

Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology

edited by Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan
and Jason De Santolo

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In the two decades since the first edition of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* there has been a flood of work exploring the decolonisation of history, education, pedagogy, universities, maps, landscapes, nature, literature, museums, health and healthcare, diets – the list goes on. Into this crowded market comes *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, edited by Jo-ann Archibald Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol Jun Lee-Morgan and Jason De Santolo, and introduced by Smith. This anthology draws on Archibald's concept of Indigenous Storywork, where researchers use seven key principles – respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness and synergy¹ – to reconnect with Indigenous world views and knowledge systems. Unlike many of the other titles currently on offer, *Decolonizing Research* goes beyond decolonisation as intellectual construct or metaphor, aiming to produce 'holistic meaning-making ... using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider society' (p. 4).

Following Smith's Foreword and an introductory chapter from the editors, the book is divided into three parts, focusing on Indigenous Storywork in Canada (Part I), Aotearoa New Zealand (Part II) and Australia (Part III). Each part contains a brief introduction, followed by chapters exploring specific projects and areas of research that draw on the Storywork concept and principles. Here the reader finds a diverse

1 Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork*, 2.

group of Indigenous researchers and activists exploring an impressively eclectic range of topics, including research ethics, film aesthetics, community-based maths education, gender studies, Māori law, literary theory, song renewal, and more. Another strength is the conspicuous inclusion of the work of postgraduate and early-career Indigenous researchers, highlighting how the shifts in perspective represented by this type of work are as much generational as conceptual.

Of the 14 main chapters, some stand out. From Canada, Sara Florence Davidson provides clear, practical and accessible descriptions of how the seven Storywork principles guided her doctoral research and enriched her relationships with participants and communities; and Georgina Martin's co-authored chapter with Elder Jean William is a valuable exploration of the ways in which story functions as Indigenous theory. From Aotearoa New Zealand, Hayley Marama Cavino looks at decolonising gender and the 'active, negotiated, relational, and political process' (p. 102) of interpretation; and Lee-Morgan's chapter 'Pūrākau from the Inside-Out' is a fascinating exploration of the methodological shift required to conduct research starting from 'the heart' or *te pū o te rākau* (the core of the tree) rather than following the Western convention of working from the outside-in. From Australia, Larissa Behrendt argues for the power of storytelling as an 'act of sovereignty' (p. 175), reasserting ownership of the land; and Evelyn Araluen Corr suggests that literary theory should be situated 'as a tool of broader storywork practice, as opposed to storywork being a subset or specific methodology of literary theory' (p. 197). The latter is a worthwhile reminder that Indigenous methodologies like Storywork may not sit comfortably within existing disciplinary structures, and may instead require researchers to step outside the 'brick wall' (p. 203) of established academic practice.

The structure of the book draws attention to geographical distinctions. It is therefore unfortunate that the introductory sections to each of the three parts from Archibald, Lee-Morgan and De Santolo are so brief, and are comprised mostly of chapter summaries. Some additional analysis drawing out the continuities and differences between the three regions would be useful, particularly given the theme of interrelatedness that recurs throughout many of the chapters. But there is plenty here to interest those working in a range of disciplines, including history. The challenge for non-Indigenous researchers in particular is to avoid the temptation to see powerful, expansive and complex Indigenous narrative traditions as an opportunity to mine data, or as untested knowledge that needs to be 'selected, framed, elevated, and legitimated' through existing colonial research methods (p. 152). Instead, as Lee-Morgan highlights, we need to think more deeply about our own position, our relationships to our research and our participants, and the

particular contexts, landscapes and communities in which different knowledge systems are embedded. *Decolonizing Research* makes a valuable contribution to this ongoing process.

Reference

Archibald, Jo-Ann. *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008.

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