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Perspective

Reflections on Collective Healing at the Community of El Juego

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Abstract: El Juego is a multicultural community of 30 people that exists as a permanent laboratory of conflict resolution and healing. Two and a half years ago, during the pandemic and after four years of living as nomads, we bought together one hundred and forty hectares in San Rafael, Antioquia, to live in close connection with nature and promote reforestation by creating a natural reserve. In this article, we share some of our reflections and experiences of collective healing. We do so through an exercise in autoethnography carried out by two members of our community following the death of Camelia, one of our horses. We then pull out themes that appeared in the autoethnographic pieces, sharing our reflections on developing a more intimate relationship with nature. In the discussion, we draw on the literature on anarchism and Indigenous ways of knowing and enrich it with the lived experience of the community.

Keywords: collective healing; community living; autoethnography; Colombia

1. Introduction

At *El Juego*, we see healing as a collective and constant process. Over the last 6 years, 30 of us, including 7 children, have been living together, utilizing our conflicts and challenges as opportunities to experiment with ourselves and develop new healing methods (which we refer to as Doors). Our 'Doors' blend different branches of psychology with ancestral knowledge. After almost 4 years of moving frequently from place to place, in 2020 we held a crowdfunding campaign and purchased 140 hectares of land in San Rafael, Antioquia, Colombia, to live together and convert it into a natural reserve.

In this article, we reflect on our understanding of collective healing by sharing how we experience relationships with ourselves, the land, and the animals that accompany us. Our intention with this paper is to transmit our collective journey and emphasize the belonging we continue to discover between the individual, the community, and nature.

This is the first academic article we have written about our experience, and we would like to share our journey in the simplest way we can, inviting the reader in, as intimately as possible, to how we live. We do so through an exercise in autoethnography. It is through our lived experiences and collective reflections that we wish to contribute to the question of this special issue: how do we contribute to restoring the relationship with nature?

To answer this question, we used as inspiration the burial ritual of Camelia, one of our horses, which Luis and I, two members of the community, wrote about from two different perspectives. The creative writing exercise was then followed by several readings and dialogues with other community members. We therefore used this text to further deepen a community dialogue on our approach to collective healing and how it exists in dialogue with the rest of the natural world.

This article is structured as follows: In the next section, we introduce ourselves and provide a brief history of the community; we do this also to explain our positionality as we write. The Methods section explains the process that led to this paper. The Results section shares the text we wrote. We then follow with a discussion teasing out themes that emerged in our collective reflections, linked to the relevant literature on anarchism and Indigenous ways of knowing.

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Introducing Ourselves

El Juego did not begin as a group of people coming together with the intention of forming a community. It started instead 'by chance' during the 2016 Kiva, a ritual hosted in San Augustin, Colombia, in which various Indigenous peoples from across Latin America gathered to raise a prayer for peace. The founding group of the community was made up of travelers from across Latin America (Argentina, Peru, Colombia, Mexico, and Venezuela) and Europe (France, Germany, Italy, and the UK) that took part in the Kiva as volunteers.

During this event, Marius, a German psychologist volunteering at the Kiva, began to share some of the methods he had been practicing, such as the Regression, Encounter, and Family Constellations. The group started 'playing together', initiating a process of self-discovery. *El Juego*—Spanish for *The Game*—became that of coming together to heal by investigating the worst in each of us, the darkest parts, the parts we spend so much time trying to avoid.

This exploration around a campfire lasted for days and nights and was not over when the Kiva ended. The group stayed together and continued in a different camp, then in a rented house, and then another. In this process, most people stayed, some left, and others joined. In other words, the community started because the experiment kept unveiling more about each person's inner world and about what happens when such worlds appear as we come together. Through this experimentation, the initial seeds of the techniques shared by Marius evolved and took on new forms, and the community's first 'Doors' emerged.

The 'Doors', the methods we develop, are techniques to transform conflicts (both individual and collective). We are not bound to any specific therapeutic paradigm. The opposite is true; we experiment and 'play' with different approaches, which sometimes can seem apparently opposite and contrasting. We mix Indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge while rooting our practices not in theory but in our lived experience and constant experimentation. We now sustain ourselves by receiving people from all over the world to receive our Doors.

I first visited the community of *El Juego* at the end of 2018, as I was wrapping up my PhD. I grew up in rural Italy, and in my early twenties I started a youth organization called Recrear, which experimented with art-based methods to carry out participatory action research. By 2018, I had lived and carried out research across Latin America on the sustainability of youth groups and movements. The end of my PhD came with a 'spiritual crisis' and a process of deep self-questioning.

At *El Juego*, I felt I was being heard when I did not want to hear myself. It was as if, through dialogue with community members, I managed to come closer to being honest with myself about who I was. Maybe it is for this reason that one visit followed another until I decided to move in with the community. There, I was invited into an exercise of radical honesty about what I was experiencing. I learned to listen to parts of myself that I used to edit out. I have now been part of the community for four years, and for this reason, I chose in this article to ping-pong between 'I' and 'we', as I feel it appropriate.

The other author of the ethnographic piece is Luis Campos. Luis is one of the co-founders of the community, meaning he was there during the Kiva and has been part of the community since 2016. He is Argentinian, from Peruvian parents. Before joining *El Juego*, he spent three years traveling across Latin America in search of a different way of living. He is passionate about literature and sustained himself during his travels by reading his own poetry. He is now the father of two children, Ilham and Danaë, who were both born in the community.

2. Methods

2.1. Autoethnography and the Process of Writing an Academic Article on Collective Healing

After participating in the ISHHR Conference titled "Collective Healing: Restoring the Relationship of Humanity and Nature" in November 2022, we were told there would be an opportunity to publish an article in a special issue of a social science journal. We wanted to make sure to write an article that represented *us* and shared our experiences healing

with each other and nature. The idea of taking part in this opportunity came with several challenges. First, we were told 'only people with a PhD can publish', which we found puzzling: do people with PhDs know more about collective healing or the relationship between nature and humans? Eventually, I decided to put my PhD to use. Still, how do you write an academic article that conveys our way of living and interacting with nature? Collective healing, in the way we know it, moves through the body, is emotional, and at times explosive; it is a process that comes in waves, with ups and downs . . .

We turned to autoethnography as an approach that includes and values subjectivity, emotionality, and our positionality instead of pretending those aspects do not exist (Ellis et al. 2011). Recognizing ourselves as emotional beings is fundamental to what we do at *El Juego*, and the methodology resonated with us since, as Adams and Herrmann (2023) put it, "good autoethnography does not downplay the fact that people are emotional beings" (p. 2). We chose autoethnography because we believe we contribute to the literature on collective healing with our own personal and collective stories, which, in the autoethnographic approach, matter. At *El Juego*, we are a community just as much as we are an ongoing social experiment that permits each of us to discover ourselves and the world around us through constant interaction, reflection, and agreeing to face our personal and collective processes. We therefore find appropriate autoethnography's invitation to use ourselves as the research tool (Stuart 2018).

2.2. Writing Together—Who Is 'Auto'?

Luis and I regularly come together to write. One afternoon, without much coordination, we sat together for two hours and both wrote about the death of Camelia, the horse, which had occurred a few days before. The death of Camelia had a big impact on us, both because we loved her and because her burial was peculiar, moving, and required us to come together as a community.

When Luis and I stopped and read out loud what we had written, we were very surprised to see that our two texts were complementary. We then started sharing the texts with other community members, and by doing so, we sparked new conversations about how people experienced their arrival to the land, their relationship with nature, and, of course, how they interacted with Camelia. We therefore used the text to elicit deeper dialogue—a dialogue that also had the function of inviting us to further observe our community culture and recognize our practices, rituals, and relationships.

The 'ethno' of autoethnography refers to the possibility of describing cultural phenomena (in this case, how we experience collective healing) and transmitting in a nuanced way our broader beliefs or practices (Adams and Herrmann 2023). I (Gioel), supported by the people in the community with more interest in the academic literature (Lea, Jenna, Marius, and Manon), have carried out the task of figuring out how to relate our reflection to the literature and give it an academic 'shape'. Yet, the processes we refer to in the Discussion section have had a collective resonance in the community. This means we share them as we have lived, processed, and made sense of them through our informal conversations, as well as within Doors and circles.

3. Results

Gioel: I am sitting in front of the deck, hovering over this valley, the mountain of San Augustin lying lusciously on the horizon. Between us, the river breathes. I am sitting here with the intention of describing the burial of Camelia a few days ago. From here, I can see the spot, her grave, and the setting of what I experienced as living inside a painting by Caravaggio: in between the green, there are a few meters of brownish-reddish dirt, tierra *revuelta*, a big step in the mountain.

As I take in this view, as I think of Camelia, in my head storm images of us arriving to this land two years ago. What feels like home now, this land, gave us huge slaps in the face and dropped us in wide mystical holes. We were drunk of nature, inebriated—marveled, overwhelmed, proud, and intimidated. All at once.

'Our land' was rivers, woods, hills, rocks, and infinite corners that we had never seen. 'Our land' was everything we did not yet know—the insects, the birds, the types of plants, and everything that exists that the eyes do not see: the shades that move at night in the forest, the way the energy of the storms kisses the ground, where the river goes when he meets with others, or the ancestors buried on the mountain of San Augustin, in an Indigenous cemetery, on 'our land'.

There was a mission-to-Mars type of atmosphere. The home base was the main house, which had been abandoned years before and had a rotten roof. We had our rituals to witness the huge storms that came. When they were on the horizon, we would sit on a bench in the back of the house and look at the lightning, waking up darkness akin to fireworks. When they came close, we switched off the electricity and stayed with the intensity of the thunder. We would sleep on the floor, many of us split between the three main rooms. For a bit, I slept outside, in a hammock with a blanket underneath, inside a sleeping bag. We would go to bed early and sleep deeply—the days were exhausting.

In the morning, we would find wood and make flatbread on the fire. After a month or so, we built a wooden stove with wood and clay; the fire became the bellybutton of the house. We made coffee, oats, coladas, hot chocolates, arepas, chapati, lentils, beans, and pastas. Right next to the main house, we inherited fruit trees. We use a long pole with a rigid net on the top to pick oranges, mandarins, and lemons. Our neighbors make panela, the raw sugar that comes in rounded blocks[1] (it is hard, the panela, and you need to cut it with a knife). So, we drank lemonade with lots of panela.

To me, the scariest thing about being on the land was also the most inspiring. I had never lived in a place that felt so wild; I remember walking up the river, in silence, in a blanket of forest sounds, and realizing how much I was learning from that land about my inner landscapes. The land was a mirror of the wilderness in me; those aspects of my being that exist untamed. As we arrived, we were humbled; a pack of animals with machetes that had just migrated to new territory. The land was clearly much bigger than us and wiser, and if you plugged in just a bit, you would feel the need to ask permission at each step. In that period, we would smoke tobacco on the big, rounded rocks all around the land. We said thanks a lot; sometimes we bragged about how big our land was, and sometimes we felt sh*t-scared: what does it mean to take care of a land so big? We went to the river and hung out naked, felt the wind, and learned about some of the *arbustos* that grew in the wood. It was as if our intelligence had to awaken and sink with that of the land we stepped on. Talking about stepping, we knew there were lots of snakes, many types of snakes. Malhi, who back then was 10 years old, was the ultimate expert. He researched them all and shared tips on how to behave if you see one. Do not freak out; move slowly. I freaked out just at the idea of seeing one. However, the image of snakes and the awareness of their presence attracted a lot of attention. I learned how to mind each step.

So we wore rubber boots all day. I went on long walks to discover. We imagined constructions, we peed anywhere, and I learned quickly which leaves were good to wipe. For the first few months, we had no bathrooms at all, and we would go poop in the woods with a shovel, a bottle of water, and a small towel.

We developed a new fashion as well—the guys looked like real campesinos with jeans and long-sleeve shirts, the machete belt, and, of course, the omnipresent rubber boots. As for the women, whatever they wore expressed their 'I am ready to sweat, or roll in the dirt, or inhale too much smoke cooking, or cut big pieces of wood with an axe, or go on a mission to fix the water tubes with rubber string' type of vibe.

For the first few months, we came here in groups. July, August, and September were the months to move—on 1 October, we left the house we had in San Rafael, which was an abandoned hotel we had adopted. Moving was a gigantic mission[2]—we carried tables and boxes and chairs and everything we had, the belongings of 30 people, up and down the hill. We could not have accomplished that without Camelia.

Luis: I open my eyes. We are about 15 people sitting around a hole in the ground in the middle of one of the slopes of the mountain where we live. It is night, and a fine drizzle

falls, imperceptible under my wide-brimmed hat. In my arms is Danaë, eight months old. The traditional music of the Huns arrives as if in a dream. Everything seems like a dream!

I close my eyes. I am a newcomer to the land that we bought with all the members of the community. I still do not quite comprehend the magnitude of the place that is now my home. I am lost. Then I met Camelia. A white mare, tall and quite skinny. She was included in the purchase of the land and swapped for a rooster. Several people warned me not to mount her yet. They said she would shoot out and I would not be able to stop her. I did not listen to them; I wanted a challenge, a meeting with the 15-year-old Luis who once rode in the Argentine pampas. He had not ridden a horse for more than 20 years.

As soon as I approached her, Camelia pulled her ears back, distrustful. I stroked her neck and tried my foot in her stirrup. She threatened to bite but did not, as if to warn me that this was serious. As soon as I mounted her, she started running. I am not talking about a Sunday jog; I am talking about a race with all the speed that animal could reach. I clung to the saddle as best I could and began looking for places to land. After 300 m, which seemed like 3 km, we came to a wire gate. Camelia did not stop until we were almost over the gate. She stopped abruptly, as if she wanted to test my balance. I was holding tight; I did not fall. I went down trembling, my legs grateful to touch the ground and, at the same time, unsure of taking the first step. Camelia looked at me impassively, although in that moment I thought I felt a smile in her eyes, perhaps mocking or perhaps complicit. I choose to think that it was the second.

I open my eyes again, and there we are, around the hole we are making for Camelia. The children peek out, clinging to the adults' hands and pants, and the dogs look for a flat space to rest their heads. Inside the hole, a team of four people alternate between shovels and buckets to remove the dirt. It is a systematic work in which several take turns participating. I do not want to do it; I am exhausted. Not so much physically, but because of the farewell that afternoon, when Camelia left.

Camelia had been ill for several days, perhaps much longer, with the biggest symptoms appearing last. A year ago, she lost one of her four front teeth, which greatly affected her eating. After that, she had periods where she became very thin, and we gave her care, vitamin injections, and carrots. The funny thing is that over the last month, she had put on more weight. Nina, my partner, gave her three tablespoons of special horse food a day, plus half a bucket of molasses every so often. Her skin and her attitude seemed healthier until one day last week, when she woke up with her entire left side swollen. We gave her medication, and two days later, her face returned to normal. During those days, she ate and drank very little. A few days later, we saw, almost by chance, that she was urinating blood. The village vet recommended injectable coagulants that did not seem to work. Her last days were pitiful; she did not eat grain, she did not drink molasses, she just stood in front of the house as if looking for company.

On her last day, she staggered several times. She would lie down, and then it would be very difficult for her to get up again. That morning I went to accompany a session, and I said goodbye to her in front of the gate of the paddock. It seemed like she wanted to get away, but we preferred her to stay to check on her health.

When I returned to the house several hours later, they told me that Camelia had fallen into the ravine behind the house. I left my things and went to see her. I found her lying on an old path that the horses used to go from one hill to the other. Nina was next to her, as always, smoking a cigar to say goodbye to her. After a few minutes, I was left alone with Camelia. She seemed to want to get up from time to time, but neither the position in which she had fallen nor her condition allowed it. I smoked the tobacco, thinking about all the experiences we had shared and how Camelia had changed my idea that "a horse must be dominated" to one of "a horse must be respected", that only with respect can we both win. She taught me patience in the face of her outbursts of mistrust, when she would kick me if I tightened the girth too much, or when she ran wild in it when passing through places where she had received violence. Because, before coming to us, Camelia was very mistreated. Before we arrived, the farm was maintained by a group of day laborers who,

according to several neighbors, treated Camelia horribly. They made her work until she was lying on the floor, they mounted her in threes and made her run uphill, and they beat her with sticks if she did not obey. Leo, one of our closest neighbors, told me that when he saw her arrive, she was such a beautiful mare that he thought of buying her, but after a few months, she was in such a state that he would only have bought her to make sausage.

I smoke the tobacco next to her, shielding her eyes from the sun with my arm while my hand caresses behind her ear. "Camelia, now you can rest," I whisper. Her pupils are not dilated yet, but I feel that she listens to me. In one of her attempts to get up, Camelia turns on herself and falls further down the old path. Some vines hold her front legs and prevent her from sliding down. With Nina, we machete the vines and see how her body gently takes her down. Nina hands me some pillows for her head.

I think of our first ride together and the last one, a few weeks ago. I think about how much we have changed. I think of Audrey, Nina's friend from high school and Camelia's coach, and how, only with love, respect, and patience (and carrots, of course), she managed to make her trust humanity again and allow us to pet, saddle, and mount her. I think of the surprise of the neighbors when they saw Audrey, a 'gringa', arrive mounted on Camelia, the crazy mare ruined by the day laborers. I think Camelia is a testament to what we do as a community and as individuals, and I only have to thank her, us, me. Thank you very much, Camelia. I keep running with you in my dreams (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A photo Gioel took from Lea's phone at 9.30 p.m. on the day we buried Camelia. In the photo, Dani stepped in the hole we dug to adjust Camelia's head.

4. Discussion

In this section, we go back to the initial question that guided the Congress, exploring how we, as a community, are approaching our own collective healing in dialogue with nature.

When we read the texts above to other community members, we reflected that the moment of burying Camelia was a ritual that expresses our community culture. With cul-

ture, I broadly mean our values, ideals, beliefs, practices, products, and norms (Reyes Cruz and Sonn 2010). In fact, as we mentioned, the community began with a group of people digging a hole in the ground, representing the womb of the earth, as part of a ritual. The founding members of the community were young travelers—they were there because they were 'searching' for different ways of living and somehow called towards this ritual, which expressed a cosmovision that steps out of Western understanding.

The invitation that Indigenous ways of knowing across the world offer to modern culture is a reminder that rational knowledge is not the only valid way of engaging with reality. In Latin America, the cosmovision known as 'Buen Vivir' or *Sumak Kawsay*, which translates to living well together, reminds that "Earth does not belong to humanity" and that "Everything has life; each part, from the micro to the macro, contains the whole" (Asociación Pop No'j & Cultural 2021). 'Buen Vivir' invites the possibility of living in harmony with the cycles of Mother Earth (Thomson 2011). In the words of Huanacuni Mamani (2014), living in balance with all forms of existence "is the path and the horizon of community", as "we cannot live well if the others are not, or if we are damaging Mother Earth" (translation from Spanish by the author).

This separation between humans and Earth is also recognized as a cause for ecological degradation and human suffering by the literature on ecological economy and eco-anarchism. Degrowth theory links natural catastrophes and ecological crises to a paradigm that values unlimited economic growth and invites us to consume less and differently (Nayeri 2021; Hernández et al. 2021; Satrústegui 2013). Meanwhile, eco-anarchism connects social hierarchy with ecological degradation, pointing to the possibility of living with decentralized decision-making and ecological harmony. Eco-anarchists such as Cudenec (2016) speak of the way authorities and social hierarchies separate humans and the Earth and that, for a coherent and healthy society, we can organize through an organic order that resembles nature. In Bookchin's words, "true freedom can only be achieved when humanity lives in harmony with the natural world, recognizing that our well-being is dependent on the health of the ecosystems that sustain us" (Bookchin 2011).

These concepts, in my opinion, are not useful as theories. They cannot be useful as theories; otherwise, we would be replicating the way of understanding the world that is at the root of the problem they try to address. The decolonization literature shows us how the hierarchy of knowledge is precisely a form of colonization (we colonize by invalidating the knowledge that is epistemologically different from Western/modern/positivist knowledge) (Reyes Cruz and Sonn 2010). This way of thinking, which creates a hierarchy of knowledge, is also reflected in the way we organize society, with dramatic power imbalances and a utilitarian way of seeing nature (Bookchin 2006). From a liberation psychology perspective, Kurtis and Adams (2015) reflect that one of the first prerogatives of decolonization is de-ideologizing. In this sense, at the community, we step away from adhering to any fixed ideology or paradigm, valuing how different paradigms create new knowledge by co-existing instead of invalidating each other. In 'Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World', Tyson Yunkaporta (2020) embeds in his book 'yarning', a way of knowledge-sharing that invites conversations, stories, and dialogues. I resonated with the practice of 'yarning': in the community, we value recognizing how knowledge intertwines and how different ways of knowing complement each other. We do this by inviting taitas, maimas, psychologists, and people from all walks of life to share with us. This also shows in our Doors. One of the first Doors developed was the 'process circle', which mixes the 'mambeaderos' (talking circles accompanied by the medicines of mambe and ambil used by Indigenous peoples in the Amazon region)[3] and tobacco ceremonies used to thank the territory with interventions inspired by regressions (Scheidlinger 1968), Family Constellations (Hellinger 1999), and non-violent communication (Rosenberg 2015), amongst others.

The ways we organize, play, experiment, and relate to nature intertwine. The community does not have any fixed rules. Why? As I mentioned in our introduction, *El Juego* exists to create a space for us to heal by discovering ourselves, showing up, and facing

the worst and the best in each one of us. By getting rid of 'rules', we have fewer tools to control ourselves. Releasing this control allows for the possibility to see and recognize 'our sh*t'. One might think that rules would allow for more 'efficiency', but in the way we experience it, this is not the case. First, because we value and want to encourage a mindset of constant experimentation. Second, because we find that, if we focus on our relationships and our communication, our decision-making processes and organization will be fluid and adaptive to different moments and evolving needs. The focus on relationships resonates with the idea of 'teal organizations' in Laloux's book (Laloux 2014), which investigates the effectiveness of organizations that are self-managed and focused on wholeness.

There is only one agreement in our community that brings us together and guides decision-making; this is our collective intention:

Por lo mejor de todas y para todas
Por lo mejor de todos y para todos
Por lo mejor de todo y para todo
Amor y libertad
"For the best of everyone and for everyone
For the best of everything and for everything
Love and freedom."

If we were to translate this intention into research terms, this would be our 'research question'. This intention guides the discovery, gives direction to our experiment, and is the spirit of our research. Yet, this intention can only be sustained by the firm awareness that we cannot really know what is 'best' for ourselves, Camelia, the river, or the mountain on which we live. We do not know what love and freedom are at any given moment, either. To take seriously the fact we do not know—that there is no destiny, no pre-fixed idea—also opens the possibility to listen to what there is, what emerged spontaneously, the signs of nature, thoughts, emotions, and needs; what is comfortable and uncomfortable. Grounded in what there is, we search for and listen for the 'best'.

The possibility to let different ways of knowing co-exist is well exemplified in 'the Four Dimensions', a tool we have developed in the community to accompany the self-observation necessary for our search. The Four Dimensions are a tool we use during meditation, talking circles, and as a reminder to ground ourselves fully within these different dimensions as we accompany each other. These four dimensions we play with are the mind, the emotions, the needs, and the body.

The mind includes all the thoughts that pass through our head (the dimension that is most activated as you read an academic article). If we observe our thoughts closely, we see how abundant they are and the way that they come and go. The mind is the youngest of all the dimensions, meaning that it was the last to develop fully. With the mind, we create, dream, build, and transform ideas. We know that modern society owes much to the mind. However, if we give more importance to the mind than the other dimensions, it can confuse us: "Only by speaking about the different species of rooster, we don't receive the spirit of a rooster!" (Boch 2022). In other words, if we are so identified with the mind, we can miss a lot of what is happening to us and around us.

Emotions have a very different quality from thoughts and, if we allow them, have a powerful connecting force (the texts on Camelia above might have engaged this dimension in you as a reader). During the burial of Camelia, there was sadness. By tuning into this sadness and letting it exist, we are present with what there is; we are connected. Can we say this sadness is mine? Or is it yours? Where does your sadness end and mine begin? When we ground ourselves in our emotions and breathe into them, we have access to a whole other channel that connects us directly to those around us.

In the community we share with many animals that accompany us, we also co-exist with wild animals. We observe how we share with animals four basic emotions: happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. Castillo-Huitrón et al. (2020) explore how animals generate strong emotions in people and therefore need to be considered if we talk about defending wildlife. Researching the relationship with nature amongst young environmentalists in Cuba, I

found that "we defend what we feel", meaning that environmental work for them implied experiencing nature by entering a state of being present with the aliveness of the earth (Gioacchino 2019). In short, our relationship with nature is not only rational and utilitarian. Instead, if we permit it, our interaction with nature is emotional: in the texts above, you might recognize the fear and joy Luis feels riding Camelia, the sadness Nina feels staying alone with Camelia and smoking tobacco as she is close to her death, and the fear/attention I felt towards snakes.

In the community, we have realized that emotions are not personal property. Instead, we are learning to see emotions as spirits, each one bringing a certain gift: happiness comes with energy, bringing consistency (e.g., when you love doing something, when something gives you joy, you will do it more and get better at it); sadness brings depth and connection; anger brings action and strength; and fear comes with speed and attentiveness. We notice with the people that visit us regularly that most of us are conditioned to give more importance to the mind than the emotions. For example, we might have the idea in our mind that being sad or showing sadness is bad, weak, or inappropriate, and will therefore repress this emotion, akin to damming a river. From this position, we are not even able to feel ourselves fully, let alone those around us or the earth beneath our feet.

Emotions are often linked to needs. Attention to our own needs is an invitation that we receive from the body of work on non-violent communication (e.g., see Rosenberg 2015). We have physical needs—such as food, water, or rest—and more emotional needs—such as the need for trust, support, strength, and company. Sometimes, it is difficult to recognize what we need, maybe because we were not used to having our needs met as children. This can lead us to create complicated strategies in an attempt to satisfy them. For example, if I need acknowledgement and do not receive it, I feel sad or angry. Maybe yesterday I spent all day cleaning the house and nobody noticed or thanked me. Instead of asking for the recognition I need, I might feel angry and start fighting with someone who did not wash their glass, in the hope that they realize that I had been cleaning and acknowledge me for it. If I do not connect with my needs and learn to take responsibility for them, it is possible to come across as very annoying. I might start complaining or acting as a victim, expecting others to magically guess and fulfill my needs (which often has the opposite effect). However, when we learn to recognize our needs and communicate them, we are more in contact with ourselves and, automatically, with our surroundings. If we reject our own needs, how can we recognize what another person, an animal, or Mother Earth needs?

Finally, Latin American traditions recognize that the body is our first territory (Arboleda Gómez 2005). It is a perfect ecosystem that sustains our lives, that hosts all that we are, and that allows us to perceive all the other dimensions. The body is very old and includes all the information passed on by our ancestors. When we stay in contact with the body, we stay in contact with the earth.

We realize we need to be in touch with all four dimensions at once to experience and feel nature:

> "If we stay only in the mind, we invent super cool technology, but we destroy the river. We destroy the earth. We do not feel the blue, the water, the fear, the green, the earth. We do not feel that we are the earth. We have to awaken a way of feeling out of all dimensions, because when I hurt someone, it hurts because his pain is mine, if I'm connected. If that is awake, it hurts me, and I don't hurt you anymore. Simple as that. If I only act from the mind and with the justification of the economic objective, I do not see the rest" (Boch 2022).

This discussion connects the ways we organize ourselves (non-hierarchical, fluid) and how we learn to feel nature. If we were only to follow the logic of the mind, without contact with the other dimensions, we would not feel ourselves or be touched if nature were being destroyed.

Using conflict as an entry point to learn about ourselves more deeply implies that our individual and collective experiences spill over into community-wide processes that we are investigating with our whole systems (through thoughts, emotions, needs, and

bodies). Quijano (2000) discusses the way broader social debates express themselves in social relationships—in this sense, we experience our conflicts as leading us to social debates such as power, gender, racism, and classism.

I will take the process of arriving to the land shared in the text above as an example of such collective processes. We bought the land during the social distancing dictated by the pandemic. We organized a crowdfunding campaign to purchase the land. To do so, we reached a consensus to set the goal for each of us to collect EUR 5000. This decision activated all sorts of processes. Some of us (mostly Europeans) either tapped into some savings or successfully reached out to our friends and family to fundraise. Others (mostly the Colombian, Argentinian, and Venezuelan community members) struggled to receive donations and raise the amount. Hence, as some people celebrated their fundraising successes and others felt frustrated, the way the social inequality of the world reflected on our community became more visible and painful.

What we realized in that wave of collective process was that, no matter the position, we all felt guilty. Those who could access resources felt guilty about being able to fundraise while others were not; those who could not, felt guilty about not being able to support the collective. The fact that it was painful on both sides supported us as we decided to accompany each other through the process. We each dove into it through regressions, a technique through which you are accompanied to the origin of a specific conflict to see how that conflict came about in your family line. As we look at 'privilege' through the paths of our ancestors, any sort of fixed category falls apart. For example, you might find out that someone had a Jewish grandfather who was persecuted and now is the 'white' person with more access to resources; meanwhile, someone else who now has no access to wealth grew up in a rich family that had a recent downfall due to a political crisis in their country. We realize we all have the whole humanity inside!

In one instance, a community member from Belgium offered to lend money to another community member from Argentina. To explore the emotions that were emerging in relation to the possibility of this loan, we hosted a circle in which the two community members had an 'encounter', one of the techniques we developed. During an encounter, two people are accompanied into an active meditation as they look each other, fixing their attention towards one eye only, and explore the conflicts between them. During an encuentro (Spanish for 'meeting'), the two people participating are invited to express themselves and share how they feel with each other. Often, 'projections' become visible. For example, I might have an encounter with Luis and see my father in him—by taking him as my father and speaking to him as if he were my father, I am able to have a catharsis of unexpressed grief. In this way, the projection falls, and I am better able to see Luis. This *encuentro* between the two community members from Belgium and Argentina was very moving for each of us. What emerged were the various archetypes and old emotions associated with the way we relate to money, privileges, and values based on our backgrounds. It soon exploded into a collective Door, meaning each person present felt very touched and identified with the pain on either side.

In this explosion of pain, suddenly there were no more sides. No matter which position one had identified with, what was made visible was how much pain came along with the class/racial/colonization processes that were emerging as we decided to buy the land. During that circle, we realized that when we connected to that pain together, we had more access to the power of that collective experience, and we felt more in tune and better able to support each other when conflict emerged.

These processes were only accentuated when we moved onto the land. For most of us, it was impactful to live in such a wild land. Meanwhile, many of us questioned the privilege of being able to buy land in Colombia thanks to the support of many family members and friends in Europe and North America. This debate, for example, emerged symbolically when we were faced with the decision of what to do with the more than 1000 pine trees that had been planted across the land prior to our arrival. Since the pine tree is not native to Antioquia, some were of the opinion that we should get rid of the

pine trees. Others suggested we clean them up and let them grow so that we could use them for wood. Ultimately, we decided to let the pine trees grow with the other native trees—in other words, to let the intelligence of the wood decide for us. Meanwhile, we started collaborating closely with our neighbors, supporting each other, sharing workdays, asking for farming tips, having conversations about the history of the land, and sharing stories, rituals, and birthday parties.

With these examples, we want to transmit what we are learning: Collective healing cannot be achieved from a rational standpoint. It goes beyond the idea of right or wrong. Instead, coming together and being able to recognize the way conflict exists in us by witnessing each other's is the way we have found to heal. Discussing the role of grief amongst the Marind people of West Papua, Chao (2022) writes that grieving allows us to "create or revive connections with more-than-human others. In that way, mourning becomes a form of resistance that pushes against human exceptionalism." Collective healing, we learned, becomes easier when we pay attention to the quality of our encounters with others and allow ourselves to be touched by humans, animals, and other forms of life alike. It becomes easier when we invent rituals to recognize nature's cycles of life and death—such as accompanying a dying horse with words and prayers and then coming all together to dig a big hole, slowly drop Camelia into it, arrange her body with dignity, and then say goodbye, thank her, cover her with dirt, and allow her to rest in peace.

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Notes

[1] They cut the sugar cane, pass it through a press that squishes out the juice, and then cook the juice in a huge oven—the juice goes from pool to pool until it becomes denser. Then, when it has the consistency of caramel, they put it in a wooden stamp. Our neighbors make panela in the middle of the countryside, even deeper inland than we are. To get there, it takes another 30 min of walking from our house.

[2] To reach the community, you need to first reach San Rafael, Antioquia, which is three hours away from Medellin, Colombia. Then, from San Rafael, you need to take a tuck-tuck or a motorbike to Orlando's house; it takes about 45 min from town. From there, the path is narrow, and it takes you up and down a hill. To get to our house, you need to either walk or ride a mule or horse for about 40 more minutes.

[3] Read the article by Radio Nacional (2023) to learn more about the traditions of mambe and ambil.

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