

NARRATIVES OF SUFFERING AND HOPE

Historical trauma and contemporary rebuilding for
Māori women with experiences of incarceration

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Abstract

This article draws from research with Māori women who have experiences of incarceration and key informants who have worked with Māori in the criminal justice system and/or in communities in Aotearoa New Zealand. Understanding was sought through an exploration of the intergenerational transfer of suffering and the associated normalisation of dysfunction and incarceration. Theories of historical trauma are utilised as a way to comprehend our history of

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incarceration; most invigorating about historical trauma theory is its ultimate aim of healing, however. Therefore we also sought narratives of hope for new pathways through which Māori women can reconnect and rebuild their lives and those of their whānau. Through such an aim that seeks self-determined solutions to past wounding, historical trauma theory can contribute to contemporary rebuilding for incarcerated Māori women and their whānau.

Keywords

Māori women, historical trauma, intergenerational transmission, indigenous peoples, Māori incarceration

Introduction

Incarceration of Māori men, women and youth is a major problem within Aotearoa New Zealand (Gordon, 2011; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012; Pratt, 2013; Robson Hanan Trust, 2010; Smith, 2013; Tauri & Webb, 2012; Workman, 2011; Workman & McIntosh, 2013). This article arises from postdoctoral research with Māori women who have experience of incarceration, and key informants who have worked with indigenous people in prison or in their communities. Given the over-representation of Māori in the prison population, this project investigates an area of vital interest to Māori and national society, within which insufficient research has been done to date. Pathways toward development of efficacious policies and practices must be foregrounded by robust research which has local context. This project seeks understanding of Māori incarceration primarily through the stories of Māori women, and by exploring the intergenerational transfer of suffering and the associated normalisation of incarceration.

Māori have one of the highest rates of imprisonment in the world (Robson Hanan Trust, 2010). The Department of Corrections (2007) wrote that Māori are “over-represented at every stage of the criminal justice system a catastrophe both for Māori as a people and ... for New Zealand as a whole” (p. 6). Despite targeted measures by the Department of Corrections to reduce Māori offending, little appreciable

change has occurred. Māori men continue to make up over 50% of the male prison population with Māori women constituting over 60% of the female prison population. Behind these statistics of incarceration, however, are narratives of devastation (Workman & McIntosh, 2013) which impact on individuals, families, communities and our nation.

Theories of historical trauma are utilised as a way in which to comprehend the history of incarceration, and further understanding of the socio-political processes that have led to the over-population of our prisons with Māori men, women and youth. Historical trauma theory has become increasingly popular with indigenous peoples through the work of indigenous scholars, where past traumatic events affecting a group of people (for example, colonisation) become embedded in the collective, social, emotional and spiritual memories of the population, accumulating across generations (Brave Heart, 2005; Brave Heart & Daw, 2012; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Sotero, 2006; Walters, 2007; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999; Wesley-Equimaux & Smolewski, 2004). With its ultimate aim of healing, historical trauma theory can be utilised to seek self-determined solutions to past wounding, thereby contributing to contemporary rebuilding for incarcerated Māori women and their whānau.

Postdoctoral research—Ngā ara hou

This project was headed by Lily George through an Erihapeti Rehu-Murchie Postdoctoral Fellowship funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand, running from June 2011 to May 2014. The original aims were to tell the stories of Māori women with experiences of incarceration to extend understanding and compassion, and contribute to development of a health and education programme for incarcerated Māori women. At present the Department of Corrections provides one rehabilitation programme for Māori women called Kowhiritanga and a variety of other treatment and education programmes (see www.corrections.govt.nz), yet the rates of recidivism are still over 60% for Māori (Department of Corrections, 2014).

The two methodological foundations used in this project were that of Kaupapa Māori Research (KMR), and Participatory Action Research (PAR). This project was “by Māori, with Māori and for Māori” (Smith, 1999), and therefore utilised kaupapa Māori as an overarching body of knowledge. PAR assumes that “knowledge is rooted in social relations and most powerful when produced collaboratively through action” (Fine et al., 2004, p. 173), recognising that community members are experts of their lives, and research is best done “with” communities, rather than “on” or “for” them.

In this project, KMR was expressed in terms of development of strong relationships (whakawhanaungatanga) between researcher, advisory group and other participants (for example, Lily and others met with Group One participants up to three times in order to establish a relationship that enabled an easier sharing of what were very personal, and often painful, narratives); use of hui; gifting of koha; use of karakia and other ritual; and in recognising the political, historical and social contexts within which this study is embedded. While not a typical PAR initiative, as our “community” is a geographically disparate group brought together by experience and ethnicity, use of four

interview participants in the advisory group ensured the “community insider” perspective remained inherent throughout data collection and analysis, as well as development of theory and models. The aims of KMR and PAR converge here in the drive for social justice and transformation.

Semi-structured interviews were held with two groups—Group One: 12 Māori women who have been incarcerated: Aorere, Ataahua, Atawhai, Kiriroa, Marama, Mereana, Ngaronoa, Papatahi, Teina, Uenuku and Whina; the twelfth was Ngawaiata, mother of Ngaronoa. Although each participant in Group One gave permission for their real first names to be used, given the sensitive nature of the material imparted in the interviews and the possibility of participants being identified, Lily made the decision to assign each one with a nom de plume. Group Two were 11 key informants who have worked with Māori in the criminal justice system or in communities. All gave their permission for their names to be used in any publications as follows, with initials to be used in the text in brackets—Awhitia Mihaere (AM), Cheryl Smith (CS), Gail Allan (GA), Kim Workman (KM), Lynda Toki (LT), Manulani Meyer (MaMe), Moe Milne (MoMi), Rosie Abbott (RA), Rangi Davis (RD), Rangi Naera (RN) and Tracey McIntosh (TM). By interviewing people from differing arenas, we were enabled to gain a wider perspective into issues surrounding incarceration and the impacts on Māori individuals, whānau and communities.

At the time of interviews, 11 of those in Group One had been incarcerated up to 20 years ago with one currently on community detention. Times served in prison were from three months to nine years; eight have been incarcerated more than once, with five having been confined in some version of the criminal justice system three times or more. The twelfth Māori woman has not been in prison herself, but six of the ten children in her blended family have been imprisoned (including one of the other participants), and as a child she experienced many of

the common risk factors associated with incarceration such as domestic violence and alcohol abuse. Ages ranged from 21 to mid-50s; eight were mothers, four were grandmothers, and there were two whānau groupings.

Unusually, four of the participants already had or were in the midst of gaining a tertiary qualification—educational underachievement at all levels is a common factor for incarcerated Māori, which in turn contributes to other forms of impoverishment (Durie, 2003; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012). All told narratives of difficulty and challenge, but there were also some significant dreams and a range of unrealised potential. While the difficult stories are important, we also wanted this project to focus on those elements which may suggest new pathways toward good health and wellbeing.

A third group of participants was the Mana Wāhine Advisory Group (MWAG), which consisted of eight Māori women who work in health, social services or education. Six were previously known to Lily as postgraduate students at Massey University, so participation gave them research experience to build research capability while supporting the project with their wisdom and experience. Four assisted with interviews and other procedural tasks. We also met every few months for a meal and an informal summation of progress to date.

Additionally, MWAG members met with Lily for two “analysis hui”. These gatherings occurred in June 2012 and March 2013 after each group of interviews. Each was assigned interview transcripts (de-identified for Group One) to report back on and draw demographic data, life maps and common themes from. Lily did not provide preliminary analyses as she thought it important for the women to contribute their own first impressions, insights and wisdoms garnered from the interviews. For Lily it was a rewarding experience to co-analyse the interviews in very insightful and inspiring gatherings, in ways that honoured te ira tangata—the essential humanity of those in all three groups.

Another feature of the project was a “Healing Wānanga” at the naval marae in Devonport, Te Taua Moana o Aotearoa. In attendance were 33 indigenous women and one Pākehā woman from varying sectors of society. Five presentations (three by Group Two participants) were made on issues relating to Māori incarceration such as historical trauma, healing modalities and current research. Robust discussions were held following each presentation, which has contributed well to data analysis. An unexpected finding of the wānanga was that while many had whānau or hapū experiences of incarceration, they had little knowledge of its extent, and therefore the wider impact on Māori communities. As McIntosh and Radojkovic (2012) state:

The warehousing of surplus humanity in prisons and the ongoing carceralisation of indigenous communities is largely *a silent crisis* The politics of confinement is both a public discourse and a concealed experience. (p. 38, emphasis added)

Māori women

There are many ways to see Māori women: some are seen as the poutokomanawa of their whānau who draws everyone within her influential sphere. Some are raised by strong women who nurture, teach, discipline and whose arms are well known as places of safety; so we grow with strong role models of women as our sisters, mothers, aunts and grandmothers. Conscious and unconscious learning occurs as Māori women perpetuate the intergenerational transmission of practical and esoteric knowledge through active and experiential lives (Irwin & Ramsden, 1995; Tuuta, Irwin, & McLean, 2011). Pihama (2001) wrote that:

Recognising the power and potential of Māori women is a means by which we can seek change. Reconnecting ourselves with a belief in who we are and ... knowledge of where

we are from is part of bring[ing] forward knowledge that can be healing for whānau, hapū and iwi. (pp. 44–45)

In the first analysis hui, RD had this to say:

It's also with all these stories [of tupuna], they are sacred stories if we look after their stories really well and we're doing the right things with them, it has potential for [others] to heal because we are doing beautiful things with their kōrero and we're trying to take it somewhere else And so what I try and say, if you can hold that big story for yourself within these realms of tapu, then you've got a pretty good start or good foundation.

But many of our girls and women do not have such foundations to build upon any more. Or what they are learning are different kinds of narratives that emerge from experiences of violence and other dysfunctions. Too many of our wāhine experience disconnection from self, from kin, from culture and society. And for some, pathways to prison become those most likely travelled (Durie, 2003; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012).

Aotearoa New Zealand rates of imprisonment are very high at 199 per 100,000, with a disaggregated rate for Māori of 700 per 100,000 (Gordon, 2011; McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012; Tauri & Webb, 2012; Workman & McIntosh, 2013). Gordon (2011) notes that similar countries have significantly lower rates: Australia at 133 per 100,000 of population; United Kingdom at 153 per 100,000; Canada at 117 per 100,000. The rate for the United States, however, is 750 per 100,000 (Workman & McIntosh, 2013), drawing equivalency with rates of Māori incarceration.

Māori imprisonment has risen from around 3% in the 19th century to 11% by 1936, 21% in 1945, 40% by 1971, to consistently 50+% since 1980 (Clayworth, 2012). In September 2013, Māori constituted 50.6% of the total New Zealand prison population (Department

of Corrections, 2013). This translates to around 4,000 Māori men (50+%) and close to 400 Māori women (60+%) in prison (sentenced or on remand). The “mass imprisonment” of Māori we now have in Aotearoa New Zealand reflects a major failure of government policy and programmes.

From 1986 to 2009, numbers of women in prison have burgeoned by 297%, almost twice the rate of growth in men (Workman & McIntosh, 2013). Māori women are the fastest growing prison population in Aotearoa New Zealand (and in fact, right through the criminal justice system), particularly in terms of young women aged 17 to 24 years. McIntosh and Radojkovic (2012) noted that for this age group in 2001, Māori made up nearly 75% of female inmates. In their research with incarcerated Māori women aged 16–18 and 18–25 years, McIntosh and Radojkovic have noted that “Too many of them have also had lives marked by violence and suffering” (p. 39), while a “significant aspect of intergenerational transfer of social inequalities is the normalisation of socially harmful activities and the normalisation of prison” (p. 38).

Gordon's (2011) report on the children of prisoners stated that 48% of those inmates she surveyed had childhood experience of imprisonment for someone in their homes, showing that incarceration of parents can have a major impact on their children—a fact that was previously largely ignored. Yet up to 30,000 children are affected by the current imprisonment of a parent or parents, along with the subsequent and ongoing impact on their lives such as social and economic marginalisation (Gordon, 2011; Ryan, 2012; Workman & McIntosh, 2013). Half of those children are Māori who are then seven times more likely than non-Māori children to end up in prison themselves (Gordon, as cited in Ryan, 2012).

As Smith (2013) notes, “Prisons create prisoners” (p. 232), so whether such people are in prison or not, they remain imprisoned by systemic inequalities such as poverty,

marginalisation and the attempt to dehumanise and categorise people as negative models of deficit and dysfunction. As a result, the “shadow of the prison colonises our landscape, and for too many people, colonises their future” (McIntosh & Radojkovic, 2012, p. 39). As noted by one of the participants at the launch of Gordon’s 2009 *Invisible Children* report: “We are building new prisons for tamariki who are not yet born” (in Gordon, 2011, p. 4).

Every Māori child is born with positive potential and promise. It is societal structures which can create whānau that are disadvantaged, marginalised and impoverished, with the intergenerational transfer of such social inequities, rather than intergenerational transfer of knowledge and practices geared towards more positive life experiences. Over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system must be examined within the wider context of historical and social factors that have created such conditions for Māori. Social facts such as 40% of Māori men entering prison at some stage of their lives (Gordon, 2011) reflect social, economic and cultural marginalisation of Māori more than, as some suggest, deficits within Māori people and culture. Māori incarceration is a challenge for *all* of Aotearoa New Zealand society, not just for Māori. Examining historical factors that have led to current situations can provide understanding and compassion, encouraging a move towards a more equitable society.

Historical trauma and narratives of suffering

Historical trauma theory is increasingly popular with indigenous peoples through the work of those such as Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (see, for example, Brave Heart, 2005; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999) and Karina Walters (see, for example, Walters, 2007; Walters & Simoni, 2002). This originated from work with second-generation Holocaust survivors, and

the recognition they exhibited signs of trauma disorders although they had not directly experienced the traumas of the Holocaust (Brave Heart, 2005; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999). Historical trauma begins from past traumatic events affecting a group of people such as colonisation, slavery, war or genocide (Brave Heart, 2005; Denham, 2008; Evans-Campbell, 2008; Sotero, 2006; Wesley-Equimaux & Smolewski, 2004). In a sense people “carry their history” (Brave Heart, 2005) with them in an internalisation of ancestral suffering compounded by subsequent generational trauma.

Historical trauma is “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations” (Brave Heart, 2005, p. 4), building generation upon generation, layer upon layer. Each generation experiences trauma which passes into the next, who can experience a new set of similar or different traumas. After several generations, there can be a grotesque amount of trauma being carried by individuals, communities and peoples. This can lead to “historical trauma responses”; for example, self-destructive behaviour, depression, substance abuse, alcoholism, maladaptive social and behavioural patterns, and internalised oppression.

Denham (2008) cautions, however, that Brave Heart distinguishes between historical trauma and historical trauma responses, citing a “constellation of features” (p. 10) that result from responses to historical traumas. Denham writes that “distress resulting from a trauma experience is not due to the traumatic event per se, but the response attributed to, or meaning derived from the trauma experience” (p. 7). Wesley-Equimaux and Smolewski (2004) clarify further that symptoms “are not caused by the trauma itself; the historical trauma disrupts adaptive social and cultural patterns and transforms them into maladaptive ones that manifest themselves in symptoms” (p. 65).

Nevertheless, “historical unresolved grief” can occur with large numbers of losses in short periods of time, when there is cultural disconnection and lack of knowledge or space

to grieve for losses, which are therefore carried forward to subsequent generations (Brave Heart, 2005; Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999). This and other responses can then result in the “intergenerational transmission of trauma”, where trauma is “transmitted to subsequent generations through physiological, environmental and social pathways resulting in an intergenerational cycle of trauma response” (Sotero, 2006, p. 95). According to Fast and Collin-Vezina (2010), however, “The common thread among these ... theories is that historical factors interact with current day trauma, parenting deficits and other difficulties” (p. 129).

The stories told by the Group One participants clearly demonstrate the intergenerational transmission of historical trauma. As Māori, they share colonisation as an example of historical trauma, and they and their whānau demonstrate factors such as poverty, cultural disconnection, and dysfunctions such as violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and/or educational underachievement. For example, among the participants were two whānau groupings, although they were all interviewed separately. The first whānau grouping consists of three sisters—Ataahua, Atawhai, Kiriroa—and a niece, Uenuku. This whānau has a history of crime; drug and alcohol abuse; domestic violence; gambling; and gang involvement. So they have experienced many of the risk factors that make them vulnerable to social ills, with few protective factors.

Ataahua has served three sentences of imprisonment for dishonesty; Kiriroa has one prison sentence for dishonesty and another for obstructing justice; Atawhai has one sentence for fraud. Ataahua said that:

One day I was sitting at the kitchen table having Weet-Bix and mum and [stepdad] were arguing. Out of the blue a tomahawk [small axe] came flying through the air and ended up embedded in the table. I remember being terrified to move and that’s where the memories of that day end.

Atawhai noted that:

The biggest impact is on your children the first time I went in [I left] a 16-year-old looking after a 14-year-old and a 10-year-old My 16-year-old is ... 20 [now]. She was on antidepressants.

Uenuku has multiple sentences for fraud and drugs. Her parents were heroin addicts who often dealt in stolen goods as well as selling drugs. Uenuku wrote that:

Home life to me was normal but an outsider looking in would have thought otherwise. Our house always had police stopping in I figured it was because people who stopped in ... were all shoplifters, burglars, fraudsters etc.

The sisters share a fraud sentence but maintain their innocence in this particular case. Ataahua calls this “guilt by whakapapa”, which has already passed into the next generation. Uenuku told the story of when she was a teenager and was attacked by another girl at a local mall. She called the police to lay a complaint, but when they realised who she was related to, they arrested her instead.

The next whānau is a mother—Ngawaiata—and daughter Ngaronoa. Ngawaiata has not been to prison herself, but experienced domestic violence and alcohol abuse as a child, was transient, and lived in several households for part of her childhood. An issue Ngawaiata talked about was guilt she carried with her from childhood. For example, her father died when she was a teenager, at a time when she was getting into trouble with the law. Ngawaiata said that:

When we returned home [after my father’s funeral] ... I heard them talking about [my] court case the oldest aunty spoke She told my mother that I drove my father to his grave.

After the break-up of her first marriage, Ngawaiata experienced a major crisis:

I started leaving all my children with my Mum and just got into drinking. Just went hard out into drinking, popping pills, just taking any drug that came my way.

Her current partner is a gang member and she has been with him for 18 years. They have 10 children between them and six of those children have been in prison. Ngawaiata has a social work degree now, however, and is doing some great work with whānau in her local community.

When Lily first met Ngaronoa she was wearing a community detention bracelet, her fourth conviction. She was 21 and the most hesitant of all participants. One of her first questions to Lily was “What’s in this for you?” Ngaronoa was first convicted at 17 years of age to a two-year sentence for burglary. This began what looked set to be a revolving door in and out of prison, and she identified strongly with her fellow inmates. She said:

I’ve been in about three times [from] when I was 17 all up for around about four years all for burglaries I liked it [prison] Because there was people ... my kind of person.

Today, however, Ngaronoa is engaged in trade training and her future looks brighter; perhaps a testament to the changes her mother, Ngawaiata, has made in her life.

Marama was raised in an urban environment, and experienced poverty and severe domestic violence:

My dad actually made Jake Heke [from the movie *Once Were Warriors*] look like f**n ah, excuse me, like a ballerina, you know what I mean, [and Marama used to] dream about being able to do my own thing when I wanted to do it I just wasn’t allowed [and] even when I wanted to she [mother] never had the money.

Marama spoke of wanting a different life for herself:

I would say to myself that I would never put myself there in that seat [position], but you know that doesn’t happen, does it? Because I think what happens is it becomes normal.

Marama started selling drugs at 20 years old:

I decided to work outside the law I got full into buying a bit of weed [marijuana] and doing a few things. I bought a house I never felt it was wrong because it wasn’t hurting anybody. I was spending my own money. I was looking after the community. I was one of those people.

This way of life suited her, giving her the independence she desired:

I have always made my own decisions. And that’s the problem. And I love that about me. A lot of people don’t They like you to be weak. They like you to be weak and under their wing I don’t like that. I like to add to my kete.

Despite these challenges, it seems Marama’s life was relatively stable until the birth of her fifth child in 2005, who has what Marama calls a birth injury—severe intellectual and physical disabilities—but what doctors say is a congenital defect. This has been an enormous trauma for Marama as she fought to get her son’s injury recognised as human error, but during that process she became addicted to methamphetamine (“P”). Her last jail sentence was for bank robbery, the purpose of which was to get enough money to hire a lawyer to fight for her son, who had by then been removed from her care. This continues to be a huge focus of Marama’s life, although the prognosis for her son is not encouraging.

So there has certainly been a lot of suffering in the narratives of the women interviewed for this project. Does that excuse their behaviour?

No. But a measure of compassion can be gained from knowing their stories and the pathways that led to incarceration, and by understanding the wider context within which their experiences sit.

Historical trauma and narratives of hope

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this project is in humanising existing stereotypes by telling the stories beneath them. We hear often about the crime, the violence, the drug and alcohol abuse and so on. But we hear very little about the potential these women carry, about the power and the positive aspects of their lives. They have shown incredible strength in really difficult situations.

One of the questions put to the Group One participants was “What are your dreams?” For Teina, it is about using her experience to help others. She says:

Wanting to help others makes everything I've been through ... gives it a purpose otherwise it just sits there and ... nothing comes of it.

Aorere had an enforced stay in Odyssey House, noting:

I promised myself ... I'll never return to that again because I hated [it]—because they tip you upside down and you're just nobody, you're just a no-one.

Today Aorere is a social worker in an urban centre working with Māori whānau, utilising and drawing positive aspects from life lessons such as incarceration.

There were others who wanted something positive to come from their experiences. Papatahi wants to be a mechanic, while Mereana told us she wants to work with “monkeys on an island”—she loved the stories of Jane Goodall and Dian Fossey (Mereana spoke of Fossey's

story immortalised in the movie *Gorillas in the Mist* as inspirational for her). Other dreams are as youth worker, social worker and psychologist. One wants to be the best grandmother she can be. Ataahua works for a community organisation in a methamphetamine addiction programme. At the first analysis hui, we worked with Ngawaiata to create a pathway leading to her goal of being Children's Commissioner. One of her most dearly held dreams is to have none of her children in prison, and therefore to have all of her whānau together for Christmas. For all these women, the trauma experienced has meant that a measure of healing is still needed in order to make those dream pathways reality.

While historical trauma and its responses can have a significant negative impact on individuals and groups, there are also stories of resilience and hope that can be narrated, however. In his research with four generations of a Coeur d'Alene Indian family, Denham (2008) noted that while there were many stories of traumatic experiences, there were also stories of resilience recounted by the family—“powerful stories, songs, histories, and strategies for resilience are often present behind the realities of inequality, injustice, and poverty” (p. 2). While assumptions are often made that all people experiencing historical trauma will be predisposed to negative historical trauma responses, this is not always the case. Fast and Collin-Vezina (2010) express similar concerns:

The focus on negative outcomes facing Indigenous people may mask the diversity of responses to the challenges facing Aboriginal, First Nations and American Indian persons Both resilient and negative outcomes for Indigenous persons are well documented but negative outcomes seem to get more attention ... which may contribute to both overt and more subtle forms of discrimination. (p. 126)

Passing on only narratives of trauma that ignore or minimise experiences of resilience

and regeneration can entrench intergenerational traumas, eventuating in the destruction of the cultural processes that could have ameliorated the harms enacted by historical trauma responses (Fast & Collin-Vezina, 2010). Historical trauma, then, carries the *potential* for negative responses; we must be careful not to only tell those narratives of suffering and pain as representing the whole of our stories, thereby re-casting ourselves as victims. While there is very real need to acknowledge those stories, and heal from them, we should not let them define us in a way that continues to cast us only in the dim light of deficit, distress and loss.

A Māori frame of historical trauma

Evans-Campbell (2008) notes:

The very fact that the concept [historical trauma] has proven so popular indicates that its descriptive power strongly resonates with those to whom it is meant to apply and suggests that it is capturing an important part of their individual and communal experience that other models miss. (p. 317)

What excites us most about historical trauma theory is that its primary aim is to heal from historical trauma and its responses. In 1992, Brave Heart and colleagues developed a four-stage intervention to help their people heal:

1. Confront our trauma and embrace our history;
2. Understand that trauma;
3. [grieve and] Release the pain; and then
4. Transcend the trauma. (Brave Heart, 2005, p. 5)

Telling the narratives and feeling the pain of those experiences is only the first step: “Taking steps towards recognizing, dealing with, and healing the trauma is critical” (Weaver & Brave Heart, 1999, p. 29). As CS notes:

The thing about alcohol and drugs, all of that’s just self-medicating so you really have to look at what are they self-medicating? What are the things that underlie that? And of course, a great deal of it is things like sexual abuse or some pretty traumatic experiences that can underpin that A lot of people think it’s endemic to Māori. They think that violence is endemic to Māori, imprisonment is natural to us, that sexual abuse is somehow natural too—and all of those things You’re really naming [what] really hurt us as a people and damaged us.

To move historical trauma into a kaupapa Māori framework, it could be seen as a whakapapa model—it concerns knowing and understanding our history, the stories of our tupuna and the impact their actions and experiences had on us. We learn from the past—we heal from the past—to improve the present, in order to build a stronger and more powerful future. Rangitiinia Wilson (personal communication, 1998) said that:

The imperative is upon us to heal ourselves, because by doing so we heal some of the pain of our tupuna as well as our own, and therefore we stop that pain from reaching forward into the future.

And as Puketapu Andrews (1997) wrote:

To heal means to become whole, to be powerful, to know your own power. This in turn means to know who you are physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally ... so that [you] are able to live [your] life positively and creatively, to [your] fullest potential. (p. 69)

Historical trauma theory is about having the ability to name our pain, and create our own pathways to hope and healing. As Walters (2007) states: “It is important to rename or reframe our experiences from traditional knowledge—it is a spiritual process and the renaming is part of decolonising ourselves”

(p. 40). But it is not about finding some “one-size-fits-all” theory to explain the lives of Māori and the challenges many face either, including the women in this postdoctoral study. It is not about blaming Pākehā for colonisation and the social, economic, environment, physical and spiritual ills that face us now. It is about “confronting our trauma and embracing our history” (Brave Heart, 2005) as an exercise in tino rangatiratanga. From that point we can determine how to deal with those confrontations. We determine it, not others.

Most of the key informants spoke of ways in which traditional knowledge can be used to create new pathways for incarcerated Māori women. For example, MoMi spoke of the loss for many Māori girls and women of their “piringa poho”—the sheltering bosom that nurtures and sustains them:

I’m doing some work with addictions, work force development and I’ve actually said we should design our workforce strategy as “Ko piringa poho” ... because people who have got an addiction of any sort mostly have lost touch with their culture, identity, with their whānau and all that we need to actually get a workforce that understands piringa poho, that what happens when you’re in your whānau is that you have a place, to not be responsible anymore for everything And so a lot of these women, when they come out [of prison], where do they get their healing? Because as a consequence or maybe even prior to them being incarcerated, they’ve lost their piringa poho; they’ve lost their place of rest and refuge.

In their work with Māori women, LT and GA consider reconnection to be an integral part of what they do:

I think it’s just disconnection from themselves. They’re just disconnected and my whole way is just finding ways to bring them back into themselves. [GA]

A lot of it was absolutely about reconnection ... back to the whenua It was also about heightening their senses and reconnecting to that because when you are disconnected from a lot of things, you disconnect or tone down a lot of your senses because a lot of it is very painful. So for those who talk about emotional aspects of life, for me it’s about how our senses have been looked after and when you bring it back to ngā mea Māori you are immediately sitting under specific atua. These are their domains, and so for me to talk about senses, I’m immediately reconnecting them back to rongoā. [LT]

CS considered that:

I actually think it’s really important [that] the whānau themselves [understand] ... there [are] generations of ways that we operate as people We need to understand how that’s looked through the generations and look at what are the opportunities in this generation to change that So being a bit more proactive about building strong whānau I think, consciously doing that more is really great. I think that provides a network of support.

There is definitely hope that can be drawn from traditional values and practices to give meaning in this contemporary world. Hope can arise from compassionate articulation of traumatic narratives, including the resilience and strength exhibited within these narratives.

Conclusion

In Aotearoa New Zealand, Māori experience the profound impact of incarceration socially, physically, economically, culturally and spiritually. Historical trauma theory provides a useful and significant way in which to understand indigenous experiences that have led to an array of negative outcomes such as high rates of incarceration. Use of such theory is

not for the purpose of re-casting ourselves as victims, but is instead for the purpose of finding self-determined solutions to the ills which challenge our lives, while also critiquing societal ideologies and policies which contribute to the continuation of such challenges.

Traditional knowledges provide clues to meaningful solutions for reducing mass incarceration of Māori. It is also necessary to look at how we as a national society view crime and punishment, and the very real social and fiscal cost of mass incarceration. Do we continue to see punishment of criminals as the major focus of the criminal justice system? Or do we seek a safe and inclusive society which continues to recognise the humanity of those who are incarcerated, with a focus on shifting “the primary direction of correctional policy from incarceration to restoration” (Robson Hanan Trust, 2010)?

Researching with incarcerated Māori women provides one avenue for exploring issues related to Māori incarceration. Through hearing narratives of suffering and hope, it becomes possible to recognise the humanity of those who can be imprisoned by society’s practices, policies and attitudes, as well as by the criminal justice system. Understanding the whakapapa of Māori incarceration enables the stronger probability of contemporary rebuilding of lives which have been shattered over generations of trauma.

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Glossary

atua	gods
hapū	sub-tribe
hui	gathering
iwi	tribe
karakia	prayer
kaupapa Māori	Māori approach
kete	knowledge base, traditional woven basket
koha	donation
kōrero	talk, discussion, narrative
marae	traditional gathering place, now often in non-Māori settings such as tertiary institutions
ngā mea Māori	Māori things
Pākehā	New Zealanders of European descent
piringa poho	sheltering bosom
poutokomanawa	central pillar, foundational strength
rongoā	medicine
tamariki	children
tapu	sacredness, restriction
te ira tangata	essential humanity, realised potential
tino rangatiratanga	self-determination
tupuna	ancestors
wāhine	women
wānanga	learning forum
whakapapa	genealogy, history
whakawhanaungatanga	relationship development and maintenance
whānau	extended family, often three or more generations
whenua	land

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