

Decolonizing Methodologies
Research and Indigenous Peoples

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perceived as a threatening activity. The research community has a number of terms which are used to good effect as exclusionary devices to dismiss the challenges made from outside the fold. Research can be judged as 'not rigorous', 'not robust', 'not real', 'not theorized', 'not valid', 'not reliable'. Sound conceptual understandings can falter when the research design is considered flawed. While researchers are trained to conform to the models provided for them, indigenous researchers have to meet these criteria as well as indigenous criteria that can judge research 'not useful', 'not indigenous', 'not friendly', 'not just'. Reconciling such views can be difficult. The indigenous agenda challenges indigenous researchers to work across these boundaries. It is a challenge that provides a focus and direction helpful in thinking through the complexities of indigenous research. At the same time, the process is evolving as researchers working in this field dialogue and collaborate on shared concerns.

Notes

- 1 Alfred, G. R. (1996), *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors*, Oxford University Press, Toronto, p. 18.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- 3 Blea, I. I. (1995), *Researching Chicano Communities*, Praeger, Westport, p. 2.
- 4 Stringer, E. T. (1996), *Action Research: a Handbook for Practitioners*, Sage Books, California, p. 15.
- 5 Trask, H. (1993), *From a Native Daughter: Common Courage Press*, Maine.
- 6 Acoose, J. (1995), *Iskwewak - Kahl' Ki Yanw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses Nor Easy Squaws*, Women's Press, Toronto, p. 30. See also Garrod, A. and C. Larimore, eds (1997), *First Person, First Peoples: Native American College Graduates Tell Their Life Stories*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca.

Twenty-five Indigenous Projects

The implications for indigenous research which have been derived from the imperatives inside the struggles of the 1970s seem to be clear and straightforward: the survival of peoples, cultures and languages; the struggle to become self-determining, the need to take back control of our destinies. These imperatives have demanded more than rhetoric and acts of defiance. The acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting indigenous cultures and languages have required the mounting of an ambitious research programme, one that is very strategic in its purpose and activities and relentless in its pursuit of social justice. Within the programme are a number of very distinct projects. Themes such as cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging indigenous researchers and communities in a diverse array of projects. The projects intersect with each other in various ways. They have multiple goals and involve different indigenous communities of interest. Some projects, for example, have been driven by lawyers and constitutional experts, others by women and health workers, or by social workers and policy analysts. This chapter sets out 25 different projects currently being pursued by indigenous communities. The projects constitute a very complex research programme. Each one intersects with the agenda for indigenous research discussed in Chapter 6 in two or three different ways, that is by site/s and by processes. Each project is outlined to give a bare indication of the parameters offered within it and how these may link in with some of the others.

It is not claimed that the projects are entirely indigenous, or that they have been created by indigenous researchers. Some approaches have arisen out of social science methodologies, which in turn have arisen out of methodological issues raised by research with various oppressed groups. Some projects invite multi-disciplinary research approaches. Others have arisen more directly out of indigenous practices. There are two technical points to make here. First, while most projects fall well within what will be recognized as empirical research, not all do.

Some important work is related to theorizing indigenous issues at the level of ideas, policy analysis and critical debate, and to setting out in writing indigenous spiritual beliefs and world views. Second, the focus is primarily on social science research projects rather than what may be happening in the natural or physical sciences or technology. There is one technical distinction to clarify. In the chapter I draw on Sandra Harding's very simple distinction between methodology and method, that is, 'A research methodology is a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed', while 'A research method is a technique for (or way of proceeding in) gathering evidence'.² Methodology is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed, and shapes the analyses. Within an indigenous framework, methodological debates are ones concerned with the broader politics and strategic goals of indigenous research. It is at this level that researchers have to clarify and justify their intentions. Methods become the means and procedures through which the central problems of the research are addressed. Indigenous methodologies are often a mix of existing methodological approaches and indigenous practices. The mix reflects the training of indigenous researchers, which continues to be within the academy, and the parameters and common sense understandings of research which govern how indigenous communities and researchers define their activities.

The Projects

The following projects are not ranked or listed in any particular order.

1 *Claiming*

In a sense colonialism has reduced indigenous peoples to making claims and assertions about our rights and dues. It is an approach that has a certain noisiness to it. Indigenous peoples, however, have transformed claiming into an interesting and dynamic process. Considerable work and energy have gone into developing the methodologies which relate to 'claiming' and 'reclaiming'. The formal claims process demanded by tribunals, courts and governments has required some indigenous groups to conduct intensive research projects, resulting in the writing of nation, tribe and family histories. These 'histories' have a focus and purpose; that is, to establish the legitimacy of the claims being asserted for the rest of time. Because they have been written to support claims to territories and resources, or about past injustices, they have been constructed around selected stories. These claiming histories have

also been written for different audiences. One audience is the formal court or tribunal audience, which is mainly non-indigenous; another is the general non-indigenous population; and a third is the people themselves. For this last audience the histories are also important teaching histories. They teach both the non-indigenous audience and the new generations of indigenous peoples an official account of their collective story. But, importantly, it is a history which has no ending because it assumes that once justice has been done the people will continue their journey. It may be that in time the histories have to be rewritten around other priorities.

2 *Testimonies* (testimonio)

'My Name is Rigoberta Menchu, I am twenty-three years old, and this is my testimony'.²

Testimonies intersect with claiming because they are a means through which oral evidence is presented to a particular type of audience. There is a formality to testimonies and a notion that truth is being revealed 'under oath'. Indigenous testimonies are a way of talking about an extremely painful event or series of events.³ The formality of testimony provides a structure within which events can be related and feelings expressed.⁴ A testimony is also a form through which the voice of a 'witness' is accorded space and protection. It can be constructed as a monologue and as a public performance. The structure of testimony – its formality, context and sense of immediacy – appeals to many indigenous participants, particularly elders. It is an approach that translates well to a formal written document. While the listener may ask questions, testimonies structure the responses, silencing certain types of questions and formalizing others. *Testimonio* is more familiar to Latin American contexts as a narrative of collective memory: it has become one of a number of literary methods for making sense of histories, of voices and representation, and of the political narrative of oppression.⁵

3 *Story telling*

Story telling, oral histories, the perspectives of elders and of women have become an integral part of all indigenous research. Each individual story is powerful. But the point about the stories is not that they simply tell a story, or tell a story simply. These new stories contribute to a collective story in which every indigenous person has a place. For many indigenous writers stories are ways of passing down the beliefs and values of a culture in the hope that the new generations will treasure them and

pass the story down further. The story and the story teller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people and the people with the story. As a research tool, Russell Bishop suggests, story telling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the 'diversities of truth' within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control.⁶ Margaret Kovach argues that stories are connected to knowing, that the story is both method and meaning, and is a central feature of indigenous research and knowledge methodologies.⁷

Jo-ann Archibald describes story as work that educates the heart, the mind, the body and the spirit. She suggests that stories engage listeners and the story teller in a respectful relationship of reciprocity that creates and sustains oral cultures.⁸ Intrinsic in story telling is a focus on dialogue and conversations amongst ourselves as indigenous peoples, to ourselves and for ourselves. Such approaches fit well with the oral traditions which are still a reality in day-to-day indigenous lives. Importantly, story telling is also about humour and gossip and creativity. Stories tell of love and sexual encounters, of war and revenge. Their themes tell us about our cultures. Stories employ familiar characters and motifs which can reassure as well as challenge. Familiar characters can be invested with the qualities of an individual or can be used to invoke a set of shared understandings and histories.

4 *Celebrating survival – survivance*

Celebrating survival is a particular sort of approach. Non-indigenous research has been intent on documenting the demise and cultural assimilation of indigenous peoples. Instead it is possible to celebrate survival, or what Gerald Vizenor has called 'survivance' – survival and resistance.⁹ Survivance accentuates the degree to which indigenous peoples and communities have retained cultural and spiritual values and authenticity in resisting colonialism. The approach is reflected sometimes in story form, sometimes in popular music and sometimes as an event in which artists and story tellers come together to celebrate collectively a sense of life and diversity and connectedness. Events and accounts which focus on the active resistance are important not just because they speak to our survival, but because they celebrate our being at an ordinary human level and affirm our identities as indigenous women and men. Gregory Cajete writes that 'celebrating is a natural outcome of spiritual sharing and it too can take a diversity of forms. It is an individual and communal process that celebrates the mystery of life and the journey that each of us takes. Celebration is a way of spreading the lights around.'¹⁰

5 *Remembering*

The remembering of a people relates not so much to an idealized remembering of a golden past but more specifically to the remembering of a painful past, re-remembering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and, importantly, people's responses to that pain. While collectively indigenous communities can talk through the history of traumatic events, there are frequent silences and intervals in the stories about what happened after the event. Often there is no collective remembering as communities were systematically ripped apart, children were removed for adoption, and extended families separated across different reserves and national boundaries. In these experiences the obliteration of memory was a deliberate strategy of oppression. The aftermath of such pain was borne by individuals or smaller family units, sometimes unconsciously, or consciously obliterated through alcohol, violence and self-destruction. Communities often turned inward and let their suffering give way to a desire to be dead. Violence and family abuse became entrenched in communities which had no hope. White society did not see and did not care. This form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our own cultural practices. Both healing and transformation, after what is referred to as historical trauma, become crucial strategies in any approach that asks a community to remember what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget.

6 *Indigenizing and indigenist processes*

This project has two dimensions. The first one is similar to that which has occurred in literature, with a centring in consciousness of the landscapes, images, languages, themes, metaphors and stories of the indigenous world, and the disconnecting of many of the cultural ties between the settler society and its metropolitan homeland. This project involves non-indigenous activists and intellectuals. The second aspect is more of an indigenous project. The term is used more frequently in South and Central America. The term centres a politics of indigenous identity and indigenous cultural action. M. Annette Jaimes refers to indigenism as being grounded in the alternative conceptions of world view and value systems: 'These differences provide a basis for a conceptualization of indigenism that counters the negative connotations of its meanings in Third World countries, where it has become synonymous with the "primitive", or with backwardness among superstitious peoples.'¹¹ Lester Rigney, an Aborigine researcher working from Flinders University in South Australia, names the approach he takes as indigenist research: it

borrow freely from feminist and other critical approaches to research, but privileges indigenous voices. In the US Karina Walters and Jane Simoni have developed an 'indigenist' stress-coping model for addressing the 'soul wound' of historical trauma and contemporary discrimination against Native women.¹²

7 *Intervening*

Intervening takes action research to mean literally the process of being proactive and of becoming involved as an interested worker for change. Intervention-based projects are usually designed around making structural and cultural changes. Graham Smith describes this approach as a necessary approach when faced with crisis conditions. Smith argues firstly, that Maori educational crises continue – this points to a failure of educational policy reforms, research and researchers. Secondly, educational researchers have continued to fail to intervene because of the lack of responsibility and accountability placed on researchers and policy makers. Thirdly much of research has been counter-productive to Maori interests, and has merely served the dominant Pakeha group interests, by maintaining the status quo of unequal power distribution.¹³

Intervention is often used against indigenous communities – for example, as an excuse to invade and occupy territories under the pretence of saving or rescuing an indigenous community. In 2008 the Australian Government intervened in the Northern Territory, ostensibly as an emergency reaction to widespread child abuse. The use of the armed forces on its own citizens in a democratic country is rare, but was justified under the rules of an emergency and was supported by some Aborigine activists. The indigenous intervening project carries with it some working principles. For example, the community itself invites the project in and sets out its parameters. The various departments and agencies involved in such a project are also expected to be willing to change themselves in some way – to redirect policy, design new programmes or train staff differently. Intervening is thus directed at changing institutions that deal with indigenous peoples, and not at changing indigenous peoples to fit the structures.

8 *Revitalizing and regenerating*

Indigenous languages, their arts and their cultural practices are in various states of crisis. Many indigenous languages are officially 'dead', with fewer than a hundred speakers. Others are in the last stages before what is described by linguists as 'language death'. Revitalization initiatives in languages encompass education, broadcasting, publishing and community-

based programmes. Margie Hohepa has used the term regeneration rather than revitalization to argue that a language does not die and does not need to be brought to life; rather, the generations of people who speak the language die, and the new generations need to make the language live by speaking it. Indigenous languages are also described as endangered, with various estimates that 3,000 language will be extinct by the end of the twenty-first century.¹⁴ While the Welsh people are not formally part of the indigenous peoples' movements as described in Chapter 6, their programmes are often studied as examples of indigenous achievement. In the cases of Maori and Welsh languages, there is a clear singular language. Many places have to battle for the survival of several languages spoken by small populations. In Canada, for example, most of the indigenous languages could be categorized as being on the verge of extinction. British Columbia has a diverse range of indigenous languages, all of which require support. Literacy campaigns tend to frame language survival programmes as being of lesser significance than national literacy. Such campaigns are designed around either official languages or one or two dominant languages. The indigenous language is often regarded as being subversive to national interests and national literacy campaigns, and is actively killed off – a process that Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and Dunbar have called linguistic genocide.¹⁵

9 *Connecting*

The importance of making connections and affirming connectedness has been noted by other minority group researchers. Connectedness positions individuals in sets of relationships with other people and with the environment. Many indigenous creation stories link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish, animals, insects and plants. To be connected is to be whole. The project of connecting is pursued in New South Wales in one form as literally connecting members of families with each other. A link programme has been designed to restore the descendants of 'stolen children', ones forcibly taken from their families and adopted, to their family connections. Forced adoption and dehumanizing child welfare practices were carried out in many indigenous contexts. Being reconnected to their families and their culture has been a painful journey for many of these children, now adults. Connecting also involves connecting people to their traditional lands through the restoration of specific rituals and practices. In New Zealand one example of this is the practice of burying the afterbirth in the land. The word for afterbirth is the same as the word for land, *whenua*. The practice was prohibited

as Maori mothers were forced to have their babies in hospitals rather than at home. Now the policies and hospital practices have changed and Maori parents have reinstated the practice of taking the afterbirth and burying it in traditional territory. Connecting children to their land and their genealogies through this process is also part of a larger health project designed to encourage young Maori mothers to take better care of themselves and their babies through stronger cultural supports. Connecting is related to issues of identity and place, to spiritual relationships and community well-being.

There are other challenges in relation to the project of connecting. Researchers, policy makers, educators, and social service providers who work with or whose work impacts on indigenous communities need to have a critical conscience about ensuring that their activities connect in humanizing ways with indigenous communities. It is a very common experience to hear indigenous communities outline the multiple ways in which agencies and individuals treat them with disrespect and disregard. Connecting is about establishing good relations.

10 Reading

Critical rereading of Western history and the indigenous presence in the making of that history, once a school curriculum designed to assimilate indigenous children, has taken on a different impetus. The new reading programme is motivated partly by a research drive to establish and support claims, but also by a need to understand what has informed both internal colonialism and new forms of colonization. The genealogy of colonialism is being mapped and used as a way to locate a different sort of origin story: the origins of imperial policies and practices, the origins of the imperial visions, the origins of ideas and values. These origin stories are deconstructed accounts of the West, its history through the eyes of indigenous and colonized peoples. The rereading of imperial history by post-colonial and cultural studies scholars provides a different, much more critical approach to history than was previously acceptable. It is no longer the single narrative story of important white imperial figures, adventurers and heroes who fought their way through undiscovered lands to establish imperial rule and bring civilization and salvation to 'barbaric savages' who lived in 'utter degradation'.

11 Writing and theory making

Indigenous people are writing and theory making. In Chapter 1 the writing project was named as 'the empire writes back' project. In a localized context, however, writing is employed in a variety of imaginative,

critical, and also quite functional ways. Maori author Witi Ihimaera has assembled a five-volume anthology of Maori literature representing, he argues, the 'crossroads ... of a literature of a past and a literature of a present and future'.¹⁶ The title of an anthology of Native Women's writings of North America, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, gives a sense of the issues being explored through writing.¹⁷ Similar anthologies and works of indigenous literature are being published around the world by indigenous writers for indigenous reading audiences. The boundaries of poetry, plays, song writing, fiction and non-fiction are blurred as indigenous writers seek to use language in ways that capture the messages, nuances and flavour of indigenous lives. Native literary and film theorists have also emerged – among them Craig Womack, Robert Warrior and Leonie Pihama – who follow in the critical anti-colonial tradition of Ngũgĩ Wa'Thiong'o and argue for the significance of indigenous views in indigenous literature and film.¹⁸ The activity of writing has produced the related activity of publishing. Indigenous publishing companies, language resources and focused academic journals such as *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* or the *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, or *Pimatisiwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* are all examples of serious engagement with writing. Language revitalization initiatives have created a demand for multi-media language resources for children. In the Western Isles of Scotland, a Stormaway publishing house called Acair has produced children's comic books in Scottish Gaelic, and cookbooks and other material which support the Gaelic language. Similar small publishing groups are operating across the indigenous world. Writing workshops and writing courses offered by indigenous writers like Okanagan scholar Jeannette Armstrong for indigenous people who want to write are held in many places.¹⁹ The work of authors such as Patricia Grace, Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, Witi Ihimaera and Sally Morgan is read by both indigenous and non-indigenous audiences. Biographies and autobiographies including those 'which are accounts 'told to a non-indigenous person', are sought after by a new reading audience of indigenous people.

12 Representing

Indigenous communities have struggled since colonization to be able to exercise what is viewed as a fundamental right, that is to represent ourselves. The representing project spans both the notion of representation as a political concept and representation as a form of voice and expression. In the political sense colonialism specifically excluded indigenous peoples from any form of decision making. States and governments have long

made decisions hostile to the interests of indigenous communities, justifying these by offering the paternalistic view that indigenous peoples were like children who needed others to protect them and decide what was in their best interests. Paternalism is still present in many forms in the way governments, local bodies and non-government agencies decide on issues which have an impact on indigenous communities. Being able as a minimum right to voice the views and opinions of indigenous communities in various decision-making bodies is still a focus of struggle. Even at the minimal level of representation indigenous communities are often 'thrown in' with all other minorities, as one voice amongst many. The politics of sovereignty and self-determination have been about resisting being thrown in with every other minority group by making claims on the basis of prior rights.

Representation is also a project of indigenous artists, writers, poets, film makers and others who attempt to express an indigenous spirit, experience or world view. Representation of indigenous peoples by indigenous people is about countering the dominant society's image of indigenous peoples, their lifestyles and belief systems. It is also about proposing solutions to the real-life dilemmas that indigenous communities confront, and trying to capture the complexities of being indigenous. Many of the dilemmas are internalized stress factors in community life, which are neither named nor voiced because they are either taken for granted or hidden by a community. And there is the humour of Alexie Sherman, who wrote *Reservation Blues*. Film makers like Merata Mita have a very clear purpose in their work which locates it firmly within a decolonization framework.

Not surprisingly, when my obsessive struggle with filmmaking began, it was with the issues that most concerned us as Maori women that I became preoccupied – the issues of injustice, land, te reo Maori [Maori language], the Treaty, and racism. Add to that women and gender issues, and for those who don't know, these are the things that consume us, consume our energy, beset us every moment of our daily lives; they are brutalising, violent, and some of us die because of them.²⁰

13 *Gendering*

Gendering indigenous debates, whether they are related to the politics of self-determination or the politics of the family, is concerned with issues arising from the relations between indigenous men and women that have come about through colonialism. Colonialization is recognized as having had a destructive effect on indigenous gender relations that reached out across all spheres of indigenous society. Family organization, child rearing,

political and spiritual life, work and social activities were all disordered by a colonial system that positioned its own women as the property of men, with primarily domestic roles. Women across many different indigenous societies claim an entirely different relationship, one embedded in beliefs about the land and the universe, about the spiritual significance of women, and about the collective endeavours that were required in the organization of society. Indigenous women would argue that their traditional roles included full participation in many aspects of political decision making and marked gender separations which were complementary in order to maintain harmony and stability. Gendering contemporary indigenous debates – for example, debates about economic development, about domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and war – occurs inside indigenous communities and – while colonialism is an important topic in other contexts, such as in Western feminist debates – analysis of colonialism is a central tenet of indigenous feminism. A key challenge within contemporary indigenous politics is the restoration to women of what are seen as their traditional roles, rights and responsibilities. Aroha Mead gives an account of a statement delivered by two Maori women to the Twelfth Session (1994) of the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, which addressed the way colonialism has influenced indigenous men and had a detrimental affect on indigenous gender relations.

[N]ever before have I witnessed what occurred while the full statement was being read out. Indigenous women sitting within their delegations were visibly moved – some looked around to see who was talking about their pain – some gave victory signals and physical signs of agreement, and many, perhaps even the majority, sat stoically, with tears swelling in their eyes. The words broke through the barriers of language and regionalism. A raw wound was clearly touched.²¹

14 *Envisioning*

One of the strategies that indigenous peoples have employed effectively to bind people together politically asks that people imagine a future, that they rise above present-day situations which are generally depressing, dream a new dream and set a new vision. The confidence of knowing that we have survived and can only go forward provides some impetus to a process of envisioning. The power of indigenous peoples to change to their own lives and set new directions, despite their impoverished and oppressed conditions, speaks to the politics of survival. Gregory Cajete talks about vision making as knowledge making, as one the methodologies for producing indigenous knowledge through vision quests and dreaming, a reflection of the spirit which is also the mind.