

Bi-cultural Theatre as an Agent for Healing; Theatre Marae in New Zealand/Aotearoa
by

SUSAN BATTYE

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Head of Drama, Epsom Girls Grammar School, Auckland. National President New Zealand Association for Drama in Education, P.O. Box 44033, Pt Chevalier, Auckland 1002, New Zealand. Member of Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu. (e.mail: info@dramamagic.com)

Unpublished paper first presented at the Fourth World Congress of the International Drama/Theatre and Education Association; IDEA 2001, Bergen, Norway.

*This paper was first published in NJ (Drama Australia Journal) Volume 26 Number 1 2002 and IDEA Journal Volume 2 – A Joint Publication of Drama Australia and IDEA as part of the Selected Papers from IDEA, 2001, the 4th World Congress of Drama / Theatre and Education ‘**Playing Betwixt and Between**’ held in Bergen, Norway – July 2001.*

ABSTRACT *This paper analyses the process of creating a piece of Bi-cultural Theatre with young people held in protective care and detention in a Youth Justice Residential Centre in New Zealand. The drama process is perceived as being therapeutic or healing in a post-colonial context in which indigenous Maori people are gaining national recognition of their right to redress for past hurts and wrong doing by the Crown. Maori see the Crown as a ‘partner’ under the terms of a founding document, The Treaty of Waitangi. On a daily basis the Crown now attempts to embrace a bi-cultural and bi-lingual perspective in all social, political and economic matters. The two official languages of New Zealand are Maori and English. A prominent Maori actor, director and producer, Jim Moriarty, together with his theatre-in-education company, Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu, works bi-culturally with young people, and with women in prisons throughout New Zealand using a process of his own invention called Theatre Marae. Jim Moriarty has recently been made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for his Services to Drama. This paper examines the processes involved in creating and presenting the work.*

“Hutia te rito o te harakeke kei hea ra te komako? Ki mai ahau, he aha te mea nui? He tangata, he tangata.”

“If you pluck the centre root of the flax, where would the bell bird be? I ask you what is the most important thing in the world? It is people, people, people.”¹

Introduction

In 1981 New Zealand society was polarised over the visit of a racially selected rugby team from South Africa. The Springbok Tour politicised ‘middle’ New Zealand in general, and Maori in particular, so that our own issues of race and power came to the

forefront. The result was that, for the first time, a deep debate ensued about the judicial significance of the Treaty of Waitangi; an agreement signed in 1840 between the British Crown and tribal chiefs from throughout New Zealand/Aotearoa.

This in turn led to a cultural, social and political awakening among Maori and Pakeha of:

- their rights and obligations related to the preservation of the Maori language (te reo),
- Maori desire for self determination in matters relating to the Crown (rangatira tanga),
- access by Maori to national resources including; housing, education, health, justice, forests, fisheries, cultural treasures (taonga),
- the drive by Maori to seek reparations for land illegally confiscated by the Crown during the Land Wars of the 1860's.

Eddie Durie, Chief Judge of the Maori Land Court and chairperson of the Waitangi Tribunal, a body created to attend to these problems, recently stated that, "The tribunal has recorded, with regard to the debate on the Treaty of Waitangi, which preceded formal annexation, Maori insistence and the lieutenant governor's promise, on behalf of the Queen, that Maori law and custom would be respected. The tribunal has observed too the close association of Maori law and Maori political autonomy and the subsequent denigration of both by the state."²

Timoti Karetu, the Maori Language Commissioner, also maintains that, "Every time this country wants to make its presence noted and admired on the world platform it looks to the Maori dimension, the very sector which cries out for cultural and linguistic recognition and the right to practice both freely; for without that dimension this country has no distinguishing or unique identity."³

Maori have a custom of welcoming and hosting visitors (manaaki tanga), with ritual (powhiri) song (waitata) and entertainment by a trained group using action songs (kapa haka). It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Maori have become a rising force in the world of New Zealand theatre, film and television, not only as performers but also as writers, directors, producers and technicians. Plays which examine this contemporary relationship between Maori and Pakeha,⁴ are increasingly popular in mainstream theatre.

Internationally acclaimed feature films, such as Lee Tamahori's *Once Were Warriors*, and Jane Campion's *The Piano*, portray Maori as being dispossessed, chauvinistic, and cut off from their roots. As with most things, Maori actors often find themselves in a cleft stick when it comes to being accepting well-paid work on a Theatre, Film or Television projects which only serve to reinforce negative stereotypes related to their culture. Increasingly, however, Maori are taking hold of their own work and demanding realistic funding for their projects.

One man who has stood out against this negative stereotyping for the last 20 years, through his work in New Zealand Film, Television, Theatre and Theatre in Education, is Jim Moriarty. A leading New Zealand Maori actor/director /producer, and former psychiatric nurse, Jim is a Maori of Ngati Toa, Koata Kahungunu, and Pakeha descent.

Apart from his own appearances in theatre and television, most of his energies are currently focussed on the work of his theatre company in schools and justice system. It is this mix of personal and cultural circumstances, which have particularly informed Moriarty's work in the creation of the 'Theatre of Healing' or 'Theatre as Change' process.⁵

As the writer of this piece, for almost a decade my involvement has been through working with Moriarty's theatre in education company, Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu.⁶ I have been a dramaturg, resource writer and workshop designer on a number productions created specifically for annually touring to some 72,000 students in secondary schools, marae and prisons throughout New Zealand.⁷

Key Concepts

Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu as a theatre company is first and foremost concerned with making a Theatre Marae or 'Theatre of Transition' take place in every venue it encounters;

Primarily the company:

- "provides 'shadow training' in all aspects of the performance arts industry to young people.
- takes its work 'to the people'
- encourages active interchange providing a dynamic workshop platform for discussion of issues relevant to the content of its work
- embraces the whole of its work in the 'Theatre Marae style
- makes its work accessible to the widest possible audience.
- works to the highest professional standards
- and encourages harmony and balance in all things especially in cultural and gender equity areas."⁸

Jim Moriarty believes that reinforcing the use of the ritual of the marae, [meeting place of whanau (family) or iwi (tribe)] is essential because it:

- "keeps alive the celestial realm,
- constantly reaffirms that we are connected to all living things via our whakapapa. (genealogy)
- follows the kaupapa (plan) handed down from those who have gone before.
- strives to surround the form of theatre with tikanga, (customs and obligations) i.e. by presenting a powhiri (opening ceremony) before every show, a waiata (song) within the narrative of the play, and reflecting the need for waiata to proceed a speaker and including the stories of gods and goddesses."⁹

Thus the company presents a style of theatre, which is uniquely Maori. The themes embraced in its performances¹⁰ are universal, and deliberately bi-cultural aiming to positively embrace two cultures, Maori and Pakeha. Jim Moriarty sees conflict, which is embodied in a theatrical context, as being "a stepping stone to progress."¹¹

Aside from his work in schools, however, Jim Moriarty is best known for his work with the Department of Child Youth and Family Residential Services working with young people in Residential Youth Justice Centres. These young people are held in

detention either for their own protection or for the protection of others in the community. The inclusive philosophy of the theatre company determines that all residents in these centres are welcome to take part in the programme.

Currently in New Zealand, according to a recent report, “Teenagers make up 10 per cent of the sentenced prison population and 15 percent of people on remand.” And “ In 1997 a total of 1253 teenagers were sent to prison, 38 per cent of them for property offences.”¹²

Of these young people the vast majority would identify as Maori.

Moriarty’s theatrical involvement in Justice Centres came about for a number of reasons. As a child he visited relatives in Arohata Women’s prison, just north of Wellington. As a psychiatric nurse working at Porirua Hospital, just north of the capital of Wellington, he had also accompanied women to and from the prison. Moriarty trained at a time when psychiatry was moving out of the chemotherapy treatments and into the behavioural treatments and psychotherapies. He uses some of these methodologies in his current theatre work.

Eventually, after years of working in mainstream Pakeha theatre, film and television, Moriarty planned the concept of Theatre Marae in order to, “deliver it back to marginalised people”¹³. He had also become involved in Theatre of the Poor¹⁴ project at a time when he personally was trying to find a way of being “most effective” in his life.

Subsequently Jim Moriarty found some funding to stage productions at Arohata and Christchurch Women’s prisons. Then with the help of professionals, his theatre company facilitators and staff in the prisons, he created several shows, all of which attracted critical acclaim. On each occasion the company trained, created the play collaboratively, then performed to paying audiences as professionals.

Since then Moriarty has delivered three theatre programmes into Youth Justice Residential Centres; at Kingslea Youth Justice Residential Centre, in Christchurch, at the Lower North Youth Justice Residential Centre in Palmerston North, and at the Weymouth Youth Justice Residential Centre in Manukau, South Auckland. Currently Moriarty and his group are working in the ‘Whale Watching’ community in the South Island of Aotearoa working with at risk people using a similar process as used in the residential work.

In the course of doing this work Moriarty has created a unique therapeutic form of Theatre Marae, which he terms ‘Theatre for Healing’ or ‘Theatre for Change’. Marae rituals are the cornerstone Moriarty’s theatre work because; firstly, the marae is the place where he was brought up as a boy, secondly, it is where Maori people practise their whole of life experiences; [for example tangihanga (mourning)] and thirdly, although he has enjoyed the ritual of the rules, protocols, and style, of the theatre, Moriarty has equally enjoyed the rituals of the marae.¹⁵

Key elements of this concept of Theatre Marae relate to the fact that for Moriarty:

- “the rituals in both places serve to dignify human behaviour, to order and modify it.

- theatre marae (or marae theatre), contains the best ingredients of both those two life streams which respect protocol and ritual.
- going to the theatre is like hui - it's a gathering as much as going to the marae.
- a hui is a very theatrical experience; i.e. Maori watch the old people parry and thrust as they dance out on the marae area, (courtyard) competing in lots of ways, through speech through haka, (fierce rhythmical dance) through waiata, through all sorts of traditional formats. (Guessing) who can incant the longest, and the furthest back in history, (seeing) who can connect who to what marae.
- Maori recognise people's ihi, (essential force) their mauri, (life principal) their mana, (status) their wehi, (awe) their whakapapa, (lineage) and how your lineage connects to their lineage is vitally important.
- Maori make connections not only through the human form but also through the taonga (gifts) of the mountains, the rivers, the bush, and the sea.
- Maori recognise claims people might have. Equal and right claims to the same areas of land or sea depending on differing historical points of view.
- Maori acknowledge a God system beginning with Te Iho Matua Kore as the ultimate being.
- Maori recognise that for Maori everything is a living form requiring acknowledgement as having an equal right to its place on the earth, (Papatuanuku).
- Maori acknowledge that those things are more permanent than we ever will be. And that we have a duty honour them. Human life is transient. Toitu te whenua, whatunarana he tangata. The land remains forever. People are transient. We need to honour that which is permanent.
- Maori recognise that the house is a living form: the personification of a living ancestor or an ancestor who once lived, but who remains alive in that form.
- Maori acknowledge that meeting houses are living whakapapa (genealogical libraries) of how Maori connect and how they therefore need to honour one another.
- Maori recognise that the concept of manaakitanga, (hosting visitors) derives from this idea.
- Maori understand that stories about their tuupuna; (ancestors) are real, they happened. Equally stories about their atua, gods and the demi-gods: e.g. Maui; are also real.¹⁶

An example of bi-cultural and bilingual theatre much admired by Jim Moriarty is a play by Hone Tuwhare, *On Ilkka Moor Ba T'at, In the Wilderness Without a Hat*. In this play different strands of a family literally get down to a fist fight about who will take the tuupaapaku, the mate, the dead person onto their marae for a period of grieving. Within Maori culture the process of 'claiming the dead' gives status to the deceased person.¹⁷

For Maori, the past is always with us in the present, and in particular our tuupuna (ancestors) are always with us. The process of coming to terms with past grievances is seen to enable us both as individuals and as a society to move forward in the present.

The Beginning

For the company of Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu, the process of beginning work in within the Justice System involves working with tight contracts which detail everything including;

- the way company members will conduct themselves in relation to the young people,
- contracts for the young people and procedures in the case of a breach of these, (twenty-five began the process and sixteen finished the performances)
- relationships with on site staff,
- reporting and monitoring mechanisms,
- agreements about the way young people who have been released may continue to be part of the programme – sometimes at the discretion of the courts.
- issues to do with publicity, marketing and privacy
- relationships with local Maori iwi (tribe)

The Group Contract which the young people and the facilitators sign at the beginning of the ten week process includes the following things:

- the need to bring Honesty, Openness, and Willingness to each day
- not interrupting speakers. Allow people to have their say then take 3-5 seconds before responding.
- confidentiality concerning material raised by the group
- the need to make “I” statements – owning your feelings
- making eye contact when speaking or listening
- no put downs, religious, racist or sexist remarks or standover tactics
- no pairing off.
- no leaving the room. Expressing the need for ‘Time Out’. Walking out of the room = Walking out of the process.
- no ‘rescuing people’ who need to cry
- no Drugs alcohol or cigarettes
- being assertive.

At the beginning of the process, the young people are told by Jim Moriarty that their stories will be moulded into a play for the paying public to see. They learn that the process is not just about creating an entertaining play with action songs, it is also about looking at the ‘child within’ that has been hurt. The young people are in fact part of a therapy programme, a change programme.

The motivation for this is that the facilitators want to help the young people to make sense of what has happened to them, that which has brought them to this particular place. They are told that in seven weeks when the public walk through the doors the hardest thing they will have to do is to see it right through to the end.¹⁸

In the case of *Purotu*, Jim Moriarty explained that the name of the show which means, *The Magic Within*, is not about the facilitators breathing something magical in to the young people, but it is about, “...us opening you up so that that beautiful thing inside each and every one of you can come out, open up and it can flower and blossom.”¹⁹

The facilitators are introduced with a ratio of almost 1:1 in the group, working on the concept that each young person has a facilitator/buddy. The facilitators work twelve hour days for a minimal wage plus food and board for the duration of the programme.

Some of the facilitators are recently released young people from other Youth Justice Residential Centres. The judicial terms of their release can involve being a part of the programme.

Other facilitators are highly experienced teachers, actors, musicians and exponents of Maori arts. Not all of the facilitators are able to complete the programme. The self-discipline required is enormous. They live and eat together for almost eleven weeks and by the end of the programme some of the newly released young people have joined them as live-in members of the company. The rewards, however, in terms of skill development and personal growth are huge for many in the group.

By the conclusion of the programme the young people will have individually:

- created an expression of their own personal stories and whakapapa (genealogy) through the creation of a sound and symbol
- learned some elementary in theatre practices
- spent a quarter to a third of their time talking and resolving conflict,
- learnt Maori action songs
- shared personal stories of hurt and shame through a ‘disclosure process within the first four weeks.
- learnt a Samoan Sasa (dance form)
- been involved offered the opportunity to be involved in the spiritual part of the programme.
- learnt mechanisms for coping with anger
- learnt a great deal about their own culture and learnt cultural tolerance
- worked in a dramatic structure on symbolic forms through movement, song, spoken word and dance
- earned self respect
- kept a journal for the duration of the show
- presented 21 performances to the public including local schools
- taken part in a process which in total amounts to some 700 hours.
- taken part in the forums which immediately follow the performance where the audience responds and is challenged to take the needs of the young people on its own shoulders
- taken part in a poroporoaki (closing farewell ceremony) after the event where everyone has the opportunity to acknowledge one another’s contributions.

The Performance Format

The final format of the shows is always similar. The following format was presented in the *Purotu* performances.

- The audience gathered outside the gymnasium and was summoned by the kai karanga (the woman caller). Inside the performers stood as a body in lines, men at the front and women at the back chanting and moving to the haka powhiri (welcoming ritual dance). The chant welcomed the audience and made specific tribal references to the origins of the people. This is alternated

with the women's haka, *Arara ka Panapana*, where the women moved through the lines to the front. Facilitators performed alongside the young people supporting them in all their roles to a greater or lesser degree as an 'active shadow'.

- The audience settled and were given the chance to absorb the transformation of the space with its drawings, elaborate raked seating, lighting, sound and smoke machine into a theatre created with the help of the young people.
- The actors performed a movement piece, *Te Mauri / Te Manu*, which made reference to the Maori spiritual dimension.
- The first waiata (song) in Maori *Whakapiripiri*, (Bind fast), identified the tribal origins of members of the performing group and the place where the play was taking place.
- The second song in English, created by specifically by the group with the musician, (in the case of *Purotu* -Meg Williams) identified the specific place and people who were part of the action. In *Purotu* this song was 'Wass Up?'

This part of the programme marked a transition from the ritual of the powhiri to the kaupapa or specific matter of the play.

PART ONE

- The third song in English was created with the input of the young people to exemplify 'The Promise' expressing belief in a deity and the concept that everyone deserves to be looked after. The actors formed a semi-circle where the audience completes the circle. The actors remained on stage for the duration of the entire performance creating a non-naturalistic Brechtian quality to the play.
- Following this came 'The Darkness', a series of improvised statements delivered with stylised movement depicting the converse life experience.

PART TWO:

- 'Promise Broken' expressed the feelings of the group behind their recognition of their 'First Hurt' where the young people individually spoke of the first time they felt betrayed physically or emotionally. The performers presented a piece with movement expressing the injustice of society. They used a highly disciplined style of Maori martial art, similar to Tai Chi known as, *Te Kawa O Turongo*. This involved skills of balance – counter-pointed by the song's message about the injustice in society.
- The company presented a series of devised and scripted sketches about the process of Abandonment.

PART THREE

- The improvised sketches were about 'Fallout' – what happened after the Abandonment and when they were left to cope and turned to crime.
- Drift into crime. The process of creating these pieces came from the 'Disclosure Process' A formal script was then put together by the writer, in a form referred to by Jim Moriarty as an "objectified narrative".²⁰ In the case of *Purotu* the writer was John Vakidis.
- There followed a challenge or *wero* using traditional Maori wind instruments and *Te Rakau*, a form of Maori combat where women use short sticks and men

use long sticks. The actions illustrated the traditional story of Hine Nui Te Po, which examines issues of incest in a highly stylised form. The story ends in triumph by the Goddess of Death, Hine Nui Te Po.

PART FOUR - The Wish for the Future

In this section the young people presented a concert led by one of the young people as the M.C. He delivered a mihimihi or speech of welcome to the audience and introduced a series of songs and dances devised with the help of the facilitators. The purpose of the section was to 'show off' their skills as writers of lyrics, rap artists, hip hop artists, singers and dancers and so on. It included a sasa or traditional Samoan dance in recognition of the origins of one of the young people who led the group through the piece.

PART FIVE – Audience Response

Following an interval, Jim Moriarty invited the audience to mihi (pay tribute) directly to the young people. Many choose to do this in Maori and sometimes waiata or haka accompanied the delivery of such speeches. For some this is the first time they had seen family members since their arrival in the institution. It was also an opportunity for social workers, probation officers, and staff from the institution, politicians and theatre workers to express their admiration for the work. Jim Moriarty in keeping with Maori tradition lays down a take (challenge) to the audience asking what it can do for the young people on their release into the community. The process of this section of the programme often added another hour to the length of the performance. The young people and facilitators sat on the floor of the stage throughout and listened to the tributes being paid to them.

Response

A tribute paid by the Chief District Court Judge, Justice David Carruthers, reads,

“I have in the past made it a condition of bail and given dispensations to the young people who have been in the residential system to return so that they could be part of the Moriarty Theatre of Healing because I consider the involvement to be so constructive and positive. I have seen some young people who were clearly headed for a life of despair and crime quite changed by the experience. For some it is the first time that they have been given the opportunity of using their talents in an open and professional way and for others it has been the first time they have been able to express their emotions before other people in a way which was both open, honest and healing.”²¹

The Department of Youth and Family Services made a formal evaluation of each of the three programmes and as a result new programmes of a similar nature are being planned. The fact that many of the young people choose to stay in the institution after their release date speaks for itself. A one and a half hour television documentary on the Purotu process made by M.F. Films will screen later this year on a public broadcast channel.

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¹ Traditional Maori whatatauki or proverb. This is the company motto for Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu. It puts people first before all else.

² WILSON, M. and HUNT, P. Eds. (2000). *Te Hono ki Hawai'iki: The bond with the Pacific* by Eddie Durie p.53

³ Ibid. Timoti S. Karetu p.86

⁴ Pakeha – non-Maori, European, Caucasian. (Ryan. 1995, p. 167) Also used informally by Maori to refer to the English language as in, “Te reo Pakeha.”

⁵ MORIARTY, J. (1993)

⁶ The name of the roopu, (group) Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu, (The Blossoming Fruit Tree of our Sacred Grove) refers to the Tree of Knowledge in general and to the branch dedicated to the performing arts. In particular Drama uses ritual, which is central to the realm of the gods and goddesses in the Maori, Polynesian, and Celtic traditions. Each culture has its own traditions and rituals. (Moriarty. 1993)

⁷ Productions toured to schools by Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu which Susan Battye has worked on since 1993 are, *Nga Puke*, by John Broughton, *Frankie and Hone* by John Broughton, *Mana* by John Vakidis, *Taiki E!* by John Vakidis, *Busted* by John Vakidis and *Nga Kaitiaki* by John Vakidis.

⁸ MORIARTY, J. (1993)

⁹ Ibid. The items referred to are fundamental to Maori cultural practice.

¹⁰ Te Rakau Hua O Te Wao Tapu performs annually to approximately 72,000 students in secondary schools, throughout New Zealand. The company has been constantly touring in schools since 1993.

¹¹ MORIARTY, J. (1993)

¹² NZ Herald Wednesday June 6 2001

¹³ MORIARTY, J. (1993)

¹⁴ Anamus Theatre led by Paul Maunder in Wellington.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ M.F. FILMS. (2001) *The Magic Within*

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ M.F. FILMS. (2001) *Op. Cit.*

²¹ CARRUTHERS, D.J. (2001)