

Māori Psychotherapy – A cultural oxymoron

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More than 18 months ago I was asked to write something for the NZAP journal. I remember saying yes, and then forgetting all about it. Over that time, the requests have continued. Only today in May 2010, have I actually done something about it. I'm not sure what I said back then, so this is what I wrote to present at the Christchurch gathering.

I begin, however, with a story, a remembering now coloured by time and recited with a different awareness.

It's about two Susans at a time when they were beginning their careers as psychotherapists. I had the good fortune to spend a little time with both of them. Susan one shared her fears and wondering about working with a group of Maori men all incarcerated in 'A' Block at Paremoro Prison. Here's this white chick dressed in vibrant colours enquiring about those unspoken things with hardcore criminals. "What can I do better, she asks me?"

I only know she finally got them to take their shades off and one memorable night they played a kids' game. She dared to be different and embraced their difference. Susan two shared her new world with some of my Counselling students. She gave them licence to ask all sorts of questions. When she shared that she was in a loving relationship a student dared to ask her did that include having sex. Susan smiled from her wheelchair and noted that although she had broken her back and had lost all physical sensation from the neck down, she was doing very nicely thanks and they were both very happy. She dared to be different and embraced her normality. Every country in the world has what is called border control or "Customs". The word for "Customs" in Māori is Tikanga.

When we encounter these borders, we are questioned, challenged. "Have you anything to declare?" is the most common.

So, have you anything meaningful to offer, to declare in wanting to step into my world, my land, my being?

Before you cross my border, let me give you some glimpses of what you will encounter.

You will hear a different language. You will see a group, a community. You will smell a different aroma, you will taste food for the mind and spirit. You will touch beyond the constraints of the physical realm. In fact you will be bombarded with a

cacophony of sounds and images that may tell you that you are in a foreign land. Perhaps you are.

Thank you for the opportunity to present. As you know it's termed a 'keynote address'. In the way I think, that means that I've been given the freedom to enter your citadel of knowledge and parade through it with all the pomp and glory I can muster.

So I've brought an army with me, a barbaric horde, a collection of togetherness. I've also brought a healthy curiosity.

In terms of the charter that this wānaka sits with, those I bring are students and role models of that Charter. The term we use is taurira - He taurira, hei taurira. It's kind of like a live powerpoint.

So that's the geographical area of this place and Te Puna Wānaka sits at the centre of it.

This is a house of learning and remembering. It's our gallery, come visit it with us.

Whakaahua, poupou (pictures and carvings of those departed).

We are the recipients of their knowledge their dreams, their wisdom.

The words we utter are music to them. They need be rich in imagery, allegory and beauty.

The term Māori psychotherapy is an oxymoron. As we know an oxymoron is a figure of speech that combines two normally contradictory terms. It's often used for rhetorical effect. Its first cousin is paradox.

To continue the grammar lesson, an oxymoron is normally an adjective/noun combination. Thank goodness for English Grammar, that in our language the word Māori can be either an adjective or a noun. Only one problem: none of us in this group identifies as Māori. We give voice to our mountain, our river, our lands, our tribes.

Psychotherapy in many ways represents the clinical expressions of a Eurocentric modality best understood as being of the predominant culture. Is psychotherapy a noun or an adjective, I'm unsure.

Under the notion of biculturalism then we are often forced into an oxymoron. To allow us to be bicultural, one of the contradictions must be weakened.

To paraphrase a Zen saying: "Now that we've burnt your house down, at least you get a better view of the sunset." Those who are hosting this gathering are doing this "in partnership." They are doing this within the tenets of judicial law "In good faith and with due diligence." I commend the Association and those they partner with, for their commitment and courage. Whatever will develop also with Te Roopu Oranga, will keep on testing that resolve.

In traditional lore, the saying goes ... “I whanau mai he whetu, a te matenga he whetu, maha ana a Purapura whetu.” - “Born a star, transformed by death, countless are the seeds of light.”

‘In partnership’ then has many configurations and may often extend beyond our lifetime.

We are a poetic nation and have a love of a good turn of phrase. Oratory is truly an art form. “ko te kai a te rangatira he kōrero.” The food for chiefs is oratory. In accessing the minds and dilemmas of others we use kōrero as the chief healing tool. We want to demonstrate how use of waiata, moteatea and pū rākau can be used to surmount the barriers to wellness.

In this the 150th year of the Kingitanga we will take a waiata belonging to those people, to unpack some of the practices and philosophies of Te Ao Māori. We start by quoting Te Arikinui Te Atairangikaahu:

For each is a lifestyle to a person of another creed and race, an ordinary person who, while engaged in the everyday problems of living and life, finds among his or her own, a community of close interest. Each race is as a tribe. Each has its own ways. Each has an “in-ness” that binds the tribe together and an “other-ness” that slows the footsteps of a stranger who would enter and yet be accommodated.

On the common ground of eating together, sleeping together, talking together we may eventually contribute to a togetherness. That increases the potency of all in this community of interest.

Here’s the waiata: I offer the words here, and if you should have the good fortune to sit beside an elder of Tainui, of the Kingitanga then I’m sure the time would be well spent listening to the song and perhaps all of its hidden meanings. I trust then that the journey you have as an association embracing all of your differences and struggling to not talk past each other will bear fruit that your grandchildren will gladly consume together.

Timatanga Te Puea

Te kupu tuatahi e, me wehi ki a Ihowa

Koia nei hoki te timatanga me te whakamutunga e!

Timatanga Te Puea e, i te pou o Mangatāwhiri

Ki te waha nga iwi, ki te waha te tikanga me te rangimarie e

Na Turongo i hanga e, te whare Pare Waikato

E tomo atu ai ki te Tairāwhiti ko Mahinarangi e

Mahi ake nei aue, i tōku nei whare e

Ngā pou o roto he māhoe he patatē, he hīnau noa e
Wai hopuapua e, e mimiti ai koa e
Ko te wai a Rona he manawa a whenua e kore e mimiti e

E huri to kanohi e, ki te hau tūārangi e
Te Tiriti o Waitangi e tū moke mai rā i waho te moana e
Nō te ariki te aroha, hurihia nuitia e
Ki runga ki nga iwi hei kākahu rā, mō te iti mō te rahi e
Kaati nei e te iwi e, tō kumekume roa e
Kei mau tātou, i te rā whakawā, i te rā whakawā a te Atua
Kō Paneiraira e, kō Paneiraira hoki
Ko Paneiraira he tangata rawerawe, nō roto Waikato e.