



International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies

Volume 5, Number 1, 2012

Book Review: Indigenous Research Methodologies

Bagele Chilisa. Published by SAGE Publications: Los Angeles, 2012, paperback 343 pages, ISBN 978-1-4129-5882-0.

Cindy Hanson, PhD, Assistant Professor of Adult Education & HRD, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.

The transnational perspectives offered in *Indigenous Research Methodologies* by Bagele Chilisa make this book not only a valuable resource for university- and community-based research and engagement, but also one with practical and wide-reaching appeal for scholars, community researchers, and graduate students. Bagele Chilisa, a Botswana-based scholar, undertakes an extensive examination of Indigenous methodologies that draws on theories and practices from a variety of cultural and academic contexts. Her examples range across African proverbs and songs, Indigenous story-telling and mixed research methods including Indigenized Euro-Western approaches. The collection of global examples and case studies reveals the author's community- and African-based perspective, making this publication a welcome addition to previous scholarship on Indigenous methodologies. Chilisa states that the book is an attempt to address some of the queries by social science researchers who are trying to take on research with a clearer goal of social justice and human rights, and a desire to develop a platform to discuss the issues that arise in the process (p. xv).

Chilisa presents an elaboration of postcolonial Indigenous research that ties together theory and examples from practice—her own as well as that of other engaged researchers. She points out in the preface that throughout her research journey she has always noticed two paradigms in operation: that of the researched and that of the academic community. She explains that this book is premised on understanding how the researched and non-academic knowledge systems are experienced. Her understanding of the subject, much of which emerges from her rural Botswana identity (her parents were subsistence farmers) and entry into Western education, presents knowledge embedded in a localised Indigenous identity. From this valuable grounding in personal experience, she reflects upon her own academic journey 'into the empire and back as one who has studied in the Western centers' (p. 77). She not only questions her own complicity in reproducing Western knowledge, but also suggests that others do the same, claiming that:

The resistance is a challenge to Western-educated indigenous researchers, demanding that they begin to interrogate their multiple identities as colonizers participating in the Othering of their people through the use of Western research methodologies and as peripheral Others marginalized by the global network of first-world research elites and by global markets that continue to define and determine knowledge discourses on the basis of global market prices. It is in this context that a relational ethical framework in indigenous research is essential. (p. 49)

By personalising the political discourse of Indigenous research, Chilisa adds greater essence and credibility to the book.

Chilisa is concerned with ‘the recovering, valuing, and internationalizing of postcolonial indigenous epistemologies, methodologies, and methods’ (p. xvi) and throughout the 300-plus pages of text, supported by a long reference list, she makes a noteworthy endeavour to achieve this goal. The book is structured into ten chapters, each introduced by a quote with a critical perspective on the topic. The first chapter begins a discussion that situates Indigenous knowledge systems, while ensuing chapters deal with ideas of discovery and recovery of post-colonial Indigenous research. A critique of Euro-Western research, including commentary on how it frames other ways of knowing, is provided via ideas such as *Whose Reality Counts?* (the title of chapter three) which is a discussion of paradigms and practices in post-colonial and critical race theories that highlight methodologies and methods that support Indigenous epistemologies and transformative approaches to research and learning, and that honour integrative knowledge systems (chapters four to seven). Her discussion of participatory action research (PAR) in chapter eight is particularly enlightening because it engages with how PAR, as a methodology, can be commensurate with postcolonial Indigenous paradigms. She suggests that Indigenous research, similar to participatory research or similar approaches (for example, she also discusses participatory rural appraisal and appreciative inquiry), offers opportunities for holistic connections so that the ‘colonized Other’ can learn to analyse and understand his or her circumstance in order to change it —or, as Paulo Freire (1987) would say, the process of ‘reading the world’ (p. 35). While the chapter on postcolonial Indigenous feminist research engages in similar discussions, it also problematises norms imposed by Western feminism at the expense of non-Western feminisms. The final chapter brings the discussion full circle by looking closely at building partnerships and integrating knowledge systems, most of which are discussed in the preceding chapters.

Chilisa carefully describes some of the complex and multiple ways that Indigenous research can be linked to, among other things, ethics, methods, cultural responsiveness, participatory research and postcolonial research paradigms, including Indigenous feminist research. She critiques how Western knowledge disconnects relationships between research(ers) and communities, and she supports the notion that Indigenous research is about finding connections. The relational aspects of Indigenous research, for example, are frequently highlighted.

If this book has any shortcomings, it is perhaps that it tries to do too much. For example, sections on reliability and validity of results, as well as demonstrations of methods from medicine wheels to appreciative inquiry, sometimes sacrifice depth for breadth. As a text, however, this range of material is likely to engage students and hopefully encourage them to pursue research more mindfully, ethically, and respectfully. Chilisa blends the use of anecdotes, stories and narratives with case studies, charts, learning activities, descriptions of terms, along with her links to, and acknowledgement of, mixed methods, all which serve to link the researcher with the researched in a critical way that both evokes and challenges simple descriptions. In the final section entitled, ‘building partnerships and integrating knowledge systems’, the writing is on the wall: ‘the researched are gatekeepers of their indigenous knowledge’ (p. 307).

Using the Tswana language, Chilisa explains that for the researchers, it is time to legitimise and welcome postcolonial Indigenous research methodologies in an integral way because 'Mmua lebe oa bo a bua la gagwe' which she translates to mean 'everyone has a right to a say, for even what might appear like a bad suggestion helps people to think of better ideas' (p. 291). We are all connected.

As a scholar engaged in international work, I would recommend this book to those involved in any form of cross-border or international and cross-cultural work. I would also recommend it to scholars interested in models of transformative education and engaged research.

Chilisa's examples are international in scope. Understanding and finding research methodologies that are culturally complex, culturally appropriate, community based, participatory and feminist—while conscious of power relations still apparent in the research process—is increasingly required in a complex global system of geopolitical and identity diverse relationships. Toward this goal, Chilisa makes a valuable contribution.

References

Freire, P. and D. Macedo. 1987. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. Cambridge MA: Bergin and Garvey.