

A review of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York, NY: Zed Books 2012. viii + 240 pp. \$27.26. ISBN-10: 1848139500 ISBN-13: 978-1848139503

Chapter one of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* takes as its provocation, as seen in the epigraph, the title of Audre Lorde's famous essay, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master's House." While Lorde believes any opposition to European imperialism that takes advantage of colonial instruments of power is susceptible to the political desires of the ruling elite, Smith holds out hope for one of the master's more insidious tools, which, in the mind of the indigenous person, can be evoked by the mention of a single word—research. To be sure, Smith reflects, "The word itself, 'research,' is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (1). Even so, the principal objective of Smith's project is to speak to indigenous (and nonindigenous) researchers as they produce scholarship in accord with the interests and desires of those communities "who have chosen to identify themselves as indigenous" (5).

Writing from the position of the colonized Maori of New Zealand and a professor of education and Maori development at the University of Waikato, New Zealand, Smith remarks that 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" (1). For this reason, in the beginning chapters Smith explores the research setting *per se* as "a significant site of struggle between the interests and ways of knowing of the West and the interests and ways of knowing of the Other" (2). By employing poststructuralist theory Smith not only unpacks the imperialist ideologies at work within the Western academy, but also shows the contestations within imperialism itself when seen as a discursive field of knowledge.

More importantly, however, Smith remarks upon how "for indigenous people, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories" (33). Indeed, the politics of the everyday life of the indigenous person reflects this fact: "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" (31). This insight is perhaps Smith's most original and exciting contribution to what she would call "indigenous methodologies."

If the first half of Smith's book describes the "why" of indigenous methodologies, the second half describes the "how." Interestingly, one of the major challenges for Smith's project is the bias (in fact, a quite understandable one) that leads many indigenous communities in the direction of "rejecting *all* theory and *all* research" (185). Smith responds to such defensive posturing on two fronts: (one) convincing indigenous communities of the importance of

research and (two) convincing research institutions of the importance of indigenous involvement in said research. The remainder of her book is full of such discussions and prescriptions, giving much needed grounding to the often jargon riddled discourse of decolonialism.

For my own part, I often naively presume that radical academics on the left have a certain political duty to ensure that their ideas not only win a large audience, but that those ideas are, in fact, worthy of winning. Even though her ideas may not find popular acclaim (let us hope that they do), Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* is worthy of winning the crowd to which it is directed, namely indigenous researchers and "other researchers committed to producing research knowledge that documents social injustice, that recovers subjugated knowledges, that helps create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and 'listened to,' and that challenge racism, colonialism and oppression..." (198).

GEORGE SCHMIDT is an activist, community organizer, and received his master of divinity from Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York where he focused on black liberation theology. His critical work surrounds corporate personhood and the construction of a genealogy of corporate power. In the next few months he will be joining the United States Navy as a chaplain.

©George Schmidt.

Schmidt, George. "A review of Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*," in *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* vol. 13 no. 1 (Winter 2014): 165-166.