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Dialogue over differences: Consideration of the issues of the war, terrorism and cultural inequality



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Introduction

When the war on Iraq started, I was wondering how long human beings have to fight. When the war was prepared, I was in Japan. I was quite anxious about where the world is going. When the gulf war started in 1991, I was also in Japan. Iraq and Kuwait were far away and I had a kind of attitude 'it's somebody else's business' at that time. However, this time was completely different. My life is based in the UK now. I have seen clients who suffered from torture, abuse, and discrimination.

I was a student counsellor in Japan, where I also engaged in counselling for non-Japanese people. Through these activities, I became interested in cross-cultural issues. Japan is largely unicultural and I found it difficult to explore the issues. So I chose to come to the UK, which is a multi-cultural society, to explore cross-cultural issues in 1992. Since coming to the UK, I have worked on cross-cultural issues and the Eastern perspectives of psychotherapy and counselling to bridge between the East and West (Nippoda, 1997, 2002a, 2003). I have also myself experienced cross-cultural transition in the vast cultural difference between the East and West. I come across the difficulty of dialogue in a different culture on a daily basis. Although I have worked on these issues extensively, the longer I live in the UK, the more I feel overwhelmed by the complexity. So I was very concerned if the war would really happen and what would happen after the war if it did begin.

The people who suffer in war are the civilians. When the war on Iraq started, my friend from Rwanda who escaped from

genocide said to me, 'How would you feel if you saw your country being attacked like that? I experienced war myself and you could be killed anytime. Bullets go over you and through the roof without stopping. You constantly have to hide and be alert. You wouldn't understand what it is like to be in the situation if you haven't really experienced this.' The question 'Is any kind of war really necessary?' constantly came to me.

This war has affected me and made me think a great deal. It raised some issues. I have wanted to express them. I was thinking about how I could contribute to society. Then I was asked to write about the conference and my thoughts about the issues which were discussed at the conference. I am so happy to have this opportunity. The conference has given me not only insight but clarity to my thoughts and courage to say what I need. This article is not a review or critique of the conference but my personal accounts and experience of the issues of the war, terrorism and cultural inequality with the view of the conference. In this article, the talks and discussions in big and small groups are described with my thoughts first. Then my process during the conference is reflected. After that, I would like to discuss inter-cultural issues followed by a summary of my learning from this conference.

During the talks of the speakers

When I got to know about this conference, I felt that I should be there. I value communications with other psychotherapists about the topic of war and cultural inequality. I also know all of the speakers since before in different professional settings. They have played an important role in my

professional development in the past. So I was interested in their views. Fifteen minutes were allowed for each speaker and the audience would join the dialogue after the four speakers' talk.

I was intrigued with Aida's background - that she was involved in political issues in her country, Iran, and was subject to persecution by the Iranian authority for believing in human and equal rights. She talked about war and terrorism from human rights' point of view including people who are 'unseen' and 'invisible', and how they suffer. She said that the commonality between terrorism and war is that both are to kill evil in the end. It represents the view that both deny dialogue. Everybody has their own views. I realise that information I receive in the UK and Japan can be different sometimes. One issue can be viewed differently from different perspectives depending on where you are in the world. Therefore, without endeavour to understand the opposition's view, reconciliation does not occur. She told us the importance of dialogue and how to bridge the differences. She pinpointed important aspects but I wanted to hear her views using more of her own experience of being oppressed politically by the oppressive regime. I thought her experience would contribute to our views.

I was interested in Talia's personal experience as somebody who lives in Israel as an Israeli. I have seen Arabs' views quite a lot on TV. As an anti-war person, I resonated to the view and experienced myself being empathetic with them. I experienced this war as having the nature of an invasion and abuse of power onto the non-Western world. Coalition forces fought in the name of justice, but the attitude appeared to me that they

would punish countries which do not agree with the Western world, particularly America. This idea gives me tremendous concerns and anxiety. I particularly understand Arab countries feeling neglected and angry. However, I have not heard much about views from Israelis. In her speech, Talia clearly said that she was not speaking as a representative of the Israeli government or nation but just Talia as an individual. I understood her vulnerable position in this talk.

She raised the issue of cultural inequality. When PCSR asked her to talk as an Israeli, she felt defined differently from a Western with a sense of inferiority. She also explained her own experience in Israel: that the place where her daughter had been until ten minutes before was bombed. While Talia was explaining the difference between Jewish and Muslim, a Palestinian started to shout, 'That's not true'. However, it was not the time that people could ask questions nor make comments, and the facilitator stopped the Palestinian from speaking. Talia prolonged her speech overtime and there was some irritation in the audience. She said she would stop soon. While she was continuing, suddenly an English man said 'Stop!' Talia stopped. Then a woman shouted 'I want to hear her more.' However, Talia did not continue. I was thinking about 'boundaries'. Boundaries in the UK are different from the one in Japan. Lots of boundaries in the UK are more blurred to me. So I wondered why boundaries were brought in on this occasion when it was only a couple of minutes.

Andrew started to speak in the sense of unfinishedness of Talia's talk. He told us that the Western world needs therapy and that it found its therapist

which is Muslim. Also, he spoke how psychotherapy makes a difference on political issues. Psychotherapists should get involved in politics more actively than just seeing people working. He claimed that we should stop being so pompous or trying to be perfect because we are not perfect anyway. He explains in his article (2004) that when psychotherapists write in the media or give a talk using psychotherapeutic jargons and interpretations, the world would not listen to the level of explanation. Although the atmosphere of the audience was with some hostility and unsmoothness due to what happened previously, I felt Andrew's talk was quite encouraging and I sensed that the energy level was going up in the room.

Something that distinctly struck me when Andrew first spoke was his accent. He spoke with an English accent, whereas Aida and Talia had a different accent since the English language was the second language for them. I felt that Andrew's accent was very easy to listen to since I am used to an English accent now. Interestingly, I heard that there was a conversation about the English accent in one of the small groups. A colleague from an African-Caribbean background said that she experienced herself in a disadvantageous position due to her accent. I myself experienced that a client refused to see me due to my accent. I do not believe it was the only reason but I think accent has an element to make some people who do not have the same kind of accent invisible, and gives an experience of rejection.

Lennox clearly spoke about his view on the war and terrorism. He questioned the legitimacy of the war. He said that this war should have been

done quite a long time ago and questioned that this war can be characterised as completion of father Bush. I felt connected with his talk when he explained that he used to support the IRA until his family suffered from danger of being attacked by IRA bombs. The incident changed his position and views towards terrorism. Everybody has their own theories and ideas about things. However, I felt that Lennox was really telling that one's own and real experience precedes ideology. I received a message that we are ultimately thinking about our own safety. People might fight in the name of justice or democracy or some kind of ideology. However, once they are exposed to danger, they would discard the ideology and have concern about their own safety. War is normally conducted in the name of justice. What about people's safety? Is this kind of justice meaningful?

My process during the dialogue with the speakers

The next session was the dialogue of the speakers with audience. When it started, the English man who told Talia to stop apologised in front of everybody. I had found the voice to stop Talia from speaking was somehow invasive. So when he apologised, I had a sense of relief that the power was withdrawn. Then the debate about the Palestinian and Israeli conflict continued.

I was very aware that the focus was the conflict between Palestinian and Israeli, and terrorism. However, I was wondering if they are aware of other issues in the world. When I came back from Japan at the end of February, I was so perplexed about the difference of information and topics you can get between the UK and Japan. I imagined

that people would not be interested in what was happening in the area far away from this country and not familiar to them. I was feeling quite invisible, and I even felt that I do not have the right to be seen. This feeling is familiar to me when I am in the UK. I feel that Japanese people are quite invisible here. I, indeed, come across cultural inequality sometimes but also the Japanese do not generally mingle with and are rather segregated from other ethnic groups, and British people would not have the opportunity to communicate with the Japanese. This is due to our cultural feature of modesty and self-effacement, the opposite to 'We are here, look at us' attitude of some cultures. Therefore, I was feeling that my view would not be so important if I raised an issue.

I was processing at that time what was happening to me. At first I was just withdrawing. Then I suddenly had an insight that it was very significant for me to feel that way. I realised that maybe that is what is happening in this room and it reflects the world itself. People are only interested in one aspect, and small voices can be ignored and become invisible. That is what Aida was talking about people 'invisible' and 'unseen' in her speech. Aida mentioned Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and somebody also mentioned that the issue of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been put aside.

When I grew up, it was taken for granted that atomic bombs were dropped in Japan. We have one minute silence on the 6th and 9th of August every year and we talk about it. We are taught how awful it was and what kind of effect atomic bombs cause. It is not only the individual who suffers, or only at the time of the bomb that they suffer. People who were exposed

After I came to the UK, I was very shocked to see that my country is the only country where atomic bombs were dropped. I knew that, of course, but I did not understand the meaning of it until I came to the UK. It is quite different to see that from another country, and I have come to understand that no other nations have experienced this.

to radiation have to go to hospital regularly for check-ups because cancer might be developed later in their life. Or the descendents of those who were exposed to radiation might have cancer as well. What happens is that if you are exposed to radiation strongly, you die. If you are exposed from radiation weakly, the genes get damaged. Cancer or Leukaemia occurs by getting the genes damaged. If the genes get damaged while cells are being produced, the cells can become malignant. After I came to the UK, I was very shocked to see that my country is the only country where atomic bombs were dropped. I knew that, of course, but I did not understand the meaning of it until I came to the UK. It is quite different to see that from another country, and I have come to understand that no other nations have experienced this. I started to focus more after coming to this country: we should never use nuclear weapons again.

When Hiroshima and Nagasaki were mentioned, I started to feel strongly that I was not going to remain invisible. I decided to get up and tell people how I was feeling. I started with telling my name, which nobody else did. I did that because I wanted to be seen clearly and it was important. I said that I would say something from the Japanese point of view which they might not hear very often. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are very sensitive issues for the Japanese. Atomic bombs cannot be justified even because we lost the war. I'm from the only country where the atomic bomb was dropped in the world. The atomic bomb is utterly dreadful. I also added that the information you get differs in some countries. It means that some issues can be ignored depending on their convenience, or the benefit to the country.

In the tea break, several people came to talk to me saying that they were moved by and supported what I said. Somebody also asked why Japanese people do not tell the world about how horrible it was and protest against the perpetrator, whereas Germany has started to talk about the war more. I wanted to hear about the Japanese views on it and I emailed some Japanese people in Japan to ask about it. Thirty people responded to me including somebody who lost a grandparent due to the Atomic Bomb and gave me various thoughts. I would like to introduce several ideas here.

My question was 'Why do you think the Japanese do not campaign about the damage of the Atomic Bomb?' (1) There is still a sense of pain and the Japanese might not want to talk about it. (2) The Japanese are not very assertive. As people from collectivism, they do not seek conflict, either. They

tend to think that they had better put up with the situation. Or they have no rights to complain if they lose. Japan attacked and lost, and it would not be right to complain arrogantly about the Atomic Bomb. It is Japanese self-effacement and humbleness. (3) Due to shame and guilt, the Japanese want to keep dignity and not to lose face, and think that they had better not say anything. If Japan complains, it might upset other countries. In fact, I have come across the view from another Eastern country that Japan occupied other countries and that considering what Japan did to other countries, they do not want the Japanese to think that Japan is the victim of the atomic bomb. (4) The Japanese want to forget about it, to move on. (5) Many Japanese do not have much education about the atomic bomb and do not know the details of it. Therefore, they cannot complain. (6) Some Japanese people said that they protest about the damage of Atomic Bombs but if it is not heard, maybe it is the West that cannot hear. In the West, many people justify that the Atomic Bomb was necessary. Or maybe the Japanese might not have voiced their feelings in a way that people can hear. Now the biggest reason is that (7) the perpetrator is America. America exerts enormous influence over Japan and Japanese life. American military bases are in Japan and, since the demise of Japanese army at the end of the Second World War, its self-defence force has been restricted in its activities; and this affects the Japanese psyche in a subtle and all-prevailing way. Economically and politically, too, America's power is very strong. There is a saying, 'If America sneezes, Japan catches a cold.' I understand that the same is said of the relationship America has with Britain and Europe. Therefore,

Japan is very afraid of America. If Japan protests against the perpetrator, Japan will make an enemy with America and Japan will be in trouble. Japan is in the position that they cannot disobey America. Japan does not want to upset America. Also America was beneficial to Japanese reconstruction after the war. So Japan thinks that they should not complain.

There seems to be lots of complication involved with this. Many cultural attributes are included in this and it does not seem to be easy for the Japanese to tell the world how horrible it was. However, is there any way that we can still claim it? Somebody at the conference encouraged me that it would be important for everybody to know how nuclear weapons damage this world, and Japanese people should tell the world, and not from the victim position. It is true that I feel agonised when I hear about development and possible use of nuclear weapons, and I can guess easily that other nations would not know the harm. I feel the importance and need for us to tell the world about it. As Lennox said, our own experience can teach a great deal and we can use the learning. The Japanese need to have proper knowledge at first. Great support from the world would be needed for this as well.

Afternoon session

In the small group I was in, the issues of difference in sense of self between individualistic and collectivistic society were discussed as the one of the topics. There are different notion of self between individualism and collectivism, 'me' individualism versus 'we' collectivism. In collectivistic society, self is more based on social roles (Nippoda, 2001). Also, groups' needs precede the individuals' needs.

Furthermore, there is little room for interpretation or negotiation and low tolerance for deviance in role expectations (Crittenden and Bae, 1994).

Communication styles are very different between the individualism and collectivism. In the individualistic society, people tell their needs and negotiate them, whereas the community or group has many common rules for their members. In collectivism, this individualistic attitude can cause conflict. In my culture, the sense of conformity is strong and if you are different from others, you would generally get treated harshly in society. Due to the homogenous nature of the culture, there are lots of shared rules and views in society and people decide their attitude according to the rule. These different ways of communication depending on the culture cause tremendous difficulties in having a dialogue. Dialogue is very important and that is something we have to keep trying for. However, it is not only many different views and perspectives but also differences of communication style in different cultures that make the dialogue quite difficult.

At the closing session with the whole group, much debate and exchange of ideas took place. What was productive to me was that it was not only that people said their thoughts, but that they focused on what was happening in the group in the here and now situation. We had an opportunity to explore the dynamics of the relationship as a group. After somebody was expressing her views and feelings about the Middle-East issues, another person spoke something which was not relevant. Then somebody else pointed it out saying that the first speaker's issue was not heard and put

aside. People talked about listening to each other. Although I did not say anything at that time, I was feeling quite involved in the discussion.

I was also intrigued with Andrew's subjective experience shared in the group. He said that it was a failure that there was no mediation between Palestinians and Israelis in the debate. He was talking about what happened during Talia's speech; a Palestinian expressed her feelings, Talia overstepped the time boundaries, and an English man stepped into the space. Andrew kept saying that maybe somebody could tell them to have a dialogue during the tea time or intervene somehow. It was quite significant to me because he was not just speaking theory but demonstrating the attitude to have dialogue and involvement by expressing his feelings openly. In fact, reflecting on what happened, I think it was a learning process for us. To me, the English man represented invasion from a more powerful position. However, he came to apologise. It was a healing experience. When Andrew said that there was no mediation, 'who is going to be the mediator' was my question. I do not want somebody from culturally 'high position' groups to be a mediator as a police role, which can reflect the world itself.

Is Western culture superior?

Prior to the conference of PCSR, I went to a lecture about colonisation for another psychotherapy institution. They were talking about the dynamics of the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. One speaker was a White British and another was Nigerian. This issue is talked about as a topic sometimes. I was wondering how this idea and theory is combined with the practical

level in this lecture as well. Most of the audience there was people from the White race and I thought about the implication to practice if the experience of pain could be conveyed on a more emotional level. Many psychotherapy schools have been reticent about the application of their knowledge to a political practical context. (Totton, 2000). My Japanese colleague said to me, 'I wonder how long White people have to talk about the pain on behalf of us?' At the closing of the lecture, the other Nigerian speaker told us that reconciliation would occur only when the oppressor gives up the idea that they are superior.

I would like to share what I experienced a few weeks ago. I was visiting an English friend. I told her that the war on Iraq had upset me. This friend was saying that war was depressing, but she did support this war. She clearly told me that she did believe that Western culture was superior although people could say that she was a racist. She said that what Western culture was superior about was democracy and that democracy meant everybody could vote. To her, in Arab world, women are oppressed. She cannot bear the oppression. Women are treated badly. Replying to my question how she knew that women were treated so badly, she answered that she gained this idea from TV. She also sees some Muslim women covering their body and face with a black robe and only eyes are open in the street. It makes her sick. That's the symbol of oppression to her and this is a very sensitive issue to her. She was pleased that the Iraqi brutal regime would go so that women would have a better life having the right to vote. She raised her voice, becoming very excited. I quietly challenged her that she was

implying that my culture was inferior to hers. Then she replied that she was not talking about Japanese culture but Muslim culture because she did not know much about Japanese culture. I explained that women's position is lower in Japan than that of the West.

The whole conversation really paralysed and froze me. First of all, nobody has ever said to me directly that they think Western culture is superior. Perhaps some people would think like that, but they have never told me, maybe because I am not a Westerner. I really felt that this is how racism and discrimination would start. The idea 'Western culture is superior' is very dangerous. They might think that Western democracy is the best so other culture should have it. I do not deny democracy by any means. Democracy can give freedom to individuals, which can offer free participation to many activities. It has a great value and I am getting benefit from that. However, each culture has many different perspectives. Something that is better for the west might not be good for other culture. On a TV debate, an African man was saying that democracy does not necessarily work everywhere in the world. This war represents the idea that Western culture has better things, so it should be conveyed even by force. This attitude can be seen as an imposition of Western view.

I have heard views that the coalition forces got rid of the tyrant and the evil regime, and that the majority of Iraqi people are rejoicing the result of the war, so what is wrong with the war? I do not think it is as simple as that. To get rid of one man, thousands of lives have been sacrificed. Can the war be justified? What I do not like about the war is that it indicates cultural and racial inequality. It

illustrates power issues between so called 'superior' and 'inferior'. I do value what Talia said about cultural inequality. When she was invited to talk at this conference, she was chosen because she was an Israeli. She felt defined differently than the British implying 'inferior'. This sense of inferiority is the issue. Talia was not saying that she wants to be included in the superior group 'British'. There are power dynamics in race and culture in this world. Due to the power dynamics, some cultures can be labelled as 'inferior'. In many cases, it is not done by individuals deliberately, but the world itself is subtly or overtly presenting inequality in race and culture on various levels. The UK is a multi-cultural society. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to deny external structure that creates institutionalised racism, sexism and classism in our society today (Kearney, 1996). It is difficult to work on the issues because lots of anger and blame are involved. 'Some White professionals have great difficulties in hearing racist experiences of Black people – probably because of their hatred in the transference.' (Thomas, 1995, p172) However, the most important thing is for everybody to acknowledge that there is hierarchy in race and culture, and people are treated unequally.

Another danger of my friend's comment is that her view was formed on the basis of Western media and she was trying to exclude something which does not fit into her value system. I know a Muslim woman. She never wore a hijab (scarf) when she was a child, because she was rebellious towards her original culture. However, she started to wear one later in her life. She felt more connected with her cultural and religious identity. The hijab means a reunion with her cultural heritage to

her. I also heard that the hijab means liberation to another Muslim. A colleague of mine was working in a Muslim country. She told me about when she visited the women who cover their face except their eyes. They have a good smile at home when they do not cover their faces. So she knows that they have a smile under the robe.

Of course, women have been liberated by the influence of the West, but I learned that they find freedom in their own way within their own cultural context as well. So why do the West want to come and change the custom, radically imposing their views?

In my country, women's position is lower than that of this country. There is certainly discrimination against women in some aspects which need to be worked on for more equality. However, there are things that are perceived by Westerners as discrimination and oppression towards women, but it can sometimes mean something completely different in my culture. Diversity needs to be taken into account in working with women as well (Burstow, 2003).

Relationships are more horizontal in collectivist culture, whereas relationships are vertical in the collectivistic culture in power dynamics of the relationships (Triandis, 1988). In many Eastern cultures, men have a facilitator role and women are followers. However, men would protect women. In the hierarchy of collectivistic culture, lower positioned people obey higher positioned and the higher positioned look after and show care towards the lower positioned (Nippoda, 2002b). Some women are happy about this kind of role in their own cultural context. I do understand and agree in many ways with the position of activists for women's right and equality. I could not stand the women's position in my country and was longing for more freedom until some years ago. However, the longer I have been away from Japan and being in the UK, the more I have come to accept my cultural heritage about the women's issues. I have also seen many Japanese women who Western people perceive as oppressed and discriminated, but many of them do not feel that way. Of course, women have been liberated by the influence of the West, but I learned that they find freedom in their own way within their own cultural context as well. So why do the West want to come and change the custom, radically imposing their views? This is not only about women's position, but many things that liberation should come within their cultural context for themselves but not by imposition of Western ideas. We should support their change in different ways than using force.

For a few days after the talk with my friend, I was thinking about what she said. I was very angry and hated her so much. I even thought that I would never see her any more. I just decided

that she was a racist and discriminator. I was thinking about it quite a lot. However, after a few days, I started to notice that I am the one who is denying her because she has a different opinion from me. She must be very important in a sense that she is teaching me something. I still disagree with what she says and thinks. However, since we have different ideas, we need to have a dialogue and try to understand where our ideas come from. There might not be anybody else who might tell me 'My culture is superior', so I can use this opportunity for something fruitful. One day we might be able to bridge our difference.

Conclusion

This conference gave me quite an impact. I learned three things. The first is that it is worth while making an effort to be visible and seen. It is painful to be invisible. However, I value that I made an effort to be heard. Sometimes the result might not be positive, but it is still worth while making an effort. It becomes hopeful by believing that somebody might be able to hear and see you in the end.

The second was that psychotherapy can help and what my role is in this international politics issue. I am sometimes overwhelmed by the diversity and difficulty of understanding and being understood. To understand and be understood, just explanation is not enough. You would experience lots of misunderstanding and pain will go with it. We constantly have to listen to others, and nothing can be achieved without this process. There are various levels that psychotherapy can participate in the international crisis, but listening to pain is a vital role of psychotherapists

and we can reflect that to society. I have been specifically working on cross-cultural issues in the UK for a long time and I have had the opportunity to think about international issues. I am from an Eastern culture and I perceive myself as having the role of bridging between the East and West. The central issue is more Middle-East issues currently. There are commonalities as collectivism and there is room for using my own being as an Easterner who lives in the West. Also, I have started to think about working on the issues of nuclear weapons more seriously after this conference.

The third point is cultural inequality and importance of dialogue. Racial and cultural inequality does exist in this world and it is necessary that everybody acknowledges that. In doing so, we should not give up dialogue even if the situation can be painful. I was very affected by the war. Since it is done, we have to think about how we can use this opportunity for our future. I confirmed that there is much room for us to intervene as psychotherapists in the world crisis and international issues.

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