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The Indigenous backstage pass

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About the author

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Abstract

In her poem “from turtle island to aotearoa”, Anishinaabe writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm writes about travelling to the other side of the world and finding ways to connect. For my part, I have taken the “reverse” journey many times from Aotearoa to Turtle Island, and the poem has both nudged and nurtured my thinking about the promises and limits of Indigenous–Indigenous connections. In Indigenous Studies, we have made really important claims about the need to research our own people, and the limits of work conducted by outsiders. In this article, I reflect on the conundrum of being an Indigenous outsider in much of my current research project in which I, as a Māori scholar, engage the works of Māori writers alongside Indigenous writings from Australia, Fiji and Hawai’i. How does working in Indigenous Studies as a discipline shape my approach to researching others? Does being an Indigenous researcher give me a backstage pass?

Keywords

Indigenous Studies, methodologies, trans-Indigenous, poetry, outsider research

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In August 2012, I arrived at Pearson International Airport to spend a year at the University of Toronto. I had lined up an apartment in Faculty Housing and was based in a visiting capacity at what was then known as Aboriginal Studies (it has since been renamed Indigenous Studies). I had made the arrangements to move to Toronto for a number of reasons—it was my sabbatical, and I relished the opportunity to work in a space with great Indigenous scholars, as well as to reconnect and think with other scholars and friends in the region. I was keen to sharpen my thinking, learn from the conversations happening in that place, and write. The arrangements for my year at the Toronto end were mostly made by Daniel Justice, since moved to the University of British Columbia, who had a cross-appointment in English and Aboriginal Studies and was a friend as well as someone I was keen to work with and think alongside. One particular bonus was that Deborah McGregor was the head of Aboriginal Studies at the time, and although I was only visiting and so she would not be my "boss" in a management sense, this would be the first time in my life I would work somewhere headed by an Indigenous woman. At Toronto I co-taught an undergraduate class (with Daniel), and was part of an informal "Indigenous Literary Studies Reading Group" that included Rick Monture, Nadine Attewell and Daniel Coleman from McMaster, Michelle Elleray from Guelph, and Daniel and me from the University of Toronto. Roughly monthly, we got together to talk about a book in the field we had all read, and ate together. Like any good reading group, the conversation and food were great.

But I also came to Toronto because I was tired. I was run down. I was burnt out. For six and a half years I had worked as hard as I could in my first academic job, but after so long feeling like every day was a fight, I needed to get far, far away. I have often told people since my sabbatical that without my year at University of Toronto, I would not still be an academic. At an Aboriginal Studies Program, on Haudenosaunee, Mississauga, Anishinaabe and Wendat land, I got to slowly rebuild and restore, and to remember why I got into all of this in the first place. During my year in Toronto, I kept a blog called "Te tau okioki: the sabbatical diaries", which were partly a way for me to stay in touch with people at home and partly a way to get writing and thinking.[1] Why was it called "Te tau okioki"? "Te tau" means a year or season or period of time—so the phrase means "the year of okioki". What's "okioki"? If you look up okioki in the online Māori dictionary you will find that it means "to rest". But okioki in the sense I have learned about it in the context of learning our specific tribal waiata[2] adds these additional layers to the word. It has a deeper meaning that is not quite the kind of "rest" that looks like lying on the couch watching Netflix. It includes ideas like repair, revitalise, rejuventate, restore. When I used it for the name of my blog, I was using the word because it is from an ancient karakia[3] that we sing or recite where I come from. Our ocean-going waka[4] hit a whirlpool on the way to Aotearoa from our tropical Polynesian ancestral homeland, and we only survived because of a final desperate push that got us out. Survival is always something to celebrate, but it is not enough by itself. We (by which I mean my ancestors) took refuge on someone else's island to repair and rebuild—okioki—and then return to the journey to Aotearoa.[5]

So the year I spent in Toronto was my Tau okioki—my year of restoration—because I was battered, and although I had survived, I could not keep going on the bigger journey without stopping to okioki. For me, it was amazing. Restorative. I read a lot, I wrote a lot, I slept a lot, I walked a lot around Toronto streets, I went to a Zumba class at the university gym on Mondays, I ate properly, I travelled to a few conferences, I met people. I realised, looking back at Aotearoa, that I could not go back to that first job, and I applied for a new job at the University of Hawai'i. In June, before I left a sweltering summery Toronto, I sent four boxes of things (mostly books) to Honolulu. Just like my ancestral waka, my sails were reset, the bags were packed, the goodbyes were said, I was off again. For this, I will always thank that place and its people. *But.* This is all about me. It was *my* tau okioki, it was *me* who continued happily on her journey. When I went to

Toronto, I got something for myself. I even called it by a name and concept from my own language and still have no idea how this idea might be expressed in an Indigenous language from the place where I lived. This raises an important, if touchy, question: What, really, is the difference between a Māori person coming to this place to refill her metaphorical tank in what she calls “te tau okioki”, and two empires from Europe coming to the same place to fill their metaphorical bags with land, pelts, children or oil?

When I got to Hawai’i, some scholars were doing brave, difficult and smart work around the idea of Asian settler colonialism. Drawing from the dynamic conversation about settler colonialism globally, this local response drew on the central tenet, as so clearly articulated by Patrick Wolfe, that settler colonialism is not an event but a structure. Candace Fujikane and others have been exploring the extent to which discourses of immigrant presence that are nation-centric, multiculturalist, civil-rights focused, and interested in past and continuing marginalisation can serve to reinforce the dominance (and indeed power) of the occupying nation state. In her introduction to *Asian Settler Colonialism*, Fujikane (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008, p. vii) opens with lines from the poem “Settlers, not immigrants” by Haunani-Kay Trask: “Settlers, not immigrants./ Killing us off/ disease by disease, lie by lie,/ one by one.” Later in the introduction, Fujikane writes:

> [T]he critical point of difference we emphasize is one that defines a settler state: the structural distinction between Natives and settlers. All Asians, then, including those who do not have political power, are identified in this book as settlers who participate in US settler colonialism. (Fujikane & Okamura, 2008, p. 6.)

Fujikane notes a resonance with Ann Curthoys, who in 2000 wrote in the context of Australia:

> The continuing presence of colonialism has implications for all immigrants, whether first-generation or sixth. All non-indigenous people, recent immigrants and descendants of immigrants alike, are beneficiaries of a colonial history. We share the situation of living on someone else’s land. (as cited in Fujikane & Okamura, 2008, p. 12)

As a Māori scholar, I had gone to Toronto because of longstanding connections with Indigenous people there (I studied for my PhD, which had a graduate minor in American Indian Studies, just down the road in New York State). I had gotten to know Daniel Justice through other Indigenous networks over the years: first when I attended the Native American Literature Symposium at the Saginaw Chippewa Reservation back in 2006, and then several times at meetings of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association. I was there because I had been given an Indigenous backstage pass to Aboriginal Studies on the basis of being a Māori scholar. Surely I wasn’t a settler? Aren’t they the bad guys?

Using settler colonialism as a prism for thinking about non-Indigenous presence is tricky in the case of nondominant settlers. This idea that we are all “beneficiaries of a colonial history” can be an uncomfortable idea for communities that are marginalised in the context of the settler state in which we live, and especially when we feel a sense of deep connection and relationship between our marginalisation and the marginalisation of Indigenous peoples in this other place. Certainly, not everyone in a settler colony came of their own volition, and surely it is helpful to retain specificity when thinking about the range of migrations in any such space. Movement is not always a sign of mobility; in the cases of enslavement and indenture, movement can signify, if anything, a lack of agency. In *Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism*, Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd (2011) draws on Caribbean writer Kamau Braithwaite’s conceptualisation of the “arrivant” in order to configure descendants of enslaved Africans currently living in the United States. This notion of the arrivant is a very helpful concept in specific contexts, especially as a way to

acknowledge and think through the ways in which not all presence on Indigenous land is deliberate or even desired on the part of non-Indigenous people. On the other hand, however, arguing for exceptions always risks emptying out the category of "settler" to the point that colonialism is once again understood as a cluster of evil or defective individuals rather than as a structure in which people can be complicit regardless of their own movement to that place.[6]

All marginalisation happens somewhere, and every "somewhere" has itself been a site of colonial violence. Fujikane suggests that understanding colonial histories need not necessarily diminish or refute the elements of other struggles:

> Honoring the struggles of those who came before us, however, also means resisting the impulse to claim only their histories of oppression and resistance… The early Asian settlers were both active agents in the making of their own histories and unwitting recruits swept into the service of empire. (Fujikane & Okamura 2008, p. 7)

For a specific example, consider Māori people in the context of Australia, the place I moved to after two years in Hawai'i, where our relative privilege is enshrined in legislation from the era of the White Australia policy. James Bennett (2001) and Paul Hamer (2014) draw our attention to the way that Australia made an exception for Māori so we could migrate to Australia on the basis of being New Zealanders at the same time that other Pacific people closely related to us were excluded on the basis of being too brown. Additionally, there is ample commentary from Aboriginal people that during the 20th century some managed to prevent the removal of children by claiming to be Māori. I will repeat this in another way: the position of Māori in Australia has been sufficiently privileged that Indigenous Australians pretended to be Māori in order to keep their families intact. When I was living in Sydney and teaching at Macquarie University there on Darug land, a Sydney-based Māori student I supervised for a masters on this topic, Innez Haua, clarified this situation:

> As important as it is to understand Māori privilege in Australian history, it is of equal importance to understand who this privilege undermined and undermines. All of the constitutional acts entitling Māori to particular benefits were very specific in outlawing Pacific Islanders and Aboriginal peoples. Exemption from the white Australia policy has many implications; primarily it has placed Māori migrants above all other migrants. To put Māori migratory privilege into perspective with those it subverts, sixty-one years after Māori were entitled to a place on the electoral roll and sixty years after Māori were granted automatic residency, in 1962, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were finally given the same right to vote. (Haua, 2017, p. 28)

In Australia, Māori were granted a backstage pass by another colonial state because being "New Zealanders" made us appear white at the border.

These moments of border crossing are not the only places where privilege is produced or embodied, but they are helpful to notice because the lines between nation states operate so baldly there that things are brought into sharper focus. In Canada, as I have said, I had prepared for my tau okioki through my relationships with Indigenous people, and came to be in an Aboriginal Studies program where, among other things, I taught students about being critically suspicious of the nation state. But I was only able to be in Toronto—and paid in Canadian dollars—because when I first landed in Vancouver I received a stamp in my passport from the Canadian state. Settler colonialism is both produced and maintained by non-Indigenous presence regardless of the power accrued to, or specific history of, that presence. You do not need to have participated in the frontier wars in order to be part of, and benefit from, the structure of colonialism in a place. Regardless of whether or not I am Māori, proffering my New Zealand passport at Vancouver airport back in August 2012 made me legible to the Canadian state. Despite my Māori-designed earrings and my birthday present from my sister which was a black and red "Strong Resilient

Wahine"[7] t-shirt folded neatly in my suitcase the most recent time I entered Canada, my passport makes me New Zealander enough—settler enough, white enough—to come in. This is an important element of the Indigenous–Indigenous connections that I confront, or that confronts me more clearly now that I am married to an Indigenous person with Fiji citizenship and a turquoise passport that is welcome in very few countries. It is so easy for me to say "I am going to go and connect with my Indigenous brothers and sisters in Turtle Island now!" and hop on a plane. For Vula, there is a lengthy and expensive process of applying for visas and proving things I never have to think about. When I have considered attending conferences or giving invited talks overseas, my New Zealand passport means I have never had to consider whether I can enter a country in the first place. Certainly, the privilege some of us Indigenous people have in these moments and contexts can feel hard to reconcile with our experiences of the opposite of privilege most of the time.

One of the last blog posts I wrote in Toronto refers to a poem by the Anishinaabe poet and publisher Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm, whom I had met not long after my arrival in Canada when I travelled to her home on Cape Croker Reserve with Daniel Justice and his husband. On my blog I wrote:

> In her poem about visiting Aotearoa, Kateri notes:
> "Weeks from now
> I will fall through the sky to turtle island
> Clutching a bit of papatuanuku in my fist
> I will create a new beginning for myself
> On the solid back of Canada"
>
> She is referring to the origin story of her people here, including the falling of a woman from the sky down towards the water and her being caught ultimately by a turtle. I am conducting the reverse journey, leaving Turtle Island (as North America is known) for Aotearoa, but with a bit of this place clutched in my fist. I will be landing in Aotearoa but moving to Hawai'i soon after. Where is the solid back in that? Well, gentle reader, it all depends on how you look at it … (and Miigwetch to Kateri for the amazing poem).[8]

The poem "from turtle island to aotearoa" comes from Akiwenzie-Damm's poetry collection, *My Heart is a Stray Bullet* (Akiwenzie-Damm, 2002.) It appears at the very end of the book, and reflects on a trip she took with a friend to Aotearoa in 1991. The eight sections of the poem (seven numbered sections, and the final unnumbered section titled "Beginning") describes the process of arriving at the gate of a cultural space, the marae, and then entering the space and, over a period of time staying there, coming to an understanding—insight, revelation, intuition—about the relationship between "turtle island" and "aotearoa".[9]

I have found the poem to be a generative touchstone for thinking about the sense of being Indigenous-from-elsewhere in Indigenous space. I have talked about and taught it quite often because she raises the questions of what happens when she, as an Anishinaabe poet, enters Māori space. But what genealogies could possibly connect us? What is the basis of connection between Indigenous groups? What is shared? What protocols are available—whose customs do we defer to while encountering one another? On what basis, ultimately, do we connect? On the one hand, we might argue that the only thing we share for sure is colonialism: any other definition of Indigeneity risks bearing too close a resemblance to the European-imagined "Native" (savage, noble or otherwise); we all believe in extended families and oral tradition and ancestors and love the earth mother. And yet, foregrounding colonialism as the basis of our connection feels problematic too—or perhaps, too problematic. Sure, this may be the only thing we actually share—

but surely this means we continue to be defined by the very thing that we define ourselves against?

Introducing the poem in the terms of Indigenous-imagined space, rather than settler nation-imagined space, is significant. Aotearoa and Turtle Island are present from the very title of the poem. “New Zealand” does not appear at all; “Canada” peeps through a gap halfway through the poem, although reframed and claimed: falling on “the solid back of Canada” reframes and claims the nation state within the terms of Anishinabe history. Rather than Akiwenzie-Damm’s travel to Aotearoa being a celebration of connection between two settler colonial nation states, or between the native emissaries of such spaces, it is a specific moment of connection between Māori and Anishinabeg, on our own terms. To me, this is one of the key demands (and opportunities) that Indigenous texts issue to us as readers, scholars and thinkers: to place less emphasis on the nation state as the base unit of analysis, and to follow the example and overt claims of these texts, which focus on the more local and specific as well as more global.

The poem opens with a section titled “i new arrival”. When Akiwenzie-Damm describes arriving at the site of encounter, she begins: “morning shatters/ like ice in our lungs”—the poem starts with dawn, with rupture, with breathing (tihei mauri ora—a sneeze of life), with images of cocoons and caterpillars reinforcing this idea of newness. An arrival on someone’s land is tied to being or feeling vulnerable, fresh, delicate, in transformation. At this early point of the poem, watery borders are negotiated: she describes “waves” of people “lapping at the shore”. Akiwenzie-Damm is not the only Indigenous creative person to “lap at the shore” in New Zealand. Describing an “arrival” in tidal rather than penetrative[10] terms highlights the genealogy of Indigenous arrivals in which the poet understands herself. As well as individual visits, like the specific trip Akiwenzie-Damm recalls in her poem, there have been other visits and other arrivals: so many kinds of physical and textual gatherings between Indigenous people, including anthologies, networks, and textual articulations. Akiwenzie-Damm herself was involved in later lapping of the same tide: the “Honouring Words” tours, which she instigated, toured groups of Indigenous writers from Aotearoa, Australia and Canada in 2002 (Canada), 2003 (Australia) and 2005 (New Zealand). Later, a spin-off series of tours called “Honouring Theatre” began in 2006 with a tour of Canada and was once again followed by tours of Australia in 2008 and New Zealand. Other kinds of connections have taken place around publication projects. The landmark international Indigenous literary anthology, *He Wai: A Song* (Menzies et al., 1996), was published in New Zealand and included Akiwenzie-Damm’s “from turtle island to Aotearoa”. This anthology was followed by anthologies that Akiwenzie-Damm herself edited: *Skins* (Akiwenzie-Damm & Douglas, 2000) was co-edited with Aboriginal editor Josie Douglas and co-published by Akiwenzie-Damm’s publishing house Kegedonce Press in collaboration with Jukurrpa Books in Australia; *Without Reservation* (Akiwenzie-Damm, 2003) was co-published by Kegedonce and the Māori press Huia Publishers.

The second section of Akiwenzie-Damm’s poem, titled “ii answering a call”, reinforces the structure of encounter. This time, the speaker is already in the process of encounter: they describe “yesterday” and the time leading up to the “new arrival” in the first section of the poem. When the call is issued by the home people, as part of the pōwhiri,[11] the first voice is that of the hosts, which is replied to by those who are waiting to enter. The stanza describes the process of being ceremonially brought onto a marae,[12] as if in waka.[13] As the speaker of the poem moves across space, she finds that she does not recognise the “voices” and yet she proposes that beyond her conscious self (indeed, her conscious body) is another (her “true ears” and her “true eyes”). The speaker of the poem foregrounds the use of genealogy as a “net” (“where songs of family lines are cast/ like nets across a sea of faces”) and realises the recounting of “family lines” (making use of the pun on “lines” of descent and fishing “lines”) performs an important ceremonial function. The

Māori poet Vernice Wineera (2009) describes the process of reciting genealogy in the context of marae ceremony in her poem “Tangi” (p. 106):

> The old men speech-making
> Under the rafters of kowhaiwhai,
> Untangling the genealogies
> And reapportioning the land.

Likewise in her poem “Whakapapa” (p. 65), Wineera writes about an “old man” who “calls the names/ into the sunlit day”:

> The names roll off his tongue
> and stand in formation
> before his eyes.
> They are the warriors,
> the chiefs, their wives,
> the sons of chiefs,
> the sons of sons.
> They fill the marae as the old man intones.

So we recite genealogies when we meet each other, not to say “I am the most important person or thing to consider”, but to say “our relationship, which is made possible by me providing past and potential threads of connection between us, is the most important thing to me”.

In the third stanza of the poem, “iii drifting”, Akiwenzie-Damm emphasises the centrality of place: “this part of mother earth”, “here”, “there”. While the speaker of the poem participates in the local practice, she is aware of her distinctiveness (“my moccasins step timid”) and yearns for other “like-covered feet”. She finds herself listening out for familiar sounds and realises she is a “stranger in another land”. A stranger. We could leave it here. We could just stop, and say “well then, Indigenous people in other people’s spaces are just non-Indigenous people”, and to some extent this is absolutely true. When I am in Toronto, or Hawai’i, or Sydney, I am still Indigenous to my own home—I carry my ancestors in and with my body—but I am not from those places. I am also a settler, non-Indigenous, someone who is present on the basis of coerced Indigenous hospitality, an expression of generosity that has been forced and is tangled up in projects of assimilation and genocide. I am a settler, and benefit (like other settlers) from the structure produced by, and productive of, acts of dispossession—regardless of my own direct involvement in, or thoughts about, such acts. So, we could say an Indigenous guest is simply another “stranger”. But, this poem demands that we do not stop there. And the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples demands that we do not stop there. And countless writers and anthologies and artistic collaborations demand that we do not stop there. If we follow the lead of these texts and networks, something is shared; there is a connection, and through the rest of the poem this connection is elaborated.

At this point of the poem, as Akiwenzie-Damm focuses on place, she describes moving forward, but finds herself being pulled back at the same time: she is “like someone walking against the current” as her “head drifts slowly home”. The speaker of the poem is respectful about the space she is in, but she finds that being in such a specific place causes her to turn her mind toward the place “where my words are”. This imaginary turn towards home brings about an array of markers of genealogical and geographic specificity and networks by gently foregrounding the supple links between language and space. Because home is where her words are (“buried, resting, floating, filling”), and she has been “called from home by voices I do not recognize”, in Aotearoa she finds herself without words: “here I am the quiet one”. However, I am very reluctant to read this

quietness as powerlessness or voicelessness. Quietness can mean a state of reflection, a state of listening, or a state of simply being humble in the context. We do not *all* have to talk *all* the time. Perhaps the speaker of the poem is surprised to find that "here" she is "the quiet one", which implies she usually is not "there", but she also affirms that this is a recognisable role rather than a mere description ("the quiet one" rather than "here I am quiet"). She does seek words—familiar words—and words are connected to place, but she knows that "[her] words" are not connected to this place, and so she finishes the stanza: "here I must reach across an ocean to find the right words". This phrase is key to this section of the poem, and for me they are a gift of the poem as a whole. What does it mean to reach across an ocean? Which words are the "right" words?

"Reaching" in this poem is an outward extension (towards Aotearoa) that is made possible because of the depth of her connection to home. However, one cannot reach without maintaining balance by being grounded in specific place. According to the logic of the poem, "reach" is towards home rather than towards the destination; however, this "reach" is to connect with, rather than escape, where she is. This is another dimension of comparative/connective/trans-Indigenous work—where one identifies the need and opportunity to reach home, not in order to escape the local context but in order to connect to it. Later in the poem, this connection with home enables strength and skill to connect in this new place: "my sister's voice is sap in my veins… feet firmly planted I call for my sister's daughter who pours out the drops of knowledge she has gathered to share with me". Akiwenzie-Damm's act of reaching is demanded both through and by the presence of Indigenous words. She hears words uttered and sung and responds by "reach[ing] across an ocean" in order to identify her own position and reflect on the ethics—the idea of what is "right", as suggested by the phrase "the right words"—of transnational Indigenous connection.

In many ways I keep doing the reverse journey to the one described in the poem: I keep moving "from aotearoa" to various places. Rather than entering Māori space, I have entered other Indigenous spaces: Cayuga space, Kanaka Maoli space, Darug space. And the thing about entering Indigenous space—and it is all Indigenous space—is that one becomes aware of one's own deep roots, one's own place. As an Indigenous scholar, I am so aware of the stakes, risks and responsibilities of talking about other people because (or "and so") I am so critical of when other people do it badly. I am a part of Indigenous networks in which people speak with me and share things and give me opportunities because I am Māori. They might also be very nice to people who do not have Indigenous ancestry, but this is not about how they treat them. In so many places I get a backstage pass of sorts, and I cannot—I will not—disavow that. I treasure it, and I willingly supply backstage passes to Indigenous people who want to connect with Aotearoa. As Indigenous scholars, certainly we should be behaving in ways that are reciprocal rather than extractive, because we know what it is like to have people speak about us in diminishing or inaccurate or damaging ways. It is possible to paint oneself into a corner and think that the only ethical option is to go home and stay home. But I do not believe the only possible—or only "right"—response to this is paralysis or refusal, as agentic and productive that "refusal" in Audra Simpson's (2007) sense might be.

Indigenous Studies as a structure, a network, a position, a discipline demands that we ask questions about what it means to talk about someone else—even as so many of our core texts and core arguments have started from the first principle, that one's research should be connected to one's own people. The next question, inevitably, is: Who are one's own people? I might be a Māori scholar, but I am not from everywhere within the political borders of New Zealand.[14] Who decides what zones your ticket gets you access to? Am I an insider to all Māori communities? No. Am I an insider to all of my own specific tribal community? No. Am I an insider to all Māori genders, perspectives, experiences, generations or knowedges? Definitely not. Part of working in

Indigenous Studies as a discipline also means we need to understand how this works differently in different Indigenous places too. For example, at Macquarie University, I worked in a Department of Indigenous Studies in which, following the convention and interests of people engaged in this conversation in Australia, “Indigenous” did not mean Māori. When I was at Cornell as a PhD student, however, I was easily absorbed into CCAIGPS—the Cornell Council of American Indian Graduate and Professional Students—in ways that I realised might not work in reverse had any of my CCAIGPS colleagues been in Aotearoa.

In my current research project, which is called “Writing the new world: Indigenous texts 1900–1975”, I am investigating and reading and writing and supervising graduate students about lots of writing that is not connected to my own community. The project focuses on four “sites”: Aotearoa, Australia, Fiji, Hawai’i. These places were not picked at random: I have particular connections with each of them (I am only Indigenous to New Zealand, however), and together they represent a diverse configuration of Indigenous and colonial contexts to the extent that the comparative and relational work I am undertaking in the project should be as rich as possible. In addition, there are traceable connections between each of these sites and the Indigenous writers who have lived and published in them. Each of these is a site of very different colonial, Indigenous, migrant, diasporic experiences, and each has very different Indigenous literary histories too. All of them, however, have a similar official or dominant story about literary origins in the late 1960s and early 1970s. My project asks what happens to our understanding of the Indigenous writing of these places (and to our understanding of these places, and of indigeneity, and perhaps of writing) when we take this period to be an ending rather than beginning point of a story.

Who am I to work on Indigenous literatures of Australia, Fiji and Hawai’i? I spent three months in different libraries in Australia and Fiji doing research and also writing and thinking about what I was meeting on these bookshelves. One afternoon in Fiji, I was picked up outside the University of the South Pacific library by my husband Vula, who is very supportive of my work and has contributed to the project with some work on a colonial newspaper *Na Mata* but also is my primary sounding board and co-thinker as we travel as a small family so I can do this work. Our two-year-old daughter Titilia had been a bit unsettled that day, wearing his nerves thin, and the traffic had been really bad on their way to campus, and he was stressed about his NZ visa situation. So when Dr Privilege, who had just spent a day in the library and drinking coffee, happily bounced into the car and started chatting away, too self-centred to see how his day had been for him, he snapped at me about being like all those other researchers who just fly in, take what they want, and fly out. We had a good argument, which ended in everything being okay and apologies on both sides, but I had to accept that he is actually right. How is this *not* what I am doing? If you watched a film of my research method, I fly to a country, stay at a hotel, go to the library, get out iPad, take lots of pics, and go home. I then analyse it all through my own cultural lenses, publish some stuff, get a stable well-paid job as an academic, and get a ridiculous amount of funding to do it. In theory I can tell you about my connections with the four main sites on which my project is focused, but colonialism in the 20th century Pacific enlarges the imperial borders of those sites beyond their current national configurations as I know them. Even if I can make some arguments for my connections to Aotearoa, Indigenous Australia, Fiji and Hawai’i, a whole lot of additional Indigenous communities and places have to be reckoned with when we consider imperial networks of the early-to-mid 20th century: Cook Islands, Niue, Sāmoa, Tokelau, Papua New Guinea, Nauru. I am a total outsider to those places, and have not lived in any of them—I have only *been* to one of them (Sāmoa). It does not look good. These places should not be issuing me a backstage pass at all.

Akiwenzie-Damm's poem "from turtle island to aotearoa" does not suggest that avoiding being an awkward outsider—a "stranger"—by staying in places where one is not a "stranger" is the most ethical, or even productive, remedy.[15] When she is in Aotearoa, Akiwenzie-Damm calls home because that's "where [her] words are", and she looks forward to returning home "clutching a piece of papatuanuku in her fist", but this call to home does not take place until halfway through the poem, and she goes on to describe the process of connecting with Aotearoa. The foreword to *My Heart is a Stray Bullet* provides further context for understanding how her trip to Aotearoa gave her a new vantage point and embedded her in new nourishing networks:

> To me this poem represents a nexus, a point at which the people and places of my past and future came together. A pinnacle from which I can look back to see where I've come from and ahead to a then-unknown but foreseeable future. Little did I know at the time how important my connection with Aotearoa would become and how my work to create and strengthen international Indigenous alliances and collaborations would grow increasingly important in all aspects of my life both professionally and personally. (Akiwenzie-Damm, 2002, p. xi)

In her poem, Akiwenzie-Damm turns her head towards her own people, but she writes about mine. Indeed, the title of the poem "from turtle island to aotearoa" describes the trajectory of the poet's journey, but could also be read as a letter addressed "to aotearoa". She is not speaking for or about Māori—she is speaking with, alongside and maybe even *to* Māori. If we think about this poem as a letter, a piece of correspondence, we might find formal precedence in the style of a thank you note: reciprocity from a guest ("from turtle island") to thank the host ("to aotearoa") for their hospitality.

The idea that Indigenous people are guests of host Indigenous people, rather than settlers who arrive and then dwell by way of colonial circuits (and perhaps circuitry), can reframe certain moments of encounter and certain relationships to move beyond/outside/despite colonialism. I have thought elsewhere about Māori presence in Australia by mobilising the Māori concepts of manuhiri (guests) and tāngata whenua (hosts[16]) in order to think about how we as Māori can draw on our own concepts to consider ways that we can act as respectful hosts (Te Punga Somerville, 2015). We are all manuhiri in places that are not ours, and being manuhiri neither lessens nor revokes our positions (and responsibilities) as tangata whenua in our home places. As I pursued, wrote about, spoke about and published some thinking about this, I did get some pushback that helped me think further about this kind of configuration. Certainly, host versus guest framing risks functioning as a way of absolving Indigenous guests from being in rather more culpable positions (e.g. settler/beneficiary of attempted genocide), and I am still mindful that an Indigenous Australian person accused me (quite rightly and accurately) of imposing my cultural perspective and making assumptions about a desire to "host" (imposing a duty to host, maybe) when I cast our roles in Australia through the frame of manuhiri/tangata whenua in a Facebook thread, but I also think this framing can help *within* community conversations. Another limit to overstating Indigenous–Indigenous relationships being based on hospitality is the process by which two people usually become guests and hosts in the first place: one invites the other. The issuing of an invitation configures the relationship, and the acceptance of the invitation confirms this configuration. But who can issue an invitation to an Indigenous place? On whose authority do Indigenous people invite? Daniel, who set up my sabbatical year in Toronto, is Cherokee. He would never claim to be Indigenous to the place to which I was invited and to which I accepted the invitation. Likewise, when I issue backstage passes to Indigenous friends and colleagues, on one level I can issue them to backstage Aotearoa, but on other levels I need to be clear that I am not Indigenous to everywhere within these state borders. Who am I to offer hospitality in a part of Aotearoa to which I am not connected?

There is another consideration here: the uses and predicament of protocol in Indigenous–Indigenous relationships. It can seem obvious (decolonised even) to simply insist on "protocol" for managing these relationships—but whose? Indigenous protocols are steeped in (maybe even defined by) specificity, and many elements of different protocols just do not line up. Any major event hosted by Indigenous peoples for other Indigenous peoples demonstrates that it is possible to thoughtfully and carefully devise protocol by which various Indigenous communities can meet, but even when a lot of time is spent thinking about, and negotiating with, the various entities involved, differences in expectations and perspectives can make things complicated. Not all protocol "lines up" across diverse Indigenous cultural contexts, and someone has to breach their own conventions in order to make it work. It is just not possible for everyone to do whatever they are used to when it comes to pragmatic aspects of protocol—things such as separate roles for men and women, appropriate attire or behaviour, a demand to speak only in an Indigenous language, a demand for translation, when or whether to sing, who can speak, gifting and receiving, and so on. Some protocol feels subtle (even invisible) to guests—who should stand or sit, who should eat first, whose head needs to be higher than everyone else in the room. Refusals to compromise (by hosts or by guests) when it comes to protocol can be very difficult to manage. Perhaps, as Tongan scholar and artist Epeli Hau'ofa once said to me at a conference in Christchurch when I asked him one evening about Māori-Pacific connections, the problem is compounded because we are meeting in institutional spaces. To an extent we could remedy this by moving outside the university context, for example, but the whole point of my inquiry here is to consider what is possible *within* those contexts. The dynamic repetitions of movement, momentum and reciprocity in Akiwenzie-Damm's poem should make us wary of paralysis. It is tempting to stick all of this in a "too hard basket"—even if we are likely to call it something more palatable than "too hard"—such as "I only work with my own people" or "I won't speak on behalf of other people".

To add another layer of accountability, physical mobility is not the only way in which we experience being Indigenous-but-not-to-that-place. I am writing this while based at a Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, where a central thread of what we do is introduce students to the wide range of scholarship, experiences and peoples in Indigenous worlds beyond, but also in connection with, the Māori world. I have had colleagues in the Faculty who also work across, and travel across, and have lived across (and, especially in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's case, are certainly read across) the Indigenous world. For the past four years, I have taught a compulsory first-year class called "Kōkiri: Academic Skills for Indigenous Studies", in which we spend a lot of time talking about the terms, histories and stakes of this broader "Indigenous" umbrella.[17] If we, or I, refuse to talk about other Indigenous people, how will our students get to understand the Indigenous world? Likewise, each year there are Indigenous students who seek supervision for masters and doctoral research but do not have members of their own communities (or do, but not within their discipline areas and/or institutions) who can supervise them. And, quite frankly, there are plenty of scholars who will keep on publishing work (and keep on getting published!) despite their rather dramatic lack of proximity to the subject of their research. To choose one example, I was riddled with anxiety about my work on poets and novelists from the Cook Islands, and then read a recent published book in which a full third of one chapter focused on the 19th century Rarotongan writer Ta'unga—but he was described as being from Tonga instead! As long as that book can be published by a major UK academic press, I will persevere with the work I am doing where at least I make attempts to talk about people in relation to the correct country of origin. (The bar is pretty low.)

There are other reasons to move beyond one's own tribal borders, as self-righteous and seductive as such self-containment may seem. As a "foreign" Indigenous person (who is not perceived to be a pesky tiresome whining *local* Indigenous person), I am granted a backstage pass to

conversations among other settlers that provide me with opportunities to stand in solidarity with local Indigenous communities. While the cliché of living in (let alone straddling) two worlds does not resonate with me, I do experience several worlds simultaneously. I am capable of understanding myself being on Waikato Tainui land, in Aotearoa, as well as being in New Zealand. I am capable of knowing that although I was admitted to study for my PhD at Cornell by the US state, I spent my time learning alongside other Indigenous students on Cayuga land. Our deliberate acts of naming ourselves as a way to decentre our own occupying states ("from turtle island") can become deliberate acts of recognition of other Indigenous people ("to Aotearoa").[18] While living in Hawai'i, I spoke with a friend and mentor, Ka'imipono Ka'iwi Kahumoku, about my sense that I was taking up Hawaiian space and not appropriately deferring to Hawaiian voices on a particular issue. She spoke strongly to me about my responsibility to make the most of my opportunities to speak up, and work, for Kanaka Maoli—not as an outside "saviour" but as an Indigenous person whose words will be heard by other settlers in ways that are different from how Hawaiian voices might be heard. Sometimes I flippantly shorthand this as "people liking other peoples' natives"—the strange and uncomfortable dynamic in which, for example, Māori voices will be heard differently in Hawai'i than in Aotearoa *and vice versa.*

Another form of solidarity with other Indigenous communities can come from understanding that every offer to come backstage is actually a double pass. As an Indigenous scholar working on Indigenous writing, I have opportunities to access, connect with, and engage certain conversations and texts. But, when they are not "my" writers (and indeed even when they are), it is my responsibility—and opportunity—to find ways to bring students, researchers and community members with me so that we all get to benefit. We can be romantic in Indigenous Studies about "the community", which is imagined to be out there somewhere far, far away, but sometimes "the community" is in my classrooms, my campus community, my networks. Over 20 Indigenous researchers have worked on the "Writing the New World" project in a range of capacities: undergraduate, masters and PhD students, as well as community researchers, and of them, several were Māori, but many were Indigenous to elsewhere in the Pacific region (Fiji, Hawai'i, Cook Islands, Sāmoa, Niue). Bringing members of other Indigenous communities into privileged spaces—paid research, scholarships, supervision, mentoring, networks—is a tangible contribution to other Indigenous communities that aligns with the commitments that Indigenous Studies has always expressed around research that "gives back". There are even more opportunities and resources for those of us from, or working in, contexts that are relatively privileged in the sense I describe above in relation to my proximity to the (rich, white, powerful) New Zealand state. I am talking here about using all opportunities to create space for other Indigenous people, a logic and ethics that is at the heart of all Indigenous activist and cultural connections.

So yes, there are Indigenous backstage passes I am handed and backstage passes I hand out. It is a privilege to be invited places, and another kind of privilege to be able to travel to take Indigenous people up on their invitations, but these passes are not handed out so you can park up on someone's couch and pontificate loudly about how the hosts can be better natives by being more like yourself. They are also not handed out so you can claim to speak on behalf of other Indigenous people in ways that silence and marginalise them. And, to put a longstanding myth to bed, the passes that are handed out do not make the research (or life) of the Indigenous scholar easier than those who do not get let in the side door. They are not a shortcut or a magical decoder. The backstage passes I have been handed since my first trip to Ithaca as a soon-to-be PhD student have made my research different—and, I would add, more fulfilling—than if I had not been given them, but they have not lessened the work involved. Akiwenzie-Damm ends her poem with a section titled "beginning", and decided after her visit to Aotearoa to not just write about her experience but to publish the poem about Aotearoa in an anthology edited by Māori women.

These backstage passes can feel like an invitation from a cousin, and the thing with a cousin inviting you to their house is that at the end of a meal you will be handed a tea-towel so you can continue your discussion while you work side by side in their kitchen. You both know this is what will happen even as you walk up the driveway and approach the front door, and your cousin knows this as they walk towards the door from the other side. What's more, as each of you walks to either side of the door to greet each other, you both look forward to the time you will spend together.

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[1] Near the end of my sabbatical year, I was talking with the Metis scholar Chris Andersen about the blog and he asked how regularly I had written posts. I wasn't sure so I added them up, and it turns out I had posted two days out of three for the whole year.

[2] While a refusal to provide glossaries has been one strategy of Māori rhetorical sovereignty, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article who nudged me to be as hospitable and inclusive as possible to readers in the global Indigenous Studies conversation in which I seek to participate. A general explanation is thus provided in these endnotes for Māori words in order to welcome readers without Māori language familiarity to the discussion. Waiata – song.

[3] Karakia – prayer.

[4] Waka – vessel, canoe.

[5] Aotearoa is often used as a Māori name for the islands in the state now known as New Zealand. I acknowledge that this name did not always include Te Wai Pounamu—the South Island—in its scope.

[6] It can be intriguing in New Zealand to find how many Pakeha people emphasise their Scottish, Welsh and Irish heritage in order to articulate a kind of equivalence with Māori colonial experience and, in turn, a removal of complicity with colonialism in the Antipodes. (One sometimes wonders whether in 21st century New Zealand the English people here in the 19th century reproduced at all!)
[7] Wahine – woman.
[8] http://tetauokioki.blogspot.com/2012/06/lolly-mix-caclals-apartments.html
[9] All references to the poem in this essay are from the second (2002) edition of the collection; the poem runs from pages 50–54.
[10] First encounters are often framed in colonial accounts as penetration, with all of the associated sexual connotations in full view.
[11] Pōwhiri – formal ceremony of encounter and negotiation.
[12] Marae – ceremonial space.
[13] Waka – canoe/ vessel.
[14] And there are non-Māori Indigenous people inside New Zealand's borders when these include the legal entity of the "Realm of New Zealand": Tokelauans, Niueans, Cook Islanders.
[15] Many texts we associate with specific Indigenous sites emerged out of engagements with other Indigenous peoples. To choose two notable examples: in the prologue to his original *Our Own Image*, Māori filmmaker Barry Barclay acknowledges that the book emerged from a visit to Vancouver to connect with First Nations communities there; Kenyan thinker Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes in his introduction to *Decolonising the Mind* that that book first took shape for a series of lectures in Auckland and he speaks directly to Māori in solidarity with our struggle in those opening pages.
[16] Tangata whenua is also the most common "translation" of Indigenous.
[17] Lots of people outside our Faculty do not really understand the "and Indigenous" part of our name or, indeed, what we do. As an example, a couple of years ago a proposed restructure sought to bundle the Faculty back in with a bunch of other disciplines, and because the name of the resulting "Division" included so many components, the paper dream chopped "Indigenous" off and we were back to being called Māori Studies.
[18] I have spoken about this idea of Indigenous–Indigenous recognition, in the context of Māori writing in Australia, as an extension of Glen Coulthard's work on recognition.