

Keynote Address: Is there a distinctive Māori psychology?

Mason Durie

School of Māori Studies: Massey University

Psychology is largely about behaviour, patterns of thinking and emotional expression. While it has many more dimensions, and is informed by several disciplines, the essential aim is to understand the human condition as it relates to the manifestations of interaction, individuation, growth, and development.

Since the modern study of psychology owes much to investigations by scientific researchers in western countries, many of the findings about behaviour, cognition and affect are particularly germane to western cultures. However, they cannot necessarily be applied to all cultures. Assumptions about universality have long since given way to recognition of the impacts of ethnicity on patterns of behaviour, and there is an increasing realisation that the ways in which people think and feel are often a reflection of the culture within which they have been raised.

In contemporary times, most Māori are subject to the prevailing New Zealand culture but also have links to Māori culture and its unique characteristics. Even if there has been a degree of deculturation, it is likely that wider family and whānau contacts will have led to some exposure to that cultural distinctiveness. Because of that exposure, the question needs to be asked whether Māori people have ways of thinking, feeling and behaving that derive from customary Māori worldviews. Moreover, if that is the case, how do those patterns differ from other worldviews?

In an attempt to answer those questions a first step reported in this paper has been to identify the psychological attributes that might be associated with Māori world views. Others addressed the same question by focusing on religious, philosophical, and metaphysical attitudes in order to highlight characteristics of Māori thinking and understanding. However, rather than conducting an analysis of concepts such as mana, ihi, wehi and their associated values,

this paper analyses the encounters commonly witnessed on a marae in modern times and makes the assumption that those encounters point toward Māori world views as well as providing a basis for understanding distinctive ways of knowing and behaving (Durie, 2001).

The fact that most Māori are not regularly involved in marae activities may reduce the extent to which observations can be generalised and applied to all Māori. At the same time, it is also likely that within wider whānau networks other members of the family may be more regularly involved, so that the cultural ethos found on the marae is not entirely removed from the conscious and unconscious minds of most Māori. In any event, the main concern has been to identify the psychological underpinnings of a range of encounters, as a way of constructing a Māori psychological framework.

Marae Encounters

Marae encounters can be conceptualised from several perspectives, including functional, structural, and symbolic viewpoints. However, in this paper, encounters are described as domains, broad conceptual zones within which distinctive psychological and behavioural activities occur (Durie, 1999).

Polynesian Society

Table 1 summarises a set of nine encounters and associated domains. While similar activities may be found in other settings, significance and understanding takes on a new form when considered within the marae context.

Te Marae Ātea: The Domain of Space

Essentially a marae is structured around an open space. At one end can be found the host group, at the other, the visitors. The physical space is necessary in order to explore relationships and establish

boundaries, usually through the process of *whaikorero*. According to the convention adopted at a particular *marae*, a series of speakers will use the space to variously challenge, inquire, connect, and inform. If all goes well and there is mutual acceptance of the terms laid down on the *marae*, the space will be narrowed so that both parties can assume close physical proximity. In effect the space has been necessary to establish relationships, the terms of coming together, and both the differences and similarities between the players.

Table 1.
Marae Encounters.

Elements of Encounters	Marae Domains
Te <i>marae ātea</i>	The domain of space
Nga <i>manu kōrero</i>	The domain of time
Koha	The domain of the circle
Tangata <i>whenua</i>	Domains of mind and earth
Tapu, <i>noa</i>	The domain of safety
Whaikōrero	Metaphorical domains
Mana, <i>manākitanga</i>	The domains of authority and generosity
Tauparapara, <i>karakia</i>	The domain of interconnectedness
Tūhonohono	The domain of synchronicity

Source: Durie (1999)

In modern times there is usually a convivial relationship between the parties even before the domain of space is approached, but the rituals that occur nonetheless offer the opportunity to reiterate the distinctions and, if appropriate, to highlight the commonalities. The important point is that the use of space is a necessary accompaniment of encounters, providing not only physical territory but also the psychological space necessary to rehearse identity and to confirm the relationship between self and others.

Nga Manu Kōrero: The Domain of Time

On a *marae*, the measurement of time depends less on being punctual and more on allocating time for necessary activities. Speakers on a *marae* (*nga manu kōrero*) epitomise the distinction. Regardless of any prearranged timeframe or schedule,

they are inclined to use time to convey essential messages and they place considerable importance on speaking until they are satisfied that the right messages have been conveyed. While some might argue that there is a tendency to disregard time, the more obvious point is that time has been allowed to complete the necessary protocols to the necessary standard. Time is ordered according to the sequence of events (Metge, 1976) and *nga manu kōrero* set the pace.

Sometimes the term ‘Māori time’ is used disparagingly, to refer to people who are late. In that interpretation ‘being on time’ is seen as more important than attending to first things first. In fact, ‘Māori time’ is more about prioritising time than being late.

Koha: The Domain of the Circle

Although the *marae* is more often rectangular than circular, the activities and symbolism reflects a circular pattern of exchanges. A good example can be found with the system of *koha*. While the practice of leaving a gift (in modern times usually money) on the *marae* tends to be associated with helping to cover expenses, it is more about relationships than costs incurred. There are two aspects to the *koha* practice. The first is the desire of a visiting group to present a gift that will encourage the development of a relationship with the hosts. The second aspect is the acceptance of the gift and by implication the establishment of a relationship. Were the gift not accepted, or if it were returned, it would be a clear sign that a relationship was not envisaged or desired. The notion of a circle is embodied in the *koha* and it would be consistent with the symbolism for the *koha* – or its equivalence – to be returned when the two parties met again. In short, the nature of a gift, in Māori eyes, is less about the generosity of the donor than the obligations placed on the receiver (Durie, 1986).

Apart from the *koha* practice, other *marae* encounters also reflect the circle as a way of interacting. The order of speakers for example often proceeds in a circular fashion, encompassing the whole *marae* and within the *whare-nui* itself there is often a circuitous route taken by speakers,

especially when fare-welling a deceased person.

Reciprocity is an integral part of Māori custom and philosophy and continues to guide thinking and interaction in contemporary times (Metge, 1976). A circular pattern is evident and the goal is to create wider ripples so that inclusiveness can be at least considered.

Tangata Whenua: The Domains of Mind and Earth

Critical to marae encounters is the notion of tangata whenua. Literally, people (of the) land, the term recognises a group who have peculiar rights and obligations on a particular marae. Sometimes tangata whenua is used as if it were synonymous with Māori people, but more accurately it refers to a group of Māori within a particular locality or region who by reason of a continued presence over time, have acquired special status. While political and territorial rights form part of that status, of greater significance is the bond they have with their land and the wider natural environment.

The bond between people and earth features strongly in marae encounters and forms an important part of identity for individuals and groups. In this regard, a personal psychology is closely attuned to the land and the wider physical environment and at a collective level a tribe is often referred to by a geographic feature within its terrain. Where there is landlessness, there may well be consequences that go beyond economic considerations to include psychological and emotional impacts.

Tapu, Noa: The Domains of Safety

Although the custom of tapu and noa is no longer widely applied, it remains a powerful force in marae encounters. Essentially, any person, object, or event that might possibly impose a risk, is regarded as tapu until it is clear that the risk ceases to operate. Once any possibility of risk has been eliminated the situation becomes noa, safe. Largely as a result of missionary interpretations, tapu has been equated with sacredness and its usefulness as a code for conduct has tended to be replaced by a fear of divine retribution. While there is a

spiritual component to tapu the more practical implications should not be overlooked. Te Rangi Hiroa drew a connection between the use of *tapu* and the prevention of accidents or calamities, implying that a dangerous activity or location would be declared *tapu* in order to prevent misfortune (Hiroa, 1954).

Marae visitors who are aware of the significance of tapu usually demonstrate a cautious attitude and are at pains to avoid any action or comment that could be misconstrued as an intended slight on their hosts. Built into their world views is the notion that risks are high until otherwise proven. Efforts to move too closely or to be overly friendly before the process of mutual evaluation has concluded are not encouraged. Indeed much of the marae protocol is aimed at determining whether there is risk and how it might best be handled.

Whaikōrero: Metaphorical Domains

Central to a marae encounter is the rehearsal of whaikōrero by chosen orators. Speakers act on behalf of either hosts or visitors and have the unenviable task of ensuring that the group they represent is not disadvantaged nor cast in a distasteful manner. As often as not, the more practised orators deliver their addresses with a masterly mix of directness and metaphor (Mahuta, 1974). Metaphor allows comparisons to be made, a wider context to be established and allusions to be suggested avoiding a micro-focus and positioning the subject within a broader perspective.

In addition, it is now usual for whaikōrero to be followed by waiata, a song or chant that adds meaning to the address and further identifies the speaker or the speaker's group (Salmond, 1976). Like aspects of whaikōrero, the waiata is rich in metaphor and contains numerous references to historical, geographic, or literary associations. While at first glance there may be little direct link to the matter under discussion, the metaphorical dimension shifts the focus onto another plane. In so doing there is an accompanying psychological shift so that meaning is transformed beyond the purely functional to acquire a broader philosophical connotation.

Mana, Manakitanga: The Domains of Authority and Generosity

A prevailing ethos on a marae is concerned with expressions of generosity. It is evident in the way guests are treated, the comments made to visitors, the provision of delicacies, and, for overnight guests, the standard of accommodation. Generally there is a collective approach to bounty so that a united front is necessary to meet the obligations towards guests. Although the comfort of guests is a high priority, it is not the only consideration. The standing of the marae, its mana, is also reflected in the way in which generosity has been delivered (Waitangi Tribunal, 1987). Generosity is not unbounded, nor does it come at the expense of maintaining authority. In fact, initiatives for generosity provide opportunities to demonstrate authority and control. If well managed, what transpires is a reciprocal relationship whereby mana is enhanced, not by a show of power, but by the more subtle display of concern and kindness. The art of *marae* negotiation is bound to a goal of enhancement of the other. The balance lies between enjoying the benefits that can accrue from generosity without diminishing local advantage.

Essentially the domains of authority and generosity are about the employment of authority in order to demonstrate benevolence. *Mana-akitanga* is the process whereby *mana* (power, authority) is translated into actions of generosity.

Tauparapara and Karakia: The Domain of Interconnectedness

The use of metaphorical language has already been noted as a feature of marae encounters. Two particular modes of expression incorporate metaphor but also shift attention into spiritual planes. The *tauparapara*, an incantation to preface an address, links the event under discussion with a wider realm, often of an esoteric nature. Similarly, the *karakia*, whether a Christian prayer or a customary entreaty, lifts the attention of listeners from mundane and terrestrial levels into higher spiritual planes. In the process, people are connected with the heavens, the winds, the stars, those long since departed, deities, and the forces of nature. The effect is to elevate

everyday mental preoccupations to a higher state of awareness, thereby promoting improved understanding based on higher levels of contextualization.

By connecting planes of thinking and symbolism there is a psychological energy flow away from the centre, outwards to broader conceptual domains, a centrifugal force away from micro dimensions (an individual, a single issue) to macro levels (groups, broad encounters, spiritual influences).

Tūhonohono: The Domain of Synchronicity

Tūhonohono is an active process that pervades many aspects of marae encounters: essentially, it is a search for commonalities (rather than differences), so that associations can be identified, and the relationship between events explained. In this process, much depends on simultaneous occurrence. Two events that share the same moment in time assume a significant relationship, regardless of any notion of cause and effect. Synchronicity underpins the relationship and the two events take on a special meaning when they are linked together by time.

This implied causal relationship between incidents which seem poles apart, is a characteristic of *marae* experience. Carl Jung used the term synchronicity to describe the significance given to the simultaneous occurrence of events not obviously related in a cause and effect manner. He believed that patterns of meaning were connected to time and that events which occurred at similar times were therefore related (Stevens, 1991). While synchronicity can easily be dismissed as coincidence, the actual experience of synchronicity defies coincidence. It creates a vivid and lasting impression which often tests the bounds of scientific rationality and challenges measurement in scientific terms. Māori belief in interconnectedness and the acceptance of time as a function of experience, readily leads to valuing the relationships between phenomena as much as the phenomena themselves.

A Māori Psychology

Psychological and Behavioural Attributes

Table 2 contains a number of psychological attributes that can be seen to emerge from the nine domains that are obvious during marae encounters.

Domains of Experience and Psychological Attributes

Among the attributes are five recurring themes. First, understanding comes from appreciating the relationship between the individual, the group, and the wider environment. The direction of Māori thought and feeling attempts to find meaning in the vastness of space and higher order relationships.

Second, although integration and association across wide ranging spheres is important, boundaries also play a large part in psychological organisation. There are clear distinctions for example between *tapu* and *noa*, *tangata whenua* and *manuhiri*, right and left, first and last, clean and unclean, food and water. Personal boundaries are also observed so that despite physical closeness (as during the hongi), individual uniqueness is endorsed.

Third, *marae* encounters reflect an underlying orderliness. Order is apparent not only in physical arrangements but also in the sequence of proceedings, the progression of thoughts, and the way in which time is allocated. Often orderliness is equated with rigidity and a lack of innovative thinking. Although that can be the case, it is also clear from marae observation that it need not be. Patterns of thinking and behaviour provide a matrix within which there is room for elaboration and creativity; and at the same time orderliness reduces opportunity for misinterpretation (Mahuta, 1974).

A fourth theme concerns patterns of thought. Māori generally shun directness, preferring a type of communication that alludes but does not necessarily focus on a detailed point. This seemingly peripheral approach can be confounding and is sometimes described as puzzling, especially if the central point cannot be deciphered. However, the clues to meaning are found less in an examination of component parts (of speech, behaviour) and more in imagery, higher order comparisons, and

long memories. Psychological energy moves outwards, it is centrifugal rather than centripetal.

Identity is a fifth theme. Māori identity, at least within a *marae* setting, is linked not only to ancestral descent but also to the land, and to wider environments well beyond human influence. Individuation is not the sole task for establishing a secure identity; identity is also a function of conscious and unconscious connections with the environment, with the group, and with those departed.

Implications

The intention in this paper has been to raise the question about a distinctive Māori psychology. In so far as marae encounters provide a glimpse into Māori ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, the presumptive conclusion is that there is a distinctive Māori psychology. While more work needs to be done to delineate the parameters and define the psychological characteristics, there is nonetheless merit in considering the practical applications to learning environments, clinical situations, psychometric measurement, and theoretical paradigms.

The process of learning is not context neutral. An open plan classroom for example tends to minimise the significance of boundaries, orderliness, and the cautious use of space. To that extent, Māori learners may well find some disjunction at the interface between physical environment and educational processes. In secondary and tertiary settings disjunctions might occur in the way knowledge is generally imparted; a focus downwards and inwards (centripetal) rather than outwards. It may also account for some of the reasons why Māori are less inclined to pursue subjects where understanding is based on an analysis of smaller and smaller parts without a parallel opportunity for creating wider domains to contextualise the detail.

In clinical arenas, patterns of thought and behaviour are particularly germane to assessment (of mental state) and psychological therapies. Metaphorical thinking may well be confused with tangential thinking or loosening of association, while a cautious attitude, as exhibited in the domain of safety, may be

interpreted as a lack of co-operation, suspiciousness, and even frank paranoia. Further, an emphasis on individual identity can underscore the importance of the group to psychological development and coherence. Equally unhelpful, the assumption that any type of behaviour or pattern of thinking that cannot be readily understood is simply 'cultural' can lead to missed clinical clues and inadequate assessments. Clinicians must be able to distinguish between 'abnormal' and 'normal' using benchmarks that may be quite different for different cultures.

In this respect psychometric tools should also be culture-relevant. While there has been some attention to translating standard psychometric instruments into various languages, there has been less work on devising instruments that can capture Māori psychological attributes, and at the same time identify areas of abnormality. *He Hua Oranga*, a mental health outcome

measure, has some promise; it is based on a Māori concept of health and employs a triangulation method that engages client (consumer), clinician, and a whānau member (Kingi, 2002).

Finally, many of the theoretical paradigms that underpin the study of psychology pay marginal attention to culture as a determinant of psychology. While there are some aspects of human experience that are universal, patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving are by no means divorced from specific cultural influence. A challenge for Māori psychologists is to re-examine psychological theory from a Māori perspective. In attempting to identify the psychological distinctiveness underlying a Māori perspective, this paper has introduced marae encounters as a rich source of information within which distinctive psychological characteristics can be identified.

Table 2.
Psychological Attributes That Can be Seen to Emerge From the Nine Domains Obvious During Marae Encounters.

Domains	Psychological Attributes
The domain of space	orderliness, formalisation of movements and relationships, regulated behaviour, personal boundaries
The domain of time	prioritisation, commitment to the moment, task completion
The domain of the circle	reciprocity, mutuality, restitution
Domains of mind and earth	territoriality, guardianship, role assignment, land and identity
The domain of safety	caution, behavioural constraints, boundaries
Metaphorical domains	allusive thinking, indirectness, metaphors
The domains of authority and generosity	responsibility and shared benefits, mutual enhancement
The domain of interconnectedness	meaning derived from similarities, relationships beyond temporal experience
The domain of synchronicity	meaning linked to time; significance not measured by causality alone

Source: Durie (2001).

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