mai, haere mai  
ki te riu o Waikato, ki nga mara whanui o to tatou Ariki Tapairu, te  
Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu, e noho ana i te taumata o te Ahurewa.  
Kia ratou ma kua wheturangitia, moe mai, e Kui ma, e Koro ma, moe  
mai koutou.

Kia tatou nei, te humga ora, tena ra tatou katoa.  
Greetings to you all.

For many, many years now I have been aware of the dearth of  
material concerning Maori women in the academic journals and in  
the broader ethnographies that affect Maori life. You are, no doubt,  
as politically aware people, informed of the current issues of Maori  
sovereignty and the need, in fact the passionate desire, for self  
determination amongst my people, a people besieged in our own  
land, in our own culture and language. And so, if we see this as a  
battlefield situation, exactly where does something like Women's  
Studies and the issues that affect Maori women fit in? Ironically, the  
most gutsy and the most articulate and the most splendid fighters,  
the Wahine toa, are female. If I say now 'Who are the leaders of the  
contemporary, radical, Maori world?' The most memorable names,  
the people that you will think of, are Maori women.

How can this have happened? How can it be going on? Maori is  
a society whose ethnographic literature quotes proverbs like 'He  
wahine he whenua, ka ngaro ai te tangata; by land and by women,  
men are lost.' We are a society which says that women supposedly  
must be complementary and supportive but certainly not  
competitive with their men. How do women fit in? As a Maori  
woman scholar and academic, for the last few years I have  
consciously and I think quite angrily challenged and questioned a  
great deal of the literature. And one of the things that has most  
disturbed and alarmed me is that *we have had Maori women's voices* but  
they have seldom, if ever, been heard.

For this reason, today, I decided that I would talk about one such

person, one such voice, and share with you my own inheritance as an Arawa woman. I grew up in a community which stated absolutely adamantly that I had no right to talk, that my older sisters had no right to talk, on the marae. We had become what you could call a wharengaro or a 'lost house' – there have been only females in the last two generations and we have no men to speak for us. We are still prohibited that right, the right of oratory, the right of declaring who we are, how we relate to the world and where we are from. And how we can change the world, from the most basic social and political forum of marae dialogue.

Te Arawa, I think, and I speak as an Arawa woman, has been perhaps the most defensive and certainly the most rigid with regard to the role of women on the marae and in public life. And yet again, you see, ironically, some of the more outstanding females in the Maori world are women from Te Arawa: women from the volcanoes and the geysers and the mud pools, women who are the descendants of people like Te Whakaotirangi or Te Aokapurangi or Hinemoa or Guide Sophia, or Makereti Papakura.

Today I am going to talk with you about Makereti. I consider her book (*The Old-Time Maori*) to be the most valuable, profound and exciting resource at the moment in print on the life of Maori women in traditional society and on the life of Maori women in transitional society as well. We are living at a time, now, where we are having to determine and define exactly what tradition is, retrospectively. This definition has been manipulated because in a society which is under siege, under threat, people need to maintain a pecking order and people need to reassure each other of their strength in relation to the oppressor. For Maori women, the toughest fight is not with the white majority culture, but, far too often, with our own. There are not very many resources out there and we are all scrambling over each other to claim them, to take them and to develop a better life for ourselves and for our children. Yet how many of us are looking at a better life specifically for our grand-daughters, for our mokopuna, for our kotiro, for those coming after us who will inherit so much of the confusion and the bewilderment and the crisis of this time:

Coming back, to Makereti. I was always aware of her when I was a young girl growing up in Ohinemutu surrounded by the glittering tourist hype of penny diving and tour guiding and the various other things that go on in the tourist community. She was always projected, and she continues to be projected, as very beautiful with a melodic, well-modulated voice and extremely feminine manner, an



*Makereti, Guide Maggie Papakura, in her prime, about 1905. Photo: family album.*

unforgettable charisma and emanating the aura of 'true' Maori womanhood. She is described, even in the museums which show and display artifacts that belonged to her, as the famous Maori guide who hosted royalty in 1901, who actually walked side-by-side with the Duke of Cornwall and York, and ultimately married into English gentry. She moved all that way across the world to his manor in Oxfordshire to set up her own idyllic little Maori room and beautiful ethnic environment. She is always described as someone whose femininity and mellow charm were unforgettable and paramount, as the picture postcard Maori woman of the souvenir shelves of 1986. And I lament that, it enrages me, because we are cheating her. I will give you the true story of Makereti, a story that I think is inspiring, not only to Maori women but to pakeha women as well; in fact, it is a story that enriches Aotearoa.

Maggie Papakura was born in 1872. She was the daughter of Pia Te Rihi of Ngati Tuhourangi and Ngati Wahiao from Whakarewarewa, the famous geyser valley of Rotorua. Her father was Mr Alfred Thom, scholar and gentleman, recently retired from the Indian Army. Thom had actually been married to Pia Te Rihi's sister who was apparently barren and so the elders decided that perhaps he should marry Pia Te Rihi as well. Within the same year, two daughters were conceived, Pera, (otherwise known as Guide Bella) and Makereti, otherwise known as Margaret. Mr Thom was very English and very much ex-Indian army. He had a good friend, General Stoddart, who in the early 1880s decided that he would educate the offspring of these roughneck colonials. With his wife he established in Tauranga, in a place tastefully known as 'The Willowbank', an English institution. They intended to 'finish' young ladies of selected families. French, German, singing, dancing, drawing and painting in watercolours were offered. At age ten, quite literally fresh out of the rainforest of Parekarangi, Makereti was sent to that school.

In a way I am beginning on the wrong side because, from the moment of her birth, she was taken by her mother's very aged relatives, deep into the bush, and she was nurtured in the traditions, in the special knowledge of Ngati Wahiao and Ngati Tuhourangi. She was fostered and cultivated in this way because at the moment of her birth there were portentous signs; she was a special child, she had certain gifts and the old people took her away and looked after and fed her the treasures of their knowledge.

However, Mr Thom decided that to be well-rounded as a late

nineteenth-century young lady of the Victorian age, Makereti also needed the benefits of a good sound English education. And so she ended up at 'The Willowbank'. She lasted a year. The Willowbank, Tauranga, is raupatu – confiscated – land. Ngaiterangi, the people of Tauranga Moana, had resisted colonial expansion and had attempted to drive the white settlers, the English colonials from the western Bay of Plenty, and for that they had been punished. Relations between Maori and pakeha in that area and particularly around The Willowbank were markedly strained because the war was very recent and Te Kooti was still riding around the King Country.

So we have a very young, vulnerable, Maori child at The Willowbank. She said later to an English magazine interviewer, 'That was the most horrible year of my life, but I learnt how you people think.' She also learned some French and some German, on top of being a primary speaker of Maori and very articulate in English. She was then sent to Hukarere, in Napier, the school set up by the Anglican Church for the training of young Maori girls. She was there until just after the Tarawera eruption.

She came back to Whakarewarewa, to the Pa and to a world in which, because of the eruption of the mountain, tourist activity had shifted focus from Rotomahana and the Pink and White Terraces, (which had been destroyed by Tarawera) to Whakarewarewa itself, the valley of over forty geysers. With her aunt, Guide Sophia, she became very involved in the hostessing of tourists. By 1900, a number of people had remarked not only on her charm and on her quiet dignity, but in letters and other manuscript material that I have looked at recently, they commented on her bookshelf and its cultivated and catholic taste. Next to Prescott's *Conquest of Peru* was the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, and a full collection of the Romantic poets. And yet, we are led to believe, this was a lady who merely smiled at the tourists, trundled them around the mud pools, took their money and then led them all off to a concert. But the reading material which she vastly enjoyed was not that of a flirtatious, dizzy, glittering, young woman but of a very astute thinker. She travelled a lot and, at the turn of the century, her star was very much in ascendant. She did guide the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York and became a prominent media figure as a result. Even at that time, eighty-six years ago, the media was just astonishing in its power, in its influence and certainly in its ability to shape, cultivate, fashion and ultimately manufacture a personality, an image, whatever the

true reality of the raw material may have been. There are so many beautiful photographs, newspaper accounts and magazine views of Makereti between the years 1900 to 1905. At the same time she was an active political lobbyist and prolific letter writer. Let me describe some of the things that she was doing.

She was one of the earliest recorded financial supporters of the Auckland Museum. She donated a guinea to the setting up of a Maori court in 1902. I have seen the receipts and the letter which accompanies it. She was very firmly against alcohol, very firmly against liquor and she lobbied. There are many letters and records concerning her prohibition activities.

She was also very heavily involved in the promotion of a certain form of Maori dance. In the early 1900s there was a great deal of concern for 'the morality of young colonial people who were visiting the corrupt and perverted temples of the Maori people in Rotorua and witnessing their lewd dances'. There were columns and columns and columns of this type of material in the *New Zealand Herald* and the *Dominion* in the first decade of this century. At every opportunity, she wrote letters, thousands of words long, refuting and challenging those statements.

Makereti was part of a very conscious and angry tribal network that was attempting to stop grave-robbing and the illicit removal of taonga Maori, of greenstone, jade, whalebone, and other graveyard treasures, from the urupa or cemeteries around Rotorua. She actually described in a letter to a friend how one night she mounted a horse and went out and physically attempted to stop a group of grave-robbers. So, she was extremely politically motivated, she was articulate, she was a political fighter, she was astute, she knew what she was doing and she was actually worlds away from the glittering, glamorous, frivolous, feminine figure that she was constantly made out to be by the media.

The public front was being manipulated, shaped and directed towards the tourist industry, but, as I have indicated, Makereti was someone else again. We are told so much about the activities of the Young Maori Party and men such as Pomare, Buck, and Ngata. They are forever described as well-meaning, earnest, philanthropic Maori men with a vision. Maggie is portrayed only as someone with a beautiful face and a glittering personality. Where is the equity in that? Whom can we as Maori women look back to, when we are shown one image of ourselves and men are shown another of themselves?



*Margaret Staples Browne of Oddington Grange, Oxfordshire: Makereti in the early years of her marriage. Photo: collection Barbara Dennan.*

During that first decade, while the boys were busy organizing, Makereti was also active in her own entrepreneurial pursuits. In 1910, she led a forty-strong party of Maori entertainers to Sydney and there they participated in a colonial exhibition. She managed that touring party and while she was there, she received an intriguing offer to take a group to the celebrations of the Festival of Empire and the crowning of those two illustrious personages the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York as Queen Mary and King George V in London in 1911. She put together a group of forty people and off they all went.

At that time, too, Makereti re-established contact with someone whom she had met in 1902: a well-to-do Oxfordshire farmer called Richard Staples-Browne. What is intriguing about Makereti is that during her high-profile period as a media celebrity she was never ever described as having a private life.

Makereti was never permanently coupled with a man, she was never ever seen as having relationships with men. The media

projected her as a glittering, inaccessible, virginal Princess. She was not that. At the age of seventeen she gave birth to a son, who was promptly farmed off to an older relative, but for all that time in her life, there is not one memory, not one recorded instance of relationships with men. She was, on the other hand, very involved with women. Her correspondence, her manuscripts, her letters, her journal entries all state this clearly. Even the songs and the poetry that she composed were written to her female friends.

Nevertheless, in 1911, who should front up looking very dapper but one Richard Staples-Browne, who chivalrously proceeded to court her and offer her the security and the wealth and the very tempting new adventure of farming life in Oxfordshire. She wanted the world he offered, so she decided to accept his proposal and she married him. She settled into his series of beautiful Oxford manor houses.

During the First World War Makereti became a famous volunteer nurse, and when the pioneer battalion rested in England she looked after all of the Maori servicemen. She was also involved in the Country Women's Institute and at the end of the First World War she entered the wonderful ivy-covered halls of academe. While becoming involved with the University in Oxford, she also gave lectures and her house with its quaint New Zealand room became the venue for a number of prominent anthropologists. Anthropology, at that time, was a new science, a fledgling discipline and in many ways it soothed the guilty consciences of colonial administrators and colonial scholars. Makereti in Oxford was right in the middle of all that.

Predictably, her husband resented it. He resented it, that is, when he was not on safari in Africa or shooting tigers in India or somewhere half-way around the globe doing something exotic and amusing. Inevitably, the marriage collapsed. By 1924, Makereti was a single woman again. She was a member of the University of Oxford. She had begun a Bachelor of Science degree – and she was involved in the most horrific upheaval of class and conflict of lifestyle. From being the lady of Bamfield Manor she had suddenly become an unmarried single woman without an income living in a tiny Oxford flat on the Woodstock Road. From being one of the local aristocracy, she had become one of the native colonial students. Yet she survived, and survived well.

In 1926, when she received a very paltry marriage settlement, she came home, back to Aotearoa for ten weeks, and during those ten

weeks she had to really examine what she was doing. She had not seen Whakarewarewa, she had not inhaled the magic fragrance of sulphur and all those things that a Te Arawa woman really misses when she is half-way around the world, for over fifteen years. She decided that she would be much more effective politically if she completed her degree, so she went back to England, to complete her thesis.

At this point, I would like to read to you something she wrote. As well as being a highly sought-after and successful Maori guide, Makereti was also a potent and powerful story-teller. She enjoyed telling stories and I think that to be a successful Kaiarahi, to be a good guide in the thermal regions, you have to just let it all go and tell a really good story. This is one of the notes from her manuscripts that she penned into a margin and then cut out because she thought it was not appropriate for her thesis. She was writing about demons, taniwha, elemental spirits and this is what she said:

'Strange tales are often told about enchanted trees and demon-haunted logs which sail uncannily about the lakes and rivers and streams, plunging along veritably like the Flying Dutchman, head to the wind, with another eccentric timber taniwha that used to go cruising around Lake Rotoiti.'

In 1984, I began the preparation of Makereti's biography. For me it was an incredibly painful and yet at the same time quite exulting experience. I had heard that she had left something at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford. Through the generosity and the support of the Victoria University Maori Studies Department and the award of a Past-Doctoral Fellowship in Maori I journeyed to England and to Oxford and ultimately to the Pitt River Museum to see what these things were. You can imagine my joy and my surprise to be presented with ten huge, acid-free, museum filing boxes of manuscripts. All this from a woman who was seen as frivolous, glittering, beautiful, glamorous, from a woman who was depicted primarily as the picture-postcard Maori maiden. And yet every day of her life Makereti had written, reflected, recorded; she kept impeccable diaries and journals. She was a prolific writer; she was also something of a hoarder when it came to things like train schedules and bus tickets and hotel receipts and all these other ephemera. Yet, often, it is this ephemera that helps build a biography and brings the woman, the person, back to life.

On her return to England in 1926 Makereti once again went into



*Makereti, the scholarly eccentric and doting grandmother with her mokopuna Barbara Dennon, Oxford, 1930. Photo: collection Barbara Dennon.*

student digs. By this stage she had become very, very close to her son, James, who had moved out during the war. His father was a red-haired Irishman called Dennon. James Dennon had become, through the divorce settlement, the legal heir of Richard Staples Browne. So he was actually quite wealthy and a lucky young part-Maori colonial fellow. For a while there was some estrangement, but during the late twenties, Makereti and her mokopuna, James

Dennon's three children, became a close family. They are still living in Peterborough, England, and are quite astonishingly, quite peculiarly, very strangely English. I met two of them, James and Barbara, and was told lots of wonderful stories.

The saddest story, though, is the account of her death. She had her thesis prepared for her Bachelor of Science degree examination in Anthropology. She was set to submit her thesis and do the viva on the seventh of May 1930. Her son wrote to a friend at the time of her death: 'Mother was to present her thesis to the University for her B.Sc. on the May 7th last. It was 30,000 words almost a doctorate and almost certain of obtaining her object which was a doctorate but alas it was not to be.' She died on the sixteenth of April 1930, three weeks before her viva. She died in a most typical way, I think, for Makereti. She had very severe muscular rheumatism and had spent a lot of time in nursing homes and in private hospitals around Oxford. However, being basically quite an athletic woman and I think physically extremely stubborn, she refused to give in, and she refused to rest. On the morning of the fourteenth of April, she took out what had become her trademark, a heavy old, clunky, black and green Raleigh bicycle with a great big basket and a great big mudguard and she decided that she would take a ride out to Oddington, a journey of about fifteen kilometres. She spent the entire day exploring the banks of the Isis, of the Thames, and generally heaving herself around on this huge, old machine, thoroughly enjoying herself. That night she had a stroke, the next day she was in a bad way and very, very early in the morning, just after midnight on the sixteenth, she died. She was only fifty-eight years old and certainly at the prime, at the pinnacle, of her academic creativity. It was a huge loss. However, what enrages me most of all is that since her death she has been remembered only as the glamorous, as the beautiful, as the dainty, as the feminine, as the charming and charismatic guide of Whakarewarewa.

Having said all that and told you this story, I drag the net back in and I say this is why we women and why we Maori women need a place in the University and also resources for us to set up a Women's Studies programme. Makereti's story is not unusual, if you look at women around the world. It is about a colonized, a manufactured and quite deliberately fashioned media personality. The white media, pakeha entrepreneurs, and greedy publishers of her time have presented us with that distortion. Through something like the Women's Studies programme, I think that we can bring her back to

life, as she truly was, as she truly felt, as she sang, as she talked, as she wrote. We are giving our grand-daughters, our Maori grand-daughters, a chance to look back and to see, not just glamour and glitter and pzazz and panache but someone who was strong, resilient, capable, autonomous and inimitably brave; someone who was a leader and someone who was also a scholar.

She is buried beside a quaint, beautiful, little English church which has a ninth-century well that has since been turned into a baptismal font. It is a church that she loved and to which she felt she belonged. Intriguingly, it was a church that for many many centuries before the arrival of Christianity had become a tribal focus for the Celtic goddess activity of the region and it was at that place she claimed that she felt most at home. The Mauri was there.

He poroporoaki tenei kia ia, kia Makereti, te puhi o Te Arawa, e tatoko ana ra i te mara pohatu o tauwi, o tawahi. E kui, e te whaea, moe mai, moe mai.