

Towards the Foundations for Working with Collective Trauma in Latin America: an Initial Articulation of Some Essential Elements

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Introduction

While collective trauma has accompanied humanity since time immemorial, it is only recently, with the simultaneous impact worldwide of the COVID-19 pandemic¹, the ever-more clear and stronger disastrous effects of climate change², the tremendous polarizations that have been erupting in vitriolic discourse³, as well as in armed violence across the globe⁴, that the concept is becoming common currency for much of today's society. Unfortunately, the current context is not only the result of the pandemic, of current political conditions, or of the emissions released today into the environment. There is a major component in the problems we are facing today that stems from the previous collective traumas that have not been addressed by human societies, particularly, Western society.

The impacts of some of these accumulated traumas can be seen today in the living conditions of the population that was and continues to be impacted by left-over colonial

¹ Naseer *et al.* (2022) "COVID-19 Outbreak: Impact on Global Economy". *Frontiers in Public Health* 2022; 10: 109393. Published online 2023, Jan 30.

([https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9923118/#:~:text=The%20COVID%2D19%20Pandemic%20has.the%20early%202020%27s%20\(30\).](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9923118/#:~:text=The%20COVID%2D19%20Pandemic%20has.the%20early%202020%27s%20(30).))

² Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023). *Assessment Report 6. Synthesis Report: Climate Change 2023-*. Published online 2023 March 20.

<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/sixth-assessment-report-cycle/>

³ Carothers, Thomas, and Andrew O'Donohue (2019) "How to Understand the Global Spread of Political Polarization". Carnegie endowment for International Peace. Published online 2019 October 1

<https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/01/how-to-understand-global-spread-of-political-polarization-pub-79893>

⁴ Raleigh, Cionadh (2024) "You're Right, the World is Getting More Violent". Published online 2024 February 6.

<https://inkstickmedia.com/youre-right-the-world-is-getting-more-violent/#:~:text=Overall%2C%20global%20conflict%20rates%20increased.an%20area%20of%20active%20conflict.>

dynamics⁵, the disconnection from nature⁶ and the sacredness of life: the enacting of dispossession, oppression and extractivism that continue to occur on the side of privileged, unconscious and/or criminal segments of the population. The tremendous upheaval caused means that dispossessed, displaced people and asylum seekers who survive end up needing to migrate to preserve their lives. This leaves them with significant impacts related to the uprootedness from the trauma of the loss of their homes and communities, from the displacement itself, and consequently, with difficulties in connecting to the new land and societies they move to.

The somatic aspect of this is marked by a sense of ungroundedness and a rupture in the sense of weight, gravity, yielding to the earth and allowing themselves to be supported by it. This reflects a sense of safety and opens up space to be able to process and digest the energy of what occurs in life.

Resources to address the needs of support for mental and emotional health of much of the world's population are woefully insufficient, especially when we consider the individualized medical model that has been so dominant in the Western world. Thus, the need for collective healing, and to address both the more recent and ancestral layers of collective trauma, is becoming increasingly imperative.

Given this context, this article is meant to:

- 1) provide some reflections and tools for addressing some of the collective trauma issues that are increasingly emerging in Latin America,
- 2) support practitioners and researchers who want to better understand at a cognitive level what we may need in order to scale our capacity to address the ongoing trauma,
- 3) find reflections and suggestions at a more practical level, for putting together offers of support for people in this region, and,
- 4) invite similar explorations tailored to the reality of other regions.

⁵ Blakemore, Erin (2023) "What is Colonialism?", in National Geographic. Published online 2023 October 6
<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/colonialism#:~:text=Colonialism%27s%20impacts%20include%20environmental%20degradation,outlast%20one%20group%27s%20colonial%20rule.>

⁶ Beery, Thomas, et al. (2023) "Disconnection from nature: Expanding our understanding of human-nature relations", in People and Nature. Published 2023 February 22.
<https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pan3.10451#:~:text=The%20multiple%20ways%20individuals%20and,represented%20in%20connection%20to%20nature%2C>

a) Origins of this collaboration

Before meeting each other, we three Latin American authors have been interested in the impacts of the collective trauma of colonialism for reasons of our own, some very related to our individual histories.

In the case of Laura, the commitment to this work emerged from the debilitating impacts of facing racism as a Mexican mestiza and realizing that her need for healing was part of a much larger, national one, involving both contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous inhabitants of Mexico. In Gabriela's case, it came out of facing the tragedy of the brutal violence stemming from the armed conflict in Colombia and its consequences in the social fabric of her homeland, conflict that has roots in ongoing colonial structures and mindsets. In Flavia's case, it stemmed from having a first row seat in the cases that came to her bench as a judge in the Tribunal for Minors in Buenos Aires, Argentina. All these experiences have in common the intergenerational and collective traumas being acted out with roots in the colonial processes that our lands and peoples experienced.

From that common context, we three have engaged in a collaborative collective healing and learning journey which began in 2017 and which continues to this day. This path is a living study that is being nourished ongoingly, not limited to certain workshops, groups, or spaces. More than a research project, for us, this path is a way of life, and our friendship and common calling are parts of its foundation.

The present text is the result of wanting to share that path, and in particular, in this article, the resources and contributions towards healing the collective trauma of colonialism, that we identify as emerging from the reality, the cultures and the people of Latin America that we have been in touch with. It includes too our experience as living participants of this inquiry, our felt sense and relationship to Latin America, and the witnessing and listening to the voices that appeared in the process.

Even though we each had charted our own path individually prior to meeting each other, our joint exploration started during the first collective trauma training offered by the non-profit organization for healing collective trauma, the Pocket Project, founded by mystical teacher Thomas Hübl and his wife, visual artist Yehudit Sasportas. The training took place in Israel from 2017 to 2018. The three of us are very grateful to Thomas Hübl, not just for having met each other, but for all that we learned regarding the way Mystical Principles are at play in the healing of trauma, and of collective trauma in particular.

After finishing that training, the three of us participated as a team exploring Collective Trauma in Latin America as part of a U-Lab Journey in 2019-2020 with the Presencing Institute, where Flavia led a team of 35 participants in Argentina, Gabriela a team of 15 participants in Colombia and Laura a team of 5 participants in Mexico. Initially, we started out with an Ibero-American exploration, that is, with the participation of a Spanish member of the group leading a Spanish group. In the process, she decided to leave the group when the time came to look at the pain

that is still present in parts of Latin America from the impact of the Spanish conquest and colonization. This was a very rich and revealing experience that showed us the tenderness of our history together and how alive it was in us. The process brought light to the importance of taking responsibility for our colonial history, reflected on having enough capacity and awareness to face the impact of what the European ancestors did in Latin America. We were not ready to work together at that point. We realized that we needed to review our own history first; otherwise, the experience can become re-wounding for those on the colonized side.

After that experience, we deepened our connection interacting as dyads in different contexts, also within Hübl's field: Laura has interviewed Flavia for the Collective Trauma Summits of 2020, 2021 and 2023. Gabriela and Laura hosted biweekly support calls in 2020 for several months during the COVID pandemic with the Pocket Project.

We then participated as a team co-hosting several 9-month exploration processes during 2021 on the Collective Trauma of Colonialism in Latin America and in various specific countries, as part of the 23 Collective Trauma Exploration Labs convened by the Pocket Project that year. The three of us co-facilitated the Lab for Latin America as a region, with the support of Stephanie Pizarro of Colombia and Danny Cohen of Israel alongside 40 participants. We also participated in dyads facilitating other Labs: Gabriela and Laura co-facilitated two other Labs: one for Colombia with the support of Paula Rodríguez and Stephanie Pizarro, both Colombians, and 30 participants, and another one for Mexico, with the support of Bárbara Ventura from Colombia and 16 participants. On her end, Flavia co-facilitated the Argentinian Lab with Tiiu Bolzmann and support from Andrea Fernández, María Raiti and Susana Sciarresi with 39 participants. The experience of co-facilitating the Labs was very illuminating, and a significant part of our collective understanding about collective trauma in Latin America comes from preparing, facilitating and integrating those experiences.

After the Labs, we three continued our exploration, meeting as a triad regularly, and participating together in the Collective Trauma Facilitator Training of 2022-23 offered by Thomas Hübl, the second iteration of a collective trauma healing training offered by his organizations. To this day we continue to meet as a triad on a regular basis.

These learnings we have gained in the spaces we have shared have been enriched by our own individual explorations, which, among others, include Gabriela doing transgenerational and collective trauma healing work with diverse communities in Colombia, interweaving trauma integration work with somatic awareness and a dedicated exploration on practices and ancestral social technologies, based at Corasoma⁷, a center co-created by her for this purpose and located in Barichara, Colombia; Flavia wrote an Introductory Handbook of Trauma Informed Approach⁸ as a UNICEF Consultant that emerged out of a training she offered in North Macedonia, In Venezuela she running different meetings as a support of Foro Social in Caracas and continuing to engage in the Pocket Project Labs, this time supporting the

⁷ <https://www.corasoma.org/>, paged accessed March 23, 2024

⁸Valgiusti, Flavia, (2022) *Trauma Informed Law. An Introductory Approach* . UNICEF. Published April 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/northmacedonia/reports/trauma-informed-approach>

exploration in Lebanon; and Laura carrying out Healing from Colonialism workshops in Mexico, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Canada and Kenya; co-presenting in different spaces information on collective trauma and co-facilitating spaces of support for groups that have experienced natural disasters with Edith Shiro, author of *The Unexpected Gift of Trauma*⁹, and through the dialogues needed for writing her co-authored article “Healing Systems”¹⁰ on the intersection of trauma and systems change with her colleagues at the Collective Change Lab.

Out of all these explorations, we would like to focus on some of our most significant learnings, particularly through the Exploration Lab on the Collective Trauma of Colonialism in Latin America, hoping to share some of what we found most useful and relevant when embarking on a journey of engaging with this important and challenging topic.

We will now turn to the questions that have guided our inquiry, and what we are choosing to share with you here.

b) The broader framework

The broader overarching question framing our efforts since 2018 is:

- What are the essential elements for healing collective trauma in Latin America?

Within this wide exploration, the questions we will be focusing on in this article are:

1. In what ways can *ancestral social technologies* and modes of connection to the sacred arising from indigenous and Afro-Latino communities, and shared to varying degrees with other groups in Latin American societies, contribute today to the integration of collective trauma from colonialism in contemporary collective contexts?
2. What resources are effective in opening new possibilities for relating in a more wholesome way to the events of the colonial past that left living wounds among the contemporary Latin American population?

Besides our exploration of these questions, in this text we are sharing some of the materials that were created for the Lab by us and the rest of our team, and by the participants. We are also including quotes from the chat meetings, personal notes from the facilitators during the process, and quotes from a recent interview carried out by Laura with two former participants of the Lab, who shall remain anonymous to protect their identities. They shared their views of why the Lab worked, and what were the key elements in their view and in their experience that allowed the Lab to be successful.

⁹ Shiro, Edith (2023) *The Unexpected Gift of Trauma. The Path to Posttraumatic Growth*. Harvest, London.

¹⁰ Calderón de la Barca, L. *et al.* (2024) “Healing Systems”, in *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Published online Feb 12, 2024. <https://ssir.org/articles/entry/healing-trauma-systems>

In our text, we are using the term Abya Yala, the ancestral name of what is now known as the American continent coined by the Kuna people of Colombia. We will discuss more about this choice later in the text.

In the following section, we share some essential aspects of our approach to this exercise as an exploration of trauma in the context of a collective from our continent.

c) Trauma approach process: following the thread of the collective fabric

The process of approaching trauma within the context of collective healing is a complex and dynamic journey, shaped by diverse experiences and historical legacies. As facilitators working within Latin America, our exploration of this terrain has illuminated the multifaceted nature of trauma and its healing trajectories, particularly in the context of colonialism's enduring impact across generations.

Consider, for instance, individuals directly impacted by recent armed conflicts, whose immediate survival concerns often render verbal expression of trauma impossible. Yet, their descendants may find solace in sharing their family's experiences, seeking to understand their own identities in relation to inherited trauma. Meanwhile, the broader societal dialogue about colonialism in Latin America reflects a spectrum of perspectives: some may recognize certain benefits, such as linguistic unity, while others confront ongoing oppression and discrimination. Acknowledging this diversity is crucial, as attempts to impose a singular approach to healing risk further marginalizing those still grappling with trauma's daily realities.

This realization underscores the need for nuanced, responsive approaches to trauma healing. There is no one-size-fits-all solution; instead, practitioners must remain adaptable, attuned to the evolving needs of participants, and be able to follow the collective voice of what organically flows in the process. Central to this process is the recognition that healing unfolds at its own pace, often requiring a slow rhythm, a lot of space, and the facilitator's qualities of presence, deep listening, and flexibility. Embracing uncertainty and staying open to unexpected shifts in the healing journey is essential.

Furthermore, along the path of trauma integration, we inevitably encounter a series of advances and setbacks. There are times when it becomes imperative to slow down, creating space and structure so that strong emotions can be experienced and acknowledged, allowing them to be effectively released.

Observing the stages of this process is truly fascinating. Once a safe container has been established, there's a profound moment in the exploration where emotions that have long been suppressed suddenly start to surface, manifesting initially as bodily sensations. As these sensations are verbalized, they gain structure and clarity, allowing for a more articulate expression. Then, we can bring our attention to a resource, and/or introduce it to the story and

focus on its felt sense. As the resources and the expressions are shared within the group, a transformative journey of awareness and reflection commences, evolving into a collective experience.

This evolution from internal sensation to shared expression represents a profound journey of individual and collective understanding, where emotions once held in silence find their voice and resonate within the group, fostering a deeper level of connection and empathy among participants.

One thing that is essential to recognize is that every experience, no matter how challenging, carries healing potential. This awareness allows us to adopt a posture of patient observation, creating a safe and supportive environment for the natural development of the healing process. It is important to understand that this process often develops gradually over several sessions and sometimes with breaks. Even when emotions surface in a seemingly disturbing way, giving them the space and time for authentic expression is key to genuine resolution and growth. For that, our disposition and capacity to experience discomfort without becoming distressed is essential.

In that sense, this approach requires a high degree of self-regulation of the team facilitating the process. It requires the ability to trust the inherent wisdom of the path to healing and to exercise patience even in the face of uncertainty. We need to stay connected and curious to follow the thread of the process, knowing that it is not linear and that it follows its momentum

Additionally, it is vital to highlight the importance of repair throughout the entire process. This involves explicitly recognizing and validating acts of acknowledgment of impacts caused and reparation offered, both within the team that facilitates the process and among the participants themselves. By fostering an environment where healing is encouraged and valued, we create a powerful foundation for healing and strengthening relationships, both individually and collectively.

This essentially means that we have to be aware of the context present in the territories we are working in, the capacities and limitations of the facilitator, and the organic unfolding of the process. As with other collective processes, we also need to be fluid with disruptions to the plan we had arrived with, particularly to accommodate sudden eruptions of unhealed material.

It is imperative to approach this work with humility and respect for the wisdom of the communities we serve. Countless generations have navigated trauma using ancestral knowledge and cultural practices, which remain alive today. So we feel we must recognize and honor the resilience of the diverse peoples and communities of Latin America, who have endured centuries of colonization, and their enduring legacies. Their wisdom and resilience serve as the foundation on which our learning is built. We gratefully acknowledge the invaluable contributions of Indigenous and Afro-Latino communities, whose teachings have informed and enriched our approach to trauma healing within a continent-spanning context.

We see our role as facilitators is not to impose rigid methodologies but rather to offer guiding principles and reflective questions that honor the rich tapestry of healing traditions already present in Latin America. At its core, our approach is guided by a commitment to humility, and responsiveness, recognizing that healing is a collective effort rooted in respect for the territory's diverse perspectives and experiences.

As part of the collaborative dimension of our work, we will now share the different resources that we and others put together, and that were well received by the participants.

d) On the resources we brought to the Lab process

The process we lived in the Labs was enormously rich, and it took time to digest and essentialize the learning we took away with us. One of the aspects that we found key was that besides bringing with us our understanding of trauma, we focused on actively bringing resources to the group. We feel this was a very crucial decision that led to the results we obtained.

One of the opportunities that the Lab gave us was to look at the different resources available in the different parts of the continent to appreciate them and get more familiar with them. One of the very damaging practices that colonialism brings with it, is the denigration of the local ways of life, of culture, in favor of European or American cultures and lifestyles. Bringing our gaze and our sensing to the richness of our continent and its beauty and wisdom, present already before the Europeans arrived, is one way in which a certain level of regaining wholeness can be fostered.

Accordingly, of the resources we identified, in this article, we will focus on sharing some of the ones that we consider particular contributions of the Latin American reality or those that have a resonance with its ancient wisdom.

While recognizing the steps proposed by Thomas Hübl for handling collective trauma, we saw the need to adjust the approach. In our region, where colonialism's effects are still deeply felt, a straight-line historical view limited connections between countries. Therefore, we proposed the circularity of time, acknowledging it as a fundamental aspect of both human and natural cycles. This adapted approach proved to be more pragmatic and resonated better with the worldview of our community.

In the same direction, we made a deliberate choice to center our efforts on fostering profound connections and coherence, while also embracing a natural emergence of the past through the collective experiences of our group and our conceptualization of time as a spiral (further elaborated in the section on circular time).

And I think we also felt the whole team very present, [...] I think it was also not [...] logical, or structured, or very academic, which I think was also part of the success, I mean, we did not feel like little laboratory rats and we are going to do an experiment and then, what is going to come out of it? I mean, the humanity that you imbued from the beginning, which I think starts in the relationship of you as a team, made the ripple effect for the rest, I feel. For me, that was like the biggest key, other things can come out of it, but I feel that that is the axis.

Additionally, we considered that an experiential, relational, and somatic approach would be essential both for the creation of coherence and for the digestion of the energy that would emerge. The presentations we created played a role in that, as well as in making the space a collaborative one.

- The role of the presentations we shared at the beginning of each group

We created presentations with images, which we would start every meeting with, so we could start to relate more deeply and feel each other's environments, and also to develop an embodied relationship with the topics we were addressing. This became a very important resource that allowed the diversity and the similarities between our lands and our peoples to be not just known but felt.

We started by asking the participants to share images of their local territories; the places they live, and the places they love that are close to where they live. This also was meant to support us in creating a sense of connection to our territories and across them, given that we were an online group, and we would never come together all of us in the same space.

After that initial presentation, we continued using images that related to different aspects of the land and culture of Abya Yala, such as the architecture, paintings, and other art pieces, pictures of archaeological sites and dances, as well as images related to the topics we were to address, such as time measurement systems, the complexity of the mix of people that arose from the coming together of the three lineages, among other topics. We used these presentations at the start of every session to inspire the discussion by having people have a direct visual experience related to the topics we explored.

Here follows some of the images we shared, and a discussion reflecting on the resources they brought.

- Art: Painting

As part of the presentation depicting art in Latin America, we shared this image of the painting "Sur" (South), by Nicolás García Uriburu¹¹:

¹¹ García Uriburu, Nicolás. Sur. <https://images.app.goo.gl/4GSSGyWsbGkCAr2q8>



The image is not upside down; that is how it was painted. We invite you to notice the reaction you have to the image. We selected this image because of the opportunity it gives us to de-automatize our view of the continent, with all the space that affords us to de-automatize our sense-making of it.

- Archeological Sites

In another presentation, we showed images of archaeological sites. This particular set of images was important for two reasons: it provided us with a felt sense of the deep wisdom and capacities of the ancestors who lived in what today is called the American continent, which, as mentioned, we are referring to as Abya Yala, (more on this name and our choice of using it later).

The wisdom and depth of understanding of cosmology allowed these civilizations to build sacred buildings that were oriented towards the location of different stars, and constellations, and also to incorporate information related to the cycles of life on Earth such that specific moments of the cycles of the Earth around the Sun: solstices and equinoxes, and of the Solar System around the central axis of our galaxy were marked by phenomena involving light and shadow, created through architectural resources. An example of this is the famous “descent of Kulkán” in the archeological site of Chichén Itzá, where during the equinoxes in the northern hemisphere, the light of the Sun and the shadow of the angles of each layer of the building create a sequence of triangles that appear as the Sun reaches the tipping point in its trajectory where the seasons change. The descent refers to the arrival of life-giving energy and light of the warmer half of the year that starts with the Spring equinox. In the building called The Castle, we see the descent of this energy as light from the top layer of the building:



This was one of the aspects mentioned as significant by Participant 1 in the interview carried out in February of 2024:

For me it [the inclusion of archaeological sites] was also important, not only because it was part of the origin, but also because we are talking about absolutely intelligent civilizations, like a capacity to create, that is, they were people of science. [...] This bullshit that we have been taught about history, that they [European colonizers] showed them the little mirror, and then they fell [for the artifact] like fools with the little mirror, please! I mean, they [the Europeans] wanted to impress [the natives] with those [mirrors], when they [the natives] are already creating all that. So, for me it was also like, implicitly, the wisdom, the intelligence, the science of where we come from, that is, we do not come from fools, but, that is, the strength, that creativity, that imposingness with those constructions.

The other aspect that we found to be a powerful resource related to ancient sites, was being able to see the similarities within the diversity of the cosmological foundations that were shared by the cultures highlighting the sense of interconnectedness, shared wisdom, and cosmogony of our ancestors, throughout the whole continent. Other sites also present similar principles in action, even if they are also particular to their specific geography. Another example is Tiwanaku in Bolivia, a site oriented to both the arch in the sky that the Sun traverses throughout the year between the two solstices on the ends, the equinoxes in the middle, and the location of the 2 sacred volcanos: in the December solstice, the Sun rises over the Illimani, and in the June one,

over the Mururata, and in the equinoxes, in the middle between them¹². Here is an image of the site, as it was depicted in the presentation we shared with the group:

Sitio arqueológico Tiwanaku La paz, Bolivia



This exercise allowed us to introduce the dimension of deep time into our work through the experience of the similarity of the profound relation that all these different cultures and ancestors had to the cosmos and to the life-giving forces that sustain our world.

- Art: Architecture

The similarities were also illustrated through looking at the architectural styles that are a part of our cities and towns. Again, we could see the particular styles present in each location, but we also saw how similar they are.

Here are two of the images we shared. One is of the historical center of Cusco, Perú, and the other of the city center of Trinidad in Cuba:

¹² The field of archaeoastronomy offers explanations for multiple examples of this. In this case, see Pedro Parodi (1996), "Arqueoastronomía en Tiwanaku":
https://www.equiponaya.com.ar/mundos_andinos/htm/conferencias/pedro_parodi.htm

Centro Histórico, Cusco, Perú



Trinidad, Cuba



Sensing the similarities was a way of allowing us to feel our shared history and heritage.

- Music

Music was a resource that we did not just enjoy sharing but allowed us to honor the diversity of cultures and lineages as well. A playlist was created by the husband of one of our team members, with music from artists originating in a variety of Latin American countries, to deepen the relation to our cultural resources, and to foster a sense of commonality. We also sometimes used music to dance together on screen, when we felt that movement was needed. This is the link to the music we used:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3YiCmbzAQzguod8QiopBaS?si=8ffc5640f1ed445f>

We invited people to arrive early to have time to get comfortable, settle down, view the presentation and listen to the music as we waited for the group to finish arriving.

- The WhatsApp group

One more resource that was of huge value to the group was a WhatsApp group that is still in use more than 3 years after the creation of the group. Initially, it became a tool for people to share their images, questions, offerings of videos, and websites of interest to the group, but as time passed and the group deepened their relatedness, it also became a resourcing space where people shared the impacts of the situations they were experiencing in their local and national contexts, and there were always responses from some of the people in the group that would support and accompany the person who shared. Participants were encouraged to share their 3 syncs (their experience of their mind, emotions, and body sensations upon reading the messages), and people quite often felt met with resonance and care in a secure place and felt resourced by the group to face what they were dealing with. In the recent interview with 2 participants, both of them expressed how important that resource was—and still is today:

Participant 1:

The Whatsapp group is another resource that for me was one of the mega important ones, because I remember, I mean, writing there: "Look, this is happening in [her country of origin], please, can you open a space for me?"

Several of us asked for support in witnessing. I think there were also fires in the Amazon at that time, that is, there were extremely important events that we shared in the chat, and I did feel it as a resource. That is, the container is alive, active, it continues, it is there, latent. But I feel that they were also those key pieces of the interweaving, like those threads from which the rest is woven, for me they are like those keys, I believe.

Participant 2:

How many years have passed and still the chat is active, maybe not so often, but it is always a resource that someone says, ah, I need such and such, I'm going to post it in the chat, and the rest, or the others, we are keeping an eye out for how we can, energetically, contribute to what someone shares there. And if it is something that can be shared with others, to reshare it.

Actually, as the conversation was unfolding, the second participant realized there was a musical resource she had created that she had not shared:

Participant 2:

I had not posted it in the chat, but now I remembered. I made a playlist on Spotify, I made a playlist in which I put one song from each country, including Brazil, Chile, and those who were not present, but I included them. Well, there I have it, maybe now I can share it, I think it is a good moment.

Laura:

It would be great if you shared it, it is a very lovely moment to do so!

Participant 2:

I remembered that, just now, so I'm going to share it in the group, because yes, I looked for songs that talked about and mentioned the name of the country, right, not only music from the country, but songs that talked about Argentina, Honduras, Mexico. They are mentioned in each of the songs.

Here we can see an illustration of both the vitality of the chat as a resource for the group, the resonance that it still has, as well as the care that many of the participants put into the offerings they created. In this case, Participant 2 took the time to look for songs that mentioned each country by name and to find songs that expressed a deep love for each of the countries or territories that were mentioned. The playlist can be found here:

<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/2nGM2aXOz1hQVp3Bn4tdKp?si=585ceb619a024a3c>

- Scribing

In each session of the laboratory, we had the support of Andrea Fernandez, who facilitated scribing. Scribing, a technique that visually represents ideas while people talk, is a distinctive social art form that enhances group learning and preserves cultural memory. Scribes listen and draw simultaneously, creating large pictures that integrate content and extend this art by capturing the energy field and relationships between individuals, as well as the emerging information within a system.

At the end of each meeting, Andrea displayed the final drawing, and participants shared their reflections in the chat based on what it evoked for them. Incorporating this technique proved to be crucial because it allowed us to reflect upon and engage with the emergent themes in each session effectively.

the interweaving of the three lineages: Native American, European, and African; the importance of ancestral cosmovisions, and of connecting with nature.

a. Our take on “Colonialism”

While formal colonial rule ended in the 19th century with the wave of independence movements across the region, the legacy of colonialism continues to be present and alive, shaping the whole relational field of Latin America, including its cultural, spiritual, political, and economic dynamics, influencing everything from language and religion to land ownership and social hierarchies.

“Colonizing” refers to the use of dominance and taking something by force, without asking for permission. Land occupation by violent means and the displacement of indigenous and peasant communities happen every day in Latin America; the State’s abandonment, poverty, and invisibility of the Afro-descendent population is evident along the continent; Earth exploitation and the interest of mining companies and extractivist on the territory has increased over time; as well as the imposition of European languages, religions, and ways have been ongoing dynamics in this part of the world.

Our approach to the study of colonialism then goes beyond thinking of Colonialism as a historical period from the past. We consider it both an attitude and a verb since its presence is encoded in daily actions and ways that we relate to each other, and it is an active agent shaping our relationship to ourselves, each other, and multiple dimensions of our world.

The view of Colonialism as an attitude and as an action has allowed us to bring light to the ongoing dynamics embedded in the systems of thought and relationships that perpetuate our history. It has opened up paths of transformation based on cultivating intention, awareness, deep listening, embodied experience, social connection, and group resonance, aiming to inspire action and contribute to healing the fractures of our collective history.

Through participants’ experiences and group sharings, we could corroborate that the collective trauma of colonialism is very much alive throughout the whole Latin American region and that there are multiple ways in which the wounds and patterns of interaction are perpetuated. Language, social interactions, political views, religion, and cultural practices, the extractive relationship to earth and nature, the polarized perspectives, and the waves of violence are live expressions of this reality.

Having said that, it is important to mention that we also inherited the resiliency of our ancestors, who stayed alive and were strengthened through spiritual and community practices. Resistance is also a very important action that emerged from the injustices of colonialism and oppression, and also as an effort to preserve some treasures that the world really needs in these chaotic times.

In that sense, we found the concept of Decoloniality¹³ helpful, understanding it as a movement that aspires to liberate people from oppression and restore our essential order and sovereignty. It invites us to look at what we elevate and serve with our actions. A symbolic example of this occurred in Colombia during the time of the Labs: a movement called “el estallido social” (“the social outburst”) erupted, in which members of Indigenous groups tore down the statues lifted in honor of Spanish nobles and conquerors who committed genocides in what is now Colombian territory¹⁴.

Involvement in studying and healing the wounds of colonialism invites us to look into our daily experiences and actions, to bring awareness to our ways of relating, and to engage in an embodied exploration of every topic as a door for transformation, and an invitation to make amends through present-day actions.

An Argentinian participant from the Latin American Lab said¹⁵:

I feel like a European discoverer. Many things have an unknown quality to me. What does it mean to inhabit, to be rooted, to belong? It was a shock to me to see colonialism as a relationship rather than an event

The experience offered the participants an opportunity to rethink and bring awareness to the ways that colonialism hides behind normalized experiences and behavior. In the case of this person, it made her aware of the impact on her capacity to take root in her land and to discover its presence in her everyday life.

b. The interweaving of the three lineages: Native American, European, and African

Although it is clear to us that the impacts of colonialism on Native and African peoples have been catastrophic when 90 to 95% of the original population perished between the end of the 15th Century and the end of the 17th Century¹⁶, and 12 to 12.8 million Africans were abducted to be shipped to the other side of the Atlantic¹⁷, and the ongoing impact of this reality needs to be attended to, we would like to focus on some aspects that are usually excluded from official versions of our history, because they hold important keys for healing.

¹³ What is Decoloniality? William and Mary University.

<https://www.wm.edu/sites/dhp/decoloniality/#:~:text=Decolonial%20approaches%2C%20methods%2C%20and%20movements.%22naturalness%22%20of%20racial%20capitalism.>

¹⁴ Colombia: polémica por el derribo de estatua de conquistador. Deutsche Welle, Sept 17, 2020.

<https://www.dw.com/es/pol%C3%A9mica-en-colombia-por-derribo-de-estatua-de-conquistador-esp%C3%B1ol-por-ind%C3%ADgenas/a-54966460>

¹⁵ From the facilitator’s personal notes. Comment during the last session of the Latin American Lab, 2021

¹⁶ From an estimate of 145 million native people when the Europeans arrived at the end of the 15th century, only 7-15 million were left by the late 17th Century. Colonialism became and remains a persistent threat to their lives, ancestral culture, language traditions, way of life and knowledge systems. McKenna, Erin; Pratt, Scott L. (2015). *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present*. 50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK: Bloomsbury. p. 375. ISBN 978-1-44118-375-0.

¹⁷ Meredith, Martin (2014). *The Fortunes of Africa*. New York: PublicAffairs. p. 191. ISBN 978-1-61039-635-6, and <https://slaveryandremembrance.org/articles/article/index.cfm?id=A0032>

Despite the catastrophic scenario, many Native peoples and Afro-descendants have survived and continue to resist the injustices sustained by colonial dynamics. Their medicines and wisdom have been safeguarded through oral tradition and community practices, offering us a guide and inspiration for cultivating resources, collective healing, and resilience.

We consider that colonialism provides us with a lens that dehumanizes and fragments relationships between the different groups involved. In contrast, we believe that each of the lineages that our societies are constituted from has both value and shadows and that an important part of what we need to do to heal is to find ways to meet the pain in a more resourced way and to start to construct the capacity to respectfully and mindfully collaborate together in allyship for the wellbeing of all. Crucially, we also need to recover the potential future of collaboration that was not actualized at the moment of the meeting of the three lineages.

Furthermore, the confluence of native Indigenous populations, Afro-descendants, and white Europeans in the Latin American territory opened up the doors for inter-breeding and gave life to a new and complex lineage of humans of mixed ethnic and cultural roots.

In colonial times, attempts were made to create a system of nomenclature to legally classify the population emerging from this complex weave. The term “mestizo” was given to those of Indigenous and European origins, “mulato” for those of black and European origins, and the term “zambo” for a person of Black and Indigenous roots. The term “criollos” was used for those who were born in America but who had Spanish ancestry and therefore, their social place was lower than those born in Europe, which meant that just for the fact of having been born in this land, they lost privilege and were disadvantaged. And this went on and on in the convoluted attempt to give linear order to a highly complex demographic phenomenon¹⁸.

In terms of our discussion, the interweaving of these 3 peoples, represents by itself the integration of a long history of experiences and offers us a precious opportunity to access information, memories, and resources from each lineage.

With all this in mind, we invited the participants throughout the Labs to explore in an embodied way the experience of each one of the lineages. In one exercise we provided for this, we invited the groups to recreate through mindful imagery the moment of the first sighting and encounter with each other of the three different peoples and cultures that our main current lineages stem from: Indigenous, European and Black. We included both the components of greed, and guile, but we invited them to also include the components of awe, curiosity, naivety and discovery that could have happened there, looking from all three perspectives, and inviting a meeting around an ancestral fire.

We also invited people to take from that moment the potential possibilities of collaboration that were present then to bring into the current moment for us to actualize them, opening up the field

¹⁸ <https://www.filosoficas.unam.mx/~lbeltran/Textos/Articulos/CastasLopezBeltran.pdf>. Accessed 22 March, 2024.

of possibilities. The results were, for some, a refreshing gaze introduced by those qualities, as well as an expansion of possibilities, while others expressed resistance towards the “distracting” and “sweetened” moment that did not compensate for the atrocities that came after. In a recent conversation with one of the participants, she mentioned this exercise as one of the aspects that made the Lab successful in her experience:

the meditation [we] did at the beginning of going [back to the moment of] the trip [of the Spaniards to the “New World”] and seeing how the Spaniards [were when they] arrived in America, was an important basis for placing colonialism at the center, because it is not the same to talk and share about colonialism, as to see the place of the other who arrived and found something that he thought was something important to exploit

This comment stresses the importance of the difference between a cognitive exploration of colonialism (it is not the same to talk and share about colonialism) and an evocation: a realization born out of an embodied experience of consciously and voluntarily placing oneself in the setting, through mindful imagery in context that one is wanting to better understand (as to see the place of the other who arrived and found something that he thought was something important to exploit).

Another two participants wrote in the chat of that session¹⁹:

I discovered awe as a resource, giving the different cultures a place in my heart, with a wider view, without judgment... like the image of the encounter of the 3 lineages around the fire, it returned dignity to me.

I was very moved by feeling colonialism, the pain of what was left behind, the surrendering of the natives, the richness of the africans... and the best, getting together around the fire.

Finally, another important aspect that was revealed was the experience of how the African heritage was rendered invisible and was not well received, neither by the mainstream society in Colonial times nor by the current dominant Euro-centric culture, and the subtle ways it managed to be encoded in mainstream cultural expressions such as music and dance.

c. Ancestral cosmovisions as sources of resilience and resistance

To better understand the deep impact that colonialism had, and still has today, on Latin American countries, it is necessary to go beyond the historical facts to enter into the systems of thought, relationship and cosmogony of the native habitants of this continent, which have constituted the primary source of their resilience and resistance, up to the present day.

The pre-Hispanic cosmovision conceived the territory as a ritual and sacred space, composed of a network of relationships between different spiritual orders and nature²⁰. This notion goes beyond the physical and geographical space, to denote methods and dynamics of interaction

¹⁹ Chat meeting session Latin America Colonialism and collective trauma Lab. February 3, 2021

²⁰ Daza, A. Introducción. (2013). *Retornando por el camino de los antiguos. El Sender para Reorganizar la Vida*. Alcaldía Mayor de Bogotá. Convenio interadministrativo No. 169 de 2012. Colombia

based on the essential principle of caring for life, deep listening to natural orders, and the role of the human being as the primary guardian of this order.

The lack of understanding of these orders, as well as the absence of social practices and technologies, the imposing, controlling and extractivist dynamics coming from the colonizing mindset generated a series of transgressions that broke with the fundamental principles of the Abya Yala cosmogony.

Abya Yala is a term that refers to the whole of the continent that is now known as America, and which has been used as a symbol of identity and respect for the roots of the original peoples of this land²¹. It has gained institutional recognition, illustrated by its adoption in official documents of the CEPAL (Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe, Naciones Unidas–Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, United Nations)²². It also played a role in our work.

During the Lab, we intentionally brought up the ancestral name Abya Yala to invite participants to feel the resonance of it in their bodies and to connect with the deep memory of this continent. The level of resonance it had was impressive, and the term has been respectfully adopted by many of the participants since then while referring to the Latin American territory.

In the recent interview with former participants, Participant 2 mentioned her experience of the associations she has with the name and how important this was in the Lab:

Something very important was to recognize the original name of Latin America as Abya Yala, because when I mention Abya Yala I get associations of splendor, nature, in its total energy, a space in which many species live together in peace, and after those species come the human groups.

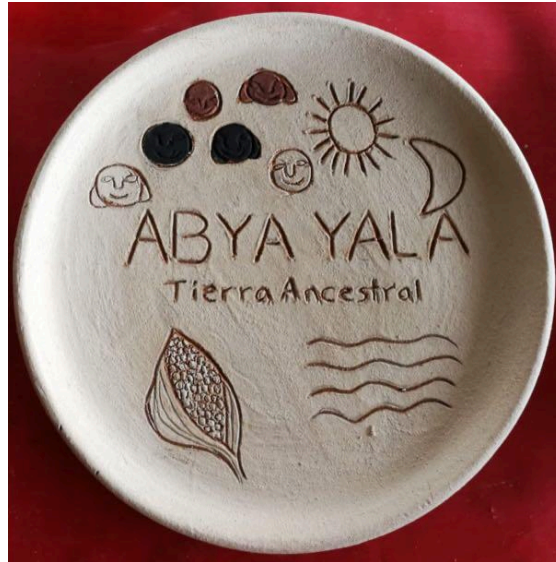
Furthermore, one of the participants made a pottery piece with the name, which became the icon for the WhatsApp group. Here is the image. It reads “Abya Yala. Ancestral Land”:

²¹ This term was initially used by the Kuna (native people of Colombia and Panama) to designate, as mentioned above, the territory comprising the American Continent, and whose meaning is "Mature Land", "Living Land" or "Land in Bloom".

<https://www.upo.es/investiga/enredars/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Pr%C3%B3logo.pdf>, page visited March 23, 2024.

²² Del Popolo, Fabiana, (ed.) (2017) *Los pueblos indígenas en América (Abya Yala)*. Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe CEPAL, Santiago.

https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/publication/files/43187/S1600364_es.pdf



Weaving together these essential orders of each territory is an essential part of working with the wounds of colonialism, since this offers us a relational map that has been used for centuries and millennia to navigate and overcome adversities, based on cultivating spirituality, fostering a sense of community and connectedness with nature.

Taking this into account, we offered throughout the Lab experiences that could tap into the felt sense of Latin American history, memories and resources of this territory. Inspiring images, music, storytelling, movement, imagination, ritual and social ancestral technologies were invited throughout the Lab. Before bringing in the name Abya Yala, we invited people to observe what got evoked in them when connecting to their felt sense of Latin America. People were then invited to contribute more than one word to form a word cloud to make visible the relationship we had as a collective with Latin America was like in that moment.

It was evident from the beginning of the process that the experience of the group was going beyond the pain of the colonial wounds and could access resources expressed in the perception of being a diverse, abundant and colorful land, even as the wounds and the pain that are part of the Latin American reality were also embraced. In the word cloud below we can see the resonance within the group of love (amor) at the center, surrounded by fraternity (fraternidad), warmth (calidez), belonging (pertenencia), light (luz), life (vida), color, wound (herida), joy (alegría), nature (naturaleza), yes (sí), peace (paz), E/earth (T/tierra), home (hogar), pain (dolor), ancestors (ancestros), fruit (frutas), flowers (flores), music (música), diversity (diversidad), etc.. Note also in a much smaller font, horror, dissociation (disociación), uprootedness (desarraigo), scars (cicatrices), marginalization (marginación), hollows (huecos), fragmentation (fragmentación), frozenness (congelamiento), etc.

essential part of trauma integration work and of restoring the sense of safety that is lost under survival states, fear-based, and displacement experiences. We need to work at an embodied level to be able to reach true transformations²⁴²⁵, and grounding is the somatic resource par excellence²⁶²⁷.

To work on this, in our meditations we paid special attention to the embodied experience of arriving, the growing awareness of the Earth's support, of deepening our felt experience of connecting with her, of being grounded, supported and spacious, to support the deeper process of being rooted.

On the other hand, making room for simply observing the experience of ungroundedness with curiosity allowed significant movements to emerge. In the words of an Argentinian participant from the Latin American Lab²⁸:

I needed to get rooted, and it had to be in this Latin American land. To discover it with a different gaze. The crack was inside of me. It was painful to feel European. Where could I step so as not to trigger something? I want to connect with the strength of everyone, with love, with healing.
I haven't been able to grow roots but I need to honor where I come from.

Here we see the support of the field for the exploration of this painful experience of lack of rootedness, important for people for whom the immigrant experience is in the forefront of their ancestry. We also see the beginning of the development of a capacity of this participant to meet herself where she was and honor where she came from.

Furthermore, nature also helps us to reconnect with a world of simplicity, abundance and resilience, that evokes a sense of comfort and access to a wide variety of resources. Unlike this perception, trauma carries ideas and experiences tinted by a perception of scarcity, hostility and lack of options. This memory of abundance and resourcefulness was present from the first day of the Lab, becoming a great resource along the path of our exploration.

In order to help participants to reconnect with nature we suggested some explorations. The first one, which we mentioned before, was asking participants to share pictures in the WhatsApp group of the diverse places of residence, offering the opportunity of an embodied "landing" in each other's territories. A thread of beautiful images opened up the window for cultivating interconnectedness, grounding, contemplation and presence, as well as preparing the coherence of the field for the information to emerge. Additionally, the display of inspiring images was joined by music from the region.

²⁴ Zimmerman, K, & Quiroz, J. (2016). *Love with power: practicing transformation for social justice*. Movement Strategy Center: Oakland

²⁵ Generative Somatics. (2011). *Why Somatics for Social Justice and a Transformative Movement?*

²⁶ Schwartz, A. & Maiburger, B. (2018). *EMDR Therapy and Somatic Psychology: Interventions to Enhance Embodiment In Trauma Treatment*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company

²⁷ Lowen, A. (1994). *Bioenergetics: The Revolutionary Therapy That Uses the Language of the Body to Heal the Problems of the Mind*. Penguin / Arkana

²⁸ From the facilitator's notes during the Latin America Colonialism and collective trauma final session Lab session.

Participants were also invited to access nature as a regulating resource, using imagery, going for walks in nature, gardening or practicing landscape and contemplation, and recognize and honor the living energy of what surrounds us, and allow it to awakening the memories of being embodied, grounded and connected, remembering the sacredness and wisdom of life through it.

3. Circular time, the spiral of the reiteration of trauma

In "The Order of Time," Carlo Rovelli²⁹ challenges the linear understanding of time, proposing a view that sees it as a complex, interconnected tapestry of events and relationships. This perspective disrupts traditional notions of past, present, and future, revealing them to be more nuanced and multidimensional than commonly believed. Rovelli's exploration delves into the dynamic and relational essence of time, introducing the concepts of "Chronos" and "Kairos". While "Chronos" serves as a mechanical measure of time's passage, "Kairos" emphasizes the subjective experience and significance of particular moments. By intertwining these concepts, Rovelli offers a deeper understanding of time, transcending mere progression and shedding light on its multidimensional nature.

Within this multidimensionality of time, traumatic history emerges as a constant echo in the present, expressing itself through its socioemotional language in search of resolution. Disregarding this call for resolution and resisting the flow of emotion and of the felt sense crystallized by the traumatic experience, culminates in the projection of its shadow and turns it into destiny.

This intertwining of time and trauma highlights the intricate relationship between past, present, and future, demonstrating how unresolved trauma can profoundly influence our perception of time and shape our present experiences

3.1. Weaving Shared Experiences Along Temporal Spirals

In our collective experience in the lab, we observed how the suggestion to create a timeline of historical events did not resonate with the group. However, when the idea of working with the time spiral was proposed, the dynamic changed significantly.

Shifting our focus to the time spiral vs. the timeline allowed us to discover intersections between different experiences, fostering resonance and revealing recurring patterns. Additionally, it opened up a wealth of new resources as we explored the potential that experience had given us.

²⁹ Rovelli, Carlo (2017) *The Order of Time*. Riverhead Books, New York.

As we delved deeper into the evocation of events from our historical past, the experience became vivid, facilitating the free flow of emotions and associated bodily sensations.

Ultimately, the integration of collective traumas along temporal spirals creates a complex tapestry of shared experiences. This continuous repetition challenges the linear conception of time. Past, present, and future events intertwine in a perpetual dance that unites generations and collective experiences.

From the perspective of trauma healing, one more aspect that is important to mention here is the process of memory reconsolidation³⁰, which can allow us to reconfigure how we relate to an event. Memories are not fixed objects, but subjective constructs that can be modified through different means, including sense-making, somatic processing and relational resourcing. The intertwining of moments from the past, present and future allows our nervous systems to bring resources from one to the other in a way that allows for new possibilities for healing the past, and for a different future to emerge.

One such example happened in the dynamic we mentioned before of returning to the moment of the first encounter between the three lineages at the beginning of the colonial process: when the first Europeans met the first natives, and later the first black people brought over from Africa. As we brought ourselves into the moment, we consciously brought along our intent to feel the complex weave of what was present, but also to find within that moment, alternative experiences and alternative ways of relating from the ones we know unfolded. We invited the participants to connect to curiosity, to awe, to the potential for collaboration that was present in that moment. As we felt that, something opened in the field, and the seeds that were present then became available for us to take them and allow them to blossom in our hearts today: looking at each other as diverse human beings with different resources and capacities who could come together to collaborate for the wellbeing of us all.

a. The Profound Connection of Indigenous Communities to the Spiral of Time

The indigenous communities of this continent, especially the Maya and Andean, deeply understood the circular nature of time. This spiral flow through natural cycles in harmony with the cosmos was reflected not just in the buildings we mentioned above, but in their ancient calendars, such as the Mayan, and in the Andean, that emerge from a very similar cosmivision, where time was measured in cycles synchronized with the stars. Life itself, especially the feminine, followed the rhythm and quality of time through various life cycles. The experience of "Kairos"³¹, the opportune time for action, was innate to them and sustained by the cosmivision

³⁰ LeDoux, Joseph E. (2017). *How Can Memory Reconsolidation Work in Therapy?* Misophonia International, Knock Out Noise, LLC. <https://youtu.be/nPCzAf9TIFk?si=2bJxh2R4Q8INDJY7>

³¹ Rovelli, Carlo, *Ibidem*; Smith, John E. (1969) Time, Times and 'The Right Time': Chronos and Kairos. In *The Monist*, Volume 53, Issue 1, 1 January 1969, Pages 1–13. <https://academic.oup.com/monist/article-abstract/53/1/1/1036837?redirectedFrom=PDF>

of "Aion"³², the circular and spiral time, reinforcing the experience of deep connection between the cycles of life and the spiral of time.

b. Exploring the Deeper Layers of Collective Suffering

Immersion in the spiral of time, concerning collective trauma, involves approaching the deepest layers of suffering. This experiential exploration allows us to unravel repetitive patterns, facilitating the healing process of traumas layered in the historical roots of collective trauma.

In its dynamics, evoking a more distant trauma becomes a tool for understanding the complexities and recurrences of human suffering over time. The structuring of a narrative across generations serves as an emotional safeguard, a way to process and make sense of painful experiences of the past, and also to re-signify the present in light of the experience and learnings of our ancestors.

Evoking and settling into this circular, spiraling dimension of time not only facilitates connection with older layers of collective suffering but gradually, through a process of resonance and synchronicity, makes it possible to approach more recent experiences. In short, this exploration reveals how the spiral of time and collective traumas are intricately intertwined and offers us a common thread that reveals, as we walk the path, the healing process.

3.2. The Time Spiral as a Tool for Collective Healing

The exploration of the spiral of time not only provided a deeper understanding of collective trauma but also opened a portal of opportunity to offer the group a new perspective and experience as a collective.

By positioning themselves within this dynamic spiral dimension, participants unlock the potential to resonate deeply with both ancient traumas and timeless resources without giving up the groundedness in the current reality. This strategic placement allows for the recognition of common topics across diverse regions, facilitating the identification of movements within the spiral of time. Moreover, it opens the possibility of finding correspondences and similarities in these movements across different countries, fostering a deeper understanding of shared experiences and collective evolution. Through this multidimensional approach, individuals not only address historical wounds but also harness ancient wisdom to fuel collective growth and resilience on a larger scale.

³² Kaizer, Heleen, (2000) 'ETERNITY' REVISITED. A Study of the Greek Word αἰών. In *Philosophia Reformata* 65 (2000) 53–71.
https://www.academia.edu/29892909/_Eternity_Revisited_A_Study_of_the_Greek_Word_%CE%B1%E1%BC%B0%CF%8E%CE%BD

One example of this was the use of images of the ancient circular archaeological sites, which allowed the deep intelligence, capacity and wisdom of the native ancestors who built them to be felt, seen and witnessed by the group in the present, creating the opportunity to bring into the present the experience of appreciation and a sense of pride in belonging to such an intelligent lineage, which flies in the face of the diminished identity that colonialism prescribes for Indigenous cultures and people.

This approach also allowed the group to follow the process organically, in its own time, slowing down when emotions erupted in order to integrate them and exploring both similarities and differences in the experience of trauma in different cultures. For example, having the group slow down to witness the emergence of the silencing of Afro-culture in Colombia served as a mirror for other regions to recognize the same dynamics in their own societies. The silencing may have happened in different moments, but the commonality of the pattern across geographies was evident to all.

This ability to identify and understand these patterns over time contributed to a greater collective consciousness. In addition, the exploration of differences and similarities between cultural forms allowed for a deeper understanding of the diversity of experiences and perspectives within the group. New resources and capabilities emerged as a result of cross-cultural hybridization.

Related to this, here are some comments from Lab participants:

I felt a deep pain to be *mestiza*, from the mix I am. I recognize myself. I have an identity. I want to be able to build something with the tapestry we are.

I am a melting pot from everything that has been shown in this Lab. I start to see more clearly.

To get conscious of the 3 lineages in my genetics, and their different behaviors: from the Europeans the tendency to analyze and being mental, from the native people my need for connection with nature and ancestral practices such as shamanism and natural medicines, and from Africans my need to feel free.

In essence, this spiral approach not only facilitated connection with older traumas and older resources, it facilitated the identification of common processes in their elaboration, allowed for the process of the group slowing down and attuning, fostered mutual understanding and opened space for collective healing; thus becoming a valuable tool for the group by providing a framework for exploring and understanding the complexities of shared history.

a. Circularity in social indigenous and Afro contexts

Similarly, the afro and indigenous heritages exhibit a great sense of circularity in their social structures and cultural practices. Latin American communities have kept alive resilient networks of mutual support, exchange and collaboration, based on their deepest values and principles.

Latin American communities are well known for being family-oriented, and for prioritizing collective well-being over the individual one, fostering a sense of care for life, identity, belonging

and interconnectedness. They do much of this through getting together in a circle, sharing stories, celebrating. Deep listening is an essential principle to cultivate here.

To come together in a circle brings an experience of horizontality in the field of relationships, helps to create a safe container for the process to emerge, and contributes to cultivating deep listening and increasing the resonance of the group. Modern restorative practices are very much based on the use of the circle as an essential part of their methodology.

Even though we had an online setting throughout the Lab, using the imagery of getting together in a circle and guiding participants through an imaginary process that evoked this form was very well received and a way of creating a strong container.

4. Social ancestral technologies

In response to the enduring legacy of collective trauma, there has been an evident resurgence of interest in the knowledge and cosmogony of our ancestors, their social ancestral technologies, preserved through values, traditional knowledge, practices, and rituals passed down through generations within indigenous, cultural, and spiritual communities.

These technologies are practices for remembering the sacredness of life and the secrets of living in harmony with all beings. They remind us about the power of caring and of ways to restore relational qualities based on the principles of deep listening, truthfulness, reciprocity, and collaboration. That is the case of ancestral indigenous practices from Colombia such as the “pagamento” that cultivates the spirit of retribution to Mother Earth for all what gives us; the “confieso” that helps us to cultivate the principle of truthfulness in relationships, and the “minga” or the art of developing collaborative actions in order to get one common result. All of them nourish and support the relational field.

These ancestral technologies embody holistic healing approaches that honor the interconnectedness of mind, body, spirit, and nature, offering profound insights and methods for restoring balance, harmony, and resilience. From indigenous community-oriented ways of living to storytelling traditions, from contemplative practices to community rituals and ceremonies, amongst many others, these ancient wisdom traditions have revealed the transformative potential they have for individuals and communities, even in the most adverse times.

In recent times there has been an evident opening to the delivery of this knowledge to the mestizos, as well as increased interest from people of other cultures and continents, seeking to remember the essential principles to live in community and harmony with nature.

This way, various practices, methods and pedagogies aimed at guarding the alignment between the spiritual, social and natural orders, as well as restoring essential relational principles, have been offered to us as a gift from our ancestors.

a. Storytelling

It is worth noting the relevance that orality has had for people from this continent, as a means of communication and fundamental representation that allows the transmission of knowledge, and essential values to live in community.

Before colonialism, our ancestors did not use written language in their daily lives, so orality was the main repository of knowledge that most people had access to. Every teaching was transmitted through the use of stories, myths and legends, for the most part in a group setting. This constituted pedagogical forms of vital importance.

Part of our interest in storytelling stems from its deep entrenchment in the cultures of origin of the continent, but also because of the healing potential that narrative has.

The process of creating a different, more wholesome way of conceiving history becomes quite significant in colonized societies, and narrative plays a very important role in opening up a field full of possibilities.

b. Ritualism

In Latin America, ritualism serves as a fundamental aspect of indigenous, cultural, and spiritual practices, providing a means to connect with the sacredness of life and to uphold the original laws governing both individual and collective existence. They are deeply rooted in the understanding of the interconnectedness of all beings and the importance of maintaining harmony with the natural and spiritual worlds. Rituals can be individual or collective practices, guided towards guarding an order, according to the original law of caring for life and maintaining the harmony of the world through all our relations.

Central to many ancestral rituals is the acknowledgment and connection to the four elements: earth, water, fire, and air. These elements represent fundamental aspects of existence and are often invoked to bring balance and harmony to the ritual.

Rituals and symbols are not merely empty gestures or superstitions, but rather profound acts of reverence and communion with the sacred. They connect us to what is essential and offer us a map for navigating the complexities of existence, for bringing light to the shadows of collective trauma, offering a pathway towards healing, transformation, and spiritual growth.

In this sense, it is customary in many indigenous traditions of Latin America to ask for permission to step into the land from the spirits of the land and the ancestors. This act of asking for permission acknowledges that the space was not empty before one arrived and demonstrates respect for the spiritual forces that govern the natural world. It is a reminder that

humans are not separate from nature but rather a part of it, and that all actions have consequences that ripple through the web of life. In that sense, asking for permission before entering to explore a space, a territory, a sacred site, is a beautiful ritual that helps us to restore original ways and sacred orders, and that helps to overcome and resignify the basic dynamic of colonialism of entering without asking.

Most sessions of our Lab got started with a ritual in order to set the intention of the meeting. It included elements such as greeting and acknowledging our ancestors, honoring the 4 directions and the 4 elements, lighting a candle, a prayer, and/or the sound of the caracola. This also allowed us to elevate our deepest prayers for collective healing and to increase its resonance.

c. Recovering the principle of truthfulness and intimacy

In a group setting, the act of speaking up the inner truths and allowing vulnerability serves as a powerful mechanism for cultivating trust and strengthening bonds among participants. When individuals courageously share their truths, they invite others into the depths of their experiences, creating a space for connection, empathy, understanding, and mutual support to flourish. This act of vulnerability not only deepens connections but also cultivates a sense of support, belonging and intimacy. In Colombian social ancestral technologies, this is called the “confieso” and it’s a wonderful way to bring transparency and to clean the relational field.

Embracing vulnerability allows for the exploration of hidden aspects, and brings light into the shadows of our collective consciousness. As individuals courageously reveal their vulnerabilities and struggles, they illuminate shared experiences and common humanity. The group’s intimacy increases.

By bravely acknowledging and confronting their shadows, intimate group sharing without judgment becomes the seed for individual and communal growth, allowing participants to journey together towards greater truthfulness, authenticity, intimacy and connection.

5. The Ethical Restoration

Moral pain and injustice are relevant dimensions of trauma. Victims often experience a lack of safety and vulnerability. It is through the recognition of the law as an ordering principle, that a framework of safety can be provided to restore proper human relationships and integrate trauma. As seen, trauma damages personal and collective identity, with one of the deepest pains being the violation of dignity. Justice, as a principle, plays an essential role in ethical restoration, re-establishing the natural flow of the law as a protector of life and paving the way for a more just and compassionate society seeking not only justice, but also harmony and balance.

5.1. Dimensions of Restoration: Personal, Family, Collective, and Historical-Social

Ethical restoration extends beyond the individual to various dimensions. On a personal level, it involves reconnecting with oneself and healing one's trauma. At the family level, it is about restoring harmony in close relationships and addressing intergenerational traumas to give them a place and, at the same time, honoring ancestors. Collectively, restorative processes seek to repair affected community relationships, restoring social bonds. On a deeper socio-historical level, it confronts the legacy of trauma, acknowledging and addressing deeply rooted wounds in a society's history. While each dimension has its dynamics and language, they are not independent; they resonate with each other. When trauma is released in one dimension, this resonance affects and releases traumas in others. Ultimately, the order of all these dimensions follows higher laws guiding transformation processes. Healing occurs when order is restored following these laws.

5.2. The Restorative Process in the Context of Trauma

A key concept in the restorative approach is responsibility, the "ability to respond." This ability, seemingly established, is affected by unprocessed trauma. Therefore, when addressing responsibility, it is crucial to examine not only personal pain but also systemic pain, and the traumas behind the conflict. Sometimes, involved parties cannot see it, but a coherent container, as a group, can hold the system and enable space to identify collective traumas involving the community, as part of the conflict's root. From this perspective, repair occurs across personal, intergenerational, and collective dimensions.

Restoration has a strong ethical component. One of the main sources of trauma is moral pain, injustice, and a sense of indignity, often associated with shame. Harming another human being breaks a law of life, and restoration involves reconnecting with this law and making it one's own through recognition.

In essence, the restorative process involves an ethical restoration for all involved: the victim, the offender, and the community. It embodies the healing power of law and justice in collective traumas as well.

a. Redemption: A Spiritual Dimension of the Law

Redemption is a principle shared by various spiritual traditions, representing the power of the spiritual dimension to heal soul wounds. In the context of trauma, redemption is the release of moral pain that occurs when a person or a group aligns with higher orders in a profound healing process, both individually and collectively. Redemption becomes an inner journey of restoration and alignment of our inner law with the cosmic law.

b. Sacred Texts and the Cosmology of Indigenous Peoples

Our deep need to reconnect purpose with the sacred orders leads us to the mystical principles expressed in the ancestral worldviews of indigenous peoples. These views recognize the sacred nature of all life forms and grant a central role to Mother Earth in healing soul pains. This worldview is expressed in sacred language through rituals that connect with the sensitive fibers of each community, making the spirit of the sacred orders understandable and allowing it to embody its essence. Honoring the essential divinity of each being becomes a way to keep the essence of justice alive and recognize its ordering and healing power in collective trauma work within our communities.

5.3. Trauma and social catastrophe: exploring cultural resilience in Latin America

Within the intricate web of Latin American history, there is a profound distinction between trauma and social catastrophe³³, each of which carries different implications about the continuity of a culture and its capacity to generate resilience.

Trauma, deeply woven into the fabric of collective experience, manifests when historical events break the intergenerational bonds that anchor cultural identity. These events often arise from periods of subjugation and colonization, and leave indelible marks on the collective psyche. However, even during painful events, the cultural essence persists in the collective subconscious, sustained by the enduring threads of myths, symbols, and rituals. These cultural pillars serve as reservoirs of vitality, preserving the essence of cultural identity, values and heritage. Although sometimes silenced for a long time, these cultural resources possess a resilient spirit, ready to re-emerge with renewed vigor when the right time arrives.

In contrast, the panorama of social catastrophe paints a bleaker picture, where the fundamental pillars of cultural resilience are shaken to their foundations. Here, the very essence of collective identity is threatened, as myths, symbols, and rituals – the basis of cultural wealth – are eroded by the extinction of a society's symbolic resources. The once vibrant tapestry of intergenerational connection is unraveling, leaving a void where the vital flame of social cohesion once burned brightly. With the loss of symbolic resources comes the loss of language, stripping away the ability to articulate the deep narratives of ancestral healing.

Navigating the terrain of trauma and social catastrophe, Latin America witnesses the delicate dance between submission and survival, resilience and transformation. Through understanding the complex interaction between historical forces and cultural resilience, we illuminate paths to healing, giving life to the collective spirit that sustains us.

³³ Bleichmar, S., Hornstein, L., & Lewkowicz, I. (2003). Conceptualización de catástrofe social: límites y encrucijadas. In *Clínica Psicoanalítica ante las catástrofes sociales: la experiencia argentina*.

6. The role of coherence and the importance of the field of co-facilitation

We believe that our experience as a co-facilitation team and the coherence between us has been the container for our journey together. Our level of connection runs deep, particularly in our profound affinity with and love for the Latin American land. This intrinsic bond seems not to be as common between individuals from other labs or cultures. For us, our research goes beyond an academic pursuit; it's intertwined with our spiritual practice and deepest prayers, adding a unique dimension to our work. Each of us has a personal connection with the sacred, which becomes amplified when we come together, making it accessible to the entire group. We also share a profound relationship with the ancestral heritage of the territory. Flavia brings an additional layer with her ancestral pain stemming from European migration, particularly through her Italian grandmother, providing an interesting link to that lineage.

Our journey together is akin to a pilgrimage. As a co-facilitation team, we are the seed of coherence within the larger field we seek to heal. The relational coherence within our co-facilitation pocket is vital for ensuring our nervous systems remain as available as possible, as we find safety and rely on each other's presence.

Furthermore, while we provide support, we are also supported by the field; we assume this and we make it a part of our work. This reciprocity underscores the need for a horizontal form of relating, where the field takes the lead, alongside a skill in attuned holding. Maintaining this coherence is essential, as it influences the group's experience and its ability to replicate it. The supporting/being supported dyad is essential in co-facilitation teams.

This image was created by one of the participants at the end of the Lab on the Collective Trauma of Colonialism in Latin America in 2021. In speaking with the creator of the image when asking for permission to show this, she mentioned:

I felt this way in my triads and the Lab sessions: democratically sustaining/supporting and being sustained/being supported.



The words read:

At the top: “Sosteniéndonos” (sustaining/supporting ourselves/ each other); on the left: “resistencia” (resistance), “ritmo” (rhythm), “gozo estético” (aesthetic pleasure); on the right: “recursos” (resources), “arraigo” (rootedness, deep belonging), “resiliencia” (resilience)

In this image we can see 2 people supporting each other as they both navigate the waters of collective trauma, floating in these baskets/boats, and creating a capacity that each of them would not have individually. In this sense, this can be seen as an expression of what started with the bond between the co-facilitators, which became the field through which higher light can flow into the group—in this case, making it into the experience and the drawing of this participant through resonance. This permits a higher order of intelligence and capacity to emerge between us. And it is the collective embodiment of that higher light which can dissolve the frozen knots into a very moving reconnection of that tremendous pain, shame and darkness that had been in the shadows, and bring it back into consciousness again.

7. Conclusions

Writing this piece gave us the opportunity to revisit the work we did over 3 years ago, with the advantage of hindsight, emotional distance and the learnings we have gained from later experiences. This remains for us a core reference for our work, as we continue walking together in our attempt to collectively illuminate the shadows of collective trauma in our lands and communities.

Out of the two initial questions we had:

- 1) “What resources are effective in opening new possibilities for relating in a more wholesome way to the events of the colonial past that left living wounds among the contemporary Latin American population?” and
- 2) “In what ways can *ancestral social technologies* and modes of connection to the sacred arising from indigenous and Afro-Latino communities, and shared to varying degrees with other groups in Latin American societies, contribute today to the integration of collective trauma from colonialism in contemporary collective contexts?”,

We are left with some answers, some questions, and some additional learnings that deepened our understanding. We will address them in the order just named in this section of our text.

- 1) What resources are effective in opening new possibilities for relating in a more wholesome way to the events of the colonial past that left living wounds among the contemporary Latin American population?

- Co-facilitation process

Co-facilitation has proven to be extremely valuable in the field of collective trauma laboratories. Firstly, by bringing together facilitators from diverse backgrounds and perspectives, it enriches the understanding of trauma complexity and provides broad support in critical situations. Having different levels of involvement and distances is also highly valuable during critical moments. Secondly, it enhances creativity and innovation by fostering a dynamic environment where ideas can emerge and develop from various sources.

Thirdly, co-facilitation improves group dynamics by distributing responsibilities, ensuring commitment, collaboration, and coherence of the team. Additionally, co-facilitators offer mutual support, facilitating self-regulation.

Lastly, co-facilitation allows for flexibility and adaptability, enabling facilitators to adjust approaches and interventions in real-time to appropriately address the needs and emergencies that may arise during each session, which is very important in collective trauma work.

The coherence between the facilitation team was the foundation for the safety of the container that we created together. The way we supported, listened to each other, allowed ourselves to contribute and be contributed to was built on the respect and care that we have for each other. And although we understand that this is not something that all teams will have to the degree that we are fortunate to have, we do believe that there is an essential diversity and solidity of connection that needs to be in place for the work with collective trauma to unfold safely. This was perceived by participants as well.

For me I think the most essential thing was the coherence of the team. The coherence, the fluidity that you had as a team and the resonance as well. So, I mean, because that container allowed the next container. [...] If there had not been that coherence, it would have been very difficult to achieve group coherence as well.

- Approach to colonialism as a verb and as an attitude

When we look at colonialism in abstract terms, it can very quickly become overwhelming. We found that this approach is crucial in being open to meeting the reality of the situation of the layers of trauma in Latin America, and being able to find points of leverage to activate our agency. When we identify its presence in interactions, we can see what choices we do have and act in a different way. When we are met with care in those places that we don't have choice, others can activate their agency as a response, and mobilize the support they have available, be it relational/emotional support, or other kinds. Together we can create pockets of a different quality of relating, which over time become an environment. These spaces become the kind of grassroots foundations that need to be nourished to become the islands of coherence that can help shift the systems in conditions far from equilibrium that Ilya Prigogine³⁴ spoke of, such as the ones our world is experiencing.

- Acknowledging our heritage from the three lineages

If healing is a return to wholeness, then no healing process in Latin America will be complete without the inclusion of all three of the lineages that most of the inhabitants of Abya Yala stem from: the Indigenous, the European and the African. We need to develop our capacity to look at all three with compassionate and sober eyes, and include in our gaze the lights and shadows, resources and wounds that each carries in their distinct experiences, and in the places where there is also confluence. One important thing we would like to name is that in making the exclusion of the African contribution to mainstream society visible, both in the past and now, and the denial of the pain and oppression that many of our Afro-descended brothers and sisters still experience, we see an ongoing task that needs to be continued, and which has the potential to transform us all in the process of becoming free from the dehumanizing lens that antiblackness³⁵ relies on.

- Resource-based approach

If trauma can be seen as the result of an experience which we did not have enough resources to face successfully, and which became overwhelming, then a resource based approach is essential to make addressing the overwhelm possible. Here, it allowed the group to become stronger and more coherent, building trust through the interactions, and strengthening our connection to the aspects of the culture, particularly of the Indigenous and Black lineages, that have been denied, relegated, shamed or obscured in our colonized societies. The strength and coherence created by strengthening our resources allowed participants to share in the group aspects of their experience that would have been excluded in other contexts, and which the container was able to hold.

³⁴ Quoted by Stephen Posner: <https://www.garrisoninstitute.org/islands-of-coherence/>

³⁵ Eds Moon-Kie Jung, João H. Costa Vargas (2021) *Antiblackness*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC. <https://www.dukeupress.edu/antiblackness>

- The diversity of the regions

When comparing the results of the collective trauma Labs by individual country and the Latin American one, since all three of us had that experience, it was evident that the Latin American laboratory exhibited fewer tensions and had access to multiple resources the others did not.

This aspect has contributed richness and depth to the process and has opened a gateway to new resources and transfer, providing access to resources that are Latin American rather than necessarily from each country. The vastness of the continent held us, and enhanced the coherence for the trauma integration processes.

- The time spiral approach

This approach proved to be effective in fostering deep resonance with historical traumas and timeless wisdom. By positioning itself within this dynamic framework, the collective gains insight into shared experiences across diverse regions, leading to a greater understanding of movements throughout history. This multidimensional perspective not only addresses historical wounds but also unlocks ancient wisdom and ultimately fosters collective growth and resilience on a significant scale.

- Art, music, rituals, poetry

By exploring the realms of non-linear components such as art, ritual, music, poetry, symbolism, and embodiment, we discover an effective means of expressing living culture, transcending language barriers. By focusing on experience and not just words, we adopt a holistic understanding of culture and emotions. These media not only allow for a deep personal experience but also foster community connection and understanding.

- Language

In our trauma facilitation group, sharing our native language and exploring its nuances proved to be essential. This shared foundation served to foster understanding and coherence among participants. Embracing differences, tones, and unique cultural particularities enriched our collective journey. Additionally, this exploration injected moments of humor, easing emotional burdens and fostering a sense of unity among members. Furthermore, delving into the subtleties of linguistic diversity within the group improved empathy and validation of the diversity of cultural roots that make up the Latin American territory.

Now, in answer to the second question:

2) In what ways can *ancestral social technologies* and modes of connection to the sacred arising from indigenous and Afro-Latino communities, and shared to varying degrees with other groups in Latin American societies, contribute today to the integration of collective trauma from colonialism in contemporary collective contexts?

To contribute to healing the fractures of our collective history it is necessary to identify and cultivate the resources that allow us to traverse this challenging path in a regulated way. For

this, we articulated diverse spiritual, somatic and relational resources, according to what we considered essential given the current and historical layers of trauma in Latin America.

Ancestral social technologies and modes of connection to the sacred are based on the principles of interconnectedness, respect for the original orders, and commonality, coming from our deep roots. All of those elements were brought into play throughout our research process, having as a result a positive experience, based on the reports from participants and the felt sense of us as facilitators.

Any attempt to cultivate the principles of community, deep listening, truthfulness, retribution and collaboration, as offered by inherited social ancestral technologies as well as by new and creative ways, are treasures for our collective healing work and the restoration of fragmentations in spirituality, relationships and ecology in Latin America.

- The presence of law and the sacred orders

Evoking the law and sacred orders served as a guiding element to navigate the complexities of collective trauma and shadow work. By incorporating rituals and practices to restore the core principles, the lab provided a structured framework for people to collectively process their experiences, fostering intimacy, cohesion and a sense of shared purpose.

- Connection to nature

From the beginning the richness and abundance of the Latin American land was present, and the deep sense of belonging or potential for it. This experience brought a sense of comfort and renewal that could be accessed as a resource at any time.

As we mentioned before, the connection to nature and the deep relationship with it were the basis for the spirituality in native peoples. This experience comes with a feminine quality of caring and recognizing its role as the source of everything, and helps us to get connected to its natural rhythms and cycles. This relationship brings a special regulating touch very much needed when working towards healing collective trauma.

We found that all the ways to connect with nature were a great path to regulate the nervous system; to cultivate presence, groundedness and spaciousness; to inspire creativity and resilience; to connect with Mother Earth's spirit of abundance and regeneration; to allow ourselves to be embraced by it. Contemplation practices are a perfect complement for this. Diverse practices to connect to nature as a resource and main gateway to the spiritual dimension, are fundamental aspects of the trauma integration work in Latin America.

- The power of community

The power of community, preserved by both Indigenous and African roots, as well as the circularity of the interactions were considered essential elements of the work. We invited the

horizontality to the space through getting organized in a circle or imagining it, as well as evoking the images of getting together, and inviting the fire to bring up the ancient experience of sitting around it and sharing life and community practices there. As we mentioned, this had a big impact and the image became a resource for many throughout the process and afterwards.

The richness of the Latin American world is its diversity, interwovenness and ancestrality. The process showed us a collective ground with a very diverse community, woven together by the experience of generations coming from 3 different lineages, each one with their own wounds and resources, living in the same continent. We believe that bringing awareness of our crossed histories through inhabiting the Latin American territory, the inevitable crossbreeding, and the richness of our heritages and cultural exchanges, strengthen the *We space* of the group and allow us to expand and access a wide field of information from a wider perspective.

Moreover, the coherence of the field allowed processing of some individual traumas that could just be integrated through collective approaches, as it was mentioned by one of the participants of the Lab. Being able to hold the differences and at the same time the points of connection from different perspectives was a beautiful resource.

- On storytelling and the creation of new possibilities

We consider that opening up the field of perspectives and possibilities by introducing new elements and experiences to historical events, created a proper field for transformation and inspired action.

Through storytelling we were able to enter into the imaginal world of all possibilities, widening the perspectives and inviting new ways of participating in relationships, inhabiting the world and restoring fractured essential principles.

Final reflections

Throughout this process, we could corroborate how alive colonialism was in Latin America and the palpable ways in which its dynamics are perpetuated and reinforced in daily interactions. This perspective invited us to approach the topic as a relational dynamic that endures, and brought us into a delicate inquiry to identify the subtle ways in which it manifests in the present.

We are in deep gratitude to the Labs participants for their courage, generosity, and transparency in sharing and showing us the path to healing collective trauma in this land.

We have the perception of this journey as being just the starting point for the unfolding and depth that trauma healing groups have on the collective landscape.

In these complex and turbulent times, collective trauma healing is a key aspect to ignite social transformation and allow our highest potential future to emerge.

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