

of domination, struggle and emancipation. She uses a dual framework – the *whakapapa* of Maori knowledge and European epistemology – to interpret and capture the world of reality for a moment in time. Thus the search for truth in complex human relations is a never-ending quest.’ RANGINUI WALKER, FORMERLY PROFESSOR OF MAORI STUDIES DEPARTMENT AND PRO-VICE CHANCELLOR, UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND.

‘We have needed this book. Academic research facilitates diverse forms of economic and cultural imperialism by shaping and legitimating policies which entrench existing unjust power relations. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s powerful critique of dominant research methodologies is eloquent, informed and timely. Her distinctive proposals for an indigenous research agenda are especially valuable. Decolonization, she reminds us, cannot be limited to deconstructing the dominant story and revealing underlying texts, for none of that helps people improve their current conditions or prevents them from dying. This careful articulation of a range of research methodologies is vital, welcome and full of promise.’ LAURIE ANNE WHITT, PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, MICHIGAN TECHNOLOGICAL UNIVERSITY.

‘A brilliant, evocative and timely book about an issue that serves to both define and create indigenous realities. In recent years, indigenous people, often led by the emerging culturally affirmed and positioned indigenous scholars, have intensified the struggle to break free from the chains of colonialism and its oppressive legacy. In writing this book, Linda Tuhiwai Smith makes a powerful and impassioned contribution to this struggle. No budding researcher should be allowed to leave the academy without reading this book and no teacher should teach without it at their side.’ BOB MORGAN, DIRECTOR, JUMBUNNA CAISER, CENTRE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS, UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY.

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## Decolonizing Methodologies

Research and Indigenous Peoples

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## Introduction

From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term 'research' is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, 'research', is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary. When mentioned in many indigenous contexts, it stirs up silence, it conjures up bad memories, it raises a smile that is knowing and distrustful. It is so powerful that indigenous people even write poetry about research. The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples. It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are.<sup>1</sup> It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. It appals us that the West can desire, extract and claim ownership of our ways of knowing, our imagery, the things we create and produce, and then simultaneously reject the people who created and developed those ideas and seek to deny them further opportunities to be creators of their own culture and own nations. It angers us when practices linked to the last century, and the centuries before that, are still employed to deny the validity of indigenous peoples' claim to existence, to land and territories, to the right of self-determination, to the survival of our languages and forms of cultural knowledge, to our natural resources and systems for living within our environments.

This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been

colonized. Edward Said refers to this process as a Western discourse about the Other which is supported by 'institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles'.<sup>2</sup> According to Said, this process has worked partly because of the constant interchange between the scholarly and the imaginative construction of ideas about the Orient. The scholarly construction, he argues, is supported by a corporate institution which 'makes statements about it [the Orient], authorising views of it, describing it, by teaching about it, settling it, ruling over it'.<sup>3</sup> In these acts both the formal scholarly pursuits of knowledge and the informal, imaginative, anecdotal constructions of the Other are intertwined with each other and with the activity of research. This book identifies research as a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of resisting of the Other. In this example, the Other has been constituted with a name, a face, a particular identity, namely *indigenous peoples*. While it is more typical (with the exception of feminist research) to write about research within the framing of a specific scientific or disciplinary approach, it is surely difficult to discuss *research methodology* and *indigenous peoples* together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices.

Many researchers, academics and project workers may see the benefits of their particular research projects as serving a greater good 'for mankind', or serving a specific emancipatory goal for an oppressed community. But belief in the ideal that benefiting mankind is indeed a primary outcome of scientific research is as much a reflection of ideology as it is of academic training. It becomes so taken for granted that many researchers simply assume that they as individuals embody this ideal and are natural representatives of it when they work with other communities. Indigenous peoples across the world have other stories to tell which not only question the assumed nature of those ideals and the practices that they generate, but also serve to tell an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonized. These counter-stories are powerful forms of resistance which are repeated and shared across diverse indigenous communities. And, of course, most indigenous peoples and their communities do not differentiate scientific or 'proper' research from the forms of amateur collecting, journalistic approaches, film making or other ways of 'taking' indigenous knowledge that have occurred so casually over the centuries. The effect of travellers' tales, as pointed out by French philosopher Foucault, has contributed as much to the West's knowledge of itself as has the systematic gathering of scientific data. From some indigenous perspectives the gathering of

information by scientists was as random, *ad hoc* and damaging as that undertaken by amateurs. There was no difference, from these perspectives, between 'real' or scientific research and any other visits by inquisitive and acquisitive strangers.

This book acknowledges the significance of indigenous perspectives on research and attempts to account for how, and why, such perspectives may have developed. It is written by someone who grew up within indigenous communities where stories about research and particularly about researchers (the human carriers of research) were intertwined with stories about all other forms of colonization and injustice. These were cautionary tales where the surface story was not as important as the underlying examples of cultural protocols broken, values negated, small tests failed and key people ignored. The greater danger, however, was in the creeping policies that intruded into every aspect of our lives, legitimated by research, informed more often by ideology. The power of research was not in the visits made by researchers to our communities, nor in their fieldwork and the rude questions they often asked. In fact, many individual non-indigenous researchers remain highly respected and well liked by the communities with whom they have lived. At a common sense level research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument. It told us things already known, suggested things that would not work, and made careers for people who already had jobs. 'We are the most researched people in the world' is a comment I have heard frequently from several different indigenous communities. The truth of such a comment is unimportant, what does need to be taken seriously is the sense of weight and unspoken cynicism about research that the message conveys.

This cynicism ought to have been strong enough to deter any self-respecting indigenous person from being associated with research. Obviously, in this case, it has not, which leads to my other motivation for writing about indigenous peoples and research. This is a book which attempts to do something more than deconstructing Western scholarship simply by our own retelling, or by sharing indigenous horror stories about research. In a decolonizing framework, deconstruction is part of a much larger intent. Taking apart the story, revealing underlying texts, and giving voice to things that are often known intuitively does not help people to improve their current conditions. It provides words, perhaps, an insight that explains certain experiences – but it does not prevent someone from dying. It is with that sense of reality that the second part of the book has been written. Whilst indigenous communities have quite valid fears about the further loss of intellectual and cultural knowledges,

and have worked to gain international attention and protection through covenants on such matters, many indigenous communities continue to live within political and social conditions that perpetuate extreme levels of poverty, chronic ill health and poor educational opportunities.<sup>4</sup> Their children may be removed forcibly from their care, 'adopted' or institutionalized. The adults may be as addicted to alcohol as their children are to glue, they may live in destructive relationships which are formed and shaped by their impoverished material conditions and structured by politically oppressive regimes. While they live like this they are constantly fed messages about their worthlessness, laziness, dependence and lack of 'higher' order human qualities. This applies as much to indigenous communities in First World nations as it does to indigenous communities in developing countries. Within these sorts of social realities, questions of imperialism and the effects of colonization may seem to be merely academic; sheer physical survival is far more pressing. The problem is that constant efforts by governments, states, societies and institutions to deny the historical formations of such conditions have simultaneously denied our claims to humanity, to having a history, and to all sense of hope. To acquiesce is to lose ourselves entirely and implicitly agree with all that has been said about us. To resist is to retrench in the margins, retrieve what we were and remake ourselves. The past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices – all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope.

It is from within these spaces that increasing numbers of indigenous academics and researchers have begun to address social issues within the wider framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice. This burgeoning international community of indigenous scholars and researchers is talking more widely about indigenous research, indigenous research protocols and indigenous methodologies. Its members position themselves quite clearly as indigenous researchers who are informed academically by critical and often feminist approaches to research, and who are grounded politically in specific indigenous contexts and histories, struggles and ideals. Many indigenous communities and organizations have developed policies about research, are discussing issues related to control over research activities and the knowledge that research produces, and have developed ethical guidelines and discussion documents. The second part of this book addresses some of the issues currently being discussed amongst indigenous communities that relate to our own priorities and problems. These priorities often demand an understanding of the ways in which we can ask and seek answers to our own concerns within a context in which resistance to new formations

of colonization still has to be mounted and articulated. In other words, research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions.

If in a sense this book is simply another contribution to the ways in which social science researchers in general think about methodologies and approaches to research – in this case among people and communities who hold research in high disdain – it has not been written with that intention. Rather, it is addressed more specifically to those researchers who work with, alongside and for communities who have chosen to identify themselves as indigenous. A growing number of these researchers define themselves as indigenous, although their training has been primarily within the Western academy and specific disciplinary methodologies. Many indigenous researchers have struggled individually to engage with the disconnections that are apparent between the demands of research, on one side, and the realities they encounter amongst their own and other indigenous communities, with whom they share lifelong relationships, on the other side. There are a number of ethical, cultural, political and personal issues that can present special difficulties for indigenous researchers who, in their own communities, work partially as insiders, and are often employed for this purpose, and partially as outsiders, because of their Western education or because they may work across clan, tribe, linguistic, age and gender boundaries. Simultaneously, they work within their research projects or institutions as insiders within a particular paradigm or research model, and as outsiders because they are often marginalized and perceived to be representative of either a minority or a rival interest group. Patricia Hill Collins refers to 'the outsider within' positioning of research.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes when in the community ('in the field') or when sitting in on research meetings it can feel like inside-out/outside-in research. More often, however, I think that indigenous research is not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels! If I have one consistent message for the students I teach and the researchers I train it is that indigenous research is a humble and humbling activity.

Indigenous researchers are expected, by their communities and by the institutions which employ them, to have some form of historical and critical analysis of the role of research in the indigenous world. In general, this analysis has been acquired organically and outside of the academy. Despite the extensive literature about the life and customs of indigenous peoples, there are few critical texts on research methodologies which mention the word indigenous or its localized synonyms. Critiques by feminist scholars, by critical theorists, by black and African American scholars have provided ways of talking about knowledge and

its social constructions, and about methodologies and the politics of research. But the words that apply to indigenous researchers have been inserted into the text, then read with our own world in/sight. I hope that what is written here provides space for further dialogue within a framework that privileges the indigenous presence, that uses 'the words' (such as colonialism, decolonization, self-determination), and that acknowledges our continuing existence. It has not been written, therefore, as a technical book about research for people who talk the language of research, but as a book which situates research in a much larger historical, political and cultural context and then examines its critical nature within those dynamics.

The term 'indigenous' is problematic in that it appears to collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different. Other collective terms also in use refer to 'First Peoples' or 'Native Peoples', 'First Nations' or 'People of the Land', 'Aboriginals' or 'Fourth World Peoples'.<sup>6</sup> Some groups prefer the labels that connect us to Mother Earth, and to deeply significant spiritual relationships. While not denying the powerful world views embedded in such terms, within my own cultural framework as within others, they are not the terms that will be used here. A recent phenomenon which partly explains such a position is the Western fascination with New Age spiritual meanings which makes our own belief systems available, yet again, for further mining and exploitation. In some contexts, such as Australia and North America, the word indigenous is a way of including the many diverse communities, language groups and nations, each with their own identification within a single grouping. In other contexts, such as New Zealand, the terms 'Maori' or *tangata whenua* are used much more frequently than 'indigenous' as the universal term, while different origin and tribal terms are also used to differentiate between groups. Although the word 'Maori' is an indigenous term it has been identified as a label which defines a colonial relationship between 'Maori' and 'Pakeha', the non-indigenous settler population. For many of the world's indigenous communities there are prior terms by which they have named themselves. There are also terms by which indigenous communities have come to be known, initially perhaps as a term of insult applied by colonizers, but then politicized as a powerful signifier of oppositional identity, for example the use of the term 'Black Australia' by Aborigine activists. Inside these categories for describing or labelling are other terms that describe different layers of relationships and meanings within and between different groups. Some of these terms are about the classification systems used within the local colonial context, and others are about a prior relationship with groups whose territories now span different states.

'Indigenous peoples' is a relatively recent term which emerged in the 1970s out of the struggles primarily of the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the Canadian Indian Brotherhood. It is a term that internationalizes the experiences, the issues and the struggles of some of the world's colonized peoples.<sup>7</sup> The final 's' in 'indigenous peoples' has been argued for quite vigorously by indigenous activists because of the right of peoples to self-determination. It is also used as a way of recognizing that there are real differences between different indigenous peoples.<sup>8</sup> The term has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages. Thus the world's indigenous populations belong to a network of peoples. They share experiences as peoples who have been subjected to the colonization of their lands and cultures, and the denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out. As Wilmer has put it, 'indigenous peoples represent the unfinished business of decolonization'.<sup>9</sup>

The word 'indigenous' is also used in ways which are quite contrary to the definitions of the term just described, but which are legitimate meanings of the word itself. For example it is used to describe or account for the distinctiveness of colonial literary and/or feminist traditions. It has been coopted politically by the descendants of settlers who lay claim to an 'indigenous' identity through their occupation and settlement of land over several generations or simply through being born in that place – though they tend not to show up at indigenous peoples' meetings nor form alliances that support the self-determination of the people whose forebears once occupied the land that they have 'tamed' and upon which they have settled. Nor do they actively struggle as a society for the survival of indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures. Their linguistic and cultural homeland is somewhere else, their cultural loyalty is to some other place. Their power, their privilege, their history are all vested in their legacy as colonizers.

Part of the project of this book is 'researching back', in the same tradition of 'writing back' or 'talking back', that characterizes much of the post-colonial or anti-colonial literature.<sup>10</sup> It has involved a 'knowingness of the colonizer' and a recovery of ourselves, an analysis of colonialism, and a struggle for self-determination. Research is one of the ways in which the underlying code of imperialism and colonialism is both regulated and realized. It is regulated through the formal rules of individual scholarly disciplines and scientific paradigms, and the

institutions that support them (including the state). It is realized in the myriad of representations and ideological constructions of the Other in scholarly and 'popular' works, and in the principles which help to select and recontextualize those constructions in such things as the media, official histories and school curricula. Ashis Nandy argues that the structures of colonialism contain rules by which colonial encounters occur and are 'managed'.<sup>11</sup> The different ways in which these encounters happen and are managed are different realizations of the underlying rules and codes which frame in the broadest sense what is possible and what is impossible. In a very real sense research has been an encounter between the West and the Other. Much more is known about one side of those encounters than is known about the other side. This book reports to some extent on views that are held and articulated by 'the other sides'. The first part of the book explores topics around the theme of imperialism, research and knowledge. They can be read at one level as a narrative about a history of research and indigenous peoples but make much more sense if read as a series of intersecting and overlapping essays around a theme.

One of the issues examined relates to the way research became institutionalized in the colonies, not just through academic disciplines, but through learned and scientific societies and scholarly networks. The transplanting of research institutions, including universities, from the imperial centres of Europe enabled local scientific interests to be organized and embedded in the colonial system. Many of the earliest local researchers were not formally 'trained' and were hobbyist researchers and adventurers. The significance of travellers' tales and adventurers' adventures is that they represented the Other to a general audience back in Europe which became fixed in the milieu of cultural ideas. Images of the 'cannibal' chief, the 'red' Indian, the 'witch' doctor, or the 'tattooed and shrunken' head, and stories which told of savagery and primitivism, generated further interest, and therefore further opportunities, to represent the Other again.

Travellers' stories were generally the experiences and observations of white men whose interactions with indigenous 'societies' or 'peoples' were constructed around their own cultural views of gender and sexuality. Observations made of indigenous women, for example, resonated with views about the role of women in European societies based on Western notions of culture, religion, race and class. Treaties and trade could be negotiated with indigenous men. Indigenous women were excluded from such serious encounters. As Memmi noted in his 'Mythical Portrait of the Colonized', the use of zoological terms to describe primitive people was one form of dehumanization.<sup>12</sup> These images have become almost permanent, so deeply embedded are they

in the way indigenous women are discussed. 'How often do we read in the newspaper about the death or murder of a Native man, and in the same paper about the victimisation of a female Native, as though we were a species of sub-human animal life?' asks a First Nation Canadian woman, Lee Maracle. 'A female horse, a female Native, but everyone else gets to be called a man or a woman.'<sup>13</sup> Across the Pacific, Maori women writers Patricia Johnston and Leonie Pihama make reference to Joseph Banks's description of young Maori women who were as 'skittish as unbroke fillies'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in Australia, Aborigine women talk about a history of being hunted, raped and then killed like animals.

Travellers' tales had wide coverage. Their dissemination occurred through the popular press, from the pulpit, in travel brochures which advertised for immigrants, and through oral discourse. They appealed to the voyeur, the soldier, the romantic, the missionary, the crusader, the adventurer, the entrepreneur, the imperial public servant and the Enlightenment scholar. They also appealed to the downtrodden, the poor and those whose lives held no possibilities in their own imperial societies, and who chose to migrate as settlers. Others, also powerless, were shipped off to the colony as the ultimate prison. In the end they were all inheritors of imperialism who had learned well the discourses of race and gender, the rules of power, the politics of colonialism. They became the colonizers.

The second part of the book examines the different approaches and methodologies that are being developed to ensure that research with indigenous peoples can be more respectful, ethical, sympathetic and useful. The chapters in the second part ought not to be read as a 'how to' manual but as a series of accounts and guidelines which map a wide range of research-related issues. Feminism and the application of more critical approaches to research have greatly influenced the social sciences. Significant spaces have been opened up within the academy and within some disciplines to talk more creatively about research with particular groups and communities – women, the economically oppressed, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. These discussions have been informed as much by the politics of groups outside the academy as by engagement with the problems which research with real, living, breathing, thinking people actually involves. Communities and indigenous activists have openly challenged the research community about such things as racist practices and attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research, sounding warning bells that research can no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter.

In contemporary indigenous contexts there are some major research issues which continue to be debated quite vigorously. These can be

summarized best by the critical questions that communities and indigenous activists often ask, in a variety of ways: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it? Who has designed its questions and framed its scope? Who will carry it out? Who will write it up? How will its results be disseminated?<sup>15</sup> While there are many researchers who can handle such questions with integrity there are many more who cannot, or who approach these questions with some cynicism, as if they are a test merely of political correctness. What may surprise many people is that what may appear as the 'right', most desirable answer can still be judged incorrect. These questions are simply part of a larger set of judgements on criteria that a researcher cannot prepare for, such as: Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything?

The issues for indigenous researchers seeking to work within indigenous contexts are framed somewhat differently. If they are 'insiders' they are frequently judged on insider criteria; their family background, status, politics, age, gender, religion, as well as on their perceived technical ability. What is frustrating for some indigenous researchers is that, even when their own communities have access to an indigenous researcher, they will still select or prefer a non-indigenous researcher over an indigenous researcher. There are a number of reasons this happens, sometimes based on a deeply held view that indigenous people will never be good enough, or that indigenous researchers may divulge confidences within their own community, or that the researcher may have some hidden agenda. For quite legitimate reasons the indigenous researcher may not be the best person for the research, or may be rejected because they do not have sufficient credibility. The point being made is that indigenous researchers work within a set of 'insider' dynamics and it takes considerable sensitivity, skill, maturity, experience and knowledge to work these issues through. Non-indigenous teachers and supervisors are often ill prepared to assist indigenous researchers in these areas and there are so few indigenous teachers that many students simply 'learn by doing'. They often get hurt and fail in the process. I have heard this articulated by indigenous researchers as 'being burned' or 'being done over'. The second part of the book provides some ways for thinking about such issues.

In writing a book that focuses on research I have drawn together a range of experiences and reflections on both indigenous and research issues. I have a childhood familiarity with museums, having helped my father – a Maori anthropologist – pursue his own research in the back rooms of the Auckland War Memorial Museum and other museums in the United States. I cannot really recollect how, specifically, I helped him

because many of my strongest memories are of playing hide and seek in the cupboards and corridors. I do remember quite vividly, however, the ritual of cleansing ourselves by sprinkling water over us which my mother insisted on when we returned home. My grandmother was not too thrilled with the idea of my being in a museum at all. Many other Maori people, I was aware, were scared of what lay in the cupboards, of whose bones and whose ancestors were imprisoned in those cases. Later, my first ever paid job was as an assistant working at the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts. I helped my father, when required, to photograph intricately carved Marquesan adzes which ships of the East India Company had taken back from the Pacific to Salem. My paid job was to work in the basement of the museum typing labels to put on the logbooks of ships which had sailed from New England during the American Revolution. What was especially ironic was that there I was, a 16-year-old Maori, in the basement of a museum in Salem, Massachusetts, working on material related to the American Revolution – and none of it was new to me! I had already had a strong diet of British, European and American history.

In a sense, then, I grew up in a world in which science and our own indigenous beliefs and practices coexisted. I did not become an anthropologist, and although many indigenous writers would nominate anthropology as representative of all that is truly bad about research, it is not my intention to single out one discipline over another as representative of what research has done to indigenous peoples. I argue that, in their foundations, Western disciplines are as much implicated in each other as they are in imperialism. Some, such as anthropology, made the study of us into 'their' science, others were employed in the practices of imperialism in less direct but far more devastating ways. My own academic background is in education, and in my field there is a very rich history of research which attempts to legitimate views about indigenous peoples which have been antagonistic and dehumanizing. Discussions around the concept of intelligence, on discipline, or on factors that contribute to achievement depend heavily on notions about the Other. The organization of school knowledge, the hidden curriculum and the representation of difference in texts and school practices all contain discourses which have serious implications for indigenous students as well as for other minority ethnic groups.

My own career in research began in the health field, working alongside a team of respiratory physicians, paediatricians, epidemiologists and psychologists who were trying to make sense of the ways families manage asthma in young children. As coordinator of this project I had to learn very quickly how to participate in discussions on a wide range of matters, how to gain access to some very serious bureaucratic systems



such as hospital wards and emergency clinics, and how to talk about research to a range of audiences, from medical doctors to families with limited English language. I enjoyed the challenges of thinking about what things mean, about why things happen and about the different ways in which the world can be understood. I also enjoyed interviewing people and, even more, analyzing the responses they gave. While I enjoyed the hands-on level at which I was working I found that the more rewarding work involved me in trying to 'think through' a problem, 'working with' the data and bringing it together with my own readings. Mostly, however, I found that the particular issues I faced as an indigenous researcher working with indigenous research participants were never addressed by the literature, my own training or the researchers with whom I worked. Later I became involved in other research projects in education, evaluation, tribal research and community-based projects. I began to teach others about research and have since become involved in managing much larger research projects that train indigenous and non-indigenous researchers. I have spoken about research to First Nations peoples in Canada, to Hawai'ian and other Pacific Islands researchers, and to Aborigine audiences as well as to many Maori groups who have become active as research communities. I supervise indigenous students carrying out their research projects, participate in research groups and lead some of my own projects.

In positioning myself as an indigenous woman, I am claiming a genealogical, cultural and political set of experiences. My *whakapapa* or descent lines come through both my parents. Through them I belong to two different major 'tribal' groups and have close links to others.<sup>16</sup> In my case, these links were nurtured through my early years by my extended family relationships and particularly by my maternal grandmother. It is through my grandmother that my sense of place became so firmly grounded. That was especially important because my parents worked away from either of their tribal territories. My grandmother insisted, and my parents supported this although she gave them no choice, that I return to her as often as possible. When I had to return to my parents she would pack food parcels for me just in case they did not feed me well enough! Although she developed in me the spiritual relationships to the land, to our tribal mountain and river, she also developed a sense of quite physical groundedness, a sense of reality, and a sense of humour about ourselves. It may be those qualities that make me sceptical or cautious about the mystical, misty-eyed discourse that is sometimes employed by indigenous people to describe our relationships with the land and the universe. I believe that our survival as peoples has come from our knowledge of our contexts, our environment, not from

some active beneficence of our Earth Mother. We had to know to survive. We had to work out ways of knowing, we had to predict, to learn and reflect, we had to preserve and protect, we had to defend and attack, we had to be mobile, we had to have social systems which enabled us to do these things. We still have to do these things.

Politically, my dissent lines come down through my tribal lines but also through my experiences as a result of schooling and an urban background. One of my tribes, Ngati Awa, is part of what is referred to as the *raupatu*. The *raupatu* refers to those tribes whose territories were invaded and whose lands were confiscated by the New Zealand Government last century. The grievances which have come about through the *raupatu* form the basis of our claim to the Waitangi Tribunal. That particular dissent line is part of a legacy shared by many other indigenous peoples. My other dissent lines, however, were shaped by the urban Maori activism which occurred in New Zealand in the late 1960s and early 1970s. I belonged to one group, Nga Tamatoa or 'Young Warriors', and was at one point its secretary. We had several aims, although the main two were the recognition of the Treaty of Waitangi and the compulsory teaching of our language in schools. We formed a number of different alliances with other radical groups and some of our members belonged simultaneously to two or three groups. One of my roles was to educate younger Maori students about our aims. This took me into school assemblies and to situations where young people gathered. From those beginnings I became a primary or elementary teacher, then a secondary school counsellor, a health researcher and then a lecturer at university. While my professional career was developing I also helped in the early development of Te Kohanga Reo, the Maori language nests, and was one of the group which initiated an alternative Maori elementary school movement known as Kura Kaupapa Maori. I write, therefore, from the position of an indigenous Maori woman from New Zealand. Like indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, the United States and Western Europe I write from the context of the First World, a world described in Julian Burger's *Report from the Frontier* simply as rich.<sup>17</sup> Despite the very powerful issues which locate many First World indigenous peoples in Third World social conditions we still, comparatively speaking, occupy a place of privilege within the world of indigenous peoples. That does not mean that indigenous peoples from the First World have better ideas or know anything more. It may mean that such things as access to food and water can be taken for granted or that the politics of food and water can be played out in vastly different ways within the First World than is possible within developing states.

One of the many criticisms that gets levelled at indigenous

intellectuals or activists is that our Western education precludes us from writing or speaking from a 'real' and authentic indigenous position. Of course, those who do speak from a more 'traditional' indigenous point of view are criticized because they do not make sense ('speak English, what!'). Or, our talk is reduced to some 'nativist' discourse, dismissed by colleagues in the academy as naïve, contradictory and illogical. Alternatively it may be dismissed as some modernist invention of the primitive. Criticism is levelled by non-indigenous and indigenous communities. It positions indigenous intellectuals in some difficult spaces both in terms of our relations with indigenous communities and within the Western academy. It is not a new phenomenon either, the matter having been addressed previously by Frantz Fanon, for example. More recent writers have situated discussions about the intellectual within debates about post-colonialism.<sup>18</sup> Many indigenous intellectuals actively resist participating in any discussion within the discourses of post-coloniality. This is because post-colonialism is viewed as the convenient invention of Western intellectuals which reinscribes their power to define the world. For each indigenous intellectual who actually succeeds in the academy, however – and we are talking relatively small numbers – there is a whole array of issues about the ways we relate inside and outside of our own communities, inside and outside the academy, and between all those different worlds.

Language and the citing of texts are often the clearest markers of the theoretical traditions of a writer. In this book I draw on selected ideas, scholarship and literature. These may or may not be attributed to either Western or indigenous traditions. I say that because like many other writers I would argue that 'we', indigenous peoples, people 'of colour', the Other, however we are named, have a presence in the Western imagination, in its fibre and texture, in its sense of itself, in its language, in its silences and shadows, its margins and intersections. The selection of ideas has been informed by a preference for, and a grounding in, particular forms of analysis which are probably already evident. Like many other Maori undergraduate students who attended university in the 1970s I read some texts for my formal course of study and another set of alternative readings to keep sane, to keep connected to the rest of my life and, more importantly, to make sense of things that were happening around me. Much of that alternative reading course is now collected in anthologies labelled as cultural studies.

In addition to this literature, however, are the stories, values, practices and ways of knowing which continue to inform indigenous pedagogies. In international meetings and networks of indigenous peoples, oracy, debate, formal speech making, structured silences and other conventions which shape oral traditions remain a most important way of developing

trust, sharing information, strategies, advice, contacts and ideas. In Maori language there is the expression *Kanohi kitea* or the 'seen face', which conveys the sense that being seen by the people – showing your face, turning up at important cultural events – cements your membership within a community in an ongoing way and is part of how one's credibility is continually developed and maintained.<sup>19</sup> In First Nations and Native American communities there are protocols of being respectful, of showing or accepting respect and reciprocating respectful behaviours, which also develop membership, credibility and reputation. In Hawai'i *kanaka Maoli*, or native Hawai'ian researchers, have talked of the many aunts, uncles and elders whose views must be sought prior to conducting any interviews in a community. In Australia Aborigine researchers speak also of the many levels of entry which must be negotiated when researchers seek information. Other indigenous researchers speak of the long-term relationships which are established and extend beyond a research relationship to one involving families, communities, organizations and networks.

Some methodologies regard the values and beliefs, practices and customs of communities as 'barriers' to research or as exotic customs with which researchers need to be familiar in order to carry out their work without causing offence. Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology. They are 'factors' to be built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of the final results of a study and to be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood. This does not preclude writing for academic publications but is simply part of an ethical and respectful approach. There are diverse ways of disseminating knowledge and of ensuring that research reaches the people who have helped make it. Two important ways not always addressed by scientific research are to do with 'reporting back' to the people and 'sharing knowledge'. Both ways assume a principle of reciprocity and feedback.

Reporting back to the people is never ever a one-off exercise or a task that can be signed off on completion of the written report. Some of my students have presented their work in formal ceremonies to family and tribal councils; one has had his work positioned amongst the wreaths which have surrounded the casket of a deceased relation. I have travelled with another student back to an area where she carried out her interviews so that she could present copies of her work to the people she interviewed. The family was waiting for her; they cooked food and made us welcome. We left knowing that her work will be passed around the family to be read and eventually will have a place in the living room

along with other valued family books and family photographs. Other indigenous students have presented a symposium on their research into native schools to an international conference, or given a paper to an academic audience. Some have been able to develop strategies and community-based initiatives directly from their own research projects. Some have taken a theoretical approach to a problem and through their analyses have shown new ways of thinking about issues of concern to indigenous peoples.

Sharing knowledge is also a long-term commitment. It is much easier for researchers to hand out a report and for organizations to distribute pamphlets than to engage in continuing knowledge-sharing processes. For indigenous researchers, however, this is what is expected of us as we live and move within our various communities. The old colonial adage that knowledge is power is taken seriously in indigenous communities and many processes have been discussed and enacted in order to facilitate effective ways of sharing knowledge. Indigenous communities probably know more than the dominant white community about issues raised by the Human Genome Diversity Project, for example, or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) agreement. I recall, when attending the Indigenous Peoples World Conference on Education in Woollongong, New South Wales, an Aborigine woman telling me that 'we are always waiting for them [white Australia] to catch up. They still don't know.' I use the term 'sharing knowledge' deliberately, rather than the term 'sharing information' because to me the responsibility of researchers and academics is not simply to share surface information (pamphlet knowledge) but to share the theories and analyses which inform the way knowledge and information are constructed and represented. By taking this approach seriously it is possible to introduce communities and people who may have had little formal schooling to a wider world, a world which includes people who think just like them, who share in their struggles and dreams and who voice their concerns in similar sorts of ways. To assume in advance that people will not be interested in, or will not understand, the deeper issues is arrogant. The challenge always is to demystify, to decolonize.

In reading this book you may well think that it is an anti-research book on research. There is certainly a history of research of indigenous peoples which continues to make indigenous students who encounter this history very angry. Sometimes they react by deciding never to do any research; but then they go out into the community and, because of their educational background and skills they are called upon to carry out projects or feasibility studies or evaluations or to write submissions that are based on information, data, archival records and interviews with

elders. They are referred to as project workers, community activists or consultants, anything but 'researchers'. They search and record, they select and interpret, they organize and re-present, they make claims on the basis of what they assemble. This is research. The processes they use can also be called methodologies. The specific tools they use to gain information can also be called methods. Everything they are trying to do is informed by a theory, regardless of whether they can talk about that theory explicitly.

Finally, a brief comment on non-indigenous researchers still researching with indigenous peoples or about indigenous issues. Clearly, there have been some shifts in the way non-indigenous researchers and academics have positioned themselves and their work in relation to the people for whom the research still counts. It is also clear, however, that there are powerful groups of researchers who resent indigenous people asking questions about their research and whose research paradigms constantly permit them to exploit indigenous peoples and their knowledges. On the positive side, in the New Zealand context, work is being carried out in terms of bicultural research, partnership research and multi-disciplinary research. Other researchers have had to clarify their research aims and think more seriously about effective and ethical ways of carrying out research with indigenous peoples. Still others have developed ways of working with indigenous peoples on a variety of projects in an ongoing and mutually beneficial way. The discussion about what that means for non-indigenous researchers and for indigenous peoples is not addressed here directly. It is not that I do not have views on the matter but rather that the present work has grown out of a concern to develop indigenous peoples as researchers. There is so little material that addresses the issues indigenous researchers face. The book is written primarily to help ourselves.

### Notes

- 1 Thompson, A. S. (1859), *The Story of New Zealand. Past and Present – Savage and Civilised*, John Murray, London. Thompson writes that, 'This comparative smallness of the brain is produced by neglecting to exercise the higher faculties of the mind, for as muscles shrink from want of use, it is only natural that generations of mental indolence should lessen the size of brains', Vol. 1, p. 81.
- 2 Said, E. (1978), *Orientalism*, Vintage Books, London, p. 2.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 3.
- 4 See, for a summary of issues, Burger, J. (1987), *Report from the Frontier. The State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*, Zed Books, London.
- 5 Collins, Patricia Hill (1991), 'Learning from the Outsider Within: the Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought', in *Beyond Methodology. Feminist Research as*

- Lived Research*, eds M. M. Fonow and J. A. Cook, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- 6 Aga Khan, Sadruddin, and Hassan bin Talal (1987), *Indigenous Peoples, a Global Quest for Justice: a Report for the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Affairs*, Zed Books, London.
- 7 For background see *ibid.* and Wilmer, F. (1993), *The Indigenous Voice in World Politics*, Sage, California.
- 8 Burger, J. (1990), *The Gaia Atlas of First Peoples*, Gaia Books, London.
- 9 Wilmer, *The Indigenous Voice*, p. 5.
- 10 I am not quite sure who said it first but several writers and texts have employed this concept in their titles and writing. Salman Rushdie wrote that the 'Empire writes back to the center'. African American women writers have taken the theme of 'talking back' or 'back chat' in similar ways to which Maori women speak of 'answering back'. Also important was a critical text on racism in Britain written by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham (1982): *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 1970s Britain*, Hutchinson.
- 11 Nandy, A. (1989), *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism*, Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- 12 Memmi, A. (1965), *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, expanded edition (1991), Beacon Press Boston, pp. 79–89.
- 13 Maracle, L. (1996), *I Am Woman. A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*, Press Gang Publishers, Vancouver, p. 21.
- 14 Johnston, P. and L. Pihama, (1994), 'The Marginalisation of Maori Women', in *Hecate*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 83–97.
- 15 See for example, Smith, L. T. (1985), 'Te Rapunga I Te Ao Maori', in *Issues of Research and Maori*, eds, G. H. Smith and M. K. Hohepa, Research Unit for Maori Education, Education Department, University of Auckland.
- 16 The term 'tribal' is problematic in the indigenous context but is used commonly in New Zealand to refer to large kinship-based, political groupings of Maori. Our preferred name for a 'tribe' is *whānau*.
- 17 Burger, *Report From the Frontier*, pp. 177–208.
- 18 See, for example, essays by Spivak, Gayatri (1990), *The Post-Colonial Critic*, ed. S. Harasym, Routledge, New York.
- 19 Bishop, R. and T. Glynn (1992), 'He Kanohi Kitea: Conducting and Evaluating Educational Research', in *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 125–35.

## CHAPTER 1

Imperialism, History,  
Writing and Theory

*The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.*

Audre Lorde<sup>1</sup>

Imperialism frames the indigenous experience. It is part of our story, our version of modernity. Writing about our experiences under imperialism and its more specific expression of colonialism has become a significant project of the indigenous world. In a literary sense this has been defined by writers like Salman Rushdie, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and many others whose literary origins are grounded in the landscapes, languages, cultures and imaginative worlds of peoples and nations whose own histories were interrupted and radically reformulated by European imperialism. While the project of creating this literature is important, what indigenous activists would argue is that imperialism cannot be struggled over only at the level of text and literature. Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly. Indigenous peoples as an international group have had to challenge, understand and have a shared language for talking about the history, the sociology, the psychology and the politics of imperialism and colonialism as an epic story telling of huge devastation, painful struggle and persistent survival. We have become quite good at talking that kind of talk, most often amongst ourselves, for ourselves and to ourselves. 'The talk' about the colonial past is embedded in our political discourses, our humour, poetry, music, story telling and other common sense ways of passing on both a narrative of history and an attitude about history. The lived experiences of imperialism and colonialism contribute another dimension to the ways in which terms like 'imperialism' can be understood. This is a dimension that indigenous peoples know and understand well.

In this chapter the intention is to discuss and contextualise four concepts which are often present (though not necessarily clearly visible) in the ways in which the ideas of indigenous peoples are articulated;

imperialism, history, writing, and theory. These terms may seem to make up a strange selection, particularly as there are more obvious concepts such as self-determination or sovereignty which are used commonly in indigenous discourses. I have selected these words because from an indigenous perspective they are problematic. They are words which tend to provoke a whole array of feelings, attitudes and values. They are words of emotion which draw attention to the thousands of ways in which indigenous languages, knowledges and cultures have been silenced or misrepresented, ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses. They are also words which are used in particular sorts of ways or avoided altogether. In thinking about knowledge and research, however, these are important terms which underpin the practices and styles of research with indigenous peoples. Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple levels. For researchers, one of those levels is concerned with having a more critical understanding of the underlying assumptions, motivations and values which inform research practices.

*The spirit of  
Columbus*

### Imperialism

There is one particular figure whose name looms large, and whose spectre lingers, in indigenous discussions of encounters with the West: Christopher Columbus. It is not simply that Columbus is identified as the one who started it all, but rather that he has come to represent a huge legacy of suffering and destruction. Columbus 'names' that legacy more than any other individual.<sup>2</sup> He sets its modern time frame (500 years) and defines the outer limits of that legacy, that is, total destruction.<sup>3</sup> But there are other significant figures who symbolize and frame indigenous experiences in other places. In the imperial literature these are the 'heroes', the discoverers and adventurers, the 'fathers' of colonialism. In the indigenous literature these figures are not so admired; their deeds are definitely not the deeds of wonderful discoverers and conquering heroes. In the South Pacific, for example it is the British explorer James Cook, whose expeditions had a very clear scientific purpose and whose first encounters with indigenous peoples were fastidiously recorded. Hawai'ian academic Haunani Kay Trask's list of what Cook brought to the Pacific includes: 'capitalism, Western political ideas (such as predatory individualism) and Christianity. Most destructive of all he brought diseases that ravaged my people until we were but a remnant of what we had been on contact with his pestilent crew.'<sup>4</sup> The French are remembered by Tasmanian Aborigine Greg Lehman, 'not [for] the intellectual hubbub of an emerging anthrologie or even with the swish of their travel-weary frocks. It is with an arrogant death that

*500  
years*

they presaged their appearance...'<sup>5</sup> For many communities there were waves of different sorts of Europeans; Dutch, Portuguese, British, French, whoever had political ascendancy over a region. And, in each place, after figures such as Columbus and Cook had long departed, there came a vast array of military personnel, imperial administrators, priests, explorers, missionaries, colonial officials, artists, entrepreneurs and settlers, who cut a devastating swathe, and left a permanent wound, on the societies and communities who occupied the lands named and claimed under imperialism.

The concepts of imperialism and colonialism are crucial ones which are used across a range of disciplines, often with meanings which are taken for granted. The two terms are interconnected and what is generally agreed upon is that colonialism is but one expression of imperialism. Imperialism tends to be used in at least four different ways when describing the form of European imperialism which 'started' in the fifteenth century: (1) imperialism as economic expansion; (2) imperialism as the subjugation of 'others'; (3) imperialism as an idea or spirit with many forms of realization; and (4) imperialism as a discursive field of knowledge. These usages do not necessarily contradict each other; rather, they need to be seen as analyses which focus on different layers of imperialism. Initially the term was used by historians to explain a series of developments leading to the economic expansion of Europe. Imperialism in this sense could be tied to a chronology of events related to 'discovery', conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation.

Economic explanations of imperialism were first advanced by English historian J. A. Hobson in 1902 and by Lenin in 1917.<sup>6</sup> Hobson saw imperialism as being an integral part of Europe's economic expansion. He attributed the later stages of nineteenth-century imperialism to the inability of Europeans to purchase what was being produced and the need for Europe's industrialists to shift their capital to new markets which were secure. Imperialism was the system of control which secured the markets and capital investments. Colonialism facilitated this expansion by ensuring that there was European control, which necessarily meant securing and subjugating the indigenous populations. Like Hobson, Lenin was concerned with the ways in which economic expansion was linked to imperialism, although he argued that the export of capital to new markets was an attempt to rescue capitalism because Europe's workers could not afford what was being produced.

A second use of the concept of imperialism focuses more upon the exploitation and subjugation of indigenous peoples. Although economic explanations might account for why people like Columbus were funded to explore and discover new sources of wealth, they do not account for the devastating impact on the indigenous peoples whose lands were

invaded. By the time contact was made in the South Pacific, Europeans, and more particularly the British, had learned from their previous encounters with indigenous peoples and had developed much more sophisticated 'rules of practice'.<sup>7</sup> While these practices ultimately lead to forms of subjugation, they also lead to subtle nuances which give an unevenness to the story of imperialism, even within the story of one indigenous society. While in New Zealand all Maori tribes, for example, lost the majority of their lands, not all tribes had their lands confiscated, were invaded militarily or were declared to be in rebellion. Similarly, while many indigenous nations signed treaties, other indigenous communities have no treaties. Furthermore, legislated identities which regulated who was an Indian and who was not, who was a *metis*, who had lost all status as an indigenous person, who had the correct fraction of blood quantum, who lived in the regulated spaces of reserves and communities, were all worked out arbitrarily (but systematically), to serve the interests of the colonizing society. The specificities of imperialism help to explain the different ways in which indigenous peoples have struggled to recover histories, lands, languages and basic human dignity. The way arguments are framed, the way dissent is controlled, the way settlements are made, while certainly drawing from international precedents, are also situated within a more localized discursive field.

A third major use of the term is much broader. It links imperialism to the spirit which characterized Europe's global activities. MacKenzie defines imperialism as being 'more than a set of economic, political and military phenomena. It is also a complex ideology which had widespread cultural, intellectual and technical expressions'.<sup>8</sup> This view of imperialism locates it within the Enlightenment spirit which signalled the transformation of economic, political and cultural life in Europe. In this wider Enlightenment context, imperialism becomes an integral part of the development of the modern state, of science, of ideas and of the 'modern' human person. In complex ways imperialism was also a mode through which the new states of Europe could expand their economies, through which new ideas and discoveries could be made and harnessed, and through which Europeans could develop their sense of European-ness. The imperial imagination enabled European nations to imagine the possibility that new worlds, new wealth and new possessions existed that could be discovered and controlled. This imagination was realized through the promotion of science, economic expansion and political practice.

These three interpretations of imperialism have reflected a view from the imperial centre of Europe. In contrast, a fourth use of the term has been generated by writers whose understandings of imperialism and

colonialism have been based either on their membership of and experience within colonized societies, or on their interest in understanding imperialism from the perspective of local contexts. Although these views of imperialism take into account the other forms of analysis, there are some important distinctions. There is, for example, a greater and more immediate need to understand the complex ways in which people were brought within the imperial system, because its impact is still being felt, despite the apparent independence gained by former colonial territories. The reach of imperialism into 'our heads' challenges those who belong to colonized communities to understand how this occurred, partly because we perceive a need to decolonize our minds, to recover ourselves, to claim a space in which to develop a sense of authentic humanity. This analysis of imperialism has been referred to more recently in terms such as 'post-colonial discourse', the 'empire writes back' and/or 'writing from the margins'. There is a more political body of writing, however, which extends to the revolutionary, anti-colonial work of various activists (only some of whom, such as Frantz Fanon, actually wrote their ideas down) that draws also upon the work of black and African American writers and other minority writers whose work may have emerged out of a concern for human and civil rights, the rights of women and other forms of oppression.

Colonialism became imperialism's outpost, the fort and the port of imperial outreach. Whilst colonies may have started as a means to secure ports, access to raw materials and efficient transfer of commodities from point of origin to the imperial centre, they also served other functions. It was not just indigenous populations who had to be subjugated. Europeans also needed to be kept under control, in service to the greater imperial enterprise. Colonial outposts were also cultural sites which preserved an image or represented an image of what the West or 'civilization' stood for. Colonies were not exact replicas of the imperial centre, culturally, economically or politically. Europeans resident in the colonies were not culturally homogeneous, so there were struggles within the colonizing community about its own identity. Wealth and class status created very powerful settler interests which came to dominate the politics of a colony. Colonialism was, in part, an image of imperialism, a particular realization of the imperial imagination. It was also, in part, an image of the future nation it would become. In this image lie images of the Other, stark contrasts and subtle nuances, of the ways in which the indigenous communities were perceived and dealt with, which make the stories of colonialism part of a grander narrative and yet part also of a very local, very specific experience.

A constant reworking of our understandings of the impact of imperialism and colonialism is an important aspect of indigenous cultural

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politics and forms the basis of an indigenous language of critique. Within this critique there have been two major strands. One draws upon a notion of authenticity, of a time before colonization in which we were intact as indigenous peoples. We had absolute authority over our lives; we were born into and lived in a universe which was entirely of our making. We did not ask, need or want to be 'discovered' by Europe. The second strand of the language of critique demands that we have an analysis of how we were colonized, of what that has meant in terms of our immediate past and what it means for our present and future. The two strands intersect but what is particularly significant in indigenous discourses is that solutions are posed from a combination of the time before, *colonized time*, and the time before that, *pre-colonized time*. Decolonization encapsulates both sets of ideas.

There are, however, new challenges to the way indigenous peoples think and talk about imperialism. When the word globalization is substituted for the word imperialism, or when the prefix 'post' is attached to colonial, we are no longer talking simply about historical formations which are still lingering in our consciousness. Globalization and conceptions of a new world order represent different sorts of challenges for indigenous peoples. While being on the margins of the world has had dire consequences, being incorporated within the world's marketplace has different implications and in turn requires the mounting of new forms of resistance. Similarly, post-colonial discussions have also stirred some indigenous resistance, not so much to the literary reimagining of culture as being centred in what were once conceived of as the colonial margins, but to the idea that colonialism is over, finished business. This is best articulated by Aborigine activist Bobbi Sykes, who asked at an academic conference on post-colonialism, 'What? Post-colonialism? Have they left?' There is also, amongst indigenous academics, the sneaking suspicion that the fashion of post-colonialism has become a strategy for reinscribing or reauthorizing the privileges of non-indigenous academics because the field of 'post-colonial' discourse has been defined in ways which can still leave out indigenous peoples, our ways of knowing and our current concerns.

Research within late-modern and late-colonial conditions continues relentlessly and brings with it a new wave of exploration, discovery, exploitation and appropriation. Researchers enter communities armed with goodwill in their front pockets and patents in their back pockets, they bring medicine into villages and extract blood for genetic analysis. No matter how appalling their behaviours, how insensitive and offensive their personal actions may be, their acts and intentions are always justified as being for the 'good of mankind'. Research of this nature on indigenous peoples is still justified by the ends rather than the means,

particularly if the indigenous peoples concerned can still be positioned as ignorant and undeveloped (savages). Other researchers gather traditional herbal and medicinal remedies and remove them for analysis in laboratories around the world. Still others collect the intangibles: the belief systems and ideas about healing, about the universe, about relationships and ways of organizing, and the practices and rituals which go alongside such beliefs, such as sweat lodges, massage techniques, chanting, hanging crystals and wearing certain colours. The global hunt for new knowledges, new materials, new cures, supported by international agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) brings new threats to indigenous communities. The ethics of research, the ways in which indigenous communities can protect themselves and their knowledges, the understandings required not just of state legislation but of international agreements – these are the topics now on the agenda of many indigenous meetings.

### On Being Human

*The faculty of imagination is not strongly developed among them, although they permitted it to run wild in believing absurd superstitions.*

(A. S. Thompson, 1859)<sup>9</sup>

One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the 'arts' of civilization. By lacking such virtues we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words we were not 'fully human'; some of us were not even considered partially human. Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here.<sup>10</sup> Imperialism provided the means through which concepts of what counts as human could be applied systematically as forms of classification, for example through hierarchies of race and typologies of different societies. In conjunction with imperial power and with 'science', these classification systems came to shape relations between imperial powers and indigenous societies.

Said has argued that the 'oriental' was partially a creation of the West, based on a combination of images formed through scholarly and imaginative works. Fanon argued earlier that the colonized were brought into existence by the settler and the two, settler and colonized, are

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mutual constructions of colonialism. In Fanon's words 'we know each other well'.<sup>11</sup> The European powers had by the nineteenth century already established systems of rule and forms of social relations which governed interaction with the indigenous peoples being colonized. These relations were gendered, hierarchical and supported by rules, some explicit and others masked or hidden. The principle of 'humanity' was one way in which the implicit or hidden rules could be shaped. To consider indigenous peoples as not fully human, or not human at all, enabled distance to be maintained and justified various policies of either extermination or domestication. Some indigenous peoples ('not human'), were hunted and killed like vermin, others ('partially human'), were rounded up and put in reserves like creatures to be broken in, branded and put to work.

The struggle to assert and claim humanity has been a consistent thread of anti-colonial discourses on colonialism and oppression. This struggle for humanity has generally been framed within the wider discourse of humanism, the appeal to human 'rights', the notion of a universal human subject, and the connections between being human and being capable of creating history, knowledge and society. The focus on asserting humanity has to be seen within the anti-colonial analysis of imperialism and what were seen as imperialism's dehumanizing imperatives which were structured into language, the economy, social relations and the cultural life of colonial societies. From the nineteenth century onwards the processes of dehumanization were often hidden behind justifications for imperialism and colonialism which were clothed within an ideology of humanism and liberalism and the assertion of moral claims which related to a concept of civilized 'man'. The moral justifications did not necessarily stop the continued hunting of Aborigines in the early nineteenth century nor the continued ill-treatment of different indigenous peoples even today.

Problems have arisen, however, within efforts to struggle for humanity by overthrowing the ideologies relating to our supposed lack of humanity. The arguments of Fanon, and many writers since Fanon, have been criticized for essentializing our 'nature', for taking for granted the binary categories of Western thought, for accepting arguments supporting cultural relativity, for claiming an authenticity which is overly idealistic and romantic, and for simply engaging in an inversion of the colonizer/colonized relationship which does not address the complex problems of power relations. Colonized peoples have been compelled to define what it means to be human because there is a deep understanding of what it has meant to be considered not fully human, to be *savage*. The difficulties of such a process, however, have been bound inextricably to constructions of colonial relations around the binary of

colonizer and colonized. These two categories are not just a simple opposition but consist of several relations, some more clearly oppositional than others. Unlocking one set of relations most often requires unlocking and unsettling the different constituent parts of other relations. The binary of colonizer/colonized does not take into account, for example, the development of different layerings which have occurred within each group and across the two groups. Millions of indigenous peoples were ripped from their lands over several generations and shipped into slavery. The lands they went to as slaves were lands already taken from another group of indigenous peoples. Slavery was as much a system of imperialism as was the claiming of other peoples' territories. Other indigenous peoples were transported to various outposts in the same way as interesting plants and animals were reclamationized, in order to fulfil labour requirements. Hence there are large populations in some places of non-indigenous groups, also victims of colonialism, whose primary relationship and allegiance is often to the imperial power rather than to the colonized people of the place to which they themselves have been brought. To put it simply, indigenous peoples as commodities were transported to and fro across the empire. There were also sexual relations between colonizers and colonized which led to communities who were referred to as 'half-castes' or 'half-breeds', or stigmatized by some other specific term which often excluded them from belonging to either settler or indigenous societies. Sometimes children from 'mixed' sexual relationships were considered at least half-way civilized; at other times they were considered worse than civilized. Legislation was frequently used to regulate both the categories to which people were entitled to belong and the sorts of relations which one category of people could have with another.

Since the Second World War wars of independence and struggles for decolonization by former parts of European empires have shown us that attempts to break free can involve enormous violence: physical, social, economic, cultural and psychological. The struggle for freedom has been viewed by writers such as Fanon as a necessarily, inevitably violent process between 'two forces opposed to each other by their very nature'.<sup>12</sup> Fanon argues further that 'Decolonization which sets out to change the order of the world is, obviously, a programme of complete disorder'.<sup>13</sup> This introduces another important principle embedded in imperialism, that of order. The principle of order provides the underlying connection between such things as: the nature of imperial social relations; the activities of Western science; the establishment of trade; the appropriation of sovereignty; the establishment of law. No great conspiracy had to occur for the simultaneous developments and activities which took place under imperialism because imperial activity



was driven by fundamentally similar underlying principles. Nandy refers to these principles as the 'code' or 'grammar' of imperialism.<sup>14</sup> The idea of code suggests that there is a deep structure which regulates and legitimates imperial practices.

The fact that indigenous societies had their own systems of order was dismissed through what Albert Memmi referred to as a series of negations: they were not fully human, they were not civilized enough to have systems, they were not literate, their languages and modes of thought were inadequate.<sup>15</sup> As Fanon and later writers such as Nandy have claimed, imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world. It was a process of systematic fragmentation which can still be seen in the disciplinary carve-up of the indigenous world: bones, mummies and skulls to the museums, art work to private collectors, languages to linguistics, 'customs' to anthropologists, beliefs and behaviours to psychologists. To discover how fragmented this process was one needs only to stand in a museum, a library, a bookshop, and ask where indigenous peoples are located. Fragmentation is not a phenomenon of postmodernism as many might claim. For indigenous peoples fragmentation has been the consequence of imperialism.

### Writing, History and Theory

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A critical aspect of the struggle for self-determination has involved questions relating to our history as indigenous peoples and a critique of how we, as the Other, have been represented or excluded from various accounts. Every issue has been approached by indigenous peoples with a view to rewriting and righting our position in history. Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account, or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying. The sense of history conveyed by these approaches is not the same thing as the discipline of history, and so our accounts collide, crash into each other.

Writing or literacy, in a very traditional sense of the word, has been used to determine the breaks between the past and the present, the beginning of history and the development of theory.<sup>16</sup> Writing has been viewed as the mark of a superior civilization and other societies have been judged, by this view, to be incapable of thinking critically and

objectively, or having distance from ideas and emotions. Writing is part of theorizing and writing is part of history. Writing, history and theory, then, are key sites in which Western research of the indigenous world have come together. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, however, from another perspective writing and especially writing theory are very intimidating ideas for many indigenous students. Having been immersed in the Western academy which claims theory as thoroughly Western, which has constructed all the rules by which the indigenous world has been theorized, indigenous voices have been overwhelmingly silenced. The act, let alone the art and science, of theorizing our own existence and realities is not something which many indigenous people assume is possible. Frantz Fanon's call for the indigenous intellectual and artist to create a new literature, to work in the cause of constructing a national culture after liberation still stands as a challenge. While this has been taken up by writers of fiction, many indigenous scholars who work in the social and other sciences struggle to write, theorize and research as indigenous scholars.

### Is History Important for Indigenous Peoples?

This may appear to be a trivial question as the answer most colonized people would give, I think, is that 'yes, history is important'. But I doubt if what they would be responding to is the notion of history which is understood by the Western academy. Poststructuralist critiques of history which draw heavily on French poststructural thought have focused on the characteristics and understandings of history as an Enlightenment or modernist project. Their critique is of both liberal and Marxist concepts of history. Feminists have argued similarly (but not necessarily from a poststructuralist position) that history is the story of a specific form of domination, namely of patriarchy, literally this story.

While acknowledging the critical approaches of poststructuralist theory and cultural studies the arguments which are debated at this level are not new to indigenous peoples. There are numerous oral stories which tell of what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people. The negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly 'primitive' and 'incorrect' and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization.

Indigenous peoples have also mounted a critique of the way history is told from the perspective of the colonizers. At the same time, however, indigenous groups have argued that history is important for

understanding the present and that reclaiming history is a critical and essential aspect of decolonization. The critique of Western history argues that history is a modernist project which has developed alongside imperial beliefs about the Other. History is assembled around a set of interconnected ideas which I will summarize briefly here. I have drawn on a wide range of discussions by indigenous people and by writers such as Robert Young, J. Abu-Lughod, Keith Jenkins, C. Steadman.<sup>17</sup>

1. *The idea that history is a totalizing discourse*

The concept of totality assumes the possibility and the desirability of being able to include absolutely all known knowledge into a coherent whole. In order for this to happen, classification systems, rules of practice and methods had to be developed to allow for knowledge to be selected and included in what counts as history.

2. *The idea that there is a universal history*

Although linked to the notion of totality, the concept of universal assumes that there are fundamental characteristics and values which all human subjects and societies share. It is the development of these universal characteristics which are of historical interest.

3. *The idea that history is one large chronology*

History is regarded as being about developments over time. It charts the progress of human endeavour through time. Chronology is important as a method because it allows events to be located at a point in time. The actual time events take place also makes them 'real' or factual. In order to begin the chronology a time of 'discovery' has to be established. Chronology is also important for attempting to go backwards and explain how and why things happened in the past.

4. *The idea that history is about development*

Implicit in the notion of development is the notion of progress. This assumes that societies move forward in stages of development much as an infant grows into a fully developed adult human being. The earliest phase of human development is regarded as primitive, simple and emotional. As societies develop they become less primitive, more civilized, more rational, and their social structures become more complex and bureaucratic.

5. *The idea that history is about a self-actualizing human subject*

In this view humans have the potential to reach a stage in their development where they can be in total control of their faculties. There is an order of human development which moves, in stages, through the

fulfilment of basic needs, the development of emotions, the development of the intellect and the development of morality. Just as the individual moves through these stages, so do societies.

6. *The idea that the story of history can be told in one coherent narrative*

This idea suggests that we can assemble all the facts in an ordered way so that they tell us the truth or give us a very good idea of what really did happen in the past. In theory it means that historians can write a true history of the world.

7. *The idea that history as a discipline is innocent*

This idea says that 'facts' speak for themselves and that the historian simply researches the facts and puts them together. Once all the known facts are assembled they tell their own story, without any need of a theoretical explanation or interpretation by the historian. This idea also conveys the sense that history is pure as a discipline, that is, it is not implicated with other disciplines.

8. *The idea that history is constructed around binary categories*

This idea is linked to the historical method of chronology. In order for history to begin there has to be a period of beginning and some criteria for determining when something begins. In terms of history this was often attached to concepts of 'discovery', the development of literacy, or the development of a specific social formation. Everything before that time is designated as prehistorical, belonging to the realm of myths and traditions, 'outside' the domain.

9. *The idea that history is patriarchal*

This idea is linked to the notions of self-actualization and development, as women were regarded as being incapable of attaining the higher orders of development. Furthermore they were not significant in terms of the ways societies developed because they were not present in the bureaucracies or hierarchies where changes in social or political life were being determined.

*Other key ideas*

Intersecting this set of ideas are some other important concepts. Literacy, as one example, was used as a criterion for assessing the development of a society and its progress to a stage where history can be said to begin. Even places such as India, China and Japan, however, which were very literate cultures prior to their 'discovery' by the West, were invoked through other categories which defined them as

uncivilized. Their literacy, in other words, did not count as a record of legitimate knowledge.

The German philosopher Hegel is usually regarded as the 'founding father' of history in the sense outlined here. This applies to both Liberal and Marxist views.<sup>18</sup> Hegel conceived of the fully human subject as someone capable of 'creating (his) own history'. However, Hegel did not simply invent the rules of history. As Robert Young argues, 'the entire Hegelian machinery simply lays down the operation of a system already in place, already operating in everyday life'.<sup>19</sup> It should also be self-evident that many of these ideas are predicated on a sense of Otherness. They are views which invite a comparison with 'something/someone else' which exists *on the outside*, such as the oriental, the 'Negro', the 'Jew', the 'Indian', the 'Aborigine'. Views about the Other had already existed for centuries in Europe, but during the Enlightenment these views became more formalized through science, philosophy and imperialism, into explicit systems of classification and 'regimes of truth'. The racialization of the human subject and the social order enabled comparisons to be made between the 'us' of the West and the 'them' of the Other. History was the story of people who were regarded as *fully human*. Others who were not regarded as human (that is, capable of self-actualization) were prehistoric. This notion is linked also to Hegel's master-slave construct which has been applied as a psychological category (by Freud) and as a system of social ordering.

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A further set of important ideas embedded in the modernist view of history relates to the origins (causes) and nature of social change. The Enlightenment project involved new conceptions of society and of the individual based around the precepts of rationalism, individualism and capitalism. There was a general belief that not only could individuals remake themselves but so could societies. The modern industrial state became the point of contrast between the pre-modern and the modern. History in this view began with the emergence of the rational individual and the modern industrialized society. However, there is something more to this idea in terms of how history came to be conceptualized as a method. The connection to the industrial state is significant because it highlights what was regarded as being worthy of history. The people and groups who 'made' history were the people who developed the underpinnings of the state – the economists, scientists, bureaucrats and philosophers. That they were all men of a certain class and race was 'natural' because they were regarded (naturally) as fully rational, self-actualizing human beings capable, therefore, of creating social change, that is history. The day-to-day lives of 'ordinary' people, and of women, did not become a concern of history until much more recently.

### Contested Histories

For indigenous peoples, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories. The idea of contested stories and multiple discourses about the past, by different communities, is closely linked to the politics of everyday contemporary indigenous life. It is very much a part of the fabric of communities that value oral ways of knowing. These contested accounts are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings, even within the personal names that many people carried. The means by which these histories were stored was through their systems of knowledge. Many of these systems have since been reclassified as oral traditions rather than histories.

Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our 'histories' to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. Schooling is directly implicated in this process. Through the curriculum and its underlying theory of knowledge, early schools redefined the world and where indigenous peoples were positioned within the world. From being direct descendants of sky and earth parents, Christianity positioned some of us as higher-order savages who deserved salvation in order that we could become children of God. Maps of the world reinforced our place on the periphery of the world, although we were still considered part of the Empire. This included having to learn new names for our own lands. Other symbols of our loyalty, such as the flag, were also an integral part of the imperial curriculum.<sup>20</sup> Our orientation to the world was already being redefined as we were being excluded systematically from the writing of the history of our own lands. This on its own may not have worked were it not for the actual material redefinition of our world which was occurring simultaneously through such things as the renaming and 'breaking in' of the land, the alienation and fragmentation of lands through legislation, the forced movement of people off their lands, and the social consequences which resulted in high sickness and mortality rates.

Indigenous attempts to reclaim land, language, knowledge and sovereignty have usually involved contested accounts of the past by colonizers and colonized. These have occurred in the courts, before various commissions, tribunals and official enquiries, in the media, in Parliament, in bars and on talkback radio. In these situations contested histories do not exist in the same cultural framework as they do when tribal or clan histories, for example, are being debated within the indigenous community itself. They are not simply struggles over 'facts' and 'truth'; the rules by which these struggles take place are never clear

(other than that we as the indigenous community know they are going to be stacked against us); and we are not the final arbiters of what really counts as the truth.

It is because of these issues that I ask the question, 'Is history in its modernist construction important or not important for indigenous peoples?' For many people who are presently engaged in research on indigenous land claims the answer would appear to be self-evident. We assume that when 'the truth comes out' it will prove that what happened was wrong or illegal and that therefore the system (tribunals, the courts, the government) will set things right. We believe that history is also about justice, that understanding history will enlighten our decisions about the future. *Wrong*. History is also about power. In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others. It is because of this relationship with power that we have been excluded, marginalized and 'Othered'. In this sense history is not important for indigenous peoples because a thousand accounts of the 'truth' will not alter the 'fact' that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into justice.

This leads then to several other questions. The one which is most relevant to this book is the one which asks, 'Why then has revisiting history been a significant part of decolonization?' The answer, I suggest, lies in the intersection of indigenous approaches to the past, of the modernist history project itself and of the resistance strategies which have been employed. Our colonial experience traps us in the project of modernity. There can be no 'postmodern' for us until we have settled some business of the modern. This does not mean that we do not understand or employ multiple discourses, or act in incredibly contradictory ways, or exercise power ourselves in multiple ways. It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice.

*Coming to know the past* has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization. To hold alternative histories is to hold alternative knowledges. The pedagogical implication of this access to alternative knowledges is that they can form the basis of alternative ways of doing things. Transforming our colonized views of our own history (as written by the West), however, requires us to revisit, site by site, our history under Western eyes. This in turn requires a theory or approach which helps us to engage with, understand and then act upon history. It is in this sense that the sites visited in this book begin with a critique of a Western view of history. Telling our stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past are all strategies

which are commonly employed by indigenous peoples struggling for justice. On the international scene it is extremely rare and unusual when indigenous accounts are accepted and acknowledged as valid interpretations of what has taken place. And yet, the need to tell our stories remains the powerful imperative of a powerful form of resistance.

### Is Writing Important for Indigenous Peoples?

As I am arguing, every aspect of the act of producing knowledge has influenced the ways in which indigenous ways of knowing have been represented. Reading, writing, talking, these are as fundamental to academic discourse as science, theories, methods, paradigms. To begin with reading, one might cite the talk in which Maori writer Patricia Grace undertook to show that 'Books Are Dangerous'.<sup>21</sup> She argues that there are four things that make many books dangerous to indigenous readers: (1) they do not reinforce our values, actions, customs, culture and identity; (2) when they tell us only about others they are saying that we do not exist; (3) they may be writing about us but are writing things which are untrue; and (4) they are writing about us but saying negative and insensitive things which tell us that we are not good. Although Grace is talking about school texts and journals, her comments apply also to academic writing. Much of what I have read has said that we do not exist, that if we do exist it is in terms which I cannot recognize, that we are not good and that what we think is not valid.

Leonie Pihama makes a similar point about film. In a review of *The Piano* she says: 'Maori people struggle to gain a voice, struggle to be heard from the margins, to have our stories heard, to have our descriptions of ourselves validated, to have access to the domain within which we can control and define those images which are held up as reflections of our realities.'<sup>22</sup> Representation is important as a concept because it gives the impression of 'the truth'. When I read texts, for example, I frequently have to orientate myself to a text world in which the centre of academic knowledge is either in Britain, the United States or Western Europe; in which words such as 'we', 'us', 'our', 'I' actually exclude me. It is a text world in which (if what I am interested in rates a mention) I have learned that I belong *partly* in the Third World, *partly* in the 'Women of Colour' world, *partly* in the black or African world. I read myself into these labels *partly* because I have also learned that, although there may be commonalities, they still do not entirely account for the experiences of indigenous peoples.

So, reading and interpretation present problems when we do not see ourselves in the text. There are problems, too, when we do see ourselves but can barely recognize ourselves through the representation. One

problem of being trained to read this way, or, more correctly, of learning to read this way over many years of academic study, is that we can adopt uncritically similar patterns of writing. We begin to write about ourselves as indigenous peoples as if we really were 'out there', the 'Other', with all the baggage that this entails. Another problem is that academic writing is a form of selecting, arranging and presenting knowledge. It privileges sets of texts, views about the history of an idea, what issues count as significant; and, by engaging in the same process uncritically, we too can render indigenous writers invisible or unimportant while reinforcing the validity of other writers. If we write without thinking critically about our writing, it can be dangerous. Writing can also be dangerous because we reinforce and maintain a style of discourse which is never innocent. Writing can be dangerous because sometimes we reveal ourselves in ways which get misappropriated and used against us. Writing can be dangerous because, by building on previous texts written about indigenous peoples, we continue to legitimate views about ourselves which are hostile to us. This is particularly true of academic writing, although journalistic and imaginative writing reinforce these 'myths'.

These attitudes inform what is sometimes referred to as either the 'Empire writes back' discourse or post-colonial literature. This kind of writing assumes that the centre does not necessarily have to be located at the imperial centre.<sup>23</sup> It is argued that the centre can be shifted ideologically through imagination and that this shifting can recreate history. Another perspective relates to the ability of 'native' writers to appropriate the language of the colonizer as the language of the colonized and to write so that it captures the ways in which the colonized actually use the language, their dialects and inflections, and in the way they make sense of their lives. Its other importance is that it speaks to an audience of people who have also been colonized. This is one of the ironies of many indigenous peoples' conferences where issues of indigenous language have to be debated in the language of the colonizers. Another variation of the debate relates to the use of literature to write about the terrible things which happened under colonialism or as a consequence of colonialism. These topics inevitably implicated the colonizers *and their literature* in the processes of cultural domination.

Yet another position, espoused in African literature by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, was to write in the languages of Africa. For Ngugi wa Thiong'o, to write in the language of the colonizers was to pay homage to them, while to write in the languages of Africa was to engage in an anti-imperialist struggle. He argued that language carries culture and the language of the colonizer became the means by which the 'mental universe of the colonized' was dominated.<sup>24</sup> This applied, in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's view, particularly to the language of writing. Whereas oral

languages were frequently still heard at home, the use of literature in association with schooling resulted in the alienation of a child from the child's history, geography, music and other aspects of culture.<sup>25</sup>

In discussing the politics of academic writing, in which research writing is a subset, Cheryl Smith argues that 'colonialism, racism and cultural imperialism do not occur only in society, outside of the gates of universities'.<sup>26</sup> Academic writing, she continues, is a way of "writing back" whilst at the same time writing to ourselves.<sup>27</sup> The act of 'writing back' and simultaneously writing to ourselves is not simply an inversion of how we have learned to write academically.<sup>28</sup> The different audiences to whom we speak makes the task somewhat difficult. The scope of the literature which we use in our work contributes to a different framing of the issues. The oral arts and other forms of expression set our landscape in a different frame of reference. Our understandings of the academic disciplines within which we have been trained also frame our approaches. Even the use of pronouns such as 'I' and 'we' can cause difficulties when writing for several audiences, because while it may be acceptable now in academic writing, it is not always acceptable to indigenous audiences.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Said also asks the following questions: 'Who writes? For whom is the writing being done? In what circumstances? These it seems to me are the questions whose answers provide us with the ingredients making a politics of interpretation.'<sup>30</sup> These questions are important ones which are being asked in a variety of ways within our communities. They are asked, for example, about research, policy making and curriculum development. Said's comments, however, point to the problems of interpretation, in this case of academic writing. 'Who' is doing the writing is important in the politics of the Third World and African America, and indeed for indigenous peoples; it is even more important in the politics of how these worlds are being represented 'back to' the West. Although in the literary sense the imagination is crucial to writing, the use of language is not highly regarded in academic discourses which claim to be scientific. The concept of imagination, when employed as a sociological tool, is often reduced to a way of seeing and understanding the world, or a way of understanding how people either construct the world or are constructed by the world. As Toni Morrison argues, however, the imagination can be a way of sharing the world.<sup>31</sup> This means, according to Morrison, struggling to find the language to do this and then struggling to interpret and perform within that shared imagination.

### Writing Theory

Research is linked in all disciplines to theory. Research adds to, is generated from, creates or broadens our theoretical understandings.

Indigenous peoples have been, in many ways, oppressed by theory. Any consideration of the ways our origins have been examined, our histories recounted, our arts analysed, our cultures dissected, measured, torn apart and distorted back to us will suggest that theories have not looked sympathetically or ethically at us. Writing research is often considered marginally more important than writing theory, providing it results in tangible benefits for farmers, economists, industries and sick people. For indigenous peoples, most of the theorizing has been driven by anthropological approaches. These approaches have shown enormous concern for our origins as peoples and for aspects of our linguistic and material culture.

The development of theories by indigenous scholars which attempt to explain our existence in contemporary society (as opposed to the 'traditional' society constructed under modernism) has only just begun. Not all these theories claim to be derived from some 'pure' sense of what it means to be indigenous, nor do they claim to be theories which have been developed in a vacuum separated from any association with civil and human rights movements, other nationalist struggles or other theoretical approaches. What is claimed, however, is that new ways of theorizing by indigenous scholars are grounded in a real sense of, and sensitivity towards, what it means to be an indigenous person. As Kathie Irwin urges, 'We don't need anyone else developing the tools which will help us to come to terms with who we are. We can and will do this work. Real power lies with those who design the tools – it always has. This power is ours'.<sup>32</sup> Contained within this imperative is a sense of being able to determine priorities, to bring to the centre those issues of our own choosing, and to discuss them amongst ourselves.

I am arguing that theory at its most simple level is important for indigenous peoples. At the very least it helps make sense of reality. It enables us to make assumptions and predictions about the world in which we live. It contains within it a method or methods for selecting and arranging, for prioritising and legitimating what we see and do. Theory enables us to deal with contradictions and uncertainties. Perhaps more significantly, it gives us space to plan, to strategize, to take greater control over our resistances. The language of a theory can also be used as a way of organising and determining action. It helps us to interpret what is being told to us, and to predict the consequences of what is being promised. Theory can also protect us because it contains within it a way of putting reality into perspective. If it is a good theory it also allows for new ideas and ways of looking at things to be incorporated constantly without the need to search constantly for new theories.

A dilemma posed by such a thorough critical approach to history, writing and theory is that whilst we may reject or dismiss them, this does

not make them go away, nor does the critique necessarily offer the alternatives. We live simultaneously within such views while needing to pose, contest and struggle for the legitimacy of oppositional or alternative histories, theories and ways of writing. At some points there is, there has to be, dialogue across the boundaries of oppositions. This has to be because we constantly collide with dominant views while we are attempting to transform our lives on a larger scale than our own localized circumstances. This means struggling to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.

Part of the exercise is about recovering our own stories of the past. This is inextricably bound to a recovery of our language and epistemological foundations. It is also about reconciling and reprioritizing what is really important about the past with what is important about the present. These issues raise significant questions for indigenous communities who are not only beginning to fight back against the invasion of their communities by academic, corporate and populist researchers, but to think about, and carry out research, on their own concerns. One of the problems discussed in this first section of this book is that the methodologies and methods of research, the theories that inform them, the questions which they generate and the writing styles they employ, all become significant acts which need to be considered carefully and critically before being applied. In other words, they need to be 'decolonized'. Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.

As a site of struggle research has a significance for indigenous peoples that is embedded in our history under the gaze of Western imperialism and Western science. It is framed by our attempts to escape the penetration and surveillance of that gaze whilst simultaneously reordering and reconstituting ourselves as indigenous human beings in a state of ongoing crisis. Research has not been neutral in its objectification of the Other. Objectification is a process of dehumanization. In its clear links to Western knowledge research has generated a particular relationship to indigenous peoples which continues to be problematic. At the same time, however, new pressures which have resulted from our own politics of self-determination, of wanting greater participation in, or control over, what happens to us, and from changes in the global environment, have meant that there is a much more active and knowing engagement in the activity of research by indigenous peoples. Many indigenous groups, communities and organisations are thinking about, talking about,

and carrying out research activities of various kinds. In this chapter I have suggested that it is important to have a critical understanding of some of the tools of research – not just the obvious technical tools but the conceptual tools, the ones which make us feel uncomfortable, which we avoid, for which we have no easy response.

*I lack imagination you say  
No. I lack language.  
The language to clarify  
my resistance to the literate....*

Cherrie Moraga<sup>33</sup>

### Notes

- 1 Lorde, Audre (1979), 'The Master's Tools will Never Dismantle the Master's House', comments at 'The personal and the Political' panel, Second Sex Conference, reproduced in Moraga, C. and G. Anzaldúa (1981), *This Bridge Called My Back*, Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, New York, pp. 98–101.
- 2 See Sale, K. (1990), *The Conquest of Paradise, Christopher and the Columbian Legacy*, Alfred Knopf, New York.
- 3 See Churchill, W. (1994), *Indians Are Us? Culture and Genocide in North America*, Common Courage Press, Maine.
- 4 Trask, H. K. (1993), *From a Native Daughter*, Common Courage Press, Maine, p. 7.
- 5 Lehman, G. (1996), 'Life's Quiet Companion', paper, Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies, University of Tasmania, Hobart, Australia.
- 6 Giddens, A. (1989), *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, pp. 530–3.
- 7 The term 'rules of practice' comes from Foucault. See, for this encounter, Salmond, A. (1991), *Two Worlds, First Meetings Between Maori and Europeans 1642–1772*, Viking, Auckland.
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