

Bicultural Issues

The National Standing Committee on Bicultural Issues provides regular commentary on bicultural issues. It aims to explain their implications for the activities of psychologists, and for the practices and policies of the Society.

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Two Keynote Addresses – Conference 2000

The keynote addresses by the Honourable Tariana Turia and Linda Waimarie Nikora at the 2000 Conference differed in several ways but each presented a challenge to psychology and psychologists in this country. Because we consider these challenges deserve serious consideration, NSCBI has obtained permission from both speakers to publish their addresses.

Clearing the air

It is unlikely any psychologist in New Zealand is unaware that Tariana Turia spoke at Conference as the media were able to generate a 'feeding frenzy' by concentrating on the 'h' word and by implying that she was using colonisation to excuse violence. Further, because conflict makes good news copy, comments were sought initially from political opponents who responded to what the Minister was alleged to have said. The Prime Minister was then asked to respond in a politically charged context that provided no support for a serious consideration of the issues raised for us as a profession working with Maori people. Several of us are currently undertaking a detailed, critical examination of that media coverage and will report, through the Journal or Bulletin, on our analyses in due course. The following comments are my own and are intended to help readers approach the address without too many media-induced preconceptions.

First the 'h' word - 'holocaust' is defined as; "destruction or loss of life on a massive scale" (Collins Dictionary). The loss of nearly three-quarters of the Maori population in the 60 years after 1840 seems to make the word appropriate. However, because of the media focus on holocaust, Tariana Turia's efforts to draw attention to the cultural and spiritual sequelae of policies of assimilation and deculturation were ignored. It may not be easy to contemplate but colonisation means displacing the indigenous people, reducing them to a marginal minority in what was their land. In numerous countries this involved; taking the land on and through which they lived, replacing their social systems with the coloniser's own, and systematically denying their identity in the place where they are Tangata Whenua. Even social

services are shaped to these ends. For example, education for Maori was intended to create practical competencies useful in a mobile agricultural and industrial workforce. Tariana Turia referred to the assault on Te Reo that was a part of that programme. Similarly law, health, and social welfare, defined by the settler-dominated parliament, cut across or undermined other important aspects of Te Ao Maori. These policies, and the practices they spawned, were driven by the desire to destroy "the beastly communism of the pa" - the Maori way of living and being.

When we recognise colonisation as an assault on the cultural and spiritual essence of Maori people we can begin to understand that we have a society in which there are few times and spaces where Maori people can feel 'at home' and be Maori. Further, the systems in which so many psychologists work were shaped by those policies and processes of colonisation. In directing us to attend to the effects of this sustained assault on the Wairua, Whanau, Hinengaro and Tinana of Maori, Tariana Turia uses self-hatred and suicide as particular examples. Having drawn our attention to this historical context and its impacts in the lives of Maori people she challenged us to look at our training. That challenge was both general - the adequacy of our theories and practices to respond helpfully to the effects of violence - and specific to New Zealand - our professional competence to attend to the wounds of the soul created in the colonisation of this country. She mostly spoke as if colonisation was a past process that is still a destructive force in Maori families but she could have reminded us of more recent wounds that have been added to the older ones. Actions, like the clearance of the Ngati Whatua from Okahu Bay, have occurred within the lifetimes of many of us.

The implicit challenge in the Minister's address is: How are we, as a helping profession, going to avoid adding to such wounds while seeking to help. We (NSCBI) encourage all practising psychologists to think about these matters and to participate in professional conversations about ways in which we can respond effectively.

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