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*Indigenous data sovereignty: Towards an agenda*. Kukutai, Tahu, and Taylor, John (Eds.). (2016). Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press. 318 pp. ISBN: 9781760460310. Book review DOI: 10.20507/MAIJournal.2017.6.2.9

Indigenous innovation continues to forge new pathways towards decolonisation in an increasingly digitised world. For populations in the CANZUS states (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America), the internet and digital data have provided windows of opportunity to speak about and hold colonising state powers accountable for injustices against Indigenous people. Statistics produced by government census surveys have informed many of these conversations, and despite their “official” status, these data are not neutral by nature. Statistics about Indigenous people present discussions ranging from deficit and disparity to matters of justice and equity.

In *Indigenous Data Sovereignty: Towards an Agenda*, editors Tahu Kukutai and John Taylor illuminate how Indigenous peoples are navigating ownership and integrity of data about and for our peoples. They bring together a broad collection of voices that contextualise the data histories of colonising nation-states

and discuss different interpretations of a future in which Indigenous information independence is recognised. The writers assert and position themselves within a critical framework supporting Indigenous potential with handling data. In a time of rapid innovation, this book is timely and appealing, and for young Māori readers who are fluent in the new languages of the digital age it promises a new wero.

The book does not shy away from the fact of Indigenous peoples being consistently compared against a Western standard of living that is both inappropriate and inaccurate in capturing our unique (colonised) realities. In Chapter 5, Maggie Walter, a trawlwoolway woman of the pymmerrairrener nation in Tasmania, identifies her five Ds of data characterised by disparity, deprivation, disadvantage, dysfunction and difference. Following this, in Chapter 7, Diane E. Smith (Australian) likens the treatment of Indigenous knowledge by governments to “data nullius”, whereby the social and family

structures of Indigenous communities have been overlooked and instead streamlined into a more “convenient”, yet ill-fitting, Western conceptualisation. The greatest challenge in reclaiming ownership of our data, of course, is navigating ourselves away from the value systems of the coloniser and placing priority on (re)interpreting data from an Indigenous perspective.

Relatedly, it is important to discuss the subject of the “postcolonial” and its inclusion in a conversation about *Indigenous* data sovereignty. Throughout the book there are uncomfortable and ambiguous jumps between decolonisation in theory and in practice, alongside mentions of the “postcolonial”. Linda Smith’s familiar perspective comes to mind to the Indigenous reader: “Naming the world as ‘post-colonial’ is, from indigenous perspectives, to name colonisation as ‘finished business’” (Smith, 1998, p. 14). Certainly, the few authors who use “postcolonial” articulate that it is a contested term. In Chapter 3, C. Matthew Snipp (Cherokee) suggests viewing postcolonialism as a continuum, although later he claims “it may make little sense to talk about a fully postcolonial world” (p. 52). In another chapter, Ian Pool (New Zealander) refers to a “postcolonial era” when systems introduced by colonisers gained “data suzerainty” (i.e., dominance over existing and independent systems used by sovereign iwi Māori; see p. 58). Pool goes on to ask whether colonial acts “accidentally submerged or intentionally expunged” (p. 61) Indigenous knowledge and epistemology. This book alone serves as evidence of a need for Indigenous reclamation and rewriting of our data, following a history of being misrepresented and negatively affected by colonial value systems. It leaves one wondering how and why authors would propose that colonial acts might be merely “accidental” in the context of an ongoing struggle for Indigenous peoples to assert our sovereignty.

The authors also explore what happens (or could happen) when data from colonial systems are transferred into Indigenous ownership.

Members of Whakatōhea iwi Maui Hudson, Dickie Farrar and Lesley McLean highlight hapū and iwi needs for managing and reclaiming data in a Te Tiriti o Waitangi settlement process. This example illustrated the layers of colonial processes that Indigenous people must navigate simply to be heard, well before any data exchange and reinterpretation occurs. Rawiri Jensen (Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Hinerangi) refers to this as the “data shadow” of a colonial legacy. Indeed, the everyday practice of decolonising data about Indigenous people meets with the intersecting demands of navigating a colonised world and wanting to create a future in which data collected about us reflects *our* values and systems.

An agenda has been set for Indigenous data sovereignty to be manifest worldwide through the ongoing work of Indigenous peoples and social scientists living in colonised nations. In the later chapters of the book, James Hudson (Ngāti Awa, Tuhoe, Ngāti Pukeko and Ngaitai) and Ray Lovett (Aboriginal, Wongaibon) identify a mandate for expertise, innovation and greater capacity building among Indigenous populations in order to authentically use and develop our own measures to assess our standard of living and contribute towards our sovereignty, our decolonisation. The book delves into confronting legal systems laden with colonial values relating crucially to cultural, intellectual, land, resource and even internal administrative rights.

Finishing this book, readers are left with both a mandate and a challenge for moving forward. Kukutai and Taylor answer a long-awaited call for sovereignty over data that affect our lives as Indigenous people. Moving forward, the agenda should continue to open up to the possibilities of Indigenous innovation and, perhaps, meddle less in contested and colonising terminology (i.e., “postcolonial”), looking instead to the challenges of decolonisation in practice. As Indigenous people, we are continually tasked with navigating power imbalances and spaces that (can) colonise our potential.

Active decolonisation practices provide opportunities for us to represent ourselves and our futures in ways that our ancestors dreamed of. It is imperative that we continue challenging colonial value systems and Western academic traditions to continue carving our own space as Indigenous researchers, social scientists and community members who are able to represent ourselves, by ourselves and for our future generations.

### Glossary

hapū	sub-tribe that shares a common ancestor
iwi	tribal kin group; nation
Te Tiriti o Waitangi	The Treaty of Waitangi
wero	challenge

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