

**B**uilding on conference conversations about positionality—about who we are and how our identities shape our views of the world, about the connections and disconnections experienced between us, and about our proximities to place, power, and privilege—this piece brings together four conference participants to continue to reflect on what positionality means, on why it is important, and on how to practice it in non-performative, well-developed, and mutually nourishing ways. Their dialogue reflects active and critical positioning in process and practice, creating opportunities for acknowledging our relationships and activating both collectivity and accountability in the various spaces where we live, work, create, and hope.

## Ko Wai Tēnei e Tū Ake Nei? Activating Collectivity and Accountability Through Grounded Positioning

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ARAMA RATA, 傅梦竹 (MENGZHU FU), JESS MIO & EMALANI CASE

Last year's social movements conference, 'Activating Collectivity: Aroha and Power', provided many different opportunities for positioning: for literally moving through physical and virtual spaces, for cultivating and nurturing relationships, and for reflecting on how our identities influence how we see the world and move through it. While we may engage in active and reflexive positioning in different ways, and to different degrees, in our daily interactions, the conference provided the time and space to bring conversations of positionality forward. It was in these conversations where we could think about how we are connected or disconnected; reflect on relationships to power, privilege, and place; and consider the interconnections between our struggles and the interdependencies of our liberation.

What follows is a conversation between four of us who participated in the conference in different ways, who each have our own identities and are interested in seeing the ways they intersect, and who are each dedicated to understanding positionality as more than something to reflect upon, but as a practice that keeps us accountable to each other and to the possibilities we hope to create. Positioning is not just the things we say about ourselves by way of introduction, but a dynamic process of creating spaces we can safely step into,

reveal ourselves, and acknowledge one another. In the conversation that follows we do just that. In responding to a series of critical questions, we create a space where we can be in safe dialogue, where we can be vulnerable and reveal parts of ourselves—including some of our ongoing questions and uncertainties—and where we can also acknowledge our relationships. By publishing this conversation, we hope others will be encouraged to do the same: to have meaningful and critical conversations about our various positionings so that we can continue to activate collectivity and accountability in our various spaces.

### **Ko wai mātou? Who are we and how do we position ourselves?**

**ARAMA RATA** – Kei aku haumi whakaaweawe, kei ngā mouna whakahī, i tēnei te mātahi o te tau hou, tēnā koutou. Ahatia te pūmātao o te takurua, kua mahana te ngākau i tēnei kaupapa, arā ko te whakawhanaungatanga. I'm grateful for the invitation from the conference organisers to be included in this publication, and for the opportunity to converse with friends I so admire. As this conversation is about positioning, it makes sense for us to first answer the question, 'Ko wai tēnei?' Who is this person speaking to you? On my grandfather's side, I am from Taranaki. His image hangs at Ōeo marae, which lies on the boundary of our two iwi there: Ngāruahine to the South, and Taranaki Iwi to the North. His bones, however, lie with my grandmother's Ngāti Maniapoto people, at Te Kūiti pā. I was born in South Auckland and lived there until my family returned to Taranaki just before my fifth birthday. Although I was raised below my ancestral mountain, the towns we lived in and the schools I attended were predominantly Pākehā. My work as a researcher has connected me with specific communities and political projects. In recent years these kaupapa have included Māori-migrant relations, anti-racism, and constitutional transformation, through which I met the three of you.

**傅梦竹** – Da jia hao! Thank you Arama for bringing us together for this conversation and many thanks to Emalani and the rest of the organisers

of the conference who created such an amazing space both online and offline. It was such a warm, generative, and stimulating space to be part of. I'm Mengzhu or 梦竹 and I'm a grandchild of rural farmers, factory workers, and teachers who migrated from villages in Guizhou, Sichuan, and Henan to the city of Tianjin, China where my parents and I were born. I'm 'Han Chinese', which is the dominant ethnic group in China. I have lived in Tāmaki-Makaurau most of my life and I'm now an international student living in Tkaronto (Toronto), which is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, a precolonial treaty between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee to peacefully share and care for the land.<sup>1</sup> A lot of my learnings and understandings of positionality has been through activism with Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiratanga (ASTR). Arama and I met through Racial Equity Aotearoa, an Indigenous-led, anti-racism organisation started by Aaryn Niuapu and Alesha Hulme. Shout out to them for bringing us together! Kia ora Jess and Emalani. I have heard great things about both of you through mutual friends, but this is the first time we're meeting properly and working on something together.

**JESS MIO** – Thank you for the opportunity to be in conversation with you all. It's wonderful to collaborate with 梦竹 for the first time, connecting through our mutual friend, Arama—who I had the good fortune to meet at Ihumātao during a workshop for tauīwi mō Matike Mai Aotearoa—and with Emalani, who I first met while participating in protests led by Kia Mau against the Crown's 2019 celebrations of invasion.

I describe myself as tauīwi Pākehā, non-Māori and white, of British descent. After growing up in Tauranga Moana, where I lived on Pirirākau land without their consent, I am now an uninvited occupant on Ngāti Pārau, Ngāti Hinemoa, and Ngāti Hinepare land here in Ahuriri 'Napier'. With respect and gratitude to them, and to all hapū, I affirm the authority of Indigenous peoples over their lives, lands, and waters. I organise in solidarity as part of a network of tauīwi mō Matike Mai Aotearoa: non-

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1 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Looking after Gdoo-Naaganinaa: Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty Relationships,' *Wicazo Sa Review* 23, no. 2 (2008): 29–42.

Māori contributing to Tiriti-based constitutional transformation and ending colonisation.<sup>2</sup>

**EMALANI CASE** – Aloha mai kākou. Thank you for the opportunity to share this space with all of you. I'm grateful for the ways our journeys have intersected in the past and present and for what those intersections have made possible, particularly the chance to reflect on positionality and the ways we might understand ourselves in relation. Reflecting on relationships, I first met Arama and Jess in Tūranganui-a-Kiwa where, as Jess mentioned, we joined with members of Kia Mau who were protesting celebrations of colonisation in 2019. Though I have not met 夢竹 in person yet, I am thankful that we've found space to be in conversation with one another for the first time.

I write this from Te Whanganui-a-Tara where I live and work on the lands of Te Ātiawa. I write this from a city that was built on streams that have been covered and culverted but that still run and nourish under the concrete.<sup>3</sup> I write this as a Kanaka Maoli (Hawaiian) woman who identifies as Indigenous but who is still trying to work through what it means to be Indigenous while living on lands that I am not Indigenous to. I come to Aotearoa from Waimea, Hawai'i, where I was born and raised in the kīpu'upu'u rain. This is where my parents modelled what it means to be an aloha 'āina, someone dedicated to protecting 'āina, or everything that feeds: lands, oceans, waters, and skies. Wherever I am in the world, I carry aloha 'āina with me. It is the fierce aloha, or love, that motivates my participation in any and all movements I am involved in. I bring that to our conversation today. Aloha.

### **Where does the practice of positioning come from and why is it**

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2 Matike Mai Aotearoa, *He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa: The Report of Matike Mai Aotearoa—The Independent Working Group on Constitutional Transformation* (Auckland: National Iwi Chairs Forum and Te Wānanga o Waipapa, 2016).

3 Alice Te Punga Somerville, 'Culvert: The Slipperiness of Place,' *Pukeahu: An Exploratory Anthology*, <http://pukeahuanthology.org/stories/migrations/culvert/>

**important? Why and how does context, place, and intersectionality matter? How do we understand positionality and power (personal, structural, and collective)?**

**ARAMA** – I feel fortunate that in Māori contexts positioning is not only common, it's expected. It didn't always feel like a blessing. As a child I remember other Māori being excited to meet me, and their faces dissolving into disappointment when I couldn't name the people and places that would connect us. I learned to fill in the blanks of a formulaic pepeha—waka, mounga, awa, iwi, hapū, marae—even if it didn't mean much more to me than passing a basic whakapapa test to begin with. There was power, though, in the repeated naming of those people and places that snuck up slowly: reaffirming tenuous connections, sinew by sinew, restoring whakapapa one whanaunga, one hui, one hīkoi at a time, bringing me to the realisation that the people and places I claim also claim me, that we are in relationship, and that our identities are bound.

Now that 'biculturalism' is widely recognised, it's common practice in many settings for Māori and non-Māori alike to position ourselves using this formulaic pepeha structure. More meaningful positioning, however, is responsive to context and power dynamics. Responsive positioning is artfully embodied in karanga and whaikōrero exchanges, where we hear our mountains greet one another, our blood ties honoured, and our shared histories recounted.

Although the pepeha framework can be a powerful decolonial framework of positioning, I sometimes wonder whether tauwi feel connected to the mountains, rivers, lakes, and oceans they recite, and whether there might be other aspects of their identities they long to acknowledge, if only they were given the space to do so. To be clear, I'm not critiquing the use of pepeha by non-Māori. I'm simply speculating whether the practice fully serves those using it, and if not, how pepeha structures could be added to. I also sometimes wonder whether our relationships are better served by tauwi learning about te ao Māori, or learning about their own heritage—particularly for Indigenous peoples from elsewhere (not that it has to be

one or the other). What possibilities might also open for our plant species, animals, prophets, and atua to also connect?

In informal settings, our desire to relate to people through whakapapa often urges us, as Māori, to reach immediately for the question, ‘Nō whea koe?’ (‘Where are you from?’) But I’ve seen the hurtful impact of that question when asked of racialised communities who are told they don’t belong. Perhaps we all would do well to understand how this question may be intended and heard differently across racialised communities.

I like the provocation here about differences in positionality and power in the personal, structural, and collective sense. Structurally, Māori are oppressed. Collectively, we experience ‘poor outcomes’. But on the personal level, being Indigenous means Māori accumulate personal power in leftist spaces, where non-Māori are often eager to position themselves as our allies. I’ve called this ‘power’, but it’s sometimes hard to distinguish this treatment from racism. Sometimes it feels like people are being respectful, sometimes it feels like they’re trying to collect me, and other times not being held to the same standards as others feels patronising: the native who is perversely exoticised for their presumed rarity and therefore ‘protected’, and the presumption we can’t meet the standards set for others.

梦竹 – I think about positioning as knowing yourself in order to relate more meaningfully with others, with consciousness of the power relations involved. I see it as also about accountability and who we are accountable to. Thanks for bringing up the ‘where are you from?’ question, Arama. It is an interesting one to reflect on for relationships between Māori and tauivi of colour (or should I use Tangata Tiriti of colour?). When I first learnt that this is how Māori make connections with each other, that intention changed the way I thought about it. Often when Pākehā ask this question, the subtext is more like, ‘What are you doing here?’ and a questioning of belonging. The racist version of this question has also caused internalised shame about where we are from, because being foreign is stigmatised. But reclaiming the places we have come from can be an act of unlearning that shame. Why should we hesitate to name the places where we were born or

where our ancestors are from?

My journey around unlearning this shame has actually been massively influenced by tangata whenua. I didn't know the villages (or my grandparents' full names) until I took te reo Māori in my undergrad years. Hone Sadler and Whaea Kā Williams were my kaiako at uni. When they taught us the pepeha structure, I had to ask my parents and find out the name of the river and mountain. And now, hearing your point, Arama, about whether this is relevant to my identity, I'm reflecting on that as a diasporic person without a deep or reciprocal relationship with the river, Haihe, or the mountain, Panshan, that I name. Maybe they are not mine to claim and they don't account for my family's ancestry in my grandparents' generation who are from three different provinces and villages.

Sharing pepeha is a way to respect Māori ways of introducing ourselves. In Aotearoa, I think of positionality firstly in relation to tangata whenua, as tauivi of colour or Tangata Tiriti. I began to think deeper about this relationship through reading the first *Mellow Yellow* zine that Wai Ho wrote where he talked about what it means to be Asian on colonised land.<sup>4</sup> This positioning carries responsibilities and accountabilities to tangata whenua rather than to the New Zealand state. Liberal multiculturalism would probably have me identify as a Chinese New Zealander or 'Kiwi-Asian'. I cringe so hard at those terms 'cause they tend to erase tangata whenua and Te Tiriti relationships and align us with, as Dr. Moana Jackson calls it, the 'ongoing colonising state' of 'New Zealand', and uphold 'kiwi' nationalism.<sup>5</sup> Too Don Brashy for my liking. It's a bit gross in other ways when Pākehā have told me, 'You are basically a kiwi then eh?' as a compliment, as a gesture of inclusion and belonging, but one that is contingent on proximity to 'kiwi' culture (i.e., speaking English without a 'foreign' accent, successfully assimilated). In terms of positioning, that's a real source of privilege within the 'Asian' category, where there is that conditional inclusion because of language and citizenship status. With citizenship, you can't be deported,

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4 Wai Ho (aka Hannah), *Mellow Yellow* (Wellington: Self-Published Zine, 2005).

5 Tina Ngata, Emalani Case, Tāwhana Chadwick, and Kassie Hartendorp, 'Deconstructing the Doctrine of Discovery,' University of Otago, 23 September 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmH2W\\_357qc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmH2W_357qc)

your status in the country isn't dependent on an employer who can exploit the immigration system to extract more labour.

I see personal power as contextual and relational, and not always that apparent; the intersectional factors of age, class, ability, education, occupation, sexuality, gender, immigration status, ethnicity, and religion all play a part. In tauwiwi-of-colour spaces, with predominantly first-generation migrants (those who migrated as adults), some of them may have generational power over me, but I might have more language privilege. For example, if I was to call an emergency line, the person on the other end is less likely to hang up on me because they don't (or refuse to) understand my accent. True story: police call-centre responders have hung up on my former colleagues who were first generation migrant women.

Collectively, I think it is also important for non-Pākehā tauwiwi who have been through the Pākehā education system to be approaching relationships from our own cultural frameworks and not replicate internalised white supremacy in the way we do things. I think this speaks to your point, Arama, about deepening knowledge on your own culture and language. For me, this is a constant journey, and being Chinese from mainland China, it is also about being careful around not contributing to contemporary iterations of Chinese state nationalism. Chineseness is also a construct that is complicated, changing, and contextual. I'm thinking about the problems of Chinese hegemony within the category of 'Asian' in diasporic contexts, but also Han Chinese supremacy within China and places under Han Chinese settler colonial occupation (Tibet, Taiwan, Singapura, East Turkestan). This is the place-dependent dimension of positionality eh, and how it is not fixed.

In my studies, I've been tracing conversations on 'Asian' positionality in contexts of ongoing colonisation. Emalani, I want to acknowledge the depth of Hawaiian discussions about this from the work of the amazing Hawaiian-sovereignty leader, Haunani-Kay Trask (may she rest in love and power). In the year 2000, her writing introduced the language of 'settlers

of colour' to describe Asians, in particular Japanese settlers, in Hawai'i.<sup>6</sup> I haven't found any earlier writings that use this language. Since then, it has really proliferated in activist discourse and writings in Northern Turtle Island, popularised through Mi'kmaw scholar, Bonita Lawrence, and South Asian scholar, Ena Dua's (who I've been lucky to learn directly from while living on Turtle Island) influential article on 'Decolonizing Antiracism'.<sup>7</sup> Haunani-Kay Trask's provocations are really lucid for thinking about positionality and sort of forewarns to other places what can happen if Asians collectively gain political and economic power but continue to undermine Indigenous sovereignty. Whether the language of 'settlers of colour' fits in Aotearoa or not, I think this quote sums up Asian responsibilities where she argues that allyship is for Asians to support 'Native control over the sovereignty process' and 'criticize Asian attempts to undermine sovereignty leaders'.<sup>8</sup> As we often hear, Asian populations are projected to grow. I think to prevent a situation where a growing Asian population gains power and uses it to claim rights to land, it's our responsibility in this political moment to steer our communities away from that, and towards the restoration of tino rangatiratanga.<sup>9</sup>

**EMALANI** – Like Arama, I grew up in an environment where positioning was both common and expected. In fact, it was so expected that it was often done unconsciously. When I think about introducing myself, or positioning myself in particular geographic, political, cultural, or even ceremonial contexts, it's about establishing connections, or at least creating space for them to be nurtured: spaces where people can speak to people, ancestors to ancestors, places to places, and as you said so beautifully, Arama, where mountains can greet mountains. At home, when we introduce ourselves, it's about opening up an opportunity to create links, to find the connections

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6 Haunani-Kay Trask, 'Settlers of Color and "Immigrant" Hegemony: "Locals" in Hawai'i,' *Amerasia Journal* 26, no. 2 (2000): 1–24.

7 Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, 'Decolonizing Antiracism,' *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 120–143.

8 Trask, 'Settlers of Color,' 11.

9 Moana Jackson, 'Decolonisation and Stories of the Land,' *E-Tangata*, 9 May 2021.

we share, not just with each other, but with place.

After moving here, I found it harder to create genealogical and geographical links. Back home, people will hear your surname and immediately start asking questions like, ‘Are you related to so-and-so?’ Or they’ll hear where you’re from and make assumptions about you based on the place, saying things like, ‘I can tell you’re from Waimea because. . .’ (sometimes said with admiration and at other times with sarcasm and even mockery). Since that can’t happen here, I’ve found that my stating that I come from Hawai‘i and that I’m Kanaka Maoli enables others to perhaps at least recognise me as Indigenous (not to this whenua, of course, but to Hawai‘i). Recognition of Indigeneity has been quite powerful. Sometimes it’s stating that I am Kanaka or that I am Indigenous that opens up the opportunity for people to relate to me on a human level, recognising shared experiences. While Indigenous peoples *are* different, and while we must pay attention to cultural and contextual specificities, there’s often a recognition of a shared struggle that has led (but does not always lead) to feelings of solidarity.

Here in Aotearoa, as you’ve mentioned, 梦竹, I think any consideration of positionality must prioritise our relationships to tangata whenua. Each year, I have deep and sometimes sticky conversations with my Pacific Studies students about our roles and responsibilities as Pacific peoples living here in Aotearoa. ‘There is a world of difference’, I often tell them, ‘between seeing this place as the New Zealand nation state and seeing this place as Aotearoa, the home of people we are related to by whakapapa’. If our relationships begin and end with the New Zealand settler state then we reinforce the structural powers that have dispossessed and oppressed tangata whenua, and that continue to do so. If our relationships do not begin with Aotearoa and with tangata whenua, in other words, we centre colonial structures and risk forgetting the relationships to place and people that transcend colonialism. Situating ourselves in relation to whenua and to tangata whenua first enables us to think critically about ourselves, our positionalities, and, perhaps most importantly, about the responsibilities that come with those positionalities.

When I first moved to Aotearoa, I was quite insistent on calling myself a ‘settler’. Having read people like the incredible Haunani-Kay Trask, who you mention, 夢竹, I felt it was my responsibility to do so. As a Kanaka Maoli woman living here, I thought it would be the most appropriate way of recognising my status as a new migrant and as someone without genealogical ties to this place. I’ve written elsewhere about my journey to explore my positionality—and my flawed logic—but to put it briefly, my use of the term ‘settler’ to refer to myself made others uncomfortable, especially my Māori friends. While I initially thought I was acting responsibly, especially as I tried to hold myself accountable to the ways that my living here is, at least in part, a structural fact—in the sense that, as Patrick Wolfe explains, I may not have dispossessed tangata whenua myself, but ‘the fact of the matter is that I wouldn’t have had a university job if Indigenous people hadn’t had their land stolen from them’—I later realised that I was only re-centring the settler state as the determining agent of how we relate to one another.<sup>10</sup> My Māori friends had other terms for me: manuhiri, whānau, and sometimes even tuākana. These terms reminded me that my relationships must be, first and foremost, with the people of this place, and that while those relationships can be close and intimate, they must also be about action and accountability. Though I don’t have it all figured out, as positioning is an ongoing journey, thinking critically about my positionality keeps me on edge in a way that I hope will always keep me accountable, or at least continuously asking the question of how I might be of service to those whose lands I live and work on.

**JESS** – In contrast with the richness and beauty of your responses, I was brought up within the dominating tauīwi Pākehā culture of disregard, ignorance, and entitlement. To trace that back further, since European people first travelled to the lands and waters of hapū Māori, we have presumed to literally and metaphorically position ourselves however we like, disregarding the fact that Māori are at home and therefore determine what

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10 J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism Then and Now: A Conversation Between J. Kēhaulani Kauanui and Patrick Wolfe,’ *Politica & Societa* 2 (2012): 237.

is appropriate here. Through violent force, we established and continue to maintain a collective position of stolen wealth and power.

When introducing ourselves, we usually omit our connections to lands and waters, ancestors, and other people. If describing our position in relation to anything at all, it's become our custom to emphasise connections to impersonal systems that our people have constructed and brutally imposed on others. For example, I was brought up to describe myself as a kiwi, a citizen of New Zealand, a graduate of the University of Auckland, a professional in the arts sector. This is, as Emalani says, beginning and ending our relationships with oppressive structural powers: such as colonising nation states, academic institutions, and capitalist workplaces. On a personal level, I found that positioning myself in relation to these structures severely limited my connections with people and place, leading to a shallow and hollow sense of identity.

Defecting from those systems enables us to grow authentic, non-colonising, honourable ways of positioning ourselves. One aspect of this is how we describe ourselves, for example, by affirming that we are here in *te ao Māori* through the use of *kupu* like *taiwi* or *Tangata Tiriti*, beyond state- and euro-centric concepts like 'New Zealander'. I think it's often important to accompany this with our explicit assertion of respect for the authority of *tangata whenua*, rather than assuming that identity markers alone can express such respect.

Reflecting on what 夢竹 has shared, I am imagining if and how *taiwi* *Pākehā*—along with white (un)settlers/colonisers globally—might usefully acknowledge ourselves as diasporic peoples. I think this would require sensitivity to the fact that white people have chosen to force our mass migration upon everyone else, while coercing so many racialised peoples into patterns of migration against their will. We may share the reality of living far from our homelands with fellow diasporic peoples, but the violence of white-supremacist imperialism creates stark differences in those experiences along racial lines. One aspect of this is how white colonising systems strive to conceal the violent nature of our position, persuading ourselves that we are peacefully at home on colonised lands while we relegate solely racialised

groups to a despised and marginalised category of ‘foreigner’.

**What reflections do you have from the conference regarding discussions on positioning?**

**ARAMA** – I te tuatahi, me mihi atu au ki a koutou ngā kaiwhakahaere o te hui taumata, arā ko Emalani koutou ko Kassie, ko Dylan, ko Tarapuhi, ko Amanda, ko Anne, ko Kaitlin, ko Fetūolemoana, ko Tayla, ko Mike. Me kore ake koutou hei manaaki i a mātou. Nā tō koutou aroha kaha, ka tipu i ngā paiaka o te whanaungatanga, ā, ka puawai ngā whakaaro hira.

I was involved in the Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiratanga session on Māori–Asian solidarities, and in the tauwiwi mō Matike Mai session on imagining a kāwanatanga sphere. In both sessions I invited non-Māori to imagine their own liberation, alongside Māori liberation, as in some contexts it feels as though tauwiwi need permission from Māori to talk about their own self-determination. 梦竹, Emalani, and Jess, given the salience of tino rangatiratanga movements in progressive spaces, does being tauwiwi sometimes make you feel like you’re not allowed to centre your own liberation from the forms of oppression you experience?

梦竹 – Even though I attended online, this conference felt so welcoming: Fetū giving us virtual tours and friends there sending mini video clips and messages. It was a totally new experience and I was grateful to be able to participate from afar. It was obvious that a lot of thought and care from the organisers had gone into making sure it was a space lovingly held. I attended both the sessions you mentioned, Arama; I really enjoyed how they focused on dreaming, healing, practising, and envisioning relationships that white-supremacist colonial states have actively tried to prevent. The discussions on Matike Mai and constitutional transformation made me think about the responsibilities, and I think understanding positionality here is quite crucial to understanding responsibilities. Because if we want to model and practice relationships envisioned in Te Tiriti in the present, we need to already be respecting self-determination, and taking responsibility

for our own education on the histories of Aotearoa. I'm grateful to have worked with Emma Moon and Kirsty Fong in organising the Māori–Asian solidarity session and to have been at a point to hold those dialogues and honour the ways that solidarity has never been one-directional. The stories and perspectives shared by you, Arama, Sina-Brown Davis, Aaryn Niuapu, Sue Gee, Ruth DeSouza, and Tze Ming Mok prompted me to transcribe a talk that Dr. Moana gave in 2018 on Te Tiriti and Asians where he shared stories of solidarity that aren't well known, involving Parihaka men and early Chinese miners in Ōtepoti, and Waikato conscientious objectors and Chinese market gardeners.<sup>11</sup> There are so many more of these stories that challenge the idea that our struggles, communities, and histories are separate or in tension and competition.

This relates to your question, Arama. I don't think being tauwiwi makes me feel like I'm not allowed to imagine liberation from oppressions I experience, but it makes me think about how all oppressions are interdependent and bound together—that liberation is not possible for some if there is no liberation for all. It reminds me of what Tze Ming Mok wrote: 'We need to realise that if Maori are expendable we are all expendable, and that the only lasting alliances will not be engineered by political parties, but by the people; not unions of convenience, but of love'.<sup>12</sup> Eliminating racism is not possible without restoration of tino rangatiratanga. But I think there is also a danger in the discourse represented by one of the Pākehā banners at Waitangi I saw one year that said 'Māori sovereignty is good for all New Zealanders'. Māori sovereignty is important for its own sake and should be respected and honoured regardless of whether it is good for anyone else. It would certainly also benefit tauwiwi-of-colour communities but that should not be the central message.

One reflection I had from the conference was that positioning ourselves doesn't always have to be a declaration, but an understanding and awareness of boundaries. It's useful to think about when it is your place to speak and

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11 MZ Fu, 'Stories of Māori and Chinese Solidarity: An Excerpt from Dr. Moana Jackson's Talk,' *Te Tangi A Te Ruru*, 11 December 2020.

12 Tze Ming Mok, 'Race You There,' *Landfall* 208 (2004): 18–26.

when you need to just listen or pass the mic, to avoid the traps of speaking over or speaking for groups you are not part of, or positioning yourself as an expert on experiences you have never lived. This is relevant especially in academic contexts when someone could be writing and researching on something they have no experience or personal political investment in. They can be disconnected from social movements working on those issues but still claim a position of expertise.

**EMALANI** – My experience of the conference was as one of the conference organisers. With a goal to open up space for conversation, I knew that my role was to try to remain in the background, doing whatever needed to be done to make sure critical and productive conversations could take place. This meant trying to be mindful of who we were inviting into different spaces and how multiple positionalities might intersect. With that said, I love that the conference has also created opportunities like this one, where I have been invited to be part of a conversation taking place long after the conference itself, and have been given the space to weigh-in on important questions.

To reflect on your question, Arama, about imagining liberation, I completely agree with 夢竹, first in the sense that liberation must be for all, and second, in the sense that my imaginings have certainly not been constricted by being here. If anything, living here has opened up the range of possibilities that I see for the future. It has both widened and deepened my dreams and radical hopes for free, healthy, and nourishing futures for all of us. It has enabled me to see the connections between our liberation movements and the inseparability of our issues. It has shown me that there are many ways to stand for freedom and liberation and that we have to do the work of seeing our connections, and acting upon them, because colonialism depends upon a notion of separateness that is both constructed and strategically maintained.

Last year, for instance, I spent a lot of time working with different groups both here and at home in Hawai‘i to put an end to RIMPAC, the US Navy’s Rim of the Pacific military war games that take place on our

lands and in our waters every other year. While doing this work, George Floyd was murdered in Minneapolis and we saw both worldwide outrage and widespread denial of the realities of racism. In this context, our work against RIMPAC could have been seen as detracting from what should have been the central issue: the Black Lives Matter movement. I even heard people saying things like, ‘We should just be focusing on this right now’, while putting other movements on the side. I therefore tried to show people how our movements are interconnected, how fighting against RIMPAC and calling for demilitarisation *is* about calling for a world where Black lives matter, *is* about calling for Indigenous rights both at home and here, *is* about calling for safer futures, and *is* about liberation for all of us.

When I dug into the realities of RIMPAC, I reminded myself that our struggle cannot be about the biennial event alone but must be about the structures that underpin it: militarism and so-called ‘justified violence’, white supremacy and the dehumanization of Black and Indigenous lives, and colonialism. Doing so meant exposing the myth of separability and calling upon our knowledge of relationality. RIMPAC has direct impacts on Aotearoa, as New Zealand is a participating nation, one that sent a contingent to Hawai‘i to participate in the war games in the middle of a global pandemic. This has implications for Māori and Pacific peoples in this country who are disproportionately targeted by New Zealand police who have been, and are increasingly, Americanised in their tactics and violence. I do not share any of this to take away from your important question, Arama, but rather to emphasize the point that last year’s activism against RIMPAC taught me that we have to remember, and intentionally remind others of, the connections between our movements and the ways that we can all benefit when our efforts, though appearing to be focused on individual and separate issues, come together. Our liberation, in other words, is deeply intertwined. This does not mean, of course, that I don’t have a responsibility to the movement for tino rangatiratanga, but rather that our actions in all spaces are enhanced and given more focus when we are aware of how they can and should contribute to that movement.

Reflecting on our movements, I think you raise a very important

question, 夢竹, about academic positionality and extraction. I've seen so many people write about our movements without having been part of them, publishing articles and book chapters and even getting cited. As an Indigenous academic, I feel that anything I write has to be of benefit to our movements, to our peoples, and to our dreams for liberation first. It's not about me, about my CV, or about job promotion. It's about tackling issues, about making structural violence visible, and about creating space for solidarities that will help us all.

**JESS** – I really admired the thought and care that you, Emalani, and all your fellow organisers of the conference put into positioning. It was clear whose land I had travelled to as an in-person attendee, who had organised the conference, which sessions were appropriate for me as part of my people to speak up in and which were not. Thank you all so much for your efforts.

Taiwi Pākehā were gifted generous spaces to lead discussions on issues that we are most responsible for. Upon reflection, I feel that we did not put in the same level of thought and care around positioning during those sessions, particularly one in which we had prepared group exercises that assumed all participants were Pākehā. We can and should always prioritise the wellbeing of members of racialised groups well ahead of our own interests. I believe our failure to do so resulted in people feeling unwelcome, as though the session was for Pākehā only. It goes to show how deeply ingrained white supremacy is when we perpetuate it in this most basic way while attempting to organise an anti-colonial, anti-racist session. The lesson I take from this is to commit abundant time during planning for deep consideration of ways to honour the dignity of all potential attendees, particularly members of those marginalised groups that I don't belong to and am therefore most likely to unwittingly let down.

It was a great experience co-facilitating the session for imagining liberatory kāwanatanga with you, Arama, and thanks for the questions you've raised here. I do think that supporting tino rangatiratanga has become far more central to many progressive spaces over recent years, but unfortunately I still find it rare to come across spaces that encourage me

to imagine my own liberation alongside—or as encompassed within—Māori liberation. I've spent plenty of time over the last dozen years in (Pākehā-dominated) queer, trans, feminist, environmentalist, socialist, and other progressive spaces that absolutely centre my own liberation from the destructive systems that target me directly, and in doing so, leave me fragmented and frustrated.

As an example, I've been part of a group at work that counters cis-heterosexism, supposedly for the benefit of all people involved with our organisation who are harmed by oppressive gender norms. But the group perceives honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi as a separate struggle, despite the fact that we tauiwi queers are living (and celebrating pride) on lands stolen from takatāpui and their whānau. Without this foundation, the links to related harms go unrecognised, and the group maintains pretty much all the other oppressive systems that intertwine with cis-heterosexism in the web of colonisation. The group fails to benefit, and it contributes to the marginalisation of those targeted by racism, ableism, classism, and more. To me this illustrates how the supremacy system replicates itself and shatters liberatory movements.

Finding my place within anti-colonial, rangatiratanga-affirming, Indigenous solidarity movements brings me back into wholeness. No part of me is compromised. Imagining my own liberation has been exponentially enhanced by listening to Māori imagining theirs, and I'm so grateful for that.

**When is positionality useful and when does it become confessional or performative (especially for non-Indigenous peoples)? Where is the line?**

**EMALANI** – I've found positionality very useful in my writing, especially when writing about Indigenous issues. I can't and don't waste time trying to be objective. If I'm going to write about Mauna Kea, for instance, I'm clear and upfront and I say, 'Mauna Kea is my mountain and is my ancestor'. Anyone who reads further will therefore know the position that I'm writing

from, unapologetically.

Positionality, however, can be tricky if it becomes performative and if we are using it to try and justify ourselves in particular spaces. I find it so troubling, for instance, when Pacific people say things like, ‘Well I’m Indigenous to the region, so . . .’ or, ‘We’re older than Māori, so . . .’ and then use that as a means of arguing for a positionality that ignores accountability. While I don’t deny whakapapa connections across the Pacific, I don’t like when those connections are used to make us feel like we don’t have to be held accountable, or that we don’t have obligations to tangata whenua, or that our experiences are somehow the same. We need to, as 梦竹 said, know when to sit down, listen, and learn. Being ‘Indigenous to the region’ doesn’t automatically grant us the right to a place here, on this whenua.

**JESS** – While continually deepening my own understanding of my positionality is always useful, I think expressing that understanding to others is only useful in contexts and manners that contribute to liberatory movements: strengthening connections between us, undermining destructive power dynamics, and helping people relate to me safely. This last point is particularly relevant when opposing injustice that does not target me directly. Because resistance to a particular injustice is rightly led by those most impacted, it’s easy to assume that people standing in solidarity are also members of the targeted group, if our position is not expressed clearly enough. As a non-Māori person acting in solidarity with Māori, I have been asked several times if I am Māori. This showed that I was not adequately expressing my position, allowing people to misread me. Misreading could lead to, among many things, being granted inappropriate access to Māori spaces that Māori have worked so hard to maintain and create in the context of continuing colonising suppression.

Using te reo Māori increases the likelihood of being misread, as does carrying a Māori name, even when actively contributing to colonisation. The behaviour of Pākehā academic Elizabeth Rata exemplifies this, as she weaponises the ability to be misread as Māori to give greater credence to her racist positions, based on the assumption that she is targeted by racism and

therefore speaks from intimate experience. She is in fact accorded material benefits by racism and her work seeks to maintain our privileged position. Her refusal to describe her position relative to colonisation obfuscates and attempts to shield it from critique.

Expressing positionality is therefore vital for transforming our material position for collective liberation. I find including ‘tauiwi pākehā’ in my email signature, pepeha, and other forms of introduction helpful to reduce misreading. However, I notice that many modes of expressing positionality that are intended to contribute to rightful transformation, are easily co-opted in unhelpful and harmful ways. For example, Pākehā who are in genuine solidarity with Māori-liberation movements often attempt to signal this simply through reciting pepeha. But pepeha can also be recited by Pākehā who are only aiming to be perceived as in solidarity, for any reason, perhaps for social credit within progressive circles or in an attempt to gain unearned trust amongst Māori. Such appropriative acts detract from, rather than add to, the growth of collective liberation. Explicit assertions of solidarity, with action in accordance, are less able to be co-opted.

**ARAMA** – The first question posed to the panel in the ASTR session at the SMRSC conference was about how we became involved in solidarity building across Asian and Māori communities, to position ourselves in relation to the kaupapa. There was an answer I could have given to that question that was deeply personal and highly relevant, but that could have fallen into the category of the confessional. While sharing in order to reflect on transformative moments in our lives, and learning from each other’s experiences can be useful, when the intention is to appear self-aware or critical by admitting to and analyzing our own mistakes, it becomes performative, and when there is a demand (either intended or heard) for atonement it becomes confessional. Closely related to the performative, perhaps, is that vicarious, exploitative form of positioning-by-proxy, when a person leverages the identity of people they are in close relationship with. I often see white scholars position themselves as experts on the communities their partners or children belong to.

梦竹 – Yes! I have seen that positioning-by-proxy happen so many times, Arama. In the 2016 conference, a Pākehā presenter was questioned on their positionality by Māori in the audience and justified their project with something along the lines of, ‘My partner is Māori’. I totally agree with you, Arama, on how sharing ‘transformative moments’ can be educational and that should not be seen as confessional. These stories of political consciousness can invite others to understand how we came to the work we do or how we think about the world. I think sharing those stories as a practice of citation of intellectual/political genealogy is also a way of honouring and acknowledging the people or situations that have led to where you are now *and* as a way of sharing history, to avoid erasures. Jess, thanks for naming that dynamic of performativity to gain social capital. Performative positioning is centred on how people want to be perceived rather than the deeper relational work, actions, and goals towards tangible transformation and change.

### **How do we put that into practice with well-developed positionality?**

**JESS** – I’m currently working through this question on a personal level. How have I been reproducing colonialism in my intimate relationships? How can I grow beyond that, relating to loved ones in only affirming rather than oppressive ways? How can I strengthen my connections with people who share important aspects of positionality with me, for example, my neighbours living here on the land of Ngāti Pārau, Ngāti Hinemoa, and Ngāti Hinepare, and fellow residents of the wider region of Te Matau ā Māui who might want to contribute to Tiriti-honouring movement together?

I feel like my activism over past years has been very disembodied (online), displaced (travelling away to support actions), and disconnected from my everyday life. This focus ‘over there’ has enabled me to overlook the way I uphold colonising dynamics right here, on the personal, interpersonal, and local scales. And those dynamics, coincidentally or not,

are the ones I have the most power to change. I'm keen to develop a much more grounded positionality in which activism is life and life is activism. Everything in alignment, no contradictions.

**EMALANI** – I love your reflections on ‘grounded positionality’, Jess, and your musings on life that is activism and activism that is life. It reminds me of something I learned about trees and roots and makes me wonder if we can find guidance on how to ground ourselves and position ourselves in relation by observing the world around us. I feel like I’ve been writing about this a lot lately, but I am constantly in awe of trees and the ways they communicate, nourish, and support one another underground. Through their interconnected root systems, they can literally feed one another. If you ever see the tree stump of a fallen tree that has new shoots and growth on it, that growth is coming from beneath the surface, where roots of the trees around it are sending nutrients and energy to the stump so that it can survive. I love thinking about what we can’t see but know is happening underground, in the dark and damp soil. It makes me think of what I’d like my activism to be like. There will be times when we will need nourishment and there will be times when we will be called upon to nourish others. It’s about recognising who needs the help and giving what you can, when you can, not for the recognition, not to be seen and heard, but because we are stronger as a collective when we are attuned enough to one another to know who needs to be fed.

梦竹 – The metaphor of the underground is such a perfect description of the everyday growth and invisible labour of sustaining activist movements. I loved listening to your kōrero, Emalani, on IPU (Indigenous Pacific Uprising) Live describing this roots system analogy in relation to Black Lives Matter.<sup>13</sup> It’s a beautiful way of thinking about solidarity and mutual aid, which has been so necessary and ever more urgent during the Covid-19 pandemic.

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13 Indigenous Pacific Uprising, ‘IPU Live with Emalani Case and Sina Brown-Davis: Solidarity Against Racism and Colonisation,’ video, <https://www.facebook.com/175994283164617/videos/667395370773742>

I think well-developed positionality comes back to the feminist axiom that the personal is political, and the personal involves collective and ethical responsibilities. It's also recognising our own limitations (based on experience, knowledge, language ability), and that individuals alone cannot make changes. We need to work together. Building good relationships is the glue and good relationships require knowing each other's boundaries, and reflexivity on our own positions. This takes time to learn, making mistakes to learn, and something I'm perpetually in the process of figuring out.

I think there are three approaches for tauwi of colour to collectively act on understandings of positionality. First, tauwi-of-colour activism centred on addressing our own oppressions that is principled in supporting tino rangatiratanga—at the very least, not undermining or getting in the way. Second, tauwi-of-colour activism that is solely focused on solidarity work and supporting tino rangatiratanga while working with our own communities, which is what some of Asians Supporting Tino Rangatiratanga's work might fall under with Te Tiriti education for Asians. I have been involved in both of these approaches and I think both are necessary. Movements need to be moving in tandem, creating what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson might call 'constellations of co-resistance'.<sup>14</sup> Then, there is the third approach where there are collaborations centred on building good relations and working together on shared issues, maybe similar to the 'relational sphere' imagined in the Matike Mai Aotearoa report.<sup>15</sup> Groups like Racial Equity Aotearoa and the Pacific Panther Network were both Indigenous-led organisations that involved tauwi of colour in dismantling systemic racism and cross-community bridge-building. These three approaches are probably more a spectrum rather than separate or bounded categories in practice.

**ARAMA** – This kōrero on grounding, root systems, and mutual nourishment brings to mind, once more, whakapapa. There's simply no possibility of 'speaking from nowhere' when, in a Māori context, to know

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<sup>14</sup> Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance,' *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2016): 19–34.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson and Mutu, *He Whakaaro Here Whakaumu Mō Aotearoa*.

something is to locate it within whakapapa. The deeper our knowledge of our root systems, the better we are able to reach into our rich pre-colonial cultural repositories and relate to one another in anti-oppressive ways. And whakapapa doesn't just extend backwards, it moves forward too. By imagining our shared liberation, we connect our whakapapa in the possibilities we hope to birth.

It can feel frustrating or performative when we position ourselves in alignment to hoped-for possibilities not yet manifest. And yet, our cosmogony reveals that from feeling comes thought, and from thought comes physical form. If we ground ourselves deeply, and bind ourselves to one another in respectful, mutually nourishing relation, we can feel, and think, and dream, and dance, (and write) our hopes into being.

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This dialogue has in many ways reflected a positioning process: iterative and responsive expanding and contracting of ourselves, in trusting relationship. While many topics invite discussion that spirals inward to a fixed point, we've felt this positioning conversation ever opening; the deeper we ground ourselves, the more capable of expansion we become.

We've discussed how we position ourselves in relation, and how positioning enables us to relate. By knowing ourselves we can know our friends, and through knowing our friends, we deepen our knowing of ourselves; through this process we are mutually transformed. While this has been a conversation between the four of us, ever present in our thinking has been you, dear reader. We have revealed uncertainties, ambiguities, and insecurities, with the hope that our vulnerabilities might give you strength (should you need some).

As we've discussed, in some contexts positioning is automatic. In others, it must be artfully restored. But through this (at times painful) process, we reconnect to ourselves, each other, and the earth. Far from restricting our identities or aspirations, Indigenous positioning processes offer anti-colonial frameworks that can be reflexively and responsively

restored and reimagined. Through these processes, reflecting on power, privilege, and place positions us in relation to one another, making visible our connections and accountabilities—accountabilities that then activate collective action towards the possibilities we hope for.