



Imagining Our Own Approaches

Linda Tuhiwai Smith

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Imagining Our Own Approaches

LINDA TUHIWAI SMITH

School of Māori and Pacific Development, University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand

I spent some formative years of my life either in the back of museums or their basements helping my father, a scholar of Māori Studies, and keeping myself out of trouble. In the late 1960s I had one small job in the library basement of the Peabody Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, typing new labels for the captains' log books of ships that were sailing during the American Revolution. I read most of those journals that consisted of pages and pages of wind directions with the rare glimpse of an encounter with another ship or a list of supplies. Why were we there in Salem when we came from Aotearoa, New Zealand? We were there because Salem was the home base for ships that sailed into the Pacific and returned home with collections of materials from the various Pacific Islands countries they visited. My father was studying elaborately carved items from the Marquesa Islands that looked very much like Māori designs.

I learned at an early age what riches lay behind the display cabinets and shelves of museums and libraries. I also learned at an early age that many of those riches were somehow connected to me culturally and yet were lying there a long way from home. It took me much longer to understand how significant those cultural resources were to knowledge and society. As a graduate student and then as a researcher I became used to searching for the materials I needed across different floors of the library in different sections and under many different subject headings. I learned to forage in search of the fragmented parts of Māori and Indigenous knowledge that had become scattered across the classification systems of the societies that had collected them. It helped somewhat that the University of Auckland Library where I studied had a Māori and Pacific section where most books of high interest were brought together in one section.

My work, and that of others who write about colonialism and de-colonization, has sought to identify how, through diverse processes and mechanisms, colonialism has undermined, ridiculed, diminished, and

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Address correspondence to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240, New Zealand. E-mail: tuhiwai@waikato.ac.nz

fragmented Indigenous knowledge while at the same time it has been enriched by that knowledge. This special issue focuses on how Indigenous knowledge frameworks and concepts can be employed to revitalize Indigenous knowledge, restore relationships between people and the objects they created, and provide new ways to understand Indigenous knowledge in contemporary contexts. The special issue brings together authors from the United States, Canada, and New Zealand who work with materials and communities and who are transforming current practices of classification, cataloging, and collections. Changes in technology, as much as Indigenous efforts to recover and repatriate important knowledge, are forcing us to think more creatively and critically about current information systems and practices and their usefulness for the future. The authors in this issue provide some practical and theoretical understandings that can be applied across other international contexts. There are examples about how Indigenous worldviews and knowledge frameworks can be applied to reclassify Indigenous knowledge and reveal more of its power as a form of knowledge and identity.

Increasingly, some Indigenous communities are developing their own collections documenting their cultures and histories. Many tribes have developed archives and some have developed museums of their own. Imagining what our own archives and museums might look like and might do is interesting and challenging. From my travels I know there are many examples of Indigenous tribally owned museums and archives across the world. I have seen some innovative and exciting attempts to re-present Indigenous cultures in Indigenous contexts and in new ways designed by Indigenous communities. I have no doubt that the articles here will be read by those who wish to re-indigenize the knowledge and materials that were once lost to them.