

MORE TRAVELS WITH HERODOTUS: TRIPPING OVER BORDERS LIGHTLY OR “PSYCHIATRIC IMPERIALISM”¹

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The main argument of this book is that there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice. Probably more than ever, global capitalism appears as a civilizational paradigm encompassing all domains of social life. The exclusion, oppression, and discrimination it produces have not only economic, social, and political dimensions but also cultural and epistemological ones. Accordingly, to confront this paradigm in all its dimensions is the challenge facing a new critical theory and emancipatory practices. Contrary to their predecessors, this theory and these practices must start from the premise that the epistemological diversity of the world is immense, as immense as its cultural diversity and the recognition of such diversity must be at the core of the global resistance against capitalism and of the formulation of alternative forms of sociability (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p. xix).

In 2009, I was invited to 1^{er} Encuentro Internacional de Psicología y Psicoterapia in the remote Mexican city of Chihuahua along with many other representatives of “therapies,” almost exclusively North American in provenance. In addition, Victoria Chavira, Coordinadora del Coloquio Politco, asked me, along with others, to address a special meeting to be attended by the Mayor of Chihuahua and local congressmen/women and senior officials of the Social and Mental Health Services in the city and state of Chihuahua. Both the questions and the answers were to be then compiled and forwarded to the local government authorities.

The questions we were asked to address were as follows:

- (i) What are the most important issues in mental health in your country?
- (ii) What kind of public policies are used to resolve these mental health issues?
- (iii) Which of these programs have been successful?
- (iv) What do you consider the basic services that any community should have to solve mental health issues?
- (vi) What would your recommendations be to our three local branches of government on mental health and family violence issues?

What follows is my address, which was considerably at variance to the questions I was asked to address:

Nothing has perplexed me more than your request to make recommendations regarding your services. I have spent more hours than I am willing to admit seated before my computer screen and everything I wrote I felt compelled to delete. I have pulled my beard, tormented myself by day and fretted through sleepless nights in my efforts to honor the sincerity of your queries. But all to no avail. I finally asked myself: 'Why can I not respond?' After all, my recommendations are only to last twenty minutes? And my hosts have been more hospitable and generous than I could ever have expected. I must find some way to return their favors.

Wandering scholars—and I am pretty sure I get the prize for coming the greatest distance to your conference from far away, English (Maori)-speaking New Zealand—can assume two distinctly different ways of going about things. One might be called the 'missionary' with his/her civilizing zeal, knowing what is right for you and what is wrong with you; the other might be called the 'anthropologist or ethnographer' with their curiosity about how you about things in your culture represent that through your language. Before I became a narrative therapist, I was an anthropologist and I find it almost impossible to detach myself from such an ethics of practice.

What I often do when I am lost like this is to 'cast my net' widely. This usually involves me wandering around my familiar libraries. Is there something uncanny about this or does it have more to do with some knowing of what you might be looking for? Why I ask this is that it was only a matter of days before I found what, with the wisdom of hindsight, I had been searching for. I discovered a book chapter by the anthropologist Brigitte Jordan entitled 'Authoritative Knowledge and Its Construction in Childbirth' (Jordan, 1997).

In some ways, this book was in her honor as she had died just prior to its publication. What had she done to merit such respect from her community of scholars? She was the first person and woman to distinguish child birthing as not only involving knowledge but 'community' and 'gendered' knowledges. And it is daunting to consider that she did so as late as the early 1970s. Haven't women been giving birth since forever? What took us so long to conceive of something so significant in terms of risk to life and so thrilling in terms of bringing unborn life to life as implicating those involved as 'knowledged'?²

Jordan compares two scenes: one from Yucutan, Mexico and the other from her viewing of videotapes from a suitably anonymous North American obstetrics hospital. Permit me to provide you with abstracts of such accounts of both studies for your interest:

'This is the case of childbirth in Yucutan, where women in the rural communities draw upon a large body of wisdom that is assembled in each particular birth from a shared history and from the experience of those present, that is, the woman's immediate family, the village midwife, and other experienced women in the community. In such situations, all participants lend a hand to give aid—physical, emotional, ritual, spiritual—and if the labor is drawn out and difficult, they build

a shared store of knowledge through stories, demonstrations, and remedies. In this manner, a joint view of what is going on in this labor with 'this' woman-plus-baby is constructed in which everyone involved in the birth participates. In contrast to Western medicalized births, there is no one in charge here. There is no single decision maker. It is certainly not the midwife either. Rather the store of knowledge required for conducting a birth is created and re-created by all participants jointly as they do the work of birthing' (Jordan, 1997, p. 60).

Compare the account above to the following:

'Business gets done between the nurse and the medical student with her (the mother) as an object but not as an actor . . . Once the doctor enters, the staff interact as a team of which the physician is the focal member and from which the woman is specifically excluded. No input is solicited from her; talk is not produced for her overhearing or participation. No explanations are given. They do the business of examining her and preparing her to be delivered . . . The result is the systematic objectification of the woman in that there are two different enterprises going on in the room. The woman is desperately struggling against the sensations of her body, cajoled and parented by the nurse, who in turn has one eye on the medical team. The second, quite separate enterprise is to deliver the baby, which is the business of the staff. For all practical purposes, the woman has nothing to do with that, nor has she anything to say about it. She is not giving birth, she is delivered' (Jordan, 1997, p. 72).

I found myself reading and re-reading her chapter not entirely knowing why but willingly giving in to it. But what had this chapter got to do with your request?

Again by chance—or was it?—I had read the day before an article by the most humane of men, the neurologist and distinguished author, Oliver Sachs, in 'The Lost Virtues of the Asylum,' (Sachs, 2009) which I had resonated with to the extent that I couldn't get it out of my mind either.

Sachs wrote: 'The last fifteen years or so have seen a new generation of anti-psychotic drugs, with better therapeutic effects and fewer side effects, but the too exclusive an emphasis on "chemical" models of schizophrenia on purely pharmacological approaches to treatment, may leave the central and human experience of being mentally ill untouched' (p. 52).

He goes on to summarize his paper:

'The remainder—the 99% of the mentally ill who have sufficient resources of their own—must face inadequate treatment and lives that cannot reach their potential. The millions of mentally ill remain the least supported, the most disenfranchised, and the most excluded people in our society today . . . And yet it is clear that in ideal circumstances, and when resources are available, even the most deeply ill people—who may have been relegated to a "hopeless" prognosis—may be enabled to lead satisfying and productive lives' (Sachs, 2009, p. 52).

I steeled myself by rereading the philosopher Michel Foucault on his uniquely Gallic notion of 'curiosity.' I had come to the conclusion that I would have to appeal to this way of thinking despite how demanding that might prove. Foucault spoke

of allowing 'the principle of innovation: to seek out in reflection those things that have never been thought or imagined' (Foucault, 1988, p. 1).

That seemed the only option open to me and I began to immediately brood on Jordan's account like a mother hen. Would I hatch something in time? At last it came to me in the bath and I dreamed what follows that very night.

How I seek to acknowledge your hospitality and generosity is by way of a very modest vision. I do not consider it to be either utopian or herculean. This vision draws more upon child birthing in Yucutan than child birthing in a prestigious North American hospital. It touches 'the central and human experience of being mentally ill' to use Sachs's poignant words. And that such problems are inherently moral concerns for all those who suffer. Their suffering has a great deal to do with what Arthur Kleinman refers to as their 'demoralization' (1988) as much as anything else. How can we then participate with those who suffer to they can 'remoralize' their lives (Frank, 2004) so that they can once again in Sachs's words 'lead satisfying and productive lives' (2009, p. 52).

My vision calls upon our own humility in the face of others and our own suffering. And to do so, we may have to reconsider the very idea of 'knowledges.' I have added an 's' to indicates their plurality rather than insisting upon a professional or cultural monopoly over them that would dismiss and erase them from counting for anything. Can those who suffer and those who care for them be conceived as not merely passive recipients of our knowledges but creators and users of their own knowledges, albeit of a very different species? And if some of us assumed the role of anthropologist we might find such otherwise unauthorized knowledges to serve many purposes we cannot serve as well. Can we restore the dignity of others any better than the communities in which they live? If we dismiss or disregard such situated and subjective knowledges of those who suffer, are we unwittingly impoverishing them of what matters most to them? Perhaps it is their knowledges, more than ours, that gives those who suffer the moral stamina to go on with their lives. And if we could conceive of such stuff as moral stamina, could we then participate with those who suffer to endow both them and us with this? My vision has to do with moral stamina as a framework to unite those who suffer and those of us who seek to alleviate their suffering.

Let me remind you again of the scene of childbirth in Yucutan. What struck me was the admixture of knowledges without any seeking a monopoly or to discredit the others—that perhaps there were times and places for all the expressions of such knowledges.

Now there is a distinct problem if we are to bring this vision down to earth here in Chihuahua or anywhere else. Those 'insider knowledges' (I am using that term to distinguish them from 'outsider' or professional knowledges) are distinctly different than what Foucault refers to as the 'regimes of truth' of the professional knowledges. In fact, they may have to be considered to be an entirely different genre of knowledge that can be measured only in their own terms. In the same way, an anthropologist does not judge another culture against his/hers but rather regards it as a distinctive way of making sense of the world.

With this in mind, let me paint in words a picture of ‘insider knowledges,’ given that they embrace fact as well as aspiration, value, commitment, passion, and hope.

I would describe an ‘insider knowledge’ as innocent as a newborn child; as delicate as a sprouting seed that has just broken through the soil, as shy and apprehensive as children arriving at what will be their school for their very first day. When we try to speak about them, we can seem as awkward as a fish out of water. ‘Insider knowledges’ are often before or without words, and for that reason, when inside knowers try to speak about their skills/knowledges/theories, they can appear either foolish or to be making unjustifiable claims. The philosopher Michael Polanyi referred to ‘insider knowledges’ as ‘tacit knowledges’ (1974) and asserted that we all know more than we can tell.

For all these reasons, ‘insider knowledges’ find it almost impossible to compete with the well established and sanctioned professional or ‘outsider knowledges.’ And it is rare that the latter ever acknowledges ‘insider knowledges.’ In fact, they commonly dismiss them as anecdotal or hold them in contempt as a willful disgrace of their power and authority.

Stories of ‘insider knowledges’ are there to inform as well as, in Eduardo Galeano’s felicitous phrase, ‘abrigar esperanzas’ (to give shelter to hope) (Fischlin & Nandorfy, 2002, p. 5), to excite the imagination, to go beyond what is already known, to secure the patience required to engage in trial and error learning, and above all else to pay careful attention to that which you, without knowing, come to know. There are those accidents that seem like random events. Likewise, we might pay heed to those seemingly unpredictable occurrences, which, if taken up and examined like one would a strange sea shell found on a beach, we might find that on even closer look, you have never seen anything like this before.

It would take practitioner/ethnographers to collect and archive such stories. They would be those who could feel comfortable bridging both worlds—the worlds of those who suffer and the professional worlds of those who intend to serve them. Such people straddling the borders between the two worlds might learn to speak both knowledges and mix them up. It’s at the borders where these two knowledges intersect that I believe ‘inter-cultural invention’ (Denborough, 2011) will take place, much like it always has at the ports and marketplaces where cultures have met to trade and talk at least since Herodotus’ time.

A modest and inexpensive vision to be sure but it would require us to rethink the very idea of ‘knowledge’ and who is knowledgeable. And in addition, we would have to reconsider the various routes to such distinctive knowledges, which like languages are incomparable and irreducible to a monopoly based on some sort of superiority.

Here is an example of a recent conversation I had in Auckland with Debbie, a mother of an eight year old. He had been diagnosed at birth as having a genetic skin disorder and she and her husband were prepared by the medical staff for him to perish within a few months. I met this young man, now eight, and, in spite of his disorder, he was hale and hearty. I asked her how her medical advisors had responded to this entirely unpredictable turn of events. Their advice was for her

and his father to continue doing whatever it was that they were doing. This was seemingly prudent advice. I asked her if anyone had ever asked her 'what it was she was doing?' She looked at me quizzically and replied that in fact no one had ever asked anything of that sort. Why not?

This conference featured the 'export' of many of the North American therapies without any reference to the inexorable fact that they were 'crossing borders' of culture/language/circumstance. This deeply troubled me. As a former anthropologist, I shared with many others a longstanding concern that we usually 'trip over borders' if we are not careful. This led me to suggest 'Tripping over Borders' as a topic for this special issue of the *Journal of Systemic Therapies* and solicited Laura Beres's help to do so. And thanks too to Jim Duvall for his editorial oversight.

Arthur Kleinman, Harvard psychiatrist and anthropologist, has been the most consistent and eloquent spokesperson for similar concerns but with a far wider field of vision than mine.

Kleinman speaks especially in reference to post traumatic stress disorder but also more generally 'how the clinician reworks the patient's perspective in to disease categories which distort the moral world of the patient and community' (1995a, p. 95). And how this ends up 'delegitimating the patient's suffering's moral commentary and political performance' (p. 97). That this recreates 'human suffering as inhuman disease' (96).

But he also casts his concerned gaze over my first profession—anthropology.

'She or he (the anthropologist) can engage in professional discourse every bit as dehumanizing as that of colleagues who unreflectively draw upon tropes of biomedicine or behaviorism to create their subject matter. An experience-rich and near human subject can be converted into a dehumanized object, a caricature of experience' (p. 97).

He concludes that we, each of us, injure the humanity of our fellow sufferers each time we fail to privilege their voices and experiences. That the professionalization of human problems as psychiatric disorders causes sufferers (and their communities) to lose a world, the local context that organizes experience through moral reverberation and popular cultural categories about what life means and what is at stake in living. And that we are far along the way of inauthenticating social worlds that could as well be humanly rendered in their own terms (Kleinman, 1995b, p. 117).

I solicited these four papers, three of which simultaneously pay homage to the similar concerns that were expressed in many aspects of Michael White's practice and thinking. But it was patently obvious in his work with Power to Our Journeys' Groups in the context of the Dulwich Centre Mental Health Project (Members of the Power to Our Journeys Group; Vercoe, and Russell, 2009) and the 'community gatherings' (which he later called 'assignments') convened with Aboriginal communities in Australia (White, 2003).

Scot Cooper writes about his personal engagement in his hometown of Caledonia, Ontario and the dangerous hostilities that had arisen over a land dispute at Douglas Creek Estate with the Six Nations community four years ago. He had invited Michael

White in the first place along with his colleagues, Jim Duvall (The Hincks-Dellcrest Centre) and Laura Beres (School of Social Work, The University of Western Ontario) to join him there. The ‘community helpers’ as they called themselves answered a ‘call to come together in love and understanding for one common goal: to promote respect, unity and connectedness with the people from Caledonia and Six Nations’ (White, 2007, p. 1) which led to ‘thirty six consultations over three days’ (White, 2007, p. 1). Prior to reading Scot’s moving account of the ripples, I urge you to either read or download ‘Community Assignments’ from the original meetings in March 2007 (White, 2007). This document is the joint property of the Six Nations and Caledonia Communities. This paper must be one of the few I have ever read in an academic journal that made me cry.

Maggie Carey and Shona Russell’s ‘Pedagogy shaped by culture: Teaching narrative approaches to Australian Aboriginal health workers’ yet again has its source in the concerns of Michael White and his allegiance to the Aboriginal Health Services in Adelaide from the 1980s onwards. This commitment was one White adhered to passionately over the years leading to many engagements around ‘community gatherings’ in Adelaide and throughout Australia. Carey and Russell propose to refer to their practice as a ‘narrative pedagogy.’ I consider this absolutely justifiable. Here Maggie, Shona, their consultants, advisors, and students have entered into an enduring collaboration that has as its foundations ‘principles of cultural partnership and of cultural accountability as non-aboriginal teachers.’ They are at pains to set their Diploma program within what they refer to as ‘the terrible legacy of the history of colonization of Australia and the dispossession of Aboriginal Australians’ and consider it as a means of ‘responding to this history.’ They are willing to wrestle with ‘an epistemology of equity’ (Rappaport, 2008) and continuously review and revise their curriculum as respective knowledges commingle. I found reading this paper extremely heartening and hope that they might consider extending this paper to a text. I believe they have far more to say than the word limit of this Journal permitted.

I traveled part of the way alongside Marcela Polanco’s political and intellectual odyssey (Polanco & Epston, 2009; Polanco, 2010) from a chance occurrence in Havana, Cuba early in 2007 to recently learning of the reception her dissertation received at its defense at Nova Southeastern University. The conference—‘Encountering the Spirit of Community in Narrative Therapy and in Cuban Social Programs’ held in Havana, Cuba in January 2007—was organized by Michael Kerman (Toronto) as a ‘two-way street.’ For three days, Cubans trained narrative therapists about what they referred to as ‘social programs’ and we reciprocated by teaching narrative therapy after which we ‘shared notes’ for the remainder of this five-day event.

Marcela had studied narrative therapy in English at Nova and through the Dulwich Centre International Training program in Adelaide and elsewhere. We first met in Havana after she had just attended her first workshop in Spanish presented by Marta Campillo (Xalapa, Mexico). As she had her back to me, I accidentally overheard her shamefully confessing to Marta her inability to understand a word of

narrative therapy in Spanish, her mother tongue. Marcela is a mestitza cachaca (a resident of Bogota, Colombia) and had fled to the United States in her 20s. When she realized my presence, her humiliation was complete. However, I was intrigued by the fact that a discipline/practice such as narrative therapy that Marcela taught at a Masters level in English could be exempt from any understanding at all in her mother tongue. The next day, I raced excitedly back to her, thrilled by what this 'accident' might allow for. She could conceivably watch herself learn Narrative Therapy anew in Spanish through a deep knowledge of it in her second language (English).

That is how her odyssey began, which as you will read, led her to determinately decolonize narrative therapy as she respectfully translates narrative therapy to her homeland.³ Many borders are crossed as she moves backwards and forwards between culture/language/poetics/circumstance. I wonder how Michael would have savored the play of his exquisite use of language being rendered through 'the exaltation of reality' (Zapata-Whelan, 2011) in the Chilean-born Isabel Allende, the 'ordinary enchantments' (Faris, 2004) in the Colombian-born Gabriel Garcia Marquez and the unofficial histories of Uruguayan Eduardo Galeano (1992; 1997; 2010). You can follow the outlines of this intellectual/political/sentimental odyssey but if you are like me, you will want to know a great deal more about this than once again the word limit of this Journal permits.

I commissioned my friends and colleagues Rose Yukich and Te Kawehau Hoskins to contribute 'Responsibility and the Other: Cross-cultural Engagement in the Narratives of Three New Zealand School Leaders' to complement Maggie and Shona's paper but also to introduce many of us to the philosophy/theology of Emmanuel Levinas and the unknowable other and 'the productivity of ignorance.' Rose's thesis told the intimate narratives of three New Zealand high school teachers who promoted bicultural (Maori and Pakeha) understanding in their respective schools and themselves were eventually able to 'straddle' the borders between cultures. Although of course there are many autobiographical accounts of emigration, etc., there are few accounts of elite professionals 'crossing the borders' of culture, ethnicity, language, status, and privilege as well as carrying with them a responsibility for a societal institution—a state secondary high school—on their shoulders.

Te Kawehau introduces us to Levinas who more than anyone else considered philosophy as a source of 'wisdom' and dutifully applied himself to the ethics of the encounter with the Other, with its overwhelming concern for an appreciation of difference rather than the seeking after sameness. Todd (2003) summarizes the basis of any encounter for Levinas as 'what can I learn from the other as one who is absolutely different from myself' (p. 15). In fact, he offers this as an ethical requirement as much as a possible source of consuming interest in the other and oneself.

On returning from Brazil I learned that the deadline for this special issue was imminent but I had fallen ill and had to take to my bed. Perhaps it was my enforced isolation that made me pick up and start to read Ryszard Kapuscinski's *Travels with Herodotus* (2007),⁴ a book Ann had brought home from the library. When I

read the title, I wondered who is or was this Herodotus? The moment I opened the book, my eyes were riveted to ‘Crossing the Border,’ the title heading the first chapter. Do you believe in the uncanny? I know I do.

As a recent university graduate in Poland, Kapuscinski joined Sztabdar Mtodych (‘The Banner of Youth’) as a fledging journalist in 1955. So enthusiastic was he about crossing the borders of Poland, which he believed would be ‘a mystical and transcendental act’ (p. 10), he convinced his editor to appoint him to his foreign assignment to India. In addition, she gave him a copy of *The Histories* by Herodotus (485BC–425BC) and said: ‘Here, a present, for the road’ (p. 10). I wonder if she knew Herodotus would be his constant traveling companion as journalist/writer/philosopher until his death in 2007. And he read and re-read Herodotus to understand where this passion of Herodotus came from to know another in his or her uniqueness. For other histories tell us that so many borders have been crossed to pillage, plunder, colonize, ‘civilize,’ convert, or enslave the other.

At the end of his life, Kapuscinski concludes: “Herodotus learns about his worlds with the rapturous enthusiasm of a child. His most important discovery? That there are many worlds. And that each is different. Each is important. And that one must learn about them, because these other worlds, the other cultures, are mirrors in which we can see ourselves, thanks to which we understand ourselves better—for we cannot define our own identity until having confronted that of others, as comparison. And that is why Herodotus, having made this discovery—that the cultures of others are a mirror in which we can examine ourselves in order to understand ourselves better—every morning tirelessly, again and again, he sets out on his journey” (p. 264).

NOTES

1. This is a term contrived by Diane Cole in her review (Cole, 2010, p. 65) of the very forcefully argued *Crazy Like Us: The Globalization of the American Psyche* (2010), which I strongly recommend to anyone interested in pursuing this further. Watters is a journalist but his 180 page long bibliography is the most complete I have ever seen.

2. This is one of my favorite neologisms of Michael White.

3. This was inspired in part by her reading of Linda Tuwai Smith’s classic text-*Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples* (1999).

4. Anyone interested in “tripping over borders lightly” will delight in a collection of speeches in *The Other* (Kapuscinski, 2008) he delivered in the last years of his life. It is interesting to note the profound influence of Father Jozef Tischner, a theologian who had been deeply influenced by Levinas.

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