



Methods of decolonisation

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, an Indigenous woman (Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou) and Professor of Maori and Indigenous Studies at the University of Waikato in New Zealand, offers 25 projects that are part of a larger program of decolonisation.

Claiming: “Claiming” or “reclaiming” Indigenous identity often involves intensive research and the writing of Indigenous histories. These histories can be for non-Indigenous members of formal bodies like tribunals, the non-Indigenous public, or the Indigenous community.

Testimonies: Testimonies are a formal means of presenting oral evidence about, often in the case of Indigenous communities, painful events and experiences.

Storytelling: Storytelling passes oral histories, traditions, beliefs, and values throughout generations, creating a collective story of all Indigenous people in the community. It is also a useful form of research, as it allows for many voices and different accounts of events to come forward, each with value, and conveys aspects of culture in a unique way that leaves control of the narrative within the hands of the storyteller.

Celebrating survival: This approach flips the narrative of many non-Indigenous researchers about Indigenous communities. Instead of documenting and lamenting the demise of Indigenous culture, this approach celebrates the resiliency of Indigenous communities and the ability of these cultures to persist and adapt.

Remembering: Remembering the painful nature of the past, and how people responded to the that pain, has been an important part of communities reflecting on colonisation and healing as a whole instead of bearing suffering as an individual.

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Indigenising: This project includes re-associating and reconnecting places and ideas with Indigenous communities and disconnecting them from their colonised narratives.

Intervening: Projects utilising intervention as a strategy typically seek to make some sort of structural or cultural change around Indigenous people, rather than forcing Indigenous people to change to fit the systems already in place. This strategy is based in action.

Revitalising: This project focuses largely on revitalising languages that are either “dead” or “dying” with very few speakers. Erasing the use of Indigenous languages was a key strategy of colonialism, as language conveys important aspects of culture. Revitalisation projects encourage use of Indigenous languages, educate speakers, and publish works in Indigenous languages.

Connecting: Some of these projects seek to reconnect children that were taken from Indigenous parents with their families, fostering connections between Indigenous people. These projects can also attempt to reconnect people with the environment, such as revitalising cultural practices that tie Indigenous people to traditional lands. Some of our collaborators are part of the New Hampshire Commission on Native American Affairs.

Reading: This strategy requires turning a critical eye toward Western accounts of history and understanding need for multiple narratives and lenses through which to view history.

Writing: The writing of Indigenous stories by Indigenous authors is an important aspect of decolonising methodologies.

Representing: Indigenous people have a right to represent themselves. Colonialism has worked to oppress the voice of Indigenous communities, instead making decisions for these people to either suppress their rights or in the belief that Indigenous people are like children that have to be protected and stewarded. Representing can occur at various levels, such as through art and media, but also at the level of national politics, attempting to have Indigenous concerns heard and addressed.

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Gendering: This project addresses the relationships between Indigenous men and women, which were negatively impacted by colonialism, and can include attempting to restore women to the roles they once held. The assumption that women were subservient was a Western one, not an Indigenous practice.

Envisioning: This term conveys a sense of hopefulness. Indigenous people and culture have survived, persisted, and will continue to work toward a better future.

Reframing: The way that issues surrounding Indigenous communities are framed has caused difficulties in addressing those issues in meaningful and productive ways. Reframing requires using a broader context that takes into account history and the impacts of imperialism.

Restoring: Restoring is rooted in healing and takes a holistic approach. Across a variety of issues, such as disease, mortality, and incarceration, Indigenous are disproportionately negatively impacted. Restorative justice is a method that has been used in South Africa to address Apartheid and in Canada to address the harm done to Indigenous people. This process seeks to address suffering and promote healing.

Returning: This project includes the repatriation of Indigenous items, such as human remains, that currently reside in museums. It also seeks to return traditional lands to the Indigenous communities that historically lived there or utilised certain resources.

Democratising: The interference of colonial states constructed systems of power and decision-making bodies in Indigenous communities that privileged some over others. This project works to expand the scope of participation and restoring Indigenous ideals and practices.

Networking: Building trust, having face-to-face interactions, and making connections are key aspects of networking. Networking brings Indigenous people together and helps to disseminate knowledge and information through these formed relationships. Networking occurs at meetings of the Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative.

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Naming: Places and people with Indigenous names were often changed to Western ones during the period of colonialism. The process of naming asserts a certain amount of control over reality, and the naming of places and people with their Indigenous titles captures Indigenous knowledge and meaning that can't be conveyed any other way.

Protecting: Protecting can apply on large and small scales toward people, places, beliefs, and languages. It is as much about protecting tangible bodies as a way of life.

Creating: The process of creating and imagining transcends simply a need for basic survival. It allows for hopefulness for the future, as well as developing creative solutions to problems from an Indigenous perspective.

Negotiating: Negotiating requires working strategically toward long-term goals. In the past, negotiations have worked toward the self-preservation and long-term survival of the community, while contemporary negotiations tend toward self-determination and returning.

Discovering: This project involves using and applying science to Indigenous interests.

Sharing: Sharing knowledge for and between Indigenous people benefits and informs the community. This is a responsibility of the research process.

Adapted from resources from the Indigenous New Hampshire Collaborative.
<https://indigenousoh.com/2018/10/26/methods-of-decolonization/>

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