

## Too many Cooks?

Ngā mihi

Ngāti Whātua

Kaiwhakahaere

Ringawera

Michael King

BWB

Friends and family here

Can we blame Cook for everything that followed? Is it the fault of the Englishman who met his early end in Kealakekua Bay in 1779 that I, because I am Māori, am statistically likely to meet an early end in 21st century New Zealand?

I am neither a biographer of Captain James Cook nor an historian of eighteenth century European people going places on boats. This lecture is not, in fact, a talk about Cook himself at all. Actually, that's the whole point of the talk. And, at the same time, I am not standing here as Reliable Native Informant ready to provide you with a titillating sense of connection with pre-contact or other-side-of-the-story authentic something something.

Today I am speaking as an Indigenous scholar whose research and teaching expertise brings me - probably more than I like, if I'm honest - to the necessity of engaging with Cook and his legacy. Whether I'm teaching in English, Indigenous Studies, or Pacific Studies, I find myself being unable to avoid talking about Cook.

And, to take a step back from the disciplines in which I work, when you teach anything at a New Zealand university surely you have a duty (and opportunity) to think about the context in which you're teaching. That context, for me, includes things like:

- how the legislation that both defines and brings into being a NZ university is passed by a parliament whose right to pass legislation can be traced in a single thread back to the Endeavour...
- the logic and history of why I'm teaching in the English language despite being so far from the island where that language was knit together,
- why the NZ university system in all of its structures – from the spatial organization and scheduling of lectures, through to curriculum and the names of departments – bears such close resemblance to learning institutions from the other side of the world and

virtually none to learning systems that have been practiced for thousands of years on this side;

- why just about everything about those classrooms and what we do in them and who teaches in them are so mind-blowingly non-Māori despite all universities having cool names in te reo and glossy brochures and earnest policy statements;
- and why Māori students and staff have particular experiences of the education system in general and the university system in particular.

So yes, even though I am a literary scholar whose work sits at the intersections of literary, Indigenous and Pacific Studies, and even though the heart of my work (and the work of my heart) is self-representation by Indigenous people rather than non-Indigenous representation of Indigenous people, and my research interest is in Indigenous-Indigenous connections more than in Indigenous-colonial connections, I do write and teach about Cook... and I write and teach about Cook in an institutional context that I suggest is inextricable from his arrival here in 1769.

In 2013, white American pastor Rob Bell wrote *What we talk about when we talk about God*. He identified that the word 'God' is used by a range of people to refer to a range of ideas, and the book – which became popular when championed by Oprah Winfrey which is how I heard about it – explores several of the things people mean by 'God' – and the stakes of those meanings - when using that word.

Bell's formulation is useful because it helps us consider not just the different ways different people might think about a particular topic, which is an idea that isn't that deep and feels obvious, but also how particular words (perhaps names) can become code words for really different things perhaps because those various things are difficult to encode in language otherwise. And this is why some conversations feel like they're happening at cross purposes or along different logics or they just completely stall all the time.

While most conversations could be drawn like Venn diagrams with overlapping bits where there are shared frames of reference or at least the same topic under discussion, these conversations could be drawn like little bubbles on a page – distinct circles that don't overlap at all except for the one word – the one name – all the people talking think they are all talking about.

So, what *are* we talking about when we talk about Cook?

No, I'm not saying Cook is God. Or am I...?

*19 Before an argument*

*Before getting to an argument you must start with facts. Here are some facts: in the beginning, there was Cook. By sailing around the Pacific he created the heavens and the earth. If these are the facts you start with, you are already deep into your argument before you begin.*

*20 With an argument I*

*Captain Cook was absolutely the bestest explorer ever. He was a hero.*

*21 With an argument II*

*Captain Cook was a violent murderer.*

*22 With an argument III*

*Captain Cook was a sacrificial lamb/a martyr/a saint.*

*23 With an argument IV*

*Captain Cook was a paedophile, a rapist, a misogynist.*

*24 With an argument V*

*Captain Cook was the founding figure of our country. (People in lots of countries make this argument.)*

*25 With an argument VI*

*Captain Cook was a man of his time.*

*26 With an argument VII*

*Captain Cook was a man ahead of his time.*

*27 With an argument VIII*

*Captain Cook was a humanitarian. He can't be blamed for what other people did or for what came after.*

*28 With an argument IX*

*Captain Cook was responsible for other people, and for his own actions. And most of these other people (and most of his own actions) sit on the spectrum between problematic and despicable.*

*29 With a non-argument that's actually an argument*

*Captain Cook? It's all so very complex. I'm going to sit on the fence. (Whose fence? On whose land? Dividing what from what? You only have a fence when you fear something or when you're trying to keep something in. Or, as a renovation show on TV informed me, when you want to upgrade your street appeal.)*

Which of these (or other) arguments do you make about Cook? Is it possible for some of these arguments to be simultaneously held? Are some of them more dangerous or less realistic or more ridiculous or less significant? Are any of them more one-sided than others? This lovely Sunday late morning I want to ask you to consider what you are talking about when you're talking about Cook.

I mean, I could spend an hour this morning re-killing Captain Cook no problem. Earlier this week when I was finishing the prep on this kōrero my husband texted to ask "How's Captain Cook cooking?"

And believe me, the cannibalistic cook-ery metaphors and puns and jokes just write themselves with Cook.

Yes I am more than capable of presenting the Captain Cook version of Ten Things I Hate About You. You probably expect that's what I'll do today. But I'm not sure that would shift our collective conversation along very much. I think we'd all go home feeling the same way about Cook that we did when we were brushing our teeth this morning.

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What am I talking about when I talk about Cook?

*12 At a pie shop in Te Rapa on a rainy day*

*My 13-year-old nephew asks whether we were cannibals. The conversation moves fast, and soon we get to the 14th February 1779 when Hawaiians killed Captain Cook. 'Was he a bad person?' he asks. We sit back and talk big-picture. It's not just who you are as a person (although it's also that). It's also the consequences of your actions. The flow-on effects. I am thinking, but do not say, Cook is*

*the reason that you my dear nephew are the first one in a few generations in our whānau to speak Māori.*

These short pieces I'm reading are from a book I published with BWB late last year, *250 Ways To Start an Essay About Captain Cook*. The book does what it says on the tin: it's 250 different starting points for thinking about Cook.

They're numbered, 1 to 250, and believe me when I say that you don't realise how big 250 is as a number until you set yourself up to make a list of 250 things. In an interview about the book, one interviewer compared it to a book they'd read which was also structured as a list, but that book was a series of failed drafts to write a particular thing, and this isn't what the list in my book is at all. I didn't have 249 false starts before finding the perfect starting point for an essay about Cook – I had 250 different starters for that many different essays about Cook. The last one – number 250 in the list - is "Too many Cooks... spoil the broth."

I would never advocate that we *stop* talking about Cook. And I'm a realist in that I know we will keep doing so regardless of what I think anyway. But. What I want is for my descendants to grow up in a country in which the historical facts of his connection with New Zealand, and the legacy of how he has been recalled, take their right-sized place next to all the other things here.

I want to be clear here when I say 'we' (as in "I would never advocate that *we* stop talking about Cook") that I do realise this is a diverse audience with a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds. Some of you may be the leading experts – or at least very well read - on Cook's life, or nationalism, or on the colonial roots of differential life expectancies. Some of you may also be teachers and writers who work at the intersections of the things I'm talking about. Some of you may not be interested in any of this stuff at all and you're here because you wanted a nice place to sit while you wait for the afternoon sessions of the Auckland Writers Festival.

I'm not making assumptions about what you bring to this conversation. I use the term 'we' in the broadest possible collective sense. We who are sitting together in the Waitākere Room on Ngāti Whātua land.

One problem with talking about Cook is not just that we can't stop talking about him... but that when we're talking about Cook we're not talking about other people. Other histories. Other

ways of tracing our place in the world. Other ways to understand what it means to have a particular connection with these windswept islands of ours.

## 2 *With beginnings*

*There was never a single beginning point for the history of this place. It wasn't Cook on a beach, it wasn't the confiscation of land and storming of Parihaka, it wasn't Gallipoli, it wasn't the pushing apart of primordial parents, it wasn't goldfields, it wasn't the arrival of waka, it wasn't a lover's tiff between mountains, it wasn't a boat full of influenza docking in Samoa, it wasn't the Treaty, it wasn't (certain) women getting the vote, it wasn't a fished-up fish. It was all of these. It was all of these and more besides.*

Cook's arrival here has clearly been claimed (and is continually re-claimed) as the logical starting point in 1769 of what decades later became the New Zealand state. We know this because we count (or at least someone counted!) the number of years since then until particular years that have been moments to commemorate who and what New Zealand is.

In 1919 a small event was held in Gisborne at the site of a monument that had been erected a few years earlier. In 1969 there was a parade in Gisborne with gigantic models not only of the Endeavour but of Cook's own head. 2019 was, of course, the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We were all there, in 2019. Telling our various stories. Rolling our eyes at people who told different ones. Today I'm not going to open the 'Tuia 250' can of worms that, at only 2 years old, hasn't yet had a chance to congeal.

So. Should we talk about Cook, or shouldn't we? - this isn't the right question. The question is why do we tell the stories about Cook that we do, and what other stories might we be able to tell? We can't change Cook's proclamation and we can't bring back to life the Indigenous people who died or suffered traumas from violence at the hands of Cook or his crews. But. We can be deliberate about the stories we do tell – the range of stories – the other stories that we remember to tell alongside and as well as and sometimes (maybe often) instead of Cook stories.

## 13 *On a couch*

*The same nephew, many years ago. He's a little kid. I am reading him a story: a library book called Horeta and the Waka and as Matiu curls up in his PJs I open the book and quickly recognise it is a version of the story written by Te Horeta Te Taniwha about his recollections of Cook's visit. A few*

*pages in, Matiu starts chuckling when Horeta describes the thundersticks – ‘they’re not thundersticks, Auntie Lala,’ he says. ‘They’re guns.’*

*I decide to check whether he understands what is happening in the story so I ask him straight up – ‘Matiu, who are these men in the blue outfits?’ He looks at me. We talk about how they are European, like my Dad, his Koko, and veer off into a discussion that would have made the ears of Hobson’s Pledge members burn. We chat about how Matiu’s Koko and Nannie are both New Zealanders even though one is Māori and one is Pākehā and so is Matiu’s Abba (Dad) even though he is from Eritrea. After dealing with the small matter of multicultural citizenship in a settler state, I try to redirect our attention back to the book: ‘Matiu these are the first Pākehā men this boy Horeta has ever seen, because they are the first ones to ever come to Aotearoa.’ He looks at the pictures and turns to me: ‘Oh I get it Auntie, I know who they are – they have come to steal our land.’*

*Matiu identified himself with Horeta and knew that the presence of Pākehā with guns is logically connected to the theft of land – ‘our land’.*

*I have tried to think through our conversation ever since. Hopefully by the time Matiu is reading to his own nieces and nephews, we as historians and we as Māori (and we as his whānau) will have expanded the range of stories he has to tell them. Yes, nineteenth-century Māori history is about guns and raupatu and land stealing; yes, that history continues to play out and makes its effects known in my generation and in Matiu’s; yes, that history demands further and deeper attention, always; and yes, Māori are connected to ‘our’ land. But Māori histories are also about movement and travel and negotiation and agency and more besides.*

Today I want to share a few Cook stories that I hope we are telling by the time Matiu’s grandchildren are growing up. Maybe some of you already tell these stories, and that’s cool. Maybe you’ve never heard them before. Maybe you would tell them differently. But the point for me is that as we all know, surely, the stories we tell about the past are what produce our future.

In 1998, Patricia Grace wrote in her novel *Baby No-Eyes*: "There's a way the older people have of telling a story, a way where the beginning is not the beginning, the end is not the end. It starts from a centre and moves away from there in such widening circles..."

I look forward to the day that stories about Cook enable our understanding to move in “such widening circles” rather than stories about Cook shutting things down.

Each of the stories I want to tell today are stories about Cook in which Cook as “the beginning” is set aside to enable another kind of story to be told. So, one of the things you’ll notice with these stories is that all of them are about re-stitching our connections back into regional and global networks that our national and nationalist scissors keep snipping off.

I’m deeply suspicious of any claims about first-ness. I’ve spent the past three and a half years working on a Marsden-funded project called ‘Writing the new world: Indigenous texts 1900-1975’ which focuses on writing by Indigenous writers in New Zealand, Australia, Fiji and Hawai’i. The whole point of the project is to bring to light the many Indigenous writers that were published in these sites before the widely-accepted ‘firsts’ in the early-to-mid 1970s. The short version of the results of the research is that there are heaps and heaps of writers especially when you think broadly around genre, site of publication and language in which they wrote.

The conventional story of Maori writing starts with Witi and Patricia as if they are our literary primordial parents from whom all else is descended. Their first single-author fictional publications are our literary firsts, our literary starting point, our literary origins.

We whisper to ourselves, and type into powerpoint presentations for our students: Witi was the first man, Patricia was the first woman. One editorial for a magazine issue that included an interview with Ihimaera in 2014 enthused that prior to his first novel in 1973 ‘there was no Māori literary tradition.’

At the session on Tino Rangatiratanga in Publishing on Friday morning, Patricia Grace shared how JC Sturm had raised the issue with her about the problem of others always describing her (Grace) as a ‘first’ – Grace clarified that she didn’t in fact encourage these claims because they do what Sturm described – they make invisible whatever and whoever came before.

Before you start tweeting that Alice hates the most famous Māori writers, let me be clear that this isn’t in any way an attack on Tuwhare, Ihimaera or Grace – or indeed Wineera, the missing name in the lineup who was the ‘first’ Māori woman to publish a collection of poetry in English (but you probably haven’t heard about her because she didn’t do it in NZ and we do like our Maories to be domesticated around here). Instead, it is more an attack on the obsession with ‘firsts’ - in a Māori context, thinking about something or someone in relation to whakapapa



doesn't diminish the significance but, instead, it enhances its mana by being positioned in a longer continuum.

The most obvious problem with thinking Māori (or Indigenous Australian, or Fijian etc) people didn't start writing until the 'firsts' of the 70s is that we don't think to look for or read the earlier writers. However, I've been reflecting a lot on the other effect of focusing on 'firsts' – and that's that the position of 'first' can also steal limelight or the microphone from writers that come after too. In all of the places I've been looking at, we are so careful to acknowledge our literary grandparents that their immediate descendants – the writers who published their own first works in the 1980s and 1990s – kind of disappear. We love new writers and new generations, and we love our literary kaumātua. I say these things without cynicism and with aroha.

But firsts make things disappear. The things that came before - but also, I've been realising, the things that came after. We talk about Cook all the time in a way that makes so many other things – and people and communities and networks - disappear.

Today I'm going to talk about three possible stories that we could tell about Cook.

Of course there are so many other stories we could tell that are about or connected to Cook that don't just end up either naturalising the New Zealand state or defending the ways that Cook was a nice bloke, so I've also brainstormed the titles of five more stories - I'll share the titles now just for fun. Yes they're long titles. Hey I work in the Humanities and write poetry on the side – rules about short titles were not made to be followed by the likes of me.

- The story of how scientific knowledge and research funding is never politically neutral, AKA How Cook really came to make scientific observations of the transit of Venus and the Indigenous death and trauma, as well as the claiming of places for the British crown, were a by-product.
- The story of Māori experiences of Cook and how these connect to how Indigenous peoples of the American hemisphere experienced Columbus, and how Indigenous peoples of parts of the Pacific experienced Magellan or Torres or whoever else.
- The story of how Cook wasn't the first European here – it was Abel Tasman who gave these islands their first European name, and whose Dutch background ties New Zealand

to Dutch imperialism in the region, most prominent of which was in Indonesia, which upon independence began the ongoing process of violent human, environmental and political colonialism in West Papua.

- The story of Māori people who boarded Cook's various ships as the foundation generation of the massive number of Māori people who moved outside these islands in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early nineteenth centuries, through to the 20% of the Māori community who currently live outside the political borders of New Zealand.
- The story of active Indigenous engagement with how we tell stories of Cook's legacy and the ways that popular media, mainstream publishing, academia and politicians rarely acknowledge and often undermine the intellectual, moral, cultural and community work of Indigenous activists specifically and Indigenous protest broadly. (refer to poem from Auckland Speaks weds nite Ngā Hinepūkōrero)

### **1) The story of Cook and how it relates not just to colonialism but to structural racism and white supremacy**

For my Christmas present to myself last year, I bought a really fabulous book I highly recommend by Seattle-based writer Ijeoma Oluo. It's called *Mediocre: the dangerous legacy of white male power*. It's a great book to read, and I will add that because of the title it's a great conversation starter to have on your coffee table or desk at work. Or, if not a conversation starter, a starter of rolled eyes or knowing chuckles, depending on who is noticing it.

I loved the book, but one of the things I kept thinking throughout it was that it repeated something you see in a lot of American stuff – where things like racism, colonialism and democracy are spoken of as if they have been historically produced and historically and contemporarily experienced only within the borders of that state. As if European representations of blackness, and imperial engagements with Indigenous peoples, didn't both precede and exceed the US colonies or nation state. As if European writers and thinkers had not been framing the discourse about race for centuries.

I don't think anything Oluo said was factually incorrect, but there was a missed opportunity to understand things in a broader context, and also perhaps a suggestion that such things didn't occur, or issues were completely different, elsewhere.

In New Zealand lots of us like to roll our eyes about this sort of thing and condescendingly mutter things about US exceptionalism which is hilarious because we are obsessed with New Zealand exceptionalism.

Before working at in my present role, I taught in the department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney where my students were convinced Cook left England to come to Australia. The fact that Australia didn't exist at the time makes this version of the story incorrect and anachronistic, sure – but the idea that intrigues me most is that way that stories in New Zealand and Australia about Cook focus on his arrival as if this was the sole and most important purpose of his trip to this part of the world.

It's entirely possible to tell a story about Cook being the first English person here, who set in motion a sequence of events (passing through the Declaration of Independence, the Treaty, the assumption and later delegation of British parliamentary power etc etc) and in this story we end up with the bounded state we live in today. This story is connected to a story about a man called Cook who left England to come to New Zealand. This is perhaps the main way we hear about Cook: as an essential part of our national origin story.

We desperately need stories that explain how we connect to places other than London, even if many of those connections pass through London.

Having taught in New Zealand university classrooms in which Indigenous students are a minority and in which Indigenous studies are a majority, I am convinced that we need to talk more about colonialism – as a global, multi-layered and ongoing project. It is really hard to understand what's going on here if we don't understand the context in which it has taken place and the logics of various empires. Too many students have never even heard of New Zealand's Realm nations (Tokelau, Niue, Cook Islands) despite the Cook Islands being named after the same dude whose name is used for the water between the North and South Islands here.

We need to talk more about colonialism in general but also about settler colonialism in particular – this relates to places like this where the form colonialism has taken is not merely resource extraction but also the mass migration of people from the colonial metropole to the extent that Indigenous people now form a minority in their own homeland. One of the central ideas of this body of work is famously articulated by the late Patrick Wolfe who wrote that “Colonialism is a structure, not an event.”

This is why telling Indigenous people to 'get over' or 'move on from' colonialism is illogical. It's possible to 'get over' something that happened in the past, but how can you get over a structure in which you're enmeshed?

I'm not going to whip out my powerpoint and give you all my lecture on colonialism and racism, but I do want to draw attention to the impossibility of removing race from stories we tell about Cook – but also I want to suggest the impossibility of removing Cook from stories we tell here about race.

The feminist postcolonial thinker Sara Ahmed writes about the inherent place of history in any 'encounter:'

Encounters are meetings... which are not simply in the present: each encounter reopens past encounters... the particular encounter both informs and is informed by the general: encounters between embodied subjects always hesitate between the domain of the particular – the face to face of this encounter – and the general – the framing of the encounter by broader relationships of power and antagonism.

We could, if we were brave, tell stories about Cook that get us talking about the devastating ongoing effects of racism in New Zealand, and we could start telling those stories by thinking about how white supremacy is reinforced when we refuse to talk about racism. We could use Cook as a starting point for understanding the "broader relationships of power and antagonism" not just in New Zealand but globally.

Some of us are already doing this – on Valentine's Day each year my social media feed is full of heartfelt posts from Indigenous people around the Pacific thanking the Hawaiians for killing Cook on 14 February 1779. We do this not to be crass or to advocate cannibalism, but to connect with one another and express the ways in which we understand not just our histories but our futures to be intertwined.

Yesterday afternoon I was proud to stand for a while with my mother and daughter in solidarity with the Palestinian community and their supporters on Aotea square. Our stories of Cook *here* must not distract us from or blind us to many other sites and forms of colonialism; I am seeking to suggest this morning that it's at least theoretically possible for stories about Cook to make these complicated global links visible.

Our stories of Cook need to explain why we need a Māori Health Authority and why such a thing isn't apartheid or racist. Our stories of Cook need to provide ways for people on City Councils to understand why there is such a broad call for Māori wards.

If our stories about Cook can't help us understand these, they are doing the opposite – they are helping us *mis*understand them.

On some level, the question of whether Captain James Cook was or wasn't personally racist is irrelevant. Whether you would accept a friend request from him on Facebook or follow him on Twitter because you think he was actually a nice guy is entirely up to you.

What we do know is that his visit here in 1769 wrenched this place into an already-developing British imperial world which was just one strand of broader European imperial networks and these both underpinned and continue to have a life in all forms of structural racism here.

## **2) The story of how these islands are a part of the Pacific**

Speaking of structural racism...

I work at the University of Waikato. At the Faculty of Māori and Indigenous Studies, where I have worked since the beginning of 2017, we have a subject students can study called 'Pacific and Indigenous Studies' which means they graduate with training in the two separate disciplines of 'Pacific Studies' and 'Indigenous Studies' and, importantly, they understand the important ways these disciplines do and don't relate to each other.

In PACIS100, our foundation paper, we start with the connections between Māori and the Pacific region, as well as the connections between the Pacific and Aotearoa. These are two of my favourite lectures to give to the first years, because they often end up helping the Māori and Pasifika students see each other with new eyes – and also because so many students live in worlds in which 'Māori' and 'Pacific' aren't tucked away in neat little boxes apart from each other from which the only view is of the state. And, because the lectures challenge so much of the logic of national narratives which shout at them regardless of what they experience in their own quiet lives.

Like many people, I first realised the significance of Tupaia in the story of Māori encounters with Cook from reading Anne Salmond's *Trial of the Cannibal Dog*, an expansive text that was published, to put it in context for me, when I was about halfway through my PhD.

Because I studied for my doctorate in the US where the PhD takes several years and includes a bunch of coursework and learning two languages and a whole lot of stuff before you decide what your dissertation (thesis) is going to be about, I had just gotten underway with my research and thinking by this halfway point. My focus for my dissertation was on what I called 'comparative contexts' of Māori writing in English, and I was interested in what happens when we think about Māori writing as Pacific literature, Indigenous literature, Postcolonial literature or New Zealand literature - in that order.

Although I was enrolled in Cornell which was in Ithaca in upstate New York, by my fourth year I started really missing the ocean so I moved to Hawai'i.

I was part of some really wonderful communities in Ithaca - including the community around the long-established American Indian Program (which was one of the main reasons I had gone there in the first place), and informal networks of New Zealanders at Cornell which meant I made a soft but invigorating landing when I first arrived in Ithaca in the vibrant social and intellectual posse of Michelle Elleray and Anne Lyden (now based in Toronto) and my flatmates from my first year, Jolisa Gracewood and Richard Easther (who are here today, having relocated to Auckland after post-Ithaca stints in New York city and New Haven). I often think of the evenings spent with all of them over kai in our respective lounges during my first semester at Cornell - three Pākehā from very different backgrounds, one Tongan and one Māori - to have functioned not only as a great social space but also an additional graduate level course in thinking critically about New Zealandness.

But in Ithaca I was landlocked and wanted to be near more people who had heard of where I was from. I also, at the time, thought this would be my one chance to be in the unique and rich intellectual space of the University of Hawai'i-Mānoa before I moved home and lived in New Zealand for the rest of my life. (This is hilarious looking back, considering how much I have continued to move between here and overseas through my academic career. Funnily enough, I ended up returning to that university (UH) as an Associate Professor back in 2012.)

I had randomly (not that I believe in such a thing, of course) been introduced by Robert Sullivan to three fabulous Hawaiian writers and literary scholars, ku'ualoha ho'omanawanui, Ka'imipono

Kaiwi-Kahumoku and Brandy Nālani McDougall when I had been on a research trip in Auckland the year before. At that time Robert was teaching in Hawai’ too. I had this sense that these were conversations I wanted to be a part of.

So, thanks to some additional mobility enabled by a Fulbright award, I flew to Hawai’i in mid-2003 and spent a year living in a tiny room and writing my first full thesis draft on a blueberry clamshell laptop. I didn’t have a formal affiliation with the University, although I am grateful for the way that less official connections provided me with the resources and networks I craved. A senior Samoan scholar in English (Sinavaiana) went on sabbatical and let me use her office, and the Centre for Pacific Islands Studies gave me an affiliation that enabled access to the library.

The first week that I got to Honolulu I stayed with the parents of a guy who went to university with Lauren, my downstairs neighbour in Ithaca. They generously let me stay in their downstairs spare room while I found a place to rent. After I’d been there for a few days and realised the enormity of stretching an Ithaca budget across even an extremely modest Honolulu life, I realised this had been a stupid idea and I should stop being so spontaneous and theatrical in my life and doing things like moving to Hawai’i to feel some kind of vibe – intellectual, social or cultural.

I wondered what to do, and thought I might as well at least read the stack of books I had dragged back to their little guest room from the library. I picked up a book called *Islands and Empires* by Ernest Dodge, and read:

In the course of his circumnavigation and survey of New Zealand Cook was in constant contact with the Maoris [sic]. Beads and nails were good currency for fish and sweet potatoes, but curiously enough large sheets of tapa obtained earlier at Tahiti were the best trade articles and were valued more highly by the New Zealanders than anything else the English could offer.

I sat there, blinked, and read again.

In the course of his circumnavigation and survey of New Zealand Cook was in constant contact with the Maoris [sic]. Beads and nails were good currency for fish and sweet potatoes, but curiously enough large sheets of tapa obtained earlier at Tahiti were the best trade articles and were valued more highly by the New Zealanders than anything else the English could offer.

The author decided the next sentence after this one should be one that clarified what this meant for Cook’s side of the interaction:

Thus began the first inter-island trade in native products by white men in the Pacific.

But I had a sudden rush of realising that this wasn't the only possible next sentence – that the story could continue by considering why and how “the Maoris” – my people! – connected more with tapa than with beads and nails.

And I have more slowly come to realise over the almost two decades since reading Dodge's phrase “curiously enough” that the phrase is an apt totally understated euphemism for the gaping chasm between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarly, cultural and political conversations. “Curiously enough,” what I write about is not *for me* just a matter of curiosity.

I find it astounding that he wrote a sentence about a fascinating juxtaposition of worldviews, values and networks – where British expectations of what Māori would value were not just not met because Māori didn't like stuff from other places – but weren't met because there was another whole system of value taking place that we glimpse in the reaction to the tapa. And then his next sentence was ‘so anyway back to the interesting thing, which is white men and money.’ I find it astounding – maybe even “curiously enough.” But I don't want to be derailed by Dodge, just as I don't want to Cook to play too big a part in my – or our – story.

I knew in that moment, reading those lines in Dodge's book, that I was in the right place to write my dissertation – yes, it felt like a *tohu* - and that there was a place for storytellers that didn't think stories about Cook in New Zealand were all best treated as explanations for new knowledge about white men.

I kept reflecting on this insight, and then Salmond's book came out, and I finished the PhD in which, in one chapter, I traced the tapa reconnection story as a way to think about the instinctive relationship between Māori and the Pacific region.

The place of Tupaia in revised stories of Cook has been incredibly productive for many of us. Shortly after I moved back to New Zealand to take up a position at Victoria, I saw Michel Tuffery's “First Contact” exhibition at Pataka – in which he rethinks, reclaims, reimagines and recasts Cook but also Tupaia – and I was particularly taken by the way Tuffery added Tupaia's perspective into how we engage Tupaia's famous painting of exchange of koura and tapa between Banks and a Māori man in 1769.



Banks was asked later in his life about the moment of exchange depicted in Tupaia's painting, and he responded by recalling an exchange of koura for nails rather than tapa, which beautifully and violently demonstrates the power of European assumptions about colonial encounters. And, the ways these assumptions can be held even in the face of usually acceptable forms evidence found in colonial archives. How are we meant to remember the painting represents the exchange for tapa that Māori valued most highly in that moment of encounter, when Banks himself - who was there - had forgotten it?

False memories that evacuate the presence of Indigenous people, products and networks have been a bit of a theme here in these islands.

The late Tongan thinker and writer Epeli Hau'ofa, whose thinking is central to Pacific Studies as a discipline and to Pacific studying people in so many places, clarifies the ways in which colonialism has chopped the dynamic networks of our region into small discrete parts, and how rethinking mobility and connection can help restore the sense of region to this region:

the contemporary process of what may be called world enlargement that is carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean... making nonsense of all national and economic boundaries, borders that have been defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages before Captain Cook's apotheosis.

So, when I lecture the first years in PACIS100 about Māori connections to the region, we don't just look down from drone view at maps of a region and little arrows showing human migration, language families, oral traditions, mitochondrial DNA, and the distribution of particular pottery, chickens, pigs and dogs (although we do look at those too). We also look across, from beach view, at the moment at which Māori connected with Tupaia and the tapa.

The profound change to how we as Māori can recall who we are when we shift our attention from the state for long enough to nurture our regional connections inspired my first book in 2012, *Once Were Pacific: Maori connections to Oceania*. I am deeply committed to what's possible when we as Māori push ourselves to remember in meaningful ways that New Zealand has only been our key site of reference for the blink of an eye in the context of the stretch of time humans have been in the region. I opened that book with words from Cook's own journal, which is something I had forgotten until I wrote a 250-thing list. ## **191 With Tapa**

*I chastise myself for taking on this task. Who am I to write about Cook? I've never written about him before! Then I realise that this isn't true. His words are the very first words of my book *Once Were Pacific*. I was intrigued and inspired by his description of still-existing paper mulberry in Aotearoa and Māori responses to the Tahitian tapa they saw on the Endeavour in 1769:*

*We met with about half a Dozn Cloth Plants, being the same as the inhabitants of the Islands lying within the Tropicks make their finest cloth on: this plant must be very scarce among them as the Cloth made from it is only work in small pieces by way of ornaments at their ears and even this we have seen but very seldom. Their knowing the use of this sort of Cloth doth in some measure account for the extraordinary fondness they have shew'd for it above every other things we had to give them, even a sheet of white paper is of more Value than so much English cloth of any sort whatever.*

*After Cook's opening words, I spend the rest of the book unpacking the ways in which we as Māori do and don't articulate our connections with the rest of the Pacific; I end with a hope that we learn to see these connections outside and beyond what we can see through the colonial spectacles Cook and his legacy have forced us to wear, as if our vision needed correction in the first place. And yet, the book starts with Cook. He becomes the line in the sand, the pivot, the start. Oh dear. I am still trying to think about the fact I'd forgotten that he was front and centre in this way. Cook: ubiquitous, ever-present, inescapable. Cook: can't see him for looking. Cook: hidden in plain view.*

I say to the PACIS100 students, and I say to you today, the painting by Tupaia depicting Māori engagement with Pacific tapa is something to remember when the state makes us fight each other for crumbs. But Tupaia's very presence that enabled him to paint the picture in the first place is the evidence you can tuck away up your sleeve for the next time someone tries to tell you that there was an historical period in these islands after Cook's arrival during which everyone was either Māori or European. Non-Māori Pacific people have been here as long as any Pakeha person's ancestors have been here. As long as English people have been here.

This might sound like quite a small point to be so dramatic about. But, I hear this idea all the time that New Zealand is somehow a country produced by the relationship of two peoples -

Māori and Pakeha – and then some other random beige people who rocked up in the later nineteenth or mid twentieth century.

I even hear it loudly said (or quietly underpinning) ideas about the Treaty – this idea that Māori signed a Treaty with Pakeha rather than with the Crown.

I hear people thinking that biculturalism is a tool of accounting in which the cultures are counted (1 + 2 = bi) instead of an analysis of diplomacy in which we clarify the two parties involved in an agreement (Māori, and the Crown/ non-Māori). I cannot tell you how many times this idea then seeps into bizarre suggestions that Māori commitments to things Māori are myopic or racist because what about all the Pacific Islanders (or Asians, or whatever other group of non-white people are scapegoated to reinforce white supremacy). ‘But what about multiculturalism?’ is a fervent cry of anti-Indigenous white supremacists everywhere.

When I was prepping this lecture I remembered that in a footnote in my PhD I also took my first steps towards more metaphorically working with this Dodge-y moment of Māori connection with the region:

Further, when Māori first came into contact with Cook’s ships they did not recognise them as being captained by Cook; to Māori, it was apparent that Tupaia, the Tahitian explorer who travelled with Cook and provided translation as well as navigational services, was in charge. I am grateful to Robert Sullivan for pointing this out to me, and suggesting that I consider its place in this metaphor. I regret that I am still unsure as to exactly how this part of the story fits within this allegory, but I wonder if it emphasises the role of Oceanic practitioners and scholars already operating within the University system. It is their ability to operate within many knowledge spheres that earns them not only a place on the ship (Tupaia was highly respected by the Europeans on board, especially Cook) but also recognition of a place within the academic structure. It is not, after all, for us to second-guess Māori and chuckle at their innocence as to the ‘real’ captain; for Māori, Tupaia was in that position. This is, of course, not to naively downplay the issue of power in this situation; just as Tupaia was ultimately at the mercy of Cook, so too Oceanic scholars are ultimately – even if they occupy crucial roles – at the mercy of the institution.

A few years later, I thought about this metaphor again and wrote a poem as I sat in a lecture theatre at the University of Auckland listening to the Tahitian scholar Titiaua Porcher speaking in French (a language I cannot understand) about Tahitian writing.

**Titaua's ship.**

(for Titaua Porcher)

another time we saw you:  
you arrived on your ship  
loaded with tapa and other gifts  
from your home

you spent time talking genealogy:  
catching up and trading stories  
with relatives you hadn't seen  
for generations

you came with tapa in sheets of impossible size:  
proof of what we'd thought were grandparents' myths  
about our shreds of paperbark  
stories of Hawaiki.

we knew you'd brought the ship to come and find us:  
next time Cook came  
we asked him where you were –

we've waited for your return.

this time,  
your ship was shaped like a lecture theatre –  
once again it was loaded with things from your home

though they all spoke with confidence about the cargo in their hold,  
and I couldn't understand a word you said,  
I know this is  
titaua's ship

one day, e hoa,  
this won't be a ship anymore:  
one day  
this will be our waka

**Story #3 The story of how creative people have already been telling different stories about Cook and its aftermath**

Wait – is it okay to read a poem as part of a lecture?

I'm mindful, and humbled, that this is the Michael King memorial lecture. There are a few things I share with Michael King - like connections to Wellington and to Waikato University, and an interest in history. I also want to acknowledge that he and I have some differences too, and I suspect we may have had shared some tense mutterings about what it means to be Indigenous here if we had ever met for a cup of tea.

Two weeks ago I met with final-year undergraduate students soon to graduate with majors in Māori & Indigenous Studies – one of their requirements is to complete a paper called Mātauranga Māori. I popped in to run a session on Mātauranga and writing, and as a book nerd of course I dragged a giant bag full of books across campus so we could enjoy a bit of show and tell and so they could see – actually see and touch in 3D, not just read from a powerpoint - the sheer bulk of the Māori written archive.

One of the texts I took was the book-length collection of essays *Te Ao Hurihuri: the world moves on – aspects of Maoritanga* published in 1975 and edited by Michael King. It's an extraordinary book that contains written chapters and recorded kōrero from a wide range of knowledgeable Māori thinkers, and it feels – if you'll forgive me – incredibly contemporary in many parts.

Writing about the purpose of the book, King explains “this book has further intentions. The first is positive. It is to show that Maori things can and should be written about by Maori participants rather than by Pakeha observers. Hence the strong element of subjectivity in many of the contributions. The second is negative. It is to suggest that Maoritanga is not something homogeneous. It is not something that can be packaged, slotted into the education curriculum and plucked out in the same form for all students in all parts of the country.”

One of the things I love about this book, which is why I wanted the students to see it, is because it is a rich repository of Māori writing and thinking. But one of the other things I love about it is his clear articulation of the limits of so many ways of thinking about Māori. I enjoy reading King's description of the difference between “Māori participants” and “Pakeha observers” and the way he writes about the various, specific and multiple knowledges held by Māori. It feels so contemporary, which is actually another way of saying relevant, but also perhaps an admission that some of the Māori scholarship we revere as being the ‘first’ to make certain claims can turn our attention from the massive range of work that came before.

This book came out in 1975 – the year of the Land March. This was also the year I was born, which means that this incredible published collection of diverse Māori perspectives has been on a bookshelf – somewhere - every day I have drawn breath.

The follow-up text *Tihe Mauri Ora* that appeared three years later, also edited by King, includes what I reckon anyway is one of the foundational essays for my own specific field of Māori writing in English – the chapter by Witi Ihimaera and Patricia Grace “The Maori in Literature.” Perhaps the inclusion of this chapter by Ihimaera and Grace reflects King’s own commitments to including an understanding of creative worlds, works and people alongside an understanding of history. Certainly he produced biographies of key New Zealand literary figures amongst his impressive range of publications.

I want to include Michael King as I trace a whakapapa of people who understand the place of creative people in the production of new stories but also in the life of any place. I want to thank him for his work, and acknowledge his ranging between writers and histories as I justify or explain why a poem can belong in a lecture.

I assume an Auckland Writers Festival audience will not mind the occasional poem, and will think that creative work has an important contribution to make to the ways in which we tell and retell histories with an eye on what different futures are made possible or foreclosed by such telling.

Indeed, Tusiata Avia’s *The Savage Coloniser Book* which prize for poetry just a couple of nights ago adds additional Cook-focussed poetry to work by Sullivan, McDougall and many others.

To provide a glimpse of the political potential of creative work, I want to shift from the published work of wonderful poets to an exercise in imagination on the part of some undergraduate students. When I was based at the University of Hawai’i-Mānoa, one year I taught an undergraduate course called ‘Pacific Genre Fiction’ in which students were put into groups during the first week of the course and asked to prepare a presentation for the rest of the class on a specific “popular” genre. As well as covering its major features and some of its key texts and authors, the group had to write about the first day of class in the style of their assigned genre: romance, science fiction, mystery, fantasy. The science fiction group did a great job of reframing—as I’d expected—the class session we’d spent together and the classroom space in which we’d met, but they also reframed the places I call home: Aotearoa, New Zealand and Oceania.

*Students filed into an empty room with white charcoal colored walls. Embedded into the wall next to the door flashed the time in soft white light, 10:25am. At 10:30, the room's frosted, trigonal, glass doors swooshed shut and L markings lit up on the floor. Each student then took their places inside one of these L's. The floor sensing this, rose up to meet them, forming a chair and a small, frosted glass desk computer. Soon afterwards the glass doors swooshed open again. "Kia Ora class!" A woman carrying a tablet computer came into the room, the doors swooshing closed behind her. She introduced herself as being from Aotearoa, or as it was once called in the 20th century, New Zealand. New Zealand she explained is a sector in the Federation of Oceania that retained independence, despite violent restructuring experienced in the region during the global economic recession.*

This group of undergraduate students, through the sheer act of imagination and without the constraints of 'reality,' managed to create a possible Pacific future which positions a different—and yet very familiar—Oceanic form. "New Zealand," which can feel so fixed—so irreversible—is abruptly limited to a specific period of time, whereas "Aotearoa," which can at the moment feel so fleeting and even mythical, endures. Perhaps the Federation of Oceania isn't exactly what Wendt or Hau'ofa had in mind when they wrote about a new Oceania in the later twentieth century, and perhaps it isn't even what King Kalākaua had in mind when he proposed an Oceanic Empire in the nineteenth century, but the future the students imagine in this short text does feel Oceanic in the best possible way. Like Wendt and Hau'ofa, after all, they set aside the limits of "truthful" disciplinary and political claims and got to work using imagination itself—"imagination in free flight" as Wendt would put it—in order to demonstrate key features of science fiction but also, it turned out, to propose a possible future that reaches far beyond the limits of the present.

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there are captain cooks amongst us too – bullies,  
throwing their weight around

they think they are the centre of the room but that's only because  
they have never been anywhere but there  
they have no idea about the edges or even how far the room extends  
one day they will realise that we in the corners are really in other centres  
they will realise there are no corners  
no walls

is it a room? is it a room then, when there are no walls?

i used to want to tell them to move over because they take up all the room  
but there's no room  
there is no room

no walls, no room - just links and connections and space

you're not at the centre; there are no centres  
you're just standing there  
one node in a massive network  
like the rest of us

\*\*\*

I want to finish with a ridiculous but hopefully memorable metaphor. I do definitely deserve a major side-eye for this metaphor. It's a terrible metaphor. But here we go.

A couple of years ago I was trying to be superwoman – mama to a baby, wife to a husband, member of a whanau, friend, scholar, poet, associate dean academic for my faculty – you name it. I was completely failing at many of the things Patricia Grace has so wisely shared in her sessions at this festival: remembering to have a life outside of work, and eating vegetables.

So anyway I decided to engage in a bit of pinterest-inspired “self care” (cos hey some days it's easier to paint your nails than to single handedly fix up the patriarchal racist colonial university sector) and I decided to treat myself to some fancy shampoo. Which, in my world, means splashing out about fifteen bucks a bottle - woohoo – instead of getting the cheapest cheap one on special.

So, I splashed out and got a lovely new shampoo and conditioner combo. After a few days, I thought hmmm. This is unfortunate – my flash shampoo and conditioner are making my hair a



bit less nice than the cheap ones I usually use. A couple more days, and I decided to investigate. Maybe these were aimed at people with really different hair from me.

And – it turns out that for the past week I had been washing my hair with conditioner, and then picking up the other bottle and conditioning it with conditioner. Yes I had bought two identical bottles and didn't notice at all.

Clearly this reflects on me really badly. You might be wondering how I manage to write anything at all with such appalling reading skills. We could go there.

But, I want us to divert our attention to something else: the fact it took so long for me to notice, and then to do anything about it. Even though, clearly, it hadn't actually been doing what I wanted it to from the first session in the shower.

It took so long to notice because I wanted to believe it was working.

It took so long to notice because this belief overrode my ability to believe my own experience.

It took so long to notice because I was too busy rushing around to take myself or my hair seriously.

It took so long to notice because I had invested so much in it – both resources and time.

It took so long to notice because it never crossed my mind to ask the right question.

E hoa mā. My week of double-conditioning and no shampoo has been 252 years of telling stories about what Cook means for this place.

Our national hair lost its lustre a long time ago, but we are too committed to the stories we've been telling and how much we've invested in them. 'Other people have worse hair' we say. 'We're balding anyway' we say. 'Let's just keep doing our thing and try to not notice we are not as shiny as we like to imagine' we say. 'Let's just look back to the golden days when things were already bad but we found a way to brush our hair and secure it with flashy clips so no one could tell, except those who were closest to the damage' we say.

We double up on conditioner: the product that doesn't get rid of the dirt but that smoothes and shines the hair. We love the stories that smooth things out, promise to untangle, make things – us – shine. We cover up smooth lovely stories with more smooth lovely stories. Cook is a hero. Then he's a nice man trapped in the ideologies of his time. Then... then... then...

New Zealand is a racial paradise. Then it may not be a racial paradise but hey we are making an effort. Then hey we are deeply structurally interpersonally environmentally destructively racist country but at least the main perpetrators and figureheads of the Crown and major corporations do say *kia ora* now – even Vodafone is committed to the principles of the Treaty apparently.

We need to stop with the smoothing stories poured on top of the smoothing stories massaged into the smoothing stories. Our national scalp is full of gunk. (I warned you this was a ridiculous yet hopefully memorable metaphor!)

We need shampoo. It may create knots, it may feel like a backward step, it may not leave us feeling smooth and lovely, it may cost us more in the short term. We need to be prepared to get used to telling stories that will clean away the dirt. And hey, we're at the Auckland Writers Festival. We believe in this stuff about the power of stories, right? As Tetiara from the novel *Island of Shattered Dreams* by Tahitian writer Chantal Spitz puts it, "she washes away this dirt by writing."

No, it won't happen overnight. But it will – it has to - happen.

*Alice Te Punga Somerville*  
*(Te Ātiawa, Taranaki)*