

GRACE NOTES XV

DR SALMA SIDDIQUE invites us
to fight for our community

STORIES ARE MADE through conversation and held in relationship and connect the individual to a sense of community. Stories based on community culture/heritage can be referred to as folklore – transformations of lived experience; through our told stories we share our beliefs and knowledge of our place in the world. Each story is unique, having the meaning the speaker gives to it and the listener's own interpretation. It is then a new story carried forward within and between generations.

Folklore is something which happens at bus stops, in post office queues, the pub, playground or consulting room. In telling the story we are creating connections. Social networks offer an opportunity to build self-esteem, worth and dignity. However, some of these networks and communities are being eroded, challenged and silenced.

These last few weeks I have been aware of the public shaming of Camila Batmanghelidjh until recently the CEO of Kids Company. She invested her own time, money and emotional resources to offer 'loving kindness' to children, many of whom have been traumatised or brutalised by horrendous levels of abuse and found themselves homeless or rejected by mainstream services.

There have been suggestions of her alleged poor financial accounting and her idiosyncratic style of management. However, at one point she was being feted by David Cameron and linked to his infamous words about 'hugging hoodies'. And yet when Batmanghelidjh is seen to be criticising the Government's child protection system as well as how austerity impacts on children, she is asked to step down. Some believe that Batmanghelidjh's fate, like Icarus in the Greek myth, was that of ambition and hubris. Icarus tried to escape Crete using a set of wings made of feathers and wax. Icarus's father Daedalus, the master craftsman, warns his son not to fly too low over the sea in case he dampened the feathers, or too high in case the sun melted the wax. In ignoring this wisdom Icarus, in defiance, flew too close to the sun and met with a tragic end. Whatever way you interpret this situation, depending on your value base, there will be a great loss for vulnerable children: Batmanghelidjh excelled 'at bridging that mistrust (of kids on the margins) preaching her gospel of empathy

and emphasising the distortion of the "emotional economy" of the whole country' (Brooks, 2015).

Where do we as transactional analysts stand in this climate of austerity and the dismantling of much needed services? The whole premise of TA is founded on the concept of the group and transactions between people where we experience connection and build community ie the 'unit of social intercourse' (Berne, 1964). As therapists our primary responsibility is to the individual client and part of that is to acknowledge the changing nature of the community in which they live and work and the increased isolation and loneliness of many of our clients. Alienation says Steiner *et al* (1975) is a felt sense of isolation and not being right with the rest of the world. Steiner (1971) sees that all mental health issues are forms of psychological alienation created through oppression. For this to change he suggests that alienated clients become aware of this oppression and become angry leading to a desire for action and change. He suggests that the anger needs to be met with support and impetus from others and can give rise to action. This relational approach suggests we have a responsibility to help facilitate clients to feel able to make contact with others in a similar position. Mazzetti (2010) when writing about cross-cultural psychotherapy makes reference to Berne's (1972) intentions for TA to be effective across cultures and communities, with individuals being driven by a deep need for recognition. He points out that strokes are one unit of this, given both by the therapist and within groups. Mazzetti makes reference to the Code of ethics (EATA, 2006) which reminds practitioners of their responsibilities to themselves, clients, colleagues and the environment – I believe this is a professional reminder for us to make more contact with each other as therapists and to take action against the austerity cuts which affect the cultural environment of us all.

It takes a whole village to raise a child.

Igbo and Yoruba (Nigeria) Proverb

References

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