

ROWING UPSTREAM: CONTEXTUALISING INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PROCESSES AND METHODOLOGIES THROUGH THE UTILIZATION OF ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

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ABSTRACT

The use of indigenous research ethics has a possibility of contextualising indigenous research. Orthodox research is guided by ethical principles which are meant to protect the institution or researcher and the participants. Despite the existence of the ethical pronouncements, literature has shown that research has proven to be a source of distress for indigenous people. Research has historically drawn upon frameworks, processes and practices of colonial, Western worldviews and the inherent knowledge, methods, morals and beliefs (Martin, 2001). This has led to the perceived notion of insensitivity towards indigenous people. First, they are not only regarded as a “problem” to be solved by external experts, they are treated as passive “objects” that require assistance from external experts. In view of these arguments one can deduce that the orthodox research methods have somehow failed to uphold the contextuality of research methods. Stemming from the incompatibility between orthodox research methods and the indigenous milieu has been the predominantly negative indigenous experience of research which has resulted in not only scepticism towards researchers but also to research processes and outcomes. For instance, indigenous people are on record saying, “researchers are like mosquitoes; they suck your blood and leave”. The umbrage has prompted robust calls from indigenous scholars and research ethicists to develop new paradigms of research that have a decolonizing agenda upholding Indigenous ethical archetype. This being a concept the article utilised descriptive and analytical approaches to examine how the indigenous research ethical modus operandi can be a lever to contextualize research. The article concludes by positing that to lessen the skepticism of indigenous peoples cultural sensitivity should be embodied in ethical considerations to negate any dilemmas. Further it avers that in the application of research methods ethical principles such as informed consent should not be taken at face value, but should be considered at a deeper level.

Keywords: Indigenous research, research methods, ethical considerations.

CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Research is a systematic inquiry with the aim to discover and interpret new knowledge that adds to the domain of knowledge (Maucaulay *et al.*, 1999). The quest for knowledge has always been central to human existence since the early beginnings of human history. However, what constitutes knowledge and the appropriate ways of producing such knowledge has been the subject of much debate over the years. For example, the thinking that dominated social research during the 19th and early 20th centuries (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007) was that scientific knowledge is the paragon of reality and as such

scientific knowledge must be free of metaphysics (Howe, 1988). The belief was that scientific knowledge must be based on pure observation that is free of the interests, values, purposes and psychological schemata of individuals and that anything that deserves the name “knowledge” must measure up to these standards. This school of thought contended that social observations should be treated as entities in much the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena and that social science inquiry should be objective. That is, time- and context-free generalizations are desirable and possible, and real causes of social scientific outcomes can be determined reliably and validly (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie and Turner, 2007).

According to this school of thought, investigators should eliminate their biases, remain emotionally detached and uninvolved with the objects of study, and test or empirically justify their stated hypotheses. The ontological position that guided this school of thought was that there is only one truth, an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Sale, Lohfeld and Brazil, 2002). Epistemologically, the investigator and investigated are independent entities. Therefore, the investigator is capable of studying a phenomenon without influencing it or being influenced by it (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Continued criticisms of this school of thought led to the rise of the qualitative research paradigm between 1900 and 1950 (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2007). This paradigm which marked the late 19th century until approximately 1990 holds that at least as far as social sciences are concerned, metaphysics (in the form of human intentions, beliefs, and so forth) cannot be eliminated; observation cannot be pure in the sense altogether excluding interests, values, purposes and psychological schemata (Howe, 1988). This paradigm contends that multiple-constructed realities abound, that time- and context-free generalizations are neither desirable nor possible, that research is value-bound, that it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects, that logic flows from specific to general (e.g., explanations are generated inductively from the data), and that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The foregoing arguments illuminate the origins of research paradigms. This historical analogy gives foundation for understanding perspectives of indigenous research methodologies.

RATIONALE FOR CONTEXTUALISING RESEARCH

Ruttan (2004) declares that research is contextual, influenced by the political, historical, economic, geographic, socio-cultural and environmental realities of both the researcher and the participants. Despite the declared contextual nature the word ‘research’ is regarded as one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary (Smith, 1999). Firstly, research to some people is an encounter between the west and the marginalized or the other (Louis, 2007; Smith, 1999). Secondly, others see research as a political weapon used to inflict dominance of western ideologies or epistemologies over others (Maucaulay *et al.*, 1999). Thirdly, others view it with suspicion and hostility as something intrusive,

exploitative, and unethical resulting in inaccurate and inadequate, reporting, leading to the creation of dehumanizing stereotypes about indigenous life and culture (Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004; Smith, 1999). The misgivings stem from the lack of congruence between precepts of indigenous worldview and orthodox research. Notably, the drive to reposition indigenous scholarship including research through decolonization has made huge inroads evident from audible voices of indigenous scholars, research ethicists and progressive researchers in general.

In the past few years most research ethicists have raised concerns over research conducted in underdeveloped, previously marginalised and vulnerable persons, which may include children, persons with developmental or cognitive disabilities, persons who are institutionalized, the homeless or those without legal status including indigenous peoples (Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004; Lavallee, 2004; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999). In particular apprehensions were raised about indigenous people, being tired of being studied, frustrated with researchers' relentless untruths and deliberately fictitious information (Hart, 2010; Louis, 2007; Smith, 1999; Wulff, 2010). In the same vein, Dunbar and Scrimgeour (2006) and Kahakalau (2004) argue for a fundamental repositioning of indigenous peoples from that of research subjects to active participants in all aspects of the research activity. Notable, research reform advocates for the repositioning and prioritisation of individual and community ethical needs because these have been marginalized. Evidently, underpinning these concerns is the standing argument that historically research has not always been of significant benefit to indigenous peoples' and that in some instances research activity has been seriously damaging, insensitive, intrusive and exploitative (Gorman and Tooms, 2009; Lavallee, 2009; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004; Wulff, 2010). Additionally, academic institutions have developed research ethics to monitor the ethical conduct of their own researchers, partly as self-protection measures not focusing on the protection or recognition of indigenous protocols (Lavallee, 2009).

EMERGENCE OF INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PARADIGM

The emergence of indigenous research paradigms founded upon indigenous worldviews, knowledge and protocols was imminent. Indigenous research, which is postcolonial research, is a knowledge seeking process guided by natural laws and ethical principles that comprise multiple relationships with others, nature, and the cosmos (Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004). Indigenous research is predicated on decolonization and contextualisation of orthodox research methods and practice. Literature indicates that decolonization and contextualisation is embodied in ethical principles which have to be integrated into the different stages of the research process, from question formulation, site selection, and measurement to data analysis, interpretation and reporting (Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999). Given that peoples and communities of the universe have inherent diverse perspectives, paradigms, orientations and worldviews, contextualising research is a research, because, what works in a certain

context might not necessarily work in a different context with a different set of realities.

Considering that research is a species of systematic and scientific investigative process, generally guided by ethical conventions or canons, the article examines how the latter can be utilized as a lever to contextualize research processes and methodologies creating an alignment with indigenous settings. In a nutshell, ethics is the moral correctness of a specified conduct it entails social responsibility that refuses to accept needless human suffering and exploitation (Hart, 2010; Lincoln and Gonzalez, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Ethics resonate with integrity based on an obligation to oneself and to others. Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004 aver that ethics is not the same as feelings, it is not religion, nor is it a science. Instead ethics are the values, principles, intentions, personal sense of responsibility, and self-definition that guide behaviours, practices, and action towards others (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Ermine, Sinclair and Jeffrey, 2004; First Nation Centre, 2007). At first glance it would appear that culture and ethics are unrelated, but in general men and women conduct their affairs and enterprises, and live according to the values that they have derived from their cultural heritage (Gallagher, Creighton and Gibbons, 1995; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, because the values of each cultural heritage differ in some form and degree that is why there might be a conflict in the interpretation or implementation of ethical standards.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND DILEMMAS IN RESEARCH

Because research usually involves humans as subjects or participants, ethics become critical to address unique and complex, legal, cultural, social and political issues (Hart, 2010; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999). Likewise, research often engrosses a great deal of cooperation and coordination among people in different settings, disciplines and institutions, ethical principles that promote values such as trust, accountability, mutual respect, and fairness which are critical to collaborative work are pertinent (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Porsanger, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). Literature indicates broadly that the objectives of ethics in research ethics is to protect human participants, to ensure that research is conducted in a way that serves interests of individuals, groups and/or society as a whole and to examine specific research activities and projects for their ethical soundness, looking at issues such as the management of risk, protection of confidentiality and the process of informed consent (Kenny, 2004; Lavalley, 2009).

Although research ethical principles are widely lauded as norm or practice, what continues to be challenging is how individuals interpret, apply, and balance these norms in different ways in light of their own values and life experiences (Gallagher, Creighton and Gibbons, 1995). Literature indicates that over the years, philosophers and ethicists have developed different approaches to determine ethical standards for different settings (Gallagher, Creighton and Gibbons, 1995):

- The utilitarian approach places emphasis on ethical action producing the greatest good doing the least harm for all who are affected including the community and the environment.
- The rights approach is premised on the belief that humans have dignity based on their human nature, on the basis of such dignity, they have a right to be treated as ends and not merely as means to other ends.
- The fairness or justice approach is based on the idea that human beings are equal therefore they should be treated equally.
- The common good approach is predicated on the notion that life in a community is as good in itself and suggests that the interlocking relationships of society are the basis of ethical reasoning and that respect and compassion for others especially the vulnerable, are requirements of such reasoning.
- The virtue approach denotes that ethical actions ought to be consistent with ideal virtues like truth, beauty, honesty, courage, compassion, generosity, tolerance, love, fidelity, integrity, fairness, self-control and prudence that enable us to act according to the highest potential of our character.

Some of these approaches may facilitate the determination of standards of behaviour that can be considered ethical. These approaches to ethical principles were not uniformly and consistently applied when it came to researching indigenous knowledge contexts. However, depending on the contextual realities, the approaches may be blended to augment each other's limitations and thereby ensure overall fairness of ethical considerations.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It is important that the indigenous research processes and methodologies are informed by appropriate ethical principles to ensure accountability, compatibility with indigenous values and beneficence to the indigenous communities. It is an undisputed fact worldwide that research has to be conducted within an ethical order informed by ethical principles. While communities might share some commonalities with regards to ethics clearly there are distinct and unique principles that evolve specific social systems, laws, and worldviews (Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The question is: how can existing ethical principles be contextualised to indigenous knowledge processes and methodologies and what should be ethical considerations that should inform the processes?

ETHICAL PRINCIPLES THAT INFORM RESEARCH

The orthodox ethical principles known worldwide generally include consent (autonomy), non-maleficence (cause no harm), beneficence, confidentiality and justice. On the other hand, values that underlie indigenous ethical research include integrity, reciprocity, respect, equality, survival and protection, responsibility, consultation, negotiation and mutual understanding, recognition and involvement, benefits, outcomes and agreement, community control, free and

informed consent (Ermine *et al.*, 2004); Gallagher, Creighton and Gibbons, 1995; Gorman and Tooms, 2009; Hart, 2012; Kahakalau, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999).

The following paragraphs examine the orthodox ethical principles alongside indigenous ethical pronouncements to determine how the latter measures in an indigenous ethical order.

Consent – Respect for Autonomy

The principle of autonomy recognizes the rights of individuals to self-determination. This is rooted in society's respect for individuals' ability to make informed decisions about personal matters. Free and informed consent in the academic setting rests on a western-biased presumption that competent adults generally have the capacity and right to decide whether or not to participate in a research study (Ermine *et al.*, 2004). Consent in this format rests on the assumption that the individual has a legal right to decide whether or not to voluntarily participate in a study (Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The notion of individuality has its roots in the western milieu, as opposed to the concept of collective ownership which is understood and practiced in indigenous settings. For instance, Ermine *et al.* (2004) and Smith (1999) affirm that knowledge is collectively owned, discovered, used, and taught and is collectively guarded by appropriate delegated or appointed collective. Given that the practice of collectivity includes bringing together multiple stakeholders (community leaders, elders, or even groups of community members) to negotiate and renegotiate multiple agendas and schedules (Macaulay *et al.*, 1999), obtaining consent from individuals in indigenous communities might be problematic. This is due to the contradictory nature of the two notions, individuality versus collectivity. This begs the question of coercion whereby the individual is obligated to participate in research.

However, because collectivity is based on trust and honesty, ethicists gravitate that in an environment with a collective orientation, getting consent should be an on-going process that is involving, not merely an event or hoop to pass through before heading into the field to conduct research (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Gallagher *et al.*, 1995; Hart, 2010; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). The critical element of this process is the dialogue that should lead to the enhancement of a culture of consultation that will breed trust, respect, responsibility and honesty. Importantly, consultation is regarded as a lever that could reposition communities as partners and not merely subjects or token participants in research projects (Kenny, 2004; Louis, 2007; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999). Unless indigenous communities are repositioned as partners, literature indicates that research in these settings will continue to be regarded with great suspicion, as opportunistic and exploitative.

Non-malificence

Researchers have an obligation to cause no harm. However, research has been perceived as a source of distress for indigenous people (Gorman and Tooms, 2009; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004)

because of inappropriate methods and practices. For instance, Cochran and others (2006) highlight that researchers are like mosquitoes as they suck your blood and leave. This perception has caused a serious indictment for research in particular as it is applied to indigenous settings. Evidently, the principle of causing no harm is well known and is undisputed, but how far researchers understand the meaning and implications of this prescript remains to be seen. It has come out strongly in the literature that harm can be experienced can take different trajectories and can be experienced in different spheres including physical, emotional, spiritual, economic, social, political, cultural, to mention just a few. It is in this regard that the principle of non-maleficence needs to be given serious consideration in accordance with local actualities, because what is regarded as offensive in one setting might be seen as harmless in another.

For example, orthodox research asserts that a research process should start with the identification of a problem that needs to be understood and possibly solved. On the other hand, this is one of the contentious issues that orthodox research has been criticised about. The assigning of a problem on research dealings with indigenous peoples (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Porsanger, 1999) creates an industry where the 'indigenous problem' is mapped, described in all its different manifestations, getting rid of it, laying blame for it, talking about it, writing about it, and researching it (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Kenny, 2004; Louis, 2007; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004).

This is an allusion that researchers need to take cognizance of a practice may inadvertently cause harm if applied without a deep understanding of inherent ranges in existence in different communities. It is clear that if researchers continue to have difference blindness, the word research will continue to be misunderstood and misrepresented.

Beneficence

Literature has shown that benefits accruing from research activities usually go to the researcher or the institution with little or no benefit to the communities. The principle of beneficence is a principle of care, reciprocity, or giving back which should ensure direct and tangible benefits to the community. Reciprocity can occur on multiple levels. At face value this is a good principle, the problem arises when the researcher decides based on conjectures that certain benefits will be good for the research participants. Literature has shown that it is best for researchers to start by acknowledging that the community is best able to define what their needs and wants are, and what will be most beneficial for them (Cochran *et al.*, 2006; Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Gorman and Tooms, 2009; Kenny, 2004; Louis, 2007; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). In keeping with the decolonizing notion of an indigenous research framework, reciprocity also includes the advancement of indigenous ways of knowing (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Hart, 2012; Kahakalau, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Porsanger, 1999). This being the case, Lavallee (2009) avers that researchers can, contribute to the creation of an environment wherein communities are empowered.

Reciprocity can happen at different levels and it extends beyond the immediate research participants. For instance, Baskin (2005) indicates that gifts like tobacco, monetary gifts, or any other gift that is in line with the cultural and social protocols of the participants might be given to demonstrate respect for the knowledge that the participant will be providing. However, Kenny (2004) cautions that this is just but one level, there are also opportunities for training local people in areas of interviewing, organizational skills, scheduling meetings, transcribing and computer skills. Such skills will be beneficial to community members for future research projects, and the community as a whole gains skilled people who will play an important role in community research (Ermine *et al.*, (2004); Gallagher *et al.*, 1995; Kenny, 2004; Lavalley, 2009; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999). They further add that research with the Indigenous community is a commitment that extends well beyond the final report, dissertation, peer-reviewed article submission, or conference presentation it is a lifelong relationship and commitment.

Funding and the Politics of Research Ethics

The most serious apprehension with regard to indigenous communities is that in general they usually do not have access to research monies or funds. Indigenous people are on record saying that researchers are a privileged group of people who get money to do research on them. Sadly, in the effort to secure grants for research projects, researchers magnify and dramatise the problems of indigenous communities (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Lavalley, 2009; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999). On the other hand, while huge monies are allocated for research or other projects undertaken in indigenous communities, indigenous people have to beg, borrow and steal to do things to save their culture (Kenny, 2004).

Likewise, no consideration is given to financial, physical and intellectual drain endured by elders, who as custodians of information usually share it with researchers. This is a heartrending reality. To address this anomaly propositions forwarded suggest that, revenue created through research publications, payments received through recognition and prestige of the work, grants, royalties, and honorariums given to the researcher should be linked to the community in an appropriate proportion (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Gorman and Tooms, 2009; Hart, 2012; Kahakalau, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999).

Confidentiality

Confidentiality, in western academic research is paramount and must be incorporated into the design as well as guaranteed in writing by both the researcher and participants (Kenny, 2004; Smith, 1999). The principle of confidentiality can, like other ethical principles inadvertently violate ethical codes. For instance, in the name of upholding confidentiality the researcher's voice may feature prominently at the expense of the information giver who may disappear into oblivion. In confirming the preceding statement Smith (1999), argues that from the indigenous perspective, smuggling of knowledge happens through the confidentiality clause in ways that highlight the researcher and the researcher's interpretation of knowledge, but hides the source of information.

Another critical aspect includes the breach of confidentiality wherein the researcher discloses or writes about knowledge without the community or individual consent to write or publish (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Gallagher *et al.*, 1995; Louis, 2007; Macaulay *et al.*, 1999; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). It had come out strongly from the literature that lack of consultation with the community might result in misinterpretation and misrepresentation of facts which is usually derogatory in nature. It is critical to exercise discretion when deciding on the extent and implications of confidentiality as applied in different settings. This is critical because once more the application of this principle might have unintended consequences.

Anonymity

Participants in indigenous contexts prefer their names to be associated with the insights that they would have shared with the researcher. "The act of sharing through personal narrative, teaching story, and general conversation is a method by which each generation is accountable to the next in transmitting knowledge" (Kovach, 2009: 14). This is in stark contrast with the western view that participants should be anonymous. Anonymity may mean that the informants are not accountable for the information they provide. In such circumstance fabrication of the results by the researcher may not be ruled out as it is not easy to trace back the piece of information to anyone as the results will be as anonymous as the informants.

Information Ownership or Stewardship

Research involves scientific inquiry. Specifically, indigenous research gravitates for the development of a sound relationship or partnership between givers and receivers of knowledge. The issue of control over knowledge once research is completed is contentious. There are questions of ownership, who controls the knowledge and who has the right to disseminate this knowledge, both as an educational tool and as a commodity (Smith, 1999). In orthodox research the researcher assumes ownership which is an act that is questionable from an indigenous perspective which avers that the givers retain authority. The basis of this argument according to Ermine *et al.* (2004), Smith (1999) and Weber-Pillwax (2004) is that heritage can never be alienated, surrendered or sold, except for conditional use not ownership. They further proclaim that researchers are caretakers of knowledge carried by others therefore for them to take credit for such work would be profane. This argument is based on the notion that in the indigenous context, knowledge is a gift and the researcher is indebted to give credit to the source which means that participants ought to be named if they consent to it and receive recognition in any reporting or publications (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Gallagher *et al.*, 1995; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004).

This highlights the lack of congruence once again between the legality of ownership based on the framework of western law and indigenous protocols. For example, the fact that indigenous communities subscribe to collective ownership when interpreted from a western perspective this means no ownership. This unfortunately opens the door to state ownership (Gorman and Tooms, 2009;

Hart, 2012), which translates into the concept of public domain or public ownership, where research because of academic freedom have due rights (Kahakalau, 2004; Kenny, 2004; Porsanger, 1999; Smith, 1999). This gives researchers the right to be protected under the Intellectual Property Act. This is a dilemma because researchers, as producers of information, are by right not entitled to sole intellectual property therefore it should at least be a case of negotiated joint ownership between the community and the researcher.

There is no easy way to do this considering that researchers are funded by the university or other funding bodies which in most cases claim ownership of the work and publishing rights. There is also the issue of journals where most of the research output is published. Most of these publications have contractual requirements that require the author to surrender copyright ownership of an article. The debate about this issue is still ongoing because information published in most journals become inaccessible to the very people where the research was conducted. However there is limited hope to this debacle because of a strong drive towards open access which is gradually gaining acceptance and appreciation. However, linked to the issue, accessibility is the issue of language used to publish most of these scholarly publications. Given that most of these journals use scholarly or academic languages, which in most cases are foreign to indigenous people, even publishing in open access solved just a small aspect of the problem.

However, all is not lost, as there are new trends or models that seek to address these challenges. These include, but are not limited to the drive towards ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Gallagher *et al.*, 1995; Kahakalau, 2004; Wulff, 2010; Weber-Pillwax, 2004), founded on partnerships and collaboration between researchers and indigenous communities. These new trends and models recognize indigenous rights and jurisdiction and are linked to the agenda of self-determination and the empowerment of participants through co-authorship or similar acknowledgement (Gallagher *et al.*, 1995).

These new initiatives might minimize the misgivings about research and narrow the gap between the researchers and the research participants, or partners as it were. This will mean the repositioning of researchers, a paradigm shift and change of focus whereby researchers do not become gatekeepers to information, but actually enhancers of the research super highway. This is a super highway that if correctly construed and implemented could mean not only an ethical crossover of research into different jurisdictions and cultures, but also open flows of information between researchers and community partners. To actualise this notion various authors advocate for cultural interaction (Ermine *et al.*, 2004; Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 2004). This will be a process whereby researchers will not only be required to deal with people, but will also be required to take sensitivity training, learn protocols and traditions and establish culturally relevant processes in research. In essence, this requires a protracted process of dialogue and negotiation between institutions, researchers and indigenous authorities.

CONCLUSIONS

Hitherto, research among the indigenous people was not “managed in a germane manner” (Struthers, 2001: 127) and research benefits often went to the researcher, “not the people being researched” (Bishop, 1997: 36). Ethical principles were applied from the point of view of the researcher and not the researched. Interpreting and applying ethical principles should be seriously considered as it might have unintended consequences. Orthodox ethical principles should be contextualised and aligned with indigenous settings and protocols. For instance, the Norwegian sociologist Ryen (2004), reporting on her field experience in Tanzania, Kenya and Indonesia, pointed out that informed consent is an ethical preoccupation and cultural artifact of Western societies and is inappropriate in oral cultures. To change the status quo and to get researchers to respect the context of research ethics and think out of the orthodox research ethics box is like rowing upstream. Advocacy for context bound ethical principles will remain important.

Research that is contextually relevant to the indigenous people, and informed by the indigenous ethos should ensure that: (a) the research process be in line with indigenous values; (b) there is some form of community accountability (letting their names stand); (c) research gives back to and benefits the community; and (d) the researcher is an ally and will do no harm (Kovach, 2009: 48). Harm on the researched may be physical, spiritual, metaphysical, and so on depending on how the researcher reports and interprets the results of an investigation among indigenous people. In fact, the application of research methods ethical principles should not be universalised, instead it should be context bound.

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