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Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing: Developing a theoretical framework and methods for Indigenous re-search and Indigenist research

Background

... The myth of terra nullius implied that this country was uninhabited and terra nullius social policy supported by research enabled for the dispossession of knowledges of Indigenous peoples. It must be remembered that university curriculum, teaching methodologies and research endeavours have a history of development that contributed to this dispossession. Has the time come for change? ... (Hart and Whatman 1998:14)

Aboriginal writers (Huggins 1998; Dodson 1995; van den Berg 1998; Rigney 1999) argue that the extent of research conducted in Aboriginal lands and on Aboriginal people since British invasion in the late 1770s, is so vast that it makes us one of the most researched group of people on earth. Natural scientists (such as biologists, geologists, botanists) and social scientists (such as anthropologists, archaeologists, educators, psychologists), have conducted research in Aboriginal lands, on Aboriginal people and at times both, since British colonisation of this country. In social science areas such as health, education and criminology we are over-researched and little wonder this has generated mistrust, animosity and resistance from many Aboriginal people.

One reason for this reaction is that, until recent times, research conducted in Aboriginal lands was done so without permission, consultation, or involvement of Aboriginal people. The same is true for research conducted on or about Aboriginal people.

In signifying the time for change has arrived, the traditions of western, colonial research are under challenge as Aboriginal people take control by reframing previous research experiences by developing our own research paradigms and programs. This paper will discuss the emergence of an Indigenist research paradigm by referring to the constructs of a theoretical framework as defined by my people: the Quandamooka people of Minjeripah (North Stradbroke Island, Queensland, Australia).

Indigenist research – a preliminary discussion

... The protocol for introducing one's self to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connection can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established ... (Moreton-Robinson 2000:xv)

As in the above words of a fellow Quandamooka woman and in accordance with the customs of my people, I provide the following details:

My name is Karen Martin. I am the youngest in the family of George and Ruby Martin (nee Holt). My Father is a Noonucle man from Minjeripah (the land, waterways, skies and spiritual systems of North Stradbroke Island) and my Mother is a Bidjara woman (from the northeastern area of Carnarvon Gorge, Central Queensland). I identify myself as a Noonucle woman with ancestral ties to Bidjara land. By qualification I am a teacher of young children and their families and have worked in various other education roles where I developed curriculum, developed policy and advice, lectured in Indigenous Studies at university, developed and conducted professional development programs and cross-cultural awareness programs. Recently, I returned to post-graduate studies undertaking a Master of Indigenous Studies, James Cook University, Cairns.

In providing these details, I am claiming and declaring my genealogy and my ancestry (Moreton-Robinson 2000; Tuhawai Smith 1998). In making these distinctions, I am also identifying, defining and describing the elements of Indigenist research (Rigney 1997). But the strength of my Aboriginal heritage hasn't always been celebrated in the same way. In the early to mid-1990s the Quandamooka people, as is the case of many other Aboriginal groups, prepared a claim for registration of native title. I was an executive committee member of the Quandamooka Land Council when research was being compiled as evidence to satisfy criteria for registration. I watched with interest and listened to the ways in which our knowledges, cultures and beliefs were collected, analysed, interpreted and presented for this claim. Having some belief in the processes,

I volunteered to contribute and although interviewed, felt my knowledge and experiences were measured against pre-determined categories of culture to which I could provide no new or convincing examples. I didn't speak the language, I hadn't grown up on the island, nor had I at that time, lived on the island. I was not considered a potential 'witness'. If this was intended to question my rights, my knowledges and my role as a Noonucle, Quandamooka woman, it succeeded. I was not alone however, as other Quandamooka people shared the same concerns and frustration privately, and at community meetings. Others still, chose to not participate. Thus began a quest to undertake some re-research that would emphasise the ways in which we view the world as having internal logic and validity, and give focus to issues that are of importance to us. This paper represents the continuation of this quest to re-research and re-present our worldviews as the basis from which we live, learn and survive. It encompasses the experiences, beliefs, tensions and exchanges that have occurred to myself and my people and other Aboriginal people both personally and professionally. More recently, it has been extended by pertinent discussion about research from:

- Maori academic Linda Tuhawai Smith (1998) who describes a number of "projects" Indigenous people use in research methods for its decolonization. Linda's work caused me to question the serious lack of Australian research that truly celebrates the traditions of its Indigenous people, our worldviews, our knowledges and our beliefs as research frameworks.
- Lester Rabinna Rigney (1997) an Aboriginal academic who developed the term 'Indigenist research' and who writes about culturally safe and culturally respectful research. The latter demands from researchers the use of ethics, research design, methods and interpretations that are at least congruent with Aboriginal worldviews.
- Norman Denzin (2000) an American qualitative researcher who describes a paradigm shift within qualitative research that is shaped by local, emic and political criteria. This shift lends to the formation of paradigms such as Indigenist research.

This confirmed for me, that change to how research regarding Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands is conducted has begun and that others, on national and international levels are instigating this through discussion and dialogue. It is through such dialogue and discussion that Indigenist research will become practice.

Indigenist research: towards a definition

From an Aboriginal position, research is an activity that draws upon frameworks, processes and practices of colonial, western worldviews and the inherent knowledges, methods, morals and beliefs. The effects for Aboriginal people is mistreatment of ourselves and our lands; marginalisation from structures of governance and development of misguided policy and programs resulting in feelings of distrust, caution, fear of exploitation and misrepresentation (Moreton-Robinson 1999; Huggins 1998; Hart and Whatman 1999; Rigney 1999; Langton 1993; Gilbert 1995). This distrust of research also encompasses inadequate levels of protection and preservation of Aboriginal knowledge systems, moral systems and life systems – that is our intellectual property and our spiritual and cultural heritages. Indigenist research then, must decolonise existing colonial, western research practices. That is, it must reframe, reclaim and rename (Tuhawai Smith 1998) the research endeavour. To reclaim research is to take control of our lives and our lands to benefit us in issues of importance for our self-determination. It is to liberate and emancipate by decolonisation and privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands so that research frameworks are reflective of this. To reframe research is to focus on matters of importance as we identify these. It is to respect our ways and honour our rites and social mores as essential processes, through which we live, act and learn. Emphasis is given to the social, historical and political contexts that shape our experiences, lives and futures and so research programs are responsive to this. To rename research is to recognise and use our worldviews, and our realities as assertions of our existence and survival. The terms, expressions, behaviours and other forms we use are recognised and employed within research programs, particularly methods, analysis, interpretation and reporting. Indigenist research, then, is undeniably political, emancipatory and confirming in its aim to control research on Aboriginal lands and regarding Aboriginal people and to regulate relations with governments, resource agencies, research institutions and visitors. Lester Rigney asserts:

... In privileging the first perspective models of Indigenous qualitative research methods, we not only provided processes to keep our Indigenous identities and knowledges safe but also provided

space for hope and the potential of moving forward to the realization of a non-colonial research future ... (1999:3).

Indigenist research then, arrives as part of cumulative research activities conducted in Aboriginal lands and on Aboriginal people since European colonisation. Its main features are identified as:

- Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival and serve as a research framework;
- Honouring Aboriginal social mores as a essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
- Emphasising the social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands;
- Identifying and redressing issues of importance for us.

Aboriginal Ontology: a framework for Indigenist research

As I see it, essentially Indigenist research utilises the core structures of Aboriginal worldview (ontology) which are distinct amongst particular locations and groups of people. The Quandamooka worldview has been, and will continue to be expressed and preserved by its people, in many forms such as literature, film, dance and art. It is particularly preserved in the stories we tell or listen to, and it is through these that we confirm and reaffirm ourselves as 'Yulubirri' - people of the sand and salt water. As such, the strength of our country can be seen in the continual motion of tides, winds. This movement of air, sand and salt water is cleansing and healing. It's important to us, as we believe that the country makes the people as much as the people make the country. We believe that country is not only the people, but is also the elements of skies, waterways, animals, plants, weather and spirits. Within this, one element should not be raised above another element. Therefore, every inch of our country is special, but there are sites that are of particular significance to particular members, for particular reasons and this is to be respected. These include women's sites, men's sites, or family/clan areas.

Other Aboriginal groups have similar ways of expressing and sharing salient elements of their worldview too. For instance, Yunupingu (1994) talks about "Ganma", a social theory from the worldview of his people, the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land, Northern Territory. He describes the need for balance between groups and recognition of their contribution for maintaining this balance. Collard and Pickwick (1995) describe processes for the teaching and gaining of knowledge and for relating to self and others based on Nyungar ideology. These serve as protocols for behaviour that also serve as research methods. West (2000) outlines the constructs of the Japanangka teaching and research paradigm based on the ideology of a Walpri person that both describes and prescribes the knowledges, beliefs and methods for research based on this Walpri worldview. Each example provides glimpses of the ontology of these Aboriginal groups, in distinct but pertinent ways. Given their distinctiveness however, it would be illogical to presume one research paradigm could be applicable for all research situations. However, I argue that some underlying constructs and their elements exist within these worldviews and these form a conceptual framework for Indigenist research. Elsewhere, (Martin 2000) I identify these as: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing because they are ontologically distinct in prescribing place and group specific knowledges, beliefs and behaviours.

Here is a brief description of each construct:

Ways of Knowing

... God gave our Yulubirri (salt and sand people) nation nutritious food supplies and miraculous medicines and the ability for our people to utilise these gifts by listening to his messages for management from weather, flora, fauna, environment, heavens and each other. After creation, he then gave our ancestors knowledge to pass on through learned and natural expression the ways and means of existence without having to defeat his gifts. This expression is enjoyed by the Koenpil, Noonuccal and other nation's form of education for some hundreds of thousands of years ... (Oodgeroo Noonuccal 1993).

In these words, Oodgeroo Noonuccal clearly describes some of our Ways of Knowing. She links this clearly to our country, and shares some of the ways in which we come to know. As it happens, I agree with Oodgeroo, but this is not a matter of establishing 'truth', but more of acknowledging

the place of multiple perspectives and realities that are a feature of our worlds. Ways of Knowing and knowledges are specific to ontology, ancestral lands and elements of waterways, skies, climate and spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups. As we live our lives, we live our Ways of Knowing, or epistemology. Epistemology is then a system through which knowledges are learned and reproduced. This includes the ways in which knowledges are retained and expressed, expanded and contracted according to social, political, historical and spatial dimensions of individuals and the group. Our Ways of Knowing shape for us our identities and particularly relationships to country, people and other elements. In this system, not one person knows all, but people have and share sets of knowledges for their particular roles. This has personal, totemic and ancestral components that signify gender, life stage and role responsibilities and rites. So there are various types of knowledges, which have different levels that have to be operational for the group to be functional. For instance, introducing our young to country at a young age is a responsibility of adults, particularly women to them, and also to ourselves. This keeps the spirit of country in the people as well as keeping the spirit of the people in the country. Every time we fish, gather, camp, talk about or walk on country we engage our Ways of Knowing. Our Ways of Knowing are consolidated through people exercising their connections to country.

Knowledge is part of the system that is our Ways of Knowing. It is more than just information or facts and is taught and learned in certain contexts, in certain ways and is purposeful only to the extent to which it is used. For instance, watching or observing is not a passive activity but the strength is in knowing what to observe and when to apply the knowledge gained from such activity. Our Ways of Knowing are embedded in our worldview and are an equal part of this system, not artefact of this. They are socially refined and affirmed, giving definition and meaning to our world. Without 'knowing' we are unable to 'be', hence, our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being

Ways of Being

... In Indigenous cultural domains relationality means that one experiences the self as part of others and that others are part of the self; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, coexistence, cooperation and social memory ... (Moreton-Robinson 2000:16).

We are part of the world as much as it is part of us, existing within a network of relations that are reciprocal and occur in certain contexts. This determines and defines for us rights to be earned and bestowed as we carry out rites to country, self and others – our Ways of Being. These are indelibly linked to our beliefs, laws, morals and values and serve as guides for our behaviour and for our responsibilities to self and others, and to elements such as land, waterways, animals, plants, skies, weather and spirits. Our Ways of Being evolve as contexts change. For instance relations change amongst people at particular times such as movement from one life stage to another, or with a birth or death of a member. Where once our Ways of Being were exercised within our country and group, since colonisation we engage with other Aboriginal people and groups more frequently and immediately set about establishing identities, interests and connections. Moreton-Robinson (2000) calls this “relationality”. Dudgeon and Oxenham (1990) call it “kindredness” and Forrest (1998) names it “connectedness”. Our Ways of Being are about the rights we earn by fulfilling rites to country, self and others. Through this, our Ways of Being shape our Ways of Doing.

Ways of Doing

... Our people did not cut down trees for paper, nor did they mine metals for pencils, typewriters, computer, print-outs, phones, facsimiles, photocopiers etc. They successfully sustained our people and environment as they talked, sang and danced the knowledge on to the young, while others used bark, branches, sticks, stones, ochres, fire and smoke for communication. To many, these methods are preferable for the environment... These methods were shared amongst the many nations through clan gatherings, family gatherings, message stick carriers, story tellers, songs, dance and paintings ... (Oodgeroo Noonuccal 1993:22).

Our Ways of Doing are seen in our languages, art, imagery, traditions and ceremonies etc. and are a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. Again these are life stage, gender and role specific. For example, women have responsibilities and rites to fulfil as nurturers and men have responsibilities and rites to fulfil as protectors. I prefer not to elaborate on this point because it links directly to discussion of who we are, what we do and how we do this. To authenticate our worlds is ultimately something we can only do for ourselves using our own processes and tools. Anything else is an imposed view that forgets the interrelationship between

our Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing. For too long, social research has imposed its own views upon us and limited the depiction of our Ways of Being largely to our behaviours and activities - or our 'culture'. The term has lost its value and is over used when describing our worlds, our lives and beliefs. For this reason the term 'culture' is not used in this discussion of Indigenist research. Our worlds are now historically, socially and politically imbued with features of colonial, western worldviews and knowledges, discussion of our Ways of Doing must show we never relinquished, nor lost the essences of our Ways of Knowing and Being. Vince Martin, a Noonuccal man asserts:

... Well, we were bought up to share, no matter what it was. And that's still the custom these days. You can put modern life in to all those changing attitudes. Some people want to go back to the old ways, some want to go ahead. It's spreading the culture in certain ways. But you'll find the majority of these people on this island have never really lost their culture, it's just done a different way. That's the only difference ... (1997:92)

Indigenist research: towards a theoretical framework

However, for Indigenist research to be recognised by the academy of western research (West 2000) it must explicitly identify its theoretical foundations. From this, research design and methods and analysis follows. But research is essentially a western practice and not a feature of our own worlds, so a research paradigm that is entirely Indigenous is not possible. However, initial investigations show that a multi-disciplinary approach, drawing on a number of social research frameworks makes development of a theoretical framework for Indigenist research possible. Frameworks such as historiography, ethnography, phenomenology and particularly hermeneutics have some congruence and cultural safety for research involving Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands. Without going into too much detail, each gives emphasis to the lived realities of the researched and expects particular levels of engagement by the researcher that extends beyond cultural relativism. So Indigenist research juxtaposes some social research frameworks and Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. This occurs in not so much the structure of social research, but more particularly in its procedures and processes that are identified as: research question; design; conduct; analysis; interpretation; reporting and dissemination (Liamputtong Rice and Ezzy 1999; Cohen and Manion 1989; Marshall and Rossman 1989). Each is discussed in terms of Indigenist research procedures and processes.

- **Research question:** A researcher's worldview shapes the types of inquiries made, defines the assumptions underlying this and planning for research. For the Indigenist researcher, these will entail the juxtaposition of our Ways of Knowing with western knowledge traditions and theoretical frameworks. The questions the Indigenist researcher asks about self or country will be different, or give different emphasis to those of western researchers and research. The research questions of Indigenist researchers emphasise issues that are of importance to us and our survival, rather than those issues assumed by others to be important for us.
- **Research design:** Research design is embedded in theoretical framework. For Indigenist researchers design is driven by our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being and Ways of Doing but draw upon western research design structures. The design then, being responsive to the protocols of the group (or groups) will feature methods that reflect this. This will include Indigenist researchers determining their own terms of reference and referents as design features and design research that is multi-sited as it will require involvement of many individuals, groups, families and organisations. The ability to design research with both flexibility and reflexivity is essential for design soundness and is more than a matter of matching methods for data collection to the research question. There are also implications for the literature review, as this will need to extend to sources where Aboriginal people re-present their worldviews. The literature review should firstly seek out primary sources of the Aboriginal people involved, in as many forms as practicable, and then review sources by non-Aboriginal people.
- **Research conduct:** Again, this will be driven by our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being to observe protocols and respect relations and earn rights to continue the research. This requires a high level of skill to ensure it is culturally rigorous and meets demands for validity. Moreton-Robinson warns against "methodological erasure" (2000) whereby the methods for data

collection ignore and perpetuate power differentials where Aboriginal people are subjects and the researcher is the knowledgeable expert. In Indigenist research, methods for data collection are demonstrations of Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. This entails following codes for communication and protocols for interacting that expects different behaviour in different settings with different participants. This will vary in each setting and must be respected as part of the research activity, not just as a means to acquire research outcomes.

- Data analysis: Since the assumptions upon which research is based vary according to worldview of the researcher, then the criteria, categories and themes devised for data analysis will further entrench a worldview difference when working with in Aboriginal lands and/or with Aboriginal people. In what is essentially a process of making meaning from the collected data, categories, themes and patterns based on western ontological and epistemological criteria, lack 'cultural' rigour in using categories, themes and patterns. The Indigenist researcher draws upon his/her Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing to identify and categorise data, using internal logic as criteria and referents.
- Data interpretation: In western research, interpretations have depicted Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands in certain ways at certain times in the history of colonisation. These interpretations are about us, not of or by us. For the Indigenist researcher, data interpretation is more an issue of according respect to the people and country involved to allow them to tell their own stories, in their own ways. It has less to do with capturing 'truth' or drawing general conclusions, than checking and re-checking interpretations with participants. Interpretation then, needs to be reflexive and draw upon our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. This ensures our involvement in the re-presentation of country, self, family and community that can be claimed and celebrated.

Reporting and dissemination: Too often research reports and findings are written in languages and produced in styles that are not understood. They are produced to suit specific audiences and rarely the research participants. Again, the findings which are about our knowledges, beliefs and behaviours are filtered through western research reporting practices and we are marginalised and excluded from access to our own stories, histories and futures. While sometimes Aboriginal people are recognised as co-researchers and co-authors, their stories too often become the 'property' of the researcher, or research institution. Furthermore, these stories are taken into forums and discussed without our consent and without recognition of our ability to speak for ourselves. This includes reporting and dissemination of research using audio-visual, audio and information technologies. Within Indigenist research, reporting is culturally regulated through respect of protocols to others such as: asking permission, using preferred language, terms and expressions and understanding that acknowledgment of a question is not always consent.

Research ethics: Many of the decisions researchers will face are moral ones, rather than epistemological ones, so ethical behaviour needs to occur throughout the research program. It's about gaining trust and maintaining integrity. To be truly ethical requires the researcher to recognise and respond to the duality of the research contexts and act in culturally safe ways. It expects the researcher to observe codes of ethical behaviour of his/her own professional and personal worlds, and also of the world in which the research is conducted. For the Indigenist researcher, acting in a culturally safe manner is a twenty-four hours per day situation. We are accountable to ourselves, our people and country and also the research or educational institutions of which we are also a part. So within Indigenist research, ethical rigour is part and parcel of our Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

Conclusion

This discussion of Indigenist research is by no means complete and the prospect of further developments that will validate and confirm Indigenist research as a paradigm in its own right are exciting. I propose that area of further investigation must be Aboriginal philosophy that moves beyond theology or religion studies but examined for 'pure' philosophy and pre-ontological value. Indigenist research then, is about the further challenging western research in all its forms. It is about our continued assertion to take control of our lives and protect ourselves, our lands, our past, our present, and particularly our future. It is about the challenge of colonial, western ideologies that form the assumptions of western research and the assertion of Aboriginal ideologies, and re-

search that involves Aboriginal ontological frameworks, epistemological processes and Aboriginal morals and rites. As such, Indigenist research is the re-research of self (or selves) for our people and our lands. It demands of the Aboriginal re-researcher the ability to contrast existing processes, to consider our own ways, to consult as a matter of respect, to combine what is known with how it is known, and confirm one's own worldview, knowledges and beliefs to decolonise existing western research traditions. For us, it is the only way forward to a research future that shifts the boundaries, recognises multiple realities and truths, enhances opportunities for reflection of self and of research traditions.

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