

Ko Wai Au: A Decolonial Reflection on Psychodrama, Presence, and Inner Child Witnessing

Ko Wai Au: Uma Reflexão Decolonial sobre Psicodrama, Presença e Testemunho da Criança Interior

Ko Wai Au: Una Reflexión Decolonial sobre el Psicodrama, la Presencia y el Testimonio del Niño Interior

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Resumo: Este relato reflexivo de experiência oferece um encontro psicodramático decolonial com a criança interior, provocado pela exibição de *Ka Puna Te Wai, Ko Te Kāwai Puna* (Rakena, 2015). Por meio da presença simbólica da água e de imagens ancestrais, o filme evocou respostas emocionais profundas relacionadas ao abandono na infância. O autor narra um momento psicodramático vívido, em que se posiciona atrás do seu eu infantil como testemunha — não para intervir, mas para acompanhar. A reflexão explora princípios centrais do psicodrama, como o duplo e a realidade suplementar, ao mesmo tempo em que questiona suposições eurocêntricas sobre cura, resolução linear e domínio emocional. A partir de éticas relacionais e saberes indígenas, especialmente a pergunta Māori *Ko wai au?* (“Quem sou eu?”), o texto reconceitualiza a presença como um ato decolonial: uma recusa em patologizar a dor e um retorno humilde àquilo que persiste. O artigo finaliza com implicações para a prática do psicodrama em grupo, enfatizando presença, testemunho poético e sensibilidade cultural no trabalho com traumas intergeracionais.

Palavras-chave: Psicodrama; Decolonialidade; Criança interior; Testemunho; Ética relacional

Abstract : This reflective experience report offers a decolonial psychodramatic encounter with the inner child, prompted by the viewing of *Ka Puna Te Wai, Ko Te Kāwai Puna* (Rakena, 2015). Through the symbolic presence of water and ancestral imagery, the film stirred deep emotional responses related to childhood neglect. The author recounts a vivid psychodramatic moment of standing behind their younger self as a witness—not to intervene, but to accompany. The reflection explores core psychodramatic principles such as doubling and surplus reality, while also questioning Eurocentric assumptions of healing, linear resolution, and emotional mastery. Drawing on Indigenous and relational ethics, particularly the Māori question *Ko wai au?* (“Who am I?”), this piece reframes presence as a decolonial act: a refusal to pathologize pain, and a turning toward it with humility. The article closes by offering implications for group psychodrama practice, emphasizing presence, poetic witnessing, and cultural responsiveness in work with intergenerational trauma.

Keywords: Psychodrama; Decoloniality; Inner child; Witnessing; Relational ethics

Resumen: Este informe reflexivo de experiencia ofrece un encuentro psicodramático decolonial con el niño interior, desencadenado por la visualización de *Ka Puna Te Wai, Ko Te Kāwai Puna* (Rakena, 2015). A través de la presencia simbólica del agua y de imágenes ancestrales, la película evocó respuestas emocionales profundas relacionadas con el abandono infantil. El autor relata un momento psicodramático vívido, situándose detrás de su yo infantil como testigo — no para intervenir, sino para acompañar. La reflexión explora principios clave del psicodrama como el doble y la realidad suplementaria, mientras cuestiona supuestos eurocéntricos sobre la sanación, la resolución lineal y el control emocional. Desde una ética relacional e indígena, especialmente en la pregunta Māori *Ko wai au?* (“¿Quién soy yo?”), el texto reconfigura la presencia como un acto decolonial: una negativa a patologizar el dolor y una vuelta humilde hacia lo que aún duele. El artículo concluye con implicaciones para la práctica del psicodrama grupal, destacando la presencia, el testimonio poético y la sensibilidad cultural en el abordaje del trauma intergeneracional.

Palabras clave: Psicodrama; Decolonialidad; Niño interior; Testimonio; Ética relacional

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Introduction

This reflective experience report explores a decolonial psychodramatic encounter with my inner child, catalyzed from viewing *Ka Puna Te Wai, Ko Te Kāwai Puna* (Rakena, 2015), a short film centering intergenerational connection and Māori identity. The encounter is recounted not as a case in the traditional clinical sense, but as a lived, embodied moment that exemplifies relational presence, cultural memory, and a turning toward personal and collective pain.

Psychodrama, rooted in action and relational truth-telling (Moreno, 1946), offers a method of accessing what lies beneath language, beneath time, what is unspoken yet fully felt. This piece is offered as a contribution to the expanding psychodramatic field through a decolonial lens: one that questions the supremacy of cognitive knowing, the dominance of individualism, and the suppression of emotional, spiritual, and ancestral relationality.

Narrative and cultural context

Watching *Ka Puna Te Wai* stirred a wave of distress in me. The film depicts tūpuna and mokopuna at the water's edge, playing, watching, holding each other across time. But I could not feel held. I saw my child self, not in the film, but within me: a boy alone in a paddling pool, age seven, playing silently, unnoticed.

From somewhere within me, I stepped into the role of witness. I stood behind the child, not as a rescuer, not as a therapist, but as tūpuna. As presence.

In psychodramatic terms, this was a moment of spontaneous doubling. The child did not ask to be seen. But I saw him. I remained. I did not speak.

Ko wai au?
Who am I, in this moment?
Am I the one who left him alone?
Or the one who returns?

This was not a clinical exercise. It was a rupture. It was decolonial in its refusal to abstract the pain or convert it into growth. It was a return to *what is still true*: that a child stood in water, alone, and no one came. But I can be present here.

Poetic witness: Ko Wai Au

Ko wai au?
I am the one who watches.
I am the one who was not watched.
Ko wai au?
I am the echo that finds its voice.
I am tūpuna now.
The pool glints.
The boy turns his head but doesn't see me.
Still, I stay.
The pain flows on.
And yet, so does presence.

Decolonial commentary

Much psychotherapy, including psychodrama, has been shaped by Eurocentric assumptions: that healing is linear, that catharsis is the goal, that interpretation is necessary. But this moment offered something else, something older.

From a decolonial perspective, *Ko wai au?* is not only a question of identity, but of genealogy, land, water, and spirit (Mika, 2019). *Wai* is water. *Ko wai au?* —Who am I? —also means: *What waters flow through me? Whose voice do I carry?*

To witness the inner child without intervening is to undo the colonial drive to fix. It is to honour the wound without attempting to colonize it with meaning. It is to say: *Your pain is real. I am here now.*

This kind of presence is, itself, an act of resistance against abandonment, silence, and the internalized voices of imperialism that told us we were only valuable if we achieved, contributed, or overcame.

Implications for psychodramatic practice

This reflection suggests a shift in psychodramatic stance: from directing toward *doing*, to facilitating *being-with*. In group contexts, it invites directors and auxiliaries to practice non-interventionist presence when appropriate, to allow surplus reality to include not only action, but shared stillness.

Furthermore, integrating poetic, cultural, and artistic prompts (such as film or ritual) into psychodrama may support deeper access to ancestral knowledge and intergenerational material, especially for participants whose histories have been shaped by colonization.

It also raises ethical questions: How do we, as practitioners, avoid becoming new colonizers in the inner worlds of others? How do we recognize when our impulse to heal is really an avoidance of witnessing?

Conclusion

Ko wai au? I am still learning.

But I know now that presence is powerful. That standing behind the child I once was, not to change him, but to accompany him, is a decolonial act.

This work is not finished. It flows on, like water. And perhaps that is the most decolonial truth of all: we do not end things. We return to ourselves, to our ancestors, to the pain, and to the presence that was once missing. This is not weakness. It is wholeness.

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