

Indigenous Psychologies Globally – A perspective from Aotearoa/New Zealand

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Indigenous psychology globally is characterised by a reaction against the dominance of the American psychological knowledge 'production machine', and the search by indigenous peoples for a voice in their own futures. While some indigenous psychologists are in search of psychological universals, some interested in cross-national studies, and some in teasing out minute similarities and differences between cultures, others have bent to the task of solving local challenges within their own contexts with compatible approaches.

Moghaddam (1987) cleverly maps the flow of psychological knowledge, from the 1st World, in this instance America, to other nations who are considered "importers" rather than exporters of knowledge. Aotearoa/New Zealand (A/NZ) is considered a 2nd World nation and importer of psychological knowledge, with very little being exported. Omitted in Moghaddam's analysis, is the position of 4th World nations, defined here as indigenous communities positioned within 1st and 2nd world nations, for example, Hawai'ians, Aboriginals, and Maori – the original inhabitants of the lands in which they dwell.

The term "indigenous" has two meanings: one refers to these 4th world peoples; another to all peoples residing in a society; in both, the focus is on peoples who are self-reflecting. The prospect of Kim and Berry (1993) book made us very excited. This was to be the first time that the interface between 'indigenous' and 'psychology' would be brought together and explored in such a major and published way. The book was not very satisfying, not from the perspective of the first meaning of the term. Indeed, what was revealing was the construction of recent migrants as being just as 'indigenous' as Maori, Hawai'ian, and Australian Aboriginals! One could not help but feel that the 'natives' were being put upon yet again.

Terminology aside, the objectives of an indigenous psychology are agreeable, that is, to develop psychologies that are not imposed or imported; which are influenced by the cultural contexts in which people live; are developed from within the culture using a variety of methods; and result in locally relevant psychological knowledge.

Indigenous psychology in A/NZ has always been a part of how Maori approach wellness, health, and being, stemming from a world view that values balance, continuity, unity and purpose. It is not widely written about, yet it is understood and assumed by Maori, and acted upon and expected. Perhaps it is best referred to by the Maori term 'tikanga' or customary practice – those behaviours, values, ways of doing things and understanding actions that have always and will continue to be with us.

Early social scientists to A/NZ sought, through key informants, to document a Maori view of the world. These writers, and later, Maori academics Buck and Ngata, left a hugely rich information base for contemporary psychologists. The search for Maori psychological frameworks often start with early works such as these rather than PsycAbstracts.

Up until the 1940's few academic psychologists took an interest in the Maori world. Criticised for being research 'on' Maori, rather than 'with' Maori, through the 1940-1960's, the Beagleholes', the Ritchies', and their students in the Culture and Personality tradition, marked an approach to Maori communities and to local contexts that set the background to the development of cross-cultural and community psychology through the 1970-1980's (see Ritchie, 1992 and Hamerton, Nikora, Robertson & Thomas). Although productive, their efforts still stood in the shadow of dominant western psychological paradigms.

Irrespective of these advances, in 1987, Abbott and Durie found psychology to be the most monocultural of professional training programmes that they surveyed. They argued that to produce graduates able to work effectively with Maori, increased speed towards the inclusion of Maori content in curriculum development needed to occur. Since then, much has been achieved, but yet still, much more needs to be done (Levy, 2002). Perhaps this explains why Maori psychologists and academics have taken their skills and invested their energies in the 'Maori development agenda' that has gripped our country for the last two decades.

Most central to advancing the Maori development agenda has been psychiatrist, psychologist, and professor of Maori Studies, Mason Durie. Durie's work has become the touchstone for professionals and policy makers across the health and welfare sectors. He is not only prolific in his ideas, he has a clear and concise way of articulating 'tikanga' - a necessary skill for any exponent of indigenous psychology in A/NZ.

For psychology, the Maori development agenda is to create psychologies to meet the needs of Maori people, in a way that maintains a unique cultural heritage, and makes for a better collective Maori future. It is a journey towards Maori self-determination (Nikora, 2001). Our primary focus has been on the development of a critical mass of indigenous psychologists capable of developing robust tikanga-based psychological frameworks. Although a slow process, there is a small yet active group of people who are making a contribution through practice, teaching, research, or involvement in professional organisations (see Nikora, Levy, Masters, Waitoki, Te Awekotuku & Etheredge, 2003).

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