# Ideology is theft: Thoughts on the legitimacy of a Maori psychology

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*'War, in fact, can be seen as a process of achieving equilibrium among unequal technologies'* (McLuhan, 1964)

We are at war. As Western science and its accompanying technology expands the frontiers of knowledge at an ever-increasing rate, 'indigenous' perspectives of knowledge are exiled into the borderlands of special interest groups and localized research programmes. Mainstream scientific thought lays claim to objective interpretations of experience at the expense of alternative realities offered by emerging theories of knowledge. Furthermore, as localized worldviews (i.e., those derived from ancestral knowledge bases and pre-industrial or non-scientific premises) challenge existing paradigms, the inevitable interactions threaten to undermine the fidelity of this knowledge. One such arena where this ideological conflict is apparent is the growing field of Maori psychology.

To clarify some terms, 'Psychology' will here refer to a *scientific* discipline that is concerned with 1.) the description, function and regularity of behaviour; 2.) the inference of personality structure, function and consistency; and, 3.) accuracy in developing relationships between known phenomena and objective evaluation. By extension, 'science' will here refer to the methods and outcomes generated within an identified scientific community with the aim of explanation and prediction in an effort to provide an account of the natural world. Given these working definitions, are we able to identify or extrapolate a Maori perspective on behaviour that is both 'psychological' AND 'scientific'? Or should Maori perspectives of behavioural concepts be referred to as something else altogether?

Indeed, is there a tradition of knowledge-acquisition and hypothesis-generation that is uniquely Maori? Historical findings such as established pre-colonial innovations in horticulture and medicine (e.g., rongoa), celestial methods of navigation, and construction (e.g., Pa) suggest that this is the case (Owens, 1992; Durie, 1998). However, what is less certain is the existence of an established heritage of generic behavioural observation and prediction. In order for modern understandings of a Maori science of behaviour to add value to Western approaches and existing health models it would need to concern itself with exploring traditional and or unique *processes of discovery* as well as the logic behind these processes.

Maori psychology (in particular Kaupapa Maori psychology) has been described as emerging from the discontent of traditional research disrupting Maori life and presents as an indigenous 'alternative' challenge to the dominant Western research worldview (Bishop, 1999). The discourse of Maori psychologies is thus assumed to be legitimated from within Maori communities. However, of interest is *who* makes up these communities and whose interests are *really* represented.

According to Poortinga (1998), two important implications of indigenisation movements in science involve 1) informing mainstream approaches to the field, and 2) addressing the needs of communities with non-Western interests. In other words, to address inherently ethnocentric biases in the field and to inform culturally-appropriate research and practice. Expanding these assumptions to Maori psychology implies generating and offering unique approaches to solving social and health problems that

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have been unresolved under the prevailing paradigm. A suggested agenda is to create psychologies to meet the needs of Maori in a way that maintains a unique cultural heritage and makes for a better collective future (Linda Waimarie Nikora, personal communication, 2006). An attempt to bridge these two worlds was proposed by Durie's (2001; 2002) 'marae encounters' model, that provides a lateral alternative to Western linear models of explanation and includes linking psychological attributes with metaphysical domains, such as space (e.g., orderliness, regulated behaviour), time (e.g., prioritisation, task completion), the circle (e.g., reciprocity, mutuality), and synchronicity (i.e., significance of events not linked solely to chronicity and causality). Despite the descriptive eloquence and conceptual sophistication of this model, explanations of behavioural functioning and individual differences do not appear well-accounted for, nor are adequate descriptors of learning processes provided to support these explanations. However, this model does offer important directions for stimulating new possibilities for exploring Maori psychology. For instance, the marae metaphor places the individual in a broad ecological and spiritual context that is not sufficiently understood within prevailing Western systems.

Furthermore, like any other scientific discipline Maori psychology may inevitably follow a developmental pathway where the accumulation of new knowledge results in periodic 'revolutions' that radically transform the nature of understanding and the creation of new paradigms (Kuhn, 1962). Indeed, the current state-of-the-art is at a crucial point in its development, and research-interfering ideologies will likely emerge as a natural by-product of this process. For instance, if we suppose that Maori psychology 1) does not share any of the core values of Western science (e.g., validity, replicability, etc.); or, 2. is not considered to be 'understandable' by non-Maori researchers (and, by extension, not open to challenge or criticism); or, 3) at risk of becoming 'colonised' by Western approaches, then who would be the custodians or *Kaitiaki* (or gatekeepers) of this knowledge? Would Maori psychology approaches only be adequately established and understood by those on the 'inside'? Who decides? A danger with this approach is that progress would be a matter of 'mob psychology' (Chalmers, 1982) conditional on the number, faith, and vocal support of its adherents. If the epistemological direction and decision-making are made according to strict canonical models, the discipline may resemble a cult with the usual baggage of elitism (or even separatism) that would invite irrelevancy.

Feyerabend (1975) warned that scientific education simplifies science by simplifying its participants. It is assumed that a domain of research is defined before being separated from the rest of history (as physics is separated from metaphysics and theology) and given a 'logic' of its own. Systematic training in such a 'logic' then conditions those working in the domain, making their endeavours more standardized and consequently freezing potential alternative growth areas. An advantage of such a scheme is that it becomes possible to create and maintain an institution held together by strict 'rules'. This has proven to be successful in other disciplines (e.g., physics) to some extent, but is it desirable – or even defensible – to support such institutions and traditions to the exclusion of all else? Furthermore, should we transfer to these institutions the exclusive rights for managing knowledge? This writer suggests not, if at least because the Maori world is still a largely unknown domain. The encouragement of generating research questions that increase our understanding in a radiating fashion (rather than a self-limiting one) means that the field will benefit from broader research-generating perspectives and not from those that impose needless restrictions in advance. If varied opinion is necessary for establishing objective knowledge, then uniformity of opinion can be seen as impairing critical power. In short, Maori psychology, like other psychologies, needs to concern itself with knowledge-creation (i.e., the conventions for identifying and organizing new knowledge) and also knowledge-*transformation* (or the ability of a field to adapt to new or changing conceptualizations of old knowledge). To ignore this process is to engage in a struggle for ideological authority over 'absolute' truths in order to win and hold political power rather than advance an agenda of improved outcomes for all. How do we determine ideology from progressive thought? By the adherents' inflexible assertion of truth, contempt for considered reflection, and fear of debate (Saul, 1995). If we accept that any worldview is inherently limited in scope, and that members of these 'knowledge communities' may inevitably prioritise the integrity of these limitations over and above the promotion of new thinking, then intended recipients – communities and researchers alike – are essentially being cheated of opportunities to explore areas not considered to exist within the scope of the prevailing ideology. Indeed, ideology is theft.

To adopt a metaphor, let us consider Maori science as co-existing on a two-way street with mainstream Western science moving towards the same destination but in different directions. In this case, the destination involves improved health outcomes, reductions in crime, and increased retention and achievement in education. The different directions are symbolic of stock-in-trade Western research methodologies and the accompanying value-base of performance-focused and outcome-driven initiatives compared with the collective-focused, consultative and more esoteric approaches of Maori science. As with any busy stretch of road, collisions are inevitable and may lead to the 'writing-off' (i.e., rethink - or even salvaging aspects of) old paradigms that no longer serve the function of adequately addressing these global issues as well as to provide learning opportunities for researchers and concerned communities to develop and explore the promise of more radical solutions.

This author welcomes the prospect of further 'collisions' (exchanges) between communities with ideological differences, and encourages researchers in the interface between Maoridom and Western psychology to generate new thinking around long-standing issues with new lenses, or a '*Collide-O-Scope*' (after McLuhan, 1967) – A 'collision' of ideas with a view towards disrupting a limited paradigm and establishing new rules for discovery. Such an approach may raise concerns regarding the existing disparity between access to bearers of ancestral knowledge, modern Maori science research, and the ongoing risk of compromising the fidelity of this knowledge. However, a 'Collide-O-Scopic' attitude acknowledges points of similarity (e.g., pragmatism, altruism, and negative social realities), anticipates points of difference (e.g., epistemological perspectives, historical contexts, and methodologies), and promotes interfaced solutions that are guided by collaboration, exploration, and innovation rather than as 'add-on' approaches or diplomatic afterthoughts.

A proposed next step is the implementation of regular conferences and symposia, wide distribution of critical publications, dialogue with other disciplines and tangata whenua to create a 'thought-community' (in contrast to 'communal thought') that is not defined by epistemology, but rather by common shared goals and a willingness to share not only knowledge, but also knowledge-generating processes. Such a community would promote the nurturance of intellectual and cultural expertise, and by extension, an accessibility to otherwise untapped resources and alternative models of understanding health.

In short, it is the evolution of a science over long periods of time and not its shape at any given moment that counts. A new paradigm will inevitably be flawed – this is to be expected, because theories and models can be developed and improved. The progress of a science does not lie with a single theory or outlook, but a succession of theories (Feyerabend, 1975).

We are at war. Or, put another way, we exist in a chaotic but exciting stage in the development of our discipline. The opportunity to explore and influence the course of Maori psychology exists, but so does the responsibility to ensure protection from misappropriation and to not deny the benefits that such fruitful endeavours can promise.

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