

Book Review

Methodology of the Oppressed. By Chela Sandoval. Foreword by Angela Davis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples. By Linda Tuhiwai Smith. London: Zed Books, 1999.

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It is noteworthy that Chela Sandoval and Linda Tuhiwai Smith, two well-known scholar activists, would focus on methodology in their recent book projects. Taken together, these books offer an extended reflection on Audre Lorde's provocation, "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." Initial assumptions about what exactly constitute "the master's tools" have given way to more complex deconstructions, which find that "the master's tools" were often fashioned by subalterns—whose social location and political desires left imprints on the tools themselves. Such deconstructions, however, do not end the conversation. Rather, they highlight the need to construct critical methodologies drawn from diverse traditions and to trace the appearance of oppressed and indigenous desires within "Western" critical theory.

The primary concern of *Decolonizing Methodologies* is research in indigenous communities, which is "inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (1). The guiding question of Tuhiwai Smith's work is how indigenous researchers might unhinge—or disarticulate—the work of research from its enmeshment in imperialist regimes of power/knowledge: in other words, how to decolonize research itself. The author begins with the proposition that research "can no longer be conducted with indigenous communities as if their views did not count or their lives did not matter," a position to which she would hold both indigenous and nonindigenous researchers (9). The primary task of this book is to guide indigenous scholars and activists as they attempt to conduct such research in accord with the desires of the communities they work with (and often

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come from), research the author in good humor describes as “not quite as simple as it looks, nor quite as complex as it feels” (5).

The first part of *Decolonizing Methodologies* explores “research 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). One specific site of this epistemological struggle is history itself. Echoing Gayatri Spivak’s question, “Can the subaltern speak?” Tuhiwai Smith asks, “Is history important for indigenous peoples?” (29). She develops an argument against history by drawing on poststructuralist critiques that characterize history as a specifically Western Enlightenment project. She is referring to the discipline of history, not the stories that people tell about their past, which she notes are “reclassified as oral *traditions* rather than histories” (33). The innovation of Tuhiwai Smith’s argument is her insistence that “for indigenous people, the critique of history is not unfamiliar, although it has now been claimed by postmodern theories” (33). She explains, “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. . . . These contested accounts are stored within genealogies, within the landscape, within weavings and carvings” (33). Drawing attention to critical theories connecting the project of history with imperialist ideologies, Tuhiwai Smith develops a list of ideas about history that she subjects to systematic critique from both
 q1 indigenous and poststructuralist points of view. Her list begins with “The idea that history is a totalizing discourse” and includes “the idea that history is one large chronology.” Her schematic outline of poststructuralist critiques of history—and their overlap with indigenous epistemologies—is accessible and lucid. Subsequent sections of the book provide grounded discussions of how to develop and carry out research projects in accord with the principles of decolonization and self-determination.

Sandoval’s project—while motivated by the same decolonizing impulse—is not concerned with field research as such. Instead, Sandoval rethinks the very terms of political engagement and possibility. The aim of *Methodology of the Oppressed* is to provide a “new, revitalized vocabulary” (6), to summon a “new kind of repoliticized citizen-warrior” (181). The author develops her theoretical framework by putting U.S. third-world feminist theory in conversation with theorists of decolonization, such as Frantz Fanon and Roland Barthes, and theorists of postmodernism and poststructuralism, such as Fredric Jameson, Donna Haraway, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida. The conversation staged by *Methodology of the Oppressed* enacts a kind of antidote to the “theoretical apartheid” that Sandoval finds both pervasive and debilitating.

Methodology of the Oppressed poses important challenges to feminism and women's studies. Sandoval contends that U.S. third-world feminist theory continues to be misread as pertaining to a particular demographic group (women of color) and not as a "theoretical and methodological approach in its own right" (171). In a footnote, Sandoval astutely observes, "The mystery of the academic erasure of U.S. third world feminism is an ongoing disappearing trick" (186, n. 9). Sandoval's project contravenes this erasure, placing U.S. third-world feminism on an equal footing with poststructuralism, tracing the similarity between these two intellectual and political trajectories.

In a convincing and long overdue argument, Sandoval excavates an affinity between terminologies that are usually seen as deriving from widely divergent theoretical traditions. She creates a list of terms—*hybridity*, *nomad thought*, *marginalization*, *la conciencia de la mestiza*, *trickster consciousness*, *masquerade*, *eccentric subjectivity*, *situated knowledges*, and *différance* (her list is even longer)—and argues that the "similar conceptual undergirding that unifies these terminologies" has gone unrecognized (69), evidence of theoretical apartheid but also of an emerging set of political possibilities. She writes, "What this concurrent, symptomatic, and insistent emergence is enacting out of each theoretical domain is the academic expression of a stubborn methodology . . . one that the cultural logic of late capital has made necessary . . . what I call, for political reasons, the 'methodology of the oppressed'" (72). Contra Jameson, Sandoval finds possibilities in "postmodern resistance and dissident globalization" (35).

Although quite different in content and tone, these two books converge in their explicit commitment to a process of decolonization. Both authors usefully situate their interventions in relation to globalization and its current economic, social, and political consequences for indigenous (Tuhiwai Smith) and oppressed (Sandoval) peoples. Tuhiwai Smith and Sandoval bring a history of activism to their scholarship, which infuses their work with energy and a sense of possibility while imparting wisdom that comes with practical experience. A professor of Maori education, Tuhiwai Smith is renowned for her work in developing *Te Kohanga Reo*, the Maori language nests, and was part of a group that initiated an alternative Maori elementary school movement in New Zealand. Sandoval is a Chicano/a studies professor, well known for her report on the 1981 National Association of Women's Studies Conference, where she developed a theory of U.S. third-world feminism as "differential consciousness." Informed by the politics and location of each author, these two books offer compelling discussions of methodology appropriate for graduate seminars and

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reading groups. Both books deserve a wide audience and are likely to positively influence the formulation and direction of future scholarship.

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QUERIES TO THE AUTHOR

1. Please give the page numbers for the quotations in the sentence that begins “Her list begins with.”