Hood, S., Hopson, R., & Frierson, H., (2015). *Continuing the journey to reposition culture and cultural context in evaluation theory and practice.* Charlotte, NC: Information Age. ISBN 978-162396935-6.

Reviewed by Akashi Kaul, George Mason University

Continuing the conversation they started in their 2005 edited volume, *The Role of Culture and Cultural Context: A Mandate for Inclusion, the Discovery of Truth, and the Understanding in Evaluative Theory and Practice*, Hood, Hopson, and Frierson take the discussion on the role of culture and cultural context in evaluation to its logical next step in their new edited volume, *Continuing the Journey to Reposition Culture and Cultural Context in Evaluation Theory and Practice*. A part of the Evaluation and Society series (edited by Jennifer C. Greene and Stewart Donaldson), the volume editors attempt to further their previous discussion by charting the advances made in Culturally Relevant Evaluation (CRE) since 2005.

While their first volume sought to define CRE and elaborate on the characteristics of culturally responsive evaluation and a culturally responsive evaluator, this current volume illustrates the growth in the field—especially among new evaluators—by featuring cases where culture is central to the discussion. Hood, Hopson, and Frierson preface the volume by highlighting that CRE can no longer be viewed as a luxury in the larger field of evaluation—on the contrary, it is now a necessity, given the "acceleration in the acknowledgement of racial, ethnic, language and cultural diversity in the U.S. population and other Western nations" (p. xiii). This statement could perhaps be extended to include the dynamics and requirements of the developing world, too. The extent to which Western epistemologies and evaluation practices determine program design and outcome in international development contexts is staggering and in dire need of review. Given the editors' claim that CRE can be a tool for the traditionally disenfranchised, the inclusion of the developing world in this discussion is imperative.

While not directly addressing cultural considerations in international development evaluation in the preface or in the conclusion, the editors have made sure to include cases that do. The volume is divided into four sections, each speaking to a specific element of CRE. This review seeks to understand the milieu of the book through some of the key articles in each section. Section I, titled "CRE Theoretical and Historical Legacies and Extensions," charts the evolution of CRE. Consisting of four chapters, this section unpacks issues ranging from the role of CRE within Theory Driven Evaluation (TDE) to a systems approach to CRE to the contributions of Rose Butler Browne—the first African American woman to receive a doctorate in education from Harvard—to the field of evaluation. The

Corresponding author: Akashi Kaul; akashikaul@gmail.com

standout article in this section, however, is the discussion on validity and its role in Indigenous Evaluation Framework, speaking specifically to multicultural validity, written by Joan LaFrance, Karen E. Kirkhart, and Richard Nichols. The authors claim that validation acts as a gatekeeper for ideas, methods, and worldviews that are recognized as being legitimate. Validity carries cultural authority by virtue of the power placed in the construct. Essentially, validity is the construct of privilege that distinguishes between "acceptable" and "nonacceptable" research. While opening up the conceptualization of validity to allow for cultural variation seems like a practice in recognizing multiple worldviews, validity as a construct is rendered useless if it is broadened to include everything. Concluding that evaluation practices had to be grounded in the local culture, language, and context to ensure the sovereignty of the historically oppressed and traditionally disenfranchised populations, the authors acknowledge that this is just the beginning of the discussion on the validity of validity in multicultural settings.

Section II, titled "Evaluators' Journeys of Introspection and Self-exploration," consists of five chapters, each of which narrates the author's experience with CRE and preparation for CRE. Hazel Symonette provides a comprehensive framework for evaluators intending to practice CRE, focusing on self-assessment and sensitization to the contexts of evaluation. Meanwhile Rae Torrie, Mathea Roorda, Robin Peace, Mark Dalgety, and Robyn Bailey write about the experiences of five Pakeha—white New Zealander—evaluators who practice CRE. Each of these chapters delves into self-reflection and self-assessment and how different evaluators practicing CRE experience it. Dominica McBride writes about cultural neuroscience and psychology and its importance in CRE. Grounding evaluation as a human process initially, McBride argues that not only does culture have a psychological impact on decisions and actions, it in fact has a neurological effect, and neglecting that is counterproductive to the evaluation process. Further, McBride elaborates on the concepts of cultural reactivity and cultural responsiveness, where the former discounts culture as an essential part of the evaluation process and the latter embraces it. Consequently, taking a reactive approach to culture, rather than a responsive one, can taint data and lead to inaccurate evaluations. This further justifies the need among evaluators for greater self-reflection and consideration of their own culture and biases in relation to that of the local context.

The three chapters in Section III, "Applications of CRE in Global and Indigenous School Contexts," make a strong case for cultural consideration in evaluation contexts by presenting the case of a subgroup in Ireland, the Roma in Macedonia, and Navajo children in Arizona. From Soula Mitakidou's chapter on the Roma children, it is clear that culture is key when evaluating programs targeting populations outside of mainstream, majority groups. Evaluation frameworks that do not consider culture perpetuate inequities by evaluating effects of programs based on standards that may not be relevant to the context. This section is well balanced in that it not only highlights the importance of CRE but also the challenges of conducting it. Ground realities, program design, and funding streams—all pose

challenges to effective CRE practice. Joe O'Hara, Gerry McNamara, and Kathy Harrison address this issue in their critique of the Irish assessment culture as being one-size-fits-all and hence problematic when accommodating Ireland's growingly diverse population. They highlight the need for partnership and collaboration and a move away from "individualism toward the greater strength of collective, interdependent thinking." This is a key critique of Western education models and epistemologies that place individualism above collectivism. A collaborative and participatory approach to evaluation also gives traditionally oppressed populations a voice and a platform to represent themselves.

Finally, Section IV follows Section III seamlessly as it transitions from case studies of culturally responsive evaluative practices to various approaches and frameworks for CRE. Donna Mertens and Heather Zimmerman elaborate on the "transformative framework" for CRE, which is rooted in social justice and human rights. The argument is that evaluation that starts with these as their main goals translates into action on every aspect of program design, implementation, and evaluation. This chapter focuses on the ability of transformative evaluators to not only honour diverse cultural practices but also to deconstruct the hegemony that stops minority and oppressed populations from being heard. In the next chapter, Fiona Cram, Vivienne Kennedy, Kirimatao Paipa, Kataraina Pipi, and Nan Wehipeihana are instrumental in illustrating how CRE should not just be limited to paying attention to and honouring local cultural practices but should in fact view it as being normal. A divergence from Western epistemological constructs should not have to be viewed as a divergence at all. The rest of the section also emphasizes the need for considering local cultural practices as being an inalienable component of any solution aimed at solving local problems.

In its entirety, this volume is effective in continuing the case for CRE. While its critique of non-CRE practices is subtle, it puts forth CRE as being a framework evaluators should be adopting by presenting cases where CRE has been instrumental in giving voice and power to traditionally ignored and oppressed groups. However, CRE is still a relatively new approach, and while there are tremendous opportunities, there are also many challenges. For one, policy and program decisions are often top-down, where the funders have more agency than target populations. The editors could have been more intentional about including a section on reasons that evaluators may be tempted to not adopt CRE, that is, the challenges to the implementation of CRE—ranging from funding to the lack of training to ground realities and politics. All in all, this volume definitely addresses some of the key issues around CRE and provides the reader with empirical evidence as to why CRE continues to be relevant, important, and effective.