























Davis's poem "Farewell Fiji" articulates points of connection and departure between the islands of Fiji and his home. The poem treats Fiji in the first stanza and Australia in the second before making a final move back to his present liminal position in the last two lines: "So with a jet's roar / Goodbye beautiful Fiji" (Davis lines 17, 18). The pivot between the two—which also serves as a point of connection—occurs at the end of the first stanza where modes of colonial rule are directly compared: "The calm of the resident European / I mean, home he is always frantic" (lines 6, 7), and this pivot is affirmed in the opening of the second stanza: "But I am not for adoption. / I love my land" (lines 8, 9). The contrast between the two sites is not only due to differing colonial patterns: the "beaut[y]" of Fiji is contrasted with the harshness of Australia ("Harsh, dominant."); while Fiji may be "beautiful" it is less familiar than Australia and unnamed Fijian "mountains" in the first stanza stand alongside named sites in the second: "Ayers Rock, the Olga's / Rising up, indomitable" (lines 13, 14). Indeed, while Fiji is described mostly in terms of sound ("soft voices," "whispering," "laughter," "calm"), Australia is described in relation to visibility and movement: "dominant," "Moulder of men," "rising up," "Kaleidoscopic in the summer haze." When the final lines of the poem return to the moment of Davis's departure/return, we find him viewing Australia, his cherished "land," from the tarmac ("with a jet's roar") from a perspective that has been made possible by his time in Fiji. The poem offers an example of ethical Indigenous connection: graciously acknowledging the specificities and "beaut[y]" of the land and people of the place he has been visiting as well as specificities of their respective oppression.

As a scholar of Pacific literatures, my first instinct is to read the poem alongside Hawaiian poet Haunani-Kay Trask's "Returning the Gift," which she wrote in response to attending a gathering of Indigenous writers in the US. Like Davis, Trask farewells and memorialises the historic gathering by drawing attention to connections but also playing up differences both of landscape and of experience. Neither poem is saying "my country is better than yours." Like Davis, her poem of farewell is offered as a gift of thanks and acknowledgement. Someone well versed in Davis's other work may well read the poem in other ways, and this is as it should be. But I also like living in the world where writing by Trask and Davis / Davis and Crocombe / Hawai'i, Fiji and Australia, are in conversation. But on what basis can this conversation work, with a particular balance between resonance and difference?

Let us return to the "cousins" in Noonuccal's phrase above by turning to another text that talks about cousins: a 1979 poem "Education Week" written by Māori poet Evelyn Patuawa-Nathan who was based in Australia at the time. I have spoken about, written about and taught this poem—about a class trip to a local jail for a group of Aboriginal children and their teacher—in a lot of places now. I often encourage readers of the poem to think about the value and remarkable productivity of close observation and careful reading (the kids read the names, the poet/teacher read the kids, and we as readers of the poem read all of this) and I also note that it draws attention to the place of writing—of archives—in Indigenous scholarly and community work. In *Opening Doors*, alongside the many poems based in Aotearoa and within specifically Māori contexts, there are four poems focused on Australia: two about Māori experiences in (actually, burial in) Australia, and two that represent perspectives of Aboriginal people and critique the colonial state while centring Indigenous agency. Years earlier, in 1960, Patuawa-Nathan wrote a lengthy obituary and artistic biography of Albert Namatjira for *Te Ao Hou*, a New Zealand state magazine for Māori. So, she had been thinking and writing about points of connection between Māori and Aboriginal people for a while.<sup>1</sup>

The kids in "Education Week" identify "names" (proximity, genealogy, family, ancestry) among "comments" and then "reach" for them. By the end of the poem the "reaching" of the Indigenous children towards the writing of their own relatives reframes the space from one of disconnection to one of connection and agency. Even in empty, tightly controlled, violent, impossibly imperial spaces, there is always prior Indigenous presence, and this

presence can be reframed and multiple. I draw attention to the echo of the word “reach” from when Linda recites her genealogy in *Mutuwhenua* and says “every branch reaches out” (101). Like Linda, these children engage in a self-conscious and deliberate act of genealogising. Neither Linda in *Mutuwhenua* nor the speaker in Patuawa-Nathan’s poem describe accidental proximity. As with Linda and her grandmother, the utterance or reading of names profoundly restructures and realigns significant family relationships. As with Linda who doesn’t argue for the merits of her white fiancé but focuses instead on the multidimensional Indigenous network of which she is a part, the children standing in the “bare concrete cell” centre Indigenous relationships through deliberately connecting with multigenerational genealogies (“cousins / and brothers / and fathers”) that in turn decentre non-Indigenous over-writing of the space *even as it provides*, as a by-product rather than the goal, new perspectives from which to engage non-Indigenous encounters with Indigenous peoples. These final three lines of the poem are structured according to three different kinds of close family relationship. The kids “reach”

for names of cousins  
and brothers  
and fathers. (Patuawa-Nathan lines 12–14)

I like thinking about the final word “fathers” standing in for ancestry, genealogy, history—this is the primary reconnection that occurs and is centred in this space—the thing that is *learned* in education week despite the plans of the state or the town or the teacher to structure the intellectual and moral knowledge experienced. The aspirations of the settler “education” system are eclipsed by the aspirations of young Indigenous people whose capacity to read and reach turns empty space (*terra nullius*) back into ancestral and family space. But what about the brothers and cousins? Why are they there? And, what do “cousins” add that “brothers” don’t already suggest in terms of generational proximity?

Cousins are relatives with whom you share one family network, but not another. In some contexts, your cousins may be like close siblings, and in others you may feel like virtual strangers. The cousin relationship speaks to connection on the basis of certain familiarity, but without forcing different Indigenous peoples to pretend that all of our experiences are comparable or familiar or legible or even visible to each other. With a nod to Noonuccal, I have been thinking about cousins as a way of thinking about Indigenous–Indigenous connections. The possibility of the concept was originally prompted in response to a passage in Tahitian novelist Chantal Spitz’s 1991 novel, published in English in 2007 as *Island of Shattered Dreams*. The central character Tetiare spends years travelling around the Pacific region in search of what Spitz describes as “cousins”:

Tetiare has finally come home, after years of wandering round the Pacific, in a vain attempt to heal the wound in her soul. She has met the *cousins* who came with them long ago in their big canoes, born of the same dream of freedom, but who stopped where the wind had blown them on tiny hopeful islands, over the centuries forgetting the ones who journeyed further. She has found them again, so similar in body and soul, yet made different by the various foreign governments that have been squatting on their land. She has discovered them, peoples of the first people, attempting through little disorganised movements to shake off the Foreigner and immerse themselves again in their origins, to be themselves, the lost children of this huge family in search of one another. (Spitz 121, my italics)

The cousins in *Island of Shattered Dreams* are deeply connected, but their connection is produced by acknowledging, rather than sidestepping, differences that are produced by two distinct processes: their cultural and historical contexts connected to the deepest histories (“origins”) of the region; and the ways they have been “made different” by the foreign governments “squatting on their land.” For Tetiara, Indigenous connection is not coincidental, disinterested, or accidental. Her connection with Indigenous people from across the region is consciously motivated and reciprocal and its purpose is “to heal the wound in her soul;” the restoration of these Indigenous links is both the foundation and purpose of decolonisation: “the lost children of this huge family in search of one another.”

To be clear, then, I am proposing that “cousins” (Noonuccal’s “cousins,” Patuawa-Nathan’s “cousins,” Spitz’s “cousins,” Linda’s cousins as lateral branches) could be a close-enough-yet-loose-enough relationship to enable us to think productively and ethically about Indigenous–Indigenous connections. In the context of Pacific literary studies and Indigenous Australian literary studies in particular, our respective worlds overlap, connect, resonate, and “reach” in more ways than we might have considered. And, what’s more, this reaching has been reciprocal: some aspects of Pacific writing are connected to Australia, and some Indigenous Australian writing sits on Pacific metaphoric (and perhaps physical) bookshelves. We don’t often see “our” texts on each other’s bookshelves. Some reasons for this are theoretical and methodological. Some are pedagogic. But some are pragmatic.

I present these thoughts hoping that they make a contribution to how we collectively think about the Study of Australian Literatures, and also with the hope they are heard unequivocally as being in solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty in this place. Certainly, Pacific literary studies should never be weaponised against Indigenous literary studies in Australia. I am not arguing for crumbs from the table that should have been diverted to Indigenous literary studies to go to the Pacific instead. I am saying: don’t make us scrap over crumbs. I am asking: what kind of loaf of bread are you even cutting in Australian literary studies? I have made a deliberate decision to not write directly about Mabo here. Instead, I have written in response to, in acknowledgement of, and in solidarity with the Mabo decision. I’ve made an argument about what becomes visible when we turn down the volume on state boundaries and turn the volume up on the transnational conversations in which Indigenous communities have been engaged for so long. Hopefully, this will also set the scene for interesting thinking about potential further conversations *and actions* in the future. Mabo demands a change in power relations and control over resources. It is also surely about the many worlds that are possible when we understand there is an absolute forest of Indigenous literary trees here, there, and everywhere . . . with so many branches reaching out, touching every other.

*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*

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I want to be very clear that although I am proposing some ways of reading this poem, we will not sidestep the fact that this poem is about Indigenous incarceration. I am deeply mindful that when I delivered the lecture on which this essay is based I stood on an island that has served both nation and empire as a carceral space in particular and violent ways, and although I am here teasing out possible metaphoric work the poem can do, it would be unethical and complicit to proceed without noticing and naming and refusing to sidestep the ways that “local jail[s]” and “small concrete cell[s]” function not just as a site but as a tool of ongoing colonialism and genocide—and Indigenous death—in Australia.

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