

The Experience and Impact of Sacred Ceremonial Apologies:
A Colonizer's Journey of Personal, Community, and Ancestral Healing

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Abstract

This study explores the experience and impact of sacred ceremonial apologies. It builds on previous research focused on the fundamental elements of genuine apologies and the psychological benefits on the apology recipient(s) and the apologizer(s).

As a point of departure, I use powerful personal experience in which I ceremonially apologized to a group of Indigenous Elders for the atrocities the Spanish colonizers perpetrated in Mexico. The study uses Heuristic and Organic Inquiry methods. It is supported by interviews with ceremony participants and a thorough literature review on apology and the transmission and healing of ancestral wounding.

The study concludes that sacred ceremonial apologies assist in the healing of personal, community, and ancestral victim and perpetrator wounding. Shared grief and unconditional love were at the center of my healing experience, resulting in the sense of spiritual union with people I previously considered “the other.”

Dedication

To my beloved wife, Nancy Raines. Without you, none of this would have been possible: my career, my spiritual life, our family. Thanks for being my loving companion, my guide, and my support in this magical journey.

To my children, Kyle and Alejandro. You have been my greatest teachers, my constant comfort, and the most important “project” in this lifetime. I am so proud and amazed to see the men you have become.

To my parents. You have always been there for me and supported my dreams in every possible way. Thanks for your love, trust, and generosity; they made me who I am today.

To my grandfather Luis Alvarez Pastor, who was an inspiration for and a companion in this work. Thanks for showering me with unconditional love and showing me that a man can have a range of emotions, including deep grief.

To the Indigenous people around the world, who have demonstrated extraordinary resilience and generosity. May we all learn from their wisdom.

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Special thanks to Will Taegel, who has been a steady companion in this journey. You were the first person I talked to at Ubiquity University, the facilitator of the apology ceremony, one of my research partners, and a wise and helpful advisor for this dissertation.

I have great appreciation for Pedro Díaz and the other Mexica dancers, who trusted my intentions, and created the perfect ceremony container for the ancestral apology to happen.

I also acknowledge all the participants in the ceremony who held the sacred space and literally held me afterward. Special thanks to my other research partners, Carol Flake Chapman and Alberto Hernández for generously sharing their time and their insights with me.

My profound gratitude to Gyorgyi Szabo, who taught me, directed me, encouraged, and supported me to get to this point.

I am indebted to all the teachers and mentors I have encountered along the way, particularly Diane Berke, David Wallace, Andrew Harvey, Jim Garrison, Judith Yost, Carolyn Myss, Joan Block. You not only talk a great talk but teach by profound example.

I am grateful for all my classmates at Ubiquity University and One Spirit Interfaith Seminary. We grew together, held each other, and learned so much from each other.

Last, but not least, I want to acknowledge the circles of love that are central to my life. My extended family, especially my brothers, my family by marriage, and my friends around the world. I love you all so much.

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*"The holiest of all spots on earth
is where an ancient hatred has become a present love."*

A Course in Miracles (T-26.IX.6:1)

Chapter I: Introduction

In November 2016, while participating in a sacred ceremony in Teotihuacán, Mexico, I was guided by Spirit to apologize for the historical atrocities committed by my people (Spanish colonizers) upon the Tenochca/Mexica² people and their land. The story of how I ended up kneeling in front of a Mexica elder and taking full responsibility for the ancestral harm, as well as the impact that this act has had in my life, provide the energetic center of this dissertation. I describe the event in detail in Chapter II.

The ceremony was part of a weeklong intensive course offered by the Earthtribe,³ which fulfilled a requirement for Ubiquity University's (UU) Wisdom School graduate program. It was one of the last classes I needed to take to complete my Ph.D. studies, and it coincided with the time I had to decide the research topic for my dissertation. I had considered at least two other possible themes and even discussed one of them at length with Judith Yost⁴, then Dean of Graduate Studies of the Wisdom School. However, once I participated in the apology ceremony, I had no doubt it had to become the focus of my dissertation. I did not know at the time that conducting this study and writing this dissertation would be the ideal vehicle to answer essential questions that naturally arose after the ceremony.

² Tenochca or Mexica are the designations preferred by Native people labeled in the Western world as "Aztecs."

³ The Earthtribe, based in Wimberley, Texas, USA, consists of communities that practice Nature-based spirituality, which gather to expand their awareness and compassion through deeper connection with the fields of Nature.

⁴ Judith Yost, D.Min., (1943-2021) was an American psychotherapist, songwriter, teacher, and author, and former Dean of Students at Wisdom School of Graduate Studies, Ubiquity University. She co-founded the Center for Creative Resources and the Earthtribe.

The organic way the topic appeared is consistent with how I have experienced every stage of my doctoral studies. I believe I have been guided by a Divine Force every step of the way. I describe this process in detail when I share my spiritual journey and personal healing in Chapter IX.⁵

A. About the Research Methods and Questions

At the suggestion of Gyorgyi Szabo⁶, UU's Dean of Graduate Students, I adopted a Heuristic method of inquiry, supplemented by elements of Organic research. These methodologies have allowed me to explore my subjective personal experience through deep self-reflection and complement and validate my observations with original qualitative research and a thorough literature review. Heuristic Inquiry does not rely on a formal hypothesis but instead emphasizes the importance of carefully crafted, open-ended questions for oneself and others (Moustakas, 1990, p. 41). The primary questions for this dissertation are:

- How do I (and other people) perceive and describe the *experience* of ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm? And

⁵ Heuristic Inquiry, the primary research method I use for this dissertation, is not a linear process, and therefore, my description of the chapters in this introduction is not sequential. The chapters' order follows a logic, starting with the story of the apology ceremony and ending with the conclusions, but there is frequent cross-reference among the chapters.

⁶ Gyorgyi Szabo (1968-) is a Hungarian author and teacher, who holds a Ph.D. in Sociology - Summa Cum Laude awarded by the Sorbonne, the University of Paris; a Master's degree in Philosophy from Trinity St David, University of Wales, and a Bachelor's degree with Honors from Birkbeck College, University of London. She currently serves as the Dean of Graduate Studies at Ubiquity University and as the Executive Director at The Laszlo Institute of New Paradigm Research.

- What is my (and other people's) perception of the *impact* of such ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, their families, and communities?

I further describe these and other support questions in Chapter III and outline the research methodologies in detail in Chapter IV. Using my personal experience, my research, and the available literature, each of the primary questions is explored in-depth in separate sections of the dissertation (Chapters X and XI).

Researching and writing this dissertation has been, in and of itself, a rich and fertile experience in my journey of spiritual development. I have integrated the development of this study into my daily spiritual practice, which also includes smudging, gratitude, prayer, meditation, and yoga. Appropriately, I start every morning with a practice of ritual apology and cleansing, using *Ho'oponopono*⁷. My research has confirmed something I intuitively knew: Creating coherence through ceremony and ritual enhances every intentional activity, including the act of apologizing, but also researching and writing about this phenomenon (I expand on this in Chapter V). Approaching the creation of this work as a sacred activity has allowed me to do some deep self-examination on various areas in my life, particularly challenging deep-seated bias and prejudices, which I illustrate in Chapter VII when I write about my socialization and personal background.

In addition to the aforementioned primary questions, other themes arose during the development of the study. It became essential to define and analyze

⁷ Terms repeatedly used in the dissertation are defined in the Glossary.

what constitutes an authentic apology, and the literature provided rich information on this subject, which I address in Chapter V.

The literature review (which is integrated throughout the dissertation rather than concentrated in one chapter) unveiled a growing body of research focusing on apology and its positive effects on the apology recipients and, to a lesser degree, on the apologizer. The literature primarily centers on interpersonal apologies, which can be private (between individuals, such as intimate partners, family members, friends, co-workers, doctors, and patients) or public (apologies for personal wrongdoing usually offered by politicians and other public figures who have done something unethical or illegal), and intergroup apologies, typically given by governments to other countries or groups of people who have been harmed by that government in the past). There is minimal research focusing on sacred ceremonial apologies for ancestral harm and their psychological and spiritual impact.

This dissertation offers an original contribution to the study of apology by exploring the experience and impact of apology for historical and ancestral harm in the context of a sacred container. To do so, I rely on my own experience and my qualitative research, and on knowledge from other fields. These include the study of the intergenerational and ancestral transmission of trauma, particularly in perpetrators of violence (Chapter VI), and the healing of historical and ancestral trauma, especially in the context of ritual and ceremony (Chapter VIII). Through my original qualitative research, I also expand the study of apology by exploring

the experience and impact of the event on witnesses and participants (Chapter XI).

In Chapter XII, the final section, I present the study's findings, conclusion, validation, limitations, and future directions for research.

B. About the Literature Review

Unlike most traditional literature reviews, in Heuristic Inquiry, “any source that provides you with reliable information about the phenomenon you are researching may qualify as professional literature” (Sultan, 2018, p. 108). A heuristic literature review may include as sources “research studies, peer-reviewed articles, books, book chapters, transcripts of interviews with subject-area experts, and [even] artifacts such as memos, photos, recordings, and works of art” (Sultan, 2018, p. 108).

To find published literature, I relied on free databases, primarily Google Scholar, JSTOR, PubMed, Academia.edu, Archive.org, and the New York Public Library Research Catalogue. I reviewed more than 300 primary and secondary sources.

C. About the Evidence

When writing about the impact of apology in Chapter XI, I have adopted the US Center of Disease Control and Prevention's *Continuum of Evidence Effectiveness* Framework (2011), which proposes three kinds of evidence for the “adoption, uptake, and implementation of prevention programs, practices, and policies” (CDC, 2013). These include *Best Available Research Evidence*, primarily peer-reviewed studies with experimental (randomized control trials) or

quasi-experimental designs with matched comparison groups that can be replicated. Academic literature reviews have traditionally been limited to this type of source; however, “while the *Best Available Research Evidence* is important, it is not the only standard of evidence that is essential” (CDC, 2011).

The CDC also proposes the inclusion of *Contextual and Experiential Evidence* in public health policy and practice. *Contextual Evidence* is “based on factors that address whether a strategy is useful, feasible to implement, and accepted by a particular community” (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011, p. 3), and *Experiential Evidence* “is the collective experience and expertise of those who have practiced or lived in a particular setting. It also includes the knowledge of subject matter experts” (CDC, 2013). *Experiential Evidence* “is based on the professional insight, understanding, skill, and expertise that is accumulated over time and is often referred to as intuitive or tacit knowledge” (Puddy & Wilkins, 2011, p. 3). Some researchers have used other names for *Experimental Evidence*, such as *Practice-Based Evidence* (to complement Evidence-Based Practice) (Green, 2008). A growing number of scholars consider *Indigenous Knowledge* a vital modality of *Experiential Evidence* (Sheehan, 2011).

For this dissertation, I have substituted the name *Best Available Research Evidence* with *Scholastic Evidence*, as academic authors have been written most of this research.

Chapter II: The Apology at Teotihuacán

In November 2016, I traveled to Mexico to participate in the Pyramid Academy at Teotihuacán, an intensive course organized by the EarthTribe and led by HeatherAsh Amara⁸, Will Taegel⁹, and Judith Yost. The Pyramid Academy is a yearly pilgrimage based on the Toltec¹⁰ path of transformation and designed to recreate the mystical initiation journey of the Ancient Mexicans, including preparation, descent to the underworld, ascent to the middle world (where we consciously live), and integration. As Taegel (personal communication, November 2016)¹¹ mentioned in one of the course's lectures: "Teotihuacán was designed as an initiation school for deep inner transformation, and its layout is indeed a map to accomplish it."

Soon after arriving in Teotihuacán, I started to feel what I first identified as cognitive and emotional dissonance (I now understand that it was really grief and sorrow; see Chapter X). The feelings came from my personal history: Even though I was born and raised in Mexico City (not far from Teotihuacán), all my

⁸ HeatherAsh Amara (1966-) is an American teacher and author dedicated to inspiring depth, creativity, and joy by sharing the most potent tools various world traditions. She studied and taught extensively with don Miguel Ruiz and continues to teach with the Ruiz family.

⁹ Will Taegel, Ph.D., (1940-) is an American teacher, author, and psychotherapist who walks in two dimensions. One reflects his lifelong connection with the Indigenous Mind/Heart and the other, his psychological and scientific research. While both his doctorates concentrate on the synergy of ecopsychology and the matrix of field physics, he counts his shamanic training as the most important of his life. He is the former dean of the Wisdom School of Graduate Studies, Ubiquity University, and the major advisor for this dissertation.

¹⁰ The Toltecs were a tribe in what is now Mexico, who flourished around AD 900. They were the heirs and keepers of an ancient way of spirituality that has survived to the present day despite enormous obstacles. Some of the contemporary teachers of this ancient tradition include Don Miguel Ruiz and HeatherAsh Amara.

¹¹ Personal communications include unpublished materials, such as interviews, lectures, and conversations. For the sake of clarity, I spell out "personal communication and the date" (if known) the first time I quote a particular exchange and abbreviate it to "p.c." and just the year thereafter.

ancestors came from Spain; so, I found myself immersed in a class to learn about a culture that my people tried to annihilate, and that in fact, my family considered inferior (I describe my socialization in detail on Chapter VII). As the course unfolded, I became more in touch with the pain my ancestors inflicted on Mexico and its people. I felt a strong need to address these feelings to be fully present in the experience of the intensive.

A. Día de los Muertos

Before traveling to Mexico, we were told by the retreat leaders to bring with us photographs of deceased ancestors we wanted to honor. The intensive coincided with the Mexican holiday of *Día de los Muertos* or Day of the Dead, a time to connect and acknowledge family members and friends who have passed away. We were told that we were going to build a traditional altar for our dead.

The image of my maternal grandfather, Luis Alvarez Pastor, immediately came to my mind as someone I wanted to honor (see Figure 1). I was very close to him, and I am forever grateful that he gave me the gift of unconditional love. As I describe in Chapter V, he also passed a legacy of racism and internalized superiority to me. As I started to deal with my internal emotional conflict, I still wanted to appreciate my grandfather. Yet, I felt



Figure 1 – My Grandfather

I also needed to honor the victims of the genocide the Spanish conquistadores had perpetrated upon the Native Mexicans.

The morning before *Día de los Muertos*, we went to a market in the nearby town of Otumba to buy supplies for our altar. Traditionally, Mexicans build these altars out of colorful flowers –especially marigolds- and add incense, candles, food, and skulls made of sugar or chocolate. As I bought some of these items, I was also looking for something that would symbolize the suffering that the Spanish unleashed on the Mexicans. I walked every row of the market but could not find anything that worked.

I finished with my shopping and decided to take a walk around the town. I soon discovered there was a small local museum and felt the urge to go in. To my astonishment, the first thing that I saw in the museum was a large, beautiful mural depicting a battle between the Spanish and the Mexicas (see Figure 2). In the painting, the conquistadores are charging with their weapons. There are mutilated

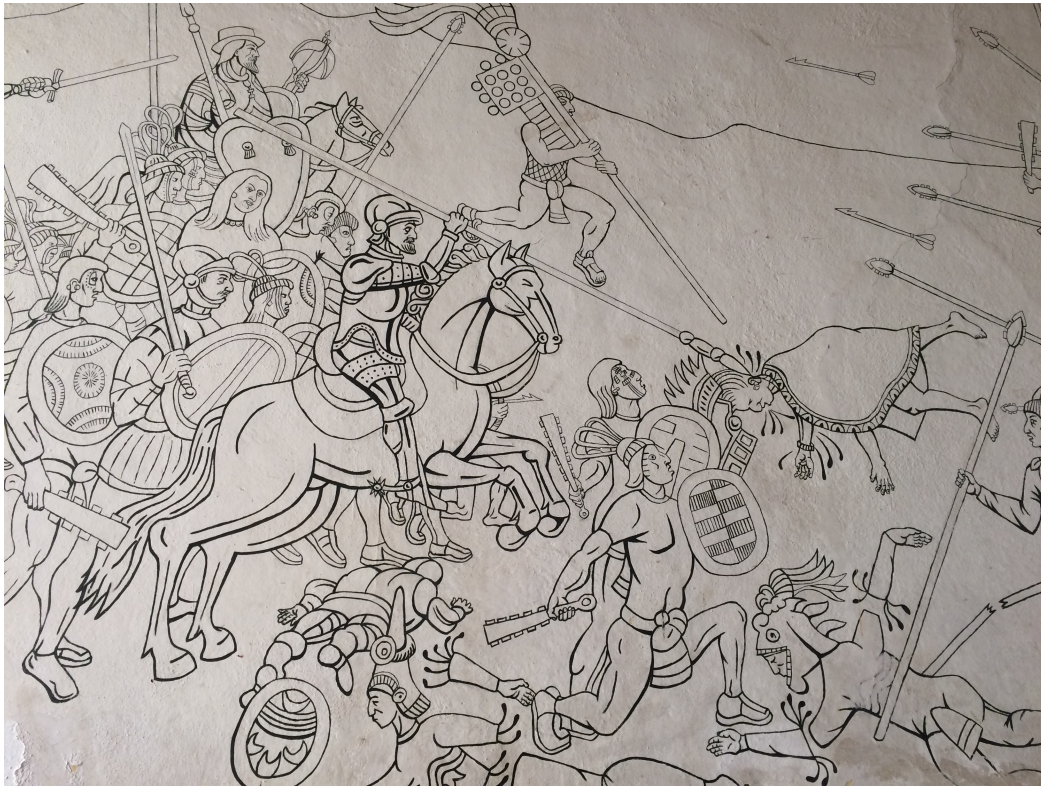


Figure 2 – The Otumba Mural

Indigenous bodies all over the ground. At the center of the mural, Hernán Cortés, the invaders' leader, is riding a horse, holding a lance, and decapitating what looks like a Mexica nobleman.

The mural was precisely the representation I was seeking for my altar. As I took a photograph, I noticed that there was a small plaque next to the mural. It explained that the author was a painter named John McGhee.¹² It also noted something that I probably had learned in school but had forgotten entirely: The painting depicted the battle of Otumba, a crucial event during the Spanish invasion of Mexico when the conquistadores decisively defeated the Mexicas. The battle led to the eventual siege and occupation of Tenochtitlan (the Mexica capital) and the overthrow of the Mexica Empire. The Mexica sustained many casualties in Otumba (the exact number is unknown) (Daniel, 1992).

The ground where I was standing when I was admiring the mural had been literally soaked with Mexica blood due to my ancestors' cruelty. There could be no better representation of the Mexican Indigenous genocide. I was full of gratitude to have been guided to this powerful work of art as my heart continued to break.

The Day of the Dead arrived, and I was able to build a beautiful altar with my grandfather's portrait on one side and the picture of the battle of Otumba on the other. I adorned it with marigolds and other flowers and included a small incense burner and a traditional chocolate skull (see Figure 3). In my post-paper for the course, I described the altar as follows:

¹² John McGhee (1922-1918) was an American painter who studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and spent most of his life in Mexico, where he created most of his work.



Figure 3 – My Altar

And now, here I was, building an altar big enough to contain all the disparate elements: My gratitude for my grandfather's love and generosity, my grief from losing him when I was a kid, my shame for having inherited his supremacist ideology, my pain for the destruction that such ideology produced in Mexico, my increased awareness of how I have benefited from that dark legacy. The process of building my altar (...) showed me that I needed to take a step to start

healing my family and my people's historical karma (Areán, 2017).

As I lit the candle to dedicate the offerings, I prayed for the thousands of victims of the Spanish conquest and for my grandfather's soul to find peace. It was a meaningful ritual, but it did not totally resolve my emotional turmoil. At that point, the idea of offering a ritual apology came to my mind for the first time.

B. The Path

The following day, over breakfast, I mentioned my urge to Will Taegel. His eyes widened, and he immediately said he thought offering a ceremonial apology would be a very powerful experience. He told me he would think about how such an event could fit into the flow of the intensive. At that point, I started to feel fear about the possibility of offering a public apology, but I also knew that my only choice was to say yes or no and that my personal growth was tied to saying yes. I naturally went to my default practice when feeling afraid: praying to the Divine Mother, especially reciting the Hail Mary (see Chapter IX). In a beautiful synchronicity, the room where we built our Day of the Dead altars had a large, striking mural of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico,

painted by Emily Grieves¹³ (see Figure 4). I built my altar at her feet, as I knew she was guiding me.

Later that day, Will came to me and told me he had had an idea. Every year, on the fifth evening of the course, a group of Indigenous Mexica dancers joins the participants and performs a sacred ceremony to share how modern-day Mexicans practice traditional

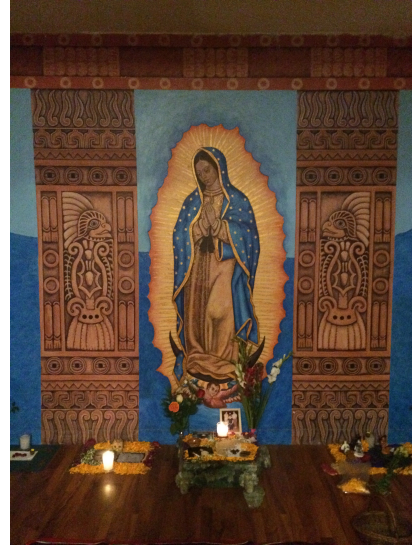


Figure 4 – Emily Grieves Mural

Toltec spirituality. Will said that he had talked to the leader of the dancers, Pedro Díaz¹⁴, and asked him whether it would be appropriate for me to offer a ritual apology during the ceremony. Díaz replied that he was open to the idea. At that point, my fear and my prayers to the Mother intensified.

I didn't find out until much later that Díaz is a person of national and international importance in *la tradición*, the contemporary movement to revive and reclaim traditional pre-Hispanic spirituality, beliefs, and customs. Alberto Hernández¹⁵ (personal communication, November 29, 2020), a close friend of Díaz, described him as follows:

¹³ Emily K. Grieves (dob unknown) is a German painter who has lived in Mexico since 2004. Her work is often inspired by the landscape and mythology of her home, drawing on nearby remnants of ancient civilization as well as from the modern-day environment.

¹⁴ Pedro Díaz's biography is not readily available.

¹⁵ Alberto Hernández (dob unknown) is a Mexican artist and teacher who has always lived in Teotihuacán. He spent his childhood training in traditional healing ways with his paternal grandmother. He is also the owner of *La Casa de los Sueños*, the hotel where the apology ceremony took place.

*Pedro is not an ordinary dancer. Pedro is a person who represents a large constituency. Pedro represents a whole generation and an enormous number of dancers from all over the country, as well as the traditions, the language, and many things that make what we call a ceremony.*¹⁶

I woke up early the morning of the ceremony and spent a long time in meditation and prayer. Another antidote to my fear came to me: A mantra that Andrew Harvey¹⁷ taught me during an intensive course in Paris in 2014: “More and more love; more and more surrender.” That is precisely what I needed at the moment, and it helped calm my fear. That evening, after dinner, Will told me that Pedro wanted to see me. He took me to the yard where the dancers were preparing for the ceremony. They were all dressed in traditional clothing. Pedro was shorter than me but had an imposing presence. On top of his head, there was an enormous *penacho* made of large feathers. Some of his clothing was made of jaguar skins (see Figure 5).



Figure 5 – Pedro Díaz

¹⁶ I use *italics* when quoting the interviews I conducted to differentiate them from quotes from the literature.

¹⁷ Andrew Harvey (1952-) is a British author, religious scholar, and teacher of mystic traditions, known for his more than 30 nonfiction books on spiritual or mystical themes. He is on the faculty of Ubiquity University and is the founder of the Sacred Activism movement.

Pedro looked at me right in the eyes. I could tell he was trying to figure out who I really was and probably wondered about my intentions and authenticity. I remained grateful and humble. As I started to speak in Spanish, his face relaxed. I briefly explained my idea, and he just said that he would call me when it was time to offer the apology. He also asked me to translate to English some instructions he wanted to give to the retreat participants, who were almost exclusively from North America.

C. The Ceremony



Figure 6 – Ceremonial Altar

I rejoined the other students for a short evening class, after which we were told that the dancers were ready for us to join them. As we came out to the yard where the ceremony was about to start, we found about a dozen dancers in full regalia, forming a circle around a magnificent altar made of fresh flowers' petals (see Figure 6). There was a container with a roaring fire and two large drums. Pedro welcomed us and started the ceremony by calling the four directions and the ancestors. Two other dancers proceeded to smudge everyone with a local bark called copal. The drummers started to play, and the dancers began a powerful ritual dance, going from left to right and in circles. I was praying to the Divine Mother and breathing deeply to work with my fear the whole time.

The Mexicas danced for about 45 minutes and then asked the intensive participants to join. We could barely keep up with the vigorous physicality of the dances. I was in awe of the dancers' stamina, especially a man who seemed to be in his 80s and did not miss a beat. The movement got me to a static state and helped me relax and feel grounded.

Everybody stopped dancing after 15 minutes, and Pedro proceeded to release the directions. This usually marks the end of a ceremony. For a moment, I thought that he had forgotten about the apology and I have to confess I felt relieved. But of course, this was not

the case. After releasing the directions, Pedro asked me to come and stand in front of him. The other dancers surrounded us in a circle, and the intensive participants formed a second circle around us. Will came forward



Figure 7 – The Apology

and stood to my right, next to Pedro

and me. I was grateful for his grounding energy. He felt like the Pyramid of the Sun, anchoring the whole complex of buildings in Teotihuacán (see Figure 7).

My heart was wide open and pounding. I felt strong and soft at the same time. I asked again the Divine Mother to guide me. Pedro told me to go ahead. I locked eyes with him and said¹⁸:

¹⁸ This translation from the original Spanish approximates the exact words I used, based on what I wrote in my journal after the ceremony.

My people, the Spanish, arrived in this land almost 500 years ago. We did not come in the spirit of peace. We did not come with our hearts open. We did not come to learn from this great culture. We came to conquest; we came to dominate; we came to subjugate, guided by greed, arrogance, hate, and a false sense of superiority.

My ancestors were welcomed on this land. And we paid you back for your generosity by killing your men, raping your women, and slaving your children. We tortured, we mutilated, we tried to destroy your culture (and we obviously failed).

Today, I come with great humility, representing myself, my family, my ancestors, and my people, to offer an apology to you, your families, your ancestors, and all the people who have walked this sacred land from the beginning of time, for all the atrocities committed by the Spanish.

I come with an open heart. I come in the spirit of peace. I come with great humility to tell you how sorry I am for what happened. It deeply pains me to see the hurt and suffering caused by my people.



Figure 8 – Kneeling

At that moment, I felt I needed to go down on one knee (see Figure 8). Pedro tried to stop me, but I insisted. I finished by saying:
Humbly, I ask you for your forgiveness, even if it is a small gesture compared to the enormity of

the mayhem that took place here. Thank you for listening.

Pedro took my hand and pulled me up. As I stood, I looked into his eyes, which like mine, were full of tears. He said to me:

In my wildest dreams, I could never have imagined someone of Spanish ancestry –never mind apologizing- but even acknowledging the damage they inflicted to my people. I will never forget this moment.



Figure 9 – Pedro and I hugging

Then he hugged me and asked every dancer there to do the same (see Figure 9). The octogenarian Mexica man came forward with a gift: He recited a beautiful poem in Nahuatl, the native language of his people. Someone repeated it in Spanish, and I translated it to English

(see Chapter X for a fragment of the poem).

Will and other participants offered a song, and he closed the ceremony by blowing a conch (see Figure 10). I thanked Pedro and the other dancers and said my goodbyes. Several fellow intensive participants came to me to share how moved they had been by the ritual. It was clear to me that this had been a community healing experience. Every person in that circle played a crucial role in creating the needed ceremonial space. I happened to be called to the center, but we co-created this together.

D. The Message

The last person to approach me was a woman I had had minimal contact with during the course. She knew nothing about my personal story and motivation to apologize to the Mexicas. I did know that she had Canadian Indigenous ancestry. She said to me: *“I have a message for you that I don’t understand. I literally feel that there*



Figure 10 – Will blowing the conch

is a spirit who is pushing me from behind and asking me to convey this message to you: 'You are a wonderful grandson.'"

At that point, all my pent-up emotions came out. I knew this was a legitimate message from the spirit of my grandfather and that some profound ancestral healing had taken place. I started to sob, and some people immediately surrounded me, held me, and started to sing a song that seemed like another message from my grandfather: *All I want from you is forever to remember me as loving you.*¹⁹

Slowly, the circle broke, and people moved on to have supper. I went directly to my room with no need for food or further interaction. I collapsed on my bed, feeling raw and superlatively grateful. I knew something extraordinary had happened but could barely start understanding its meaning. Immediately, I began asking questions about the ceremony: *What just happened? Why was I part of this ritual? What am I to do with this experience?*

I knew right away that this experience would become the focus of my doctoral dissertation. What I didn't realize was that some version of these questions would provide the basis for my research.

¹⁹ The chorus of this song has a mystical source. It has been identified as a Sufi adage, which later became a Christian hymn (see Federle, S. (2018). *"All I ask for you is forever to remember me as loving you."* Retrieved July 4, 2021, from <http://stevenfederle.blogspot.com/2018/04/all-i-ask-of-you-is-forever-to-remember.html>).

Chapter III: Research Questions

In Heuristic Inquiry (HI), I found the perfect methodology to approach my research and explore the questions that arose right after the Teotihuacán ceremony. To guide research, HI relies on carefully crafted, open-ended questions for oneself and for others, which are “simple, clear, and concrete” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 41). The questions focus on the “how” and “what” of the topic of inquiry, which often translate into exploring the experience and the impact of an event or phenomenon (Sultan, 2018). This framework allowed me to gain a deep understanding of what happened in Teotihuacán.

HI discourages the development of a formal hypothesis since “bringing our assumptions or preexisting theories into any process of inquiry may compromise it as we attempt to confirm what we already know” (Sultan, 2018, p. 18). However, the methodology significantly relies on personal experience, tacit knowledge, and intuition (Moustakas, 1990). I think it is not possible for researchers to completely set aside all their ideas and feelings about a phenomenon, especially when they have experienced it intimately. And, of course, researchers bring previous knowledge and life experience to their projects, which they cannot readily discount.

In my case, I started the process of self-inquiry right after the Teotihuacán ceremony ended. As I asked some questions, I intuitively arrived at some preliminary answers. Most importantly, I *knew* right away that a karmic healing had happened and that it was related to the harm that my ancestors, my family, and myself had caused in Mexico (this was further confirmed by the message

from my grandfather). During my studies at Ubiquity University and One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, I experienced the extraordinary power of ceremonies and rituals. In fact, that is what impacted me the most in my years of study at both institutions. Therefore, I also *knew* that the sacred ceremony in Teotihuacán played an essential part in the healing. I didn't know –and wanted to learn- how I and the other participants were transformed both during the ceremony and afterward. This was the basis of my main research questions.

A. Primary Research Questions

The primary questions for this dissertation are:

- How do I (and other people) perceive and describe the *experience* of sacred ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm?
- What is my (and other people's) perception of the *impact* of such sacred ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, their families, and communities?

The *experience* of apology refers to exploring the state of mind, heart, and spirit that participants may embody *during* the moment an apology takes place.

The *impact* of apology addresses the consequences that the act of apologizing has on participants *after the fact*.

B. Support Research Questions

The process of self-inquiry led me to additional questions, which I classified as supportive to the primary investigation. Before the ceremony, I was already familiar with the research on victimization trauma and how it can be generationally passed on emotionally, spiritually, and epigenetically. I didn't

know whether there was such thing as trauma or wounding derived from the perpetration of violence and whether this wounding could be passed on generationally in the same way as victimization trauma. So, I articulated two support questions as follows:

- Does perpetration of violence cause wounding in the perpetrator?
- If so, can perpetration wounding be passed on ancestrally, and what are its emotional and spiritual consequences?

I also was acquainted with the concept that sacred ceremonies and rituals can heal historical victimization trauma. Still, I didn't know if there was something equivalent for perpetration of violence and whether the act of apologizing was a possible mode of healing. This led me to the next support questions:

- If there is personal and ancestral perpetration wounding, how can it be healed?
- Can a sacred ceremonial apology contribute to the healing?

The literature review led me to consider one more support question. A central concern of scholars is not only the definition but also the operationalization of apologies. There is consensus among experts that apologies are significant in reconciliation and healing, and there is also agreement that apologies must be genuine to be effective. Thus, I found it crucial to explore an additional support question:

- What are the essential elements of an authentic apology?

Chapter IV: Research Methods and Process

The primary research method for this dissertation is Heuristic Inquiry (HI), with some added elements from Organic Inquiry (OI). Gerard Kenny²⁰ (2012) writes,

The value of the heuristic method (...) is that it begins with the experience of the practitioners or researchers. It requires that there is a personal experience that has left the inquirer with a desire to understand the experience more fully (p. 7).

This is a perfect description of my situation. The topic of the dissertation originated from my personal experience in the apology ceremony in Teotihuacán. And it has evolved as I have sought to better understand how the ceremony has impacted my life. According to Jennifer Clements²¹ (2004), Organic Inquiry also centers on the idea of “self-as-instrument” (p. 29), and “the first step in an organic process involves writing one’s personal story of the topic under consideration” (p. 40). I followed this process by beginning with a description of the Teotihuacán event in Chapter II and providing relevant personal background when I explore my socialization in Chapter VII and my spiritual journey in Chapter IX.

Even before I had the experience in Mexico, I chose to pursue my Ph.D. at Ubiquity University (UU) because it espouses an epistemology based on “a synthesis of the objective with the subjective” (The Wisdom School at Ubiquity University, 2018, p. 2). Will Taegel (2012), former dean of UU’s Graduate

²⁰ Gerard Kenny, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a senior lecturer at the University of the West of England, Bristol in the United Kingdom.

²¹ Jennifer Clements (dob unknown) received her Ph.D. in transpersonal psychology at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology (ITP) in 1992. She had a private psychological practice in San Francisco. She is one of the creators of Organic Inquiry.

School, writes, “the University advances no orthodoxy of knowing, but [puts a] new epistemology (...) in dynamic tension with Western Civilization’s approach to reality” (p. 86). This new epistemology welcomes ways of knowing that go beyond what can be physically observed and measured. William Braud²² (1998), a proponent of Organic Inquiry, adds to this idea,

To the physical scientist, the real is what is external and measurable, what can be accessed by the senses or physical instruments and verified by the senses or physical instruments of others. To human beings, inner events—that are unobservable from the outside—can be as real or more real than outer events (p. 236).

I deeply resonate with the epistemology that UU proposes because the tension that Taegel describes is not only how I *learn*, but in fact, how I *live* in the world. Every major decision (and many minor decisions) I have made in the last 35 years has been based both on consideration of the facts and on the reliance on spiritual guidance. I receive direction mostly during sitting or walking meditation. Researching and writing this work has naturally followed the same path.

The objective aspects of the research have been explored primarily through a thorough literature review of the field of apology and related topics. The scholarship helped inform and shape my qualitative inquiry, which focused on my own experience and interviews with researcher partners who participated in the Teotihuacán ceremonial apology. The interviews explored the effects of apologies on the research partners and other people present at the ceremony.

²² William Braud (1942-2012) was an American experimental psychologist who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Iowa in 1967. He was Professor and Dissertation Director at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology in Palo Alto, California.

UU's Dissertation Manual (2018) frames the subjective aspects of research as "the introspective work of discerning how the material actually affects one's inner life and soul-growth" (p. 2). This idea encompasses both psychological and spiritual facets of the subjective realm. These elements were best explored in this study using a combination of Heuristic and Organic research methods.

HI expands the traditional Western epistemological paradigm to include the subconscious realm, with expanded research methods such as journaling, contemplation, therapeutic modalities, dream work, and art-making. Clark Moustakas²³ (1990) writes,

Heuristics is a way of engaging in scientific search through methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meaning of important human experiences. The deepest currents of meaning and knowledge take place within the individual through one's senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments (p. 15).

A. Research Processes

Heuristic Inquiry stresses subjective processes based on psychological self-exploration. Both Moustakas (1990) and Nevine Sultan²⁴ (2018) propose seven research processes for a heuristic study. Most of them are framed as methods of introspection, such as *identifying with the focus of inquiry* (choosing an intensely autobiographical experience); *self-dialogue* (journaling or talking aloud with oneself); *indwelling* (intense inward focus "to seek a deeper, more extended

²³ Clark Moustakas, Ed.D., Ph.D., (1923-2012) was an American scholar and author. He was President Emeritus and Co-Founder of the Center for Humanistic Studies. He designed the Heuristic method of inquiry.

²⁴ Nevine Sultan, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American scholar and author. She is Assistant Professor of Clinical Mental Health Counseling at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas, and a Licensed Professional Counselor in private practice.

comprehension of the nature or meaning” of an experience (Moustakas, 1990, p. 24); *focusing* (a relaxed and receptive space, akin to contemplation, to “declutter your inner world and connect with multiple meanings of the topic of inquiry” (Sultan, 2018, pp. 91-92); and *the internal frame of reference* (constant returning within the researcher to seek “a deeper understanding of their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, decisions, and actions” (Sultan, 2018, p. 92).

The descriptions and examples of these five methods paint a picture of a non-linear, cyclical research journey that alternates between the objective and the subjective, the conscious and the subconscious. There are two other central processes in HI that are rooted firmly in the realm of the subconscious: The reliance on *tacit knowing* and *intuition*. Sultan (2018) describes *tacit knowing* as “personal knowledge of phenomena we understand deeply (based on a variety of past experiences) without necessarily being consciously aware of the particular experiences that have constituted that knowledge or understanding” (p. 87). Both Sultan and Moustakas borrow an example of tacit knowledge from Michael Polanyi²⁵ (2009): The fact that we can recognize a person’s face among billions of other faces but cannot explain how we do it.

Moustakas (1990) describes *intuition* as a bridge between the explicit (observable and describable) and the implicit (tacit knowledge)²⁶ and affirms it is “an essential characteristic for seeking knowledge” and that it “makes immediate knowledge possible without the intervening steps of logic and reasoning” (p. 23).

²⁵ Michael Polanyi, M.D., Ph.D., (1891–1976) was a Hungarian-British polymath who made significant theoretical contributions to physical chemistry, economics, and philosophy.

²⁶ Will Taegel uses the same language to describe the function of a sacred ceremony (see Chapter VIII).

Sultan (2018) adds, “intuition is that knowledge that allows me, for example, to make a decision with regard to whether or not to remain in a setting within which I am questioning my safety” (p. 89).

The seven research processes of HI provided a substantial methodological base for my study. However, my personal epistemology (and ontology) not only relies on conscious and subconscious knowledge but also uses the mystical realm as a central way of learning. Fortunately, HI is a flexible research method amenable to what Sultan (2018) calls bricolaging, which she defines as “piecing together techniques, perspectives, practices, or tools from a variety of qualitative methodologies” (p. 260). In my study, I have expanded the traditional HI inquiry processes to incorporate Organic Inquiry techniques, including epistemological approaches based on mysticism. As Clements (2004) asserts: “The organic orientation includes the assumption of the mystical tradition that divine/human interaction is available to one who is open” (p. 27).

In particular, I have relied on information received from the divine/human interaction through internal processes such as revelation and direct internal dialogue with spiritual entities (using OI practices like devotional and walking meditation, contemplation, prayer, automatic writing, and ritual). And also through external phenomena (e.g., signs, synchronicities, and verbal channeled messages from other people).

Direct channeling of spiritual entities is not explicitly listed by Clements as an OI process. Still, she writes about a study she conducted on spiritual partnerships, in which the research subjects described seeing visions and/or

hearing words from “helpful and immediate spiritual partners” perceived as “angels, shamanic spirits, God, a deceased relative, and the Goddess” (Clements, 2004, p. 37). Braud (1998) does explicitly include channeling as an “alternative way of knowing” in his book *Transpersonal research methods for the social sciences: Honoring human experience* (p. 152).²⁷

A value-added of OI is its strong emphasis on intentional preparation for all phases of the research to connect with the spiritual experience (Clements, 2004). Clements (2004) affirms, “participation in the organic approach calls for spading up one’s old habits and expectations to cultivate a sacred perspective” (p. 30).

I have personally approached the research and writing of this dissertation as a sacred practice and started every working session intentionally creating what Taegel and others call spiritual coherence (see Chapter V). In particular, I relied on the Twelve Steps of *Ho’Oponopono*, as taught by Mornah Siemona²⁸ (1980). I also practiced daily gratitude to the Divine Mother for all the blessings in my life and asked Her to guide me every step of the way.

I prepared for the interviews of research partners similarly, following Clements (2004) suggestions:

Before the interview, the researcher intentionally moves into a frame of mind where Spirit may participate as well as ego. One hopes that the interview will itself be a liminal or spiritual experience so that

²⁷ Channeled messages have been central to my spiritual development and direction and play an important role in this study (see Chapter IX).

²⁸ Mornah Nalamaku Siemona (1913–1992) was recognized as a *kahuna lapa’au* (healer) in Hawai’i and taught her updated version of *Ho’oponopono* throughout the United States, Asia, and Europe.

transformative change may occur (...) A variety of means may be used to invite liminal or spiritual experience, including ritual, creating an altar, lighting a candle, meditation, silence, poetry, or prayer (p. 40).

The UU Dissertation Manual (2018) poses the following guiding questions regarding the subjective realm: “What is it about your life experience that called forth this project? And how were you transformed by the experience?” (p. 3). Again, a combination of methods helped answer these questions. Heuristic Inquiry places the researcher’s experience at the center of the investigation. It is based on the “direct, personal encounter of the phenomenon being investigated” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14). Organic Inquiry expands this concept to emphasize the process of personal transformation. In fact, the center of an organic research study is the transformative change of the researcher and the research partners (Clements, 2004).

B. Research Methods

Heuristic inquiry is a structured method of research, which includes clear steps for preparation of the study, data collection, and data analysis, using both objective and subjective sources (Moustakas, 1990). David Hiles²⁹ (2008) opines, “the strength of HI is in the way it sets out a systematic and transparent methodology for self-inquiry” (p. 389). Nevine Sultan’s recent comprehensive book *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically* (2018) has

²⁹ David Hiles, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Honorary Research Fellow at both De Montfort University, Leicester, UK, and the Centre for Counselling and Psychotherapy Education in London. He has been a transpersonal psychotherapist for more than 50 years.

been invaluable in providing primary guidance on how to design and implement the study.

When Clark Moustakas (1990) and his colleagues developed Heuristic Research, they established a methodology delineated in six distinct phases:

- *Initial Engagement*: selecting a topic based on a deep, personal experience;
- *Immersion*: an intensive process of self-inquiry;
- *Incubation*: periods of retreat from the process of *Immersion*;
- *Illumination*: expanding the research to include other people who have had a similar experience, known as research partners;
- *Explication*: after gathering data, a complete examination of the “various layers of meaning” (p. 31); and
- *Creative Synthesis*: “an aesthetic rendition of the theme and essential meanings of the phenomenon” (p. 52).

Sultan (2018) writes that she has been a “heuristic researcher, informally, [her] entire life” (p. xxiii). Anyone who has asked deep questions about their life experiences could say the same. After discovering that HI was an ideal match for my study, I realized that I too had already embarked -informally and intuitively- on the first three phases of the HI methodology. Next, I will describe how I integrated the seven phases of HI in my work.

C. My Personal Heuristic Journey

1. *Initial Engagement*

By the time I chose HI as a research method, I had already selected my dissertation topic, or more accurately, I had been given the theme. Sultan (2018) writes about the *Initial Engagement*: “In a manner of speaking, the general topic of inquiry chooses you, which is quite a departure from many traditional approaches to research whereby you go about a rather methodological selection and ‘pruning’ of the research topic” (p. 11).

This was certainly my own experience. When I started the doctoral journey, after my first Chartres intensive, I was interested in focusing my dissertation on the sacred music composed for and performed in the Cathedral during the first Academy.³⁰ Later on, I decided to switch subjects and was intrigued to explore the role of gender socialization in the experience of authentic spirituality. In fact, during the Teotihuacán intensive, I talked to Judith Yost, then Dean of Students of WSGS, about my plan. Two days later, the ceremonial apology happened, and it became crystal clear that I was supposed to research and write my dissertation based on that event. Yost, who was a participant in the ceremony, wholeheartedly agreed.

2. *Immersion*

Right after the experience in Teotihuacán, I embarked on a journey equivalent to *Immersion*, as Moustakas (1990) describes it: “The researcher lives

³⁰ The New Chartres Academy was inspired by and based on the original Chartres School, which operated primarily in the XI and XII centuries.

the question in walking, sleeping, and even dream state. Everything in his or her life becomes crystallized around the question” (p. 28). In the three years that passed between the ceremony and the development of the dissertation proposal, when I had to formally articulate my research questions, I was involved in a deep process of self-inquiry, trying to make meaning of the experience. I spent countless hours in deep meditation, journaling, reading about, and contemplating the subject. I also was called to facilitate apology circles, where I shared my story and invited participants to experience their own processes of apology and forgiveness through guided visualizations. The circles have included deep sharing that has helped me with my inquiry (see Chapter XII for more information about the circles). Sultan (2018) aptly describes this process of exploration as “a calling, a sort of invitation to enter the labyrinth³¹ and embrace the journey” (p. 11).

3. Incubation

Incubation is the process “in which the researcher retreats from the intense, concentrated focus on the [research] question (...) During this process, the researcher is no longer absorbed in the topic in any direct way (...) Nevertheless, growth is taking place” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 28).

Sultan (2018) calls it the “sleeping-on-it” phase (p. 96) and gives as an example the “tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon.” (p. 97). This is when we cannot consciously recall a name or word and let go of the search only to have it appear later when we are no longer trying to actively remember it. For me, the analogy

³¹ In a poetic synchronicity, Sultan (2018) uses the Chartres Labyrinth throughout her book as an analogy of the heuristic research process.

that *Incubation* conjured was the final *asana* (pose) of yoga sessions, *Savasana* or corpse pose, “a time of digestion, assimilation, and adaptation of all the information that [the] active practice has put into [the] body” (Creel, n.d.).

In the three years of self-inquiry, I have naturally taken breaks from thinking about the meaning of the apology ceremony. I think these breaks have been an essential part of my process and have allowed my intuition “to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 29). I see HI methodology as cyclical, and particularly the phases of *Immersion* and *Incubation* as complementary and ongoing. Clearly, there is always more to discover within ourselves. As Sultan (2018) writes, “throughout the course of the study, you go back and forth in a rhythmic dance between the processes of immersion and incubation, within and between a variety of contexts that nurtures the knowledge that is about to emerge” (p. 12).

4. *Illumination*

Sultan (2018) writes that *Illumination*

encourages the researcher’s continued immersion and focused attention, and may evoke ‘the opening of wounds and passionate concerns’ (Moustakas, 1990, p.14) as they pursue a creative, existential journey that, while it originates in the self, has the potential for both personal and communal transformation. Along similar lines, the heuristic approach demands engagement in external processes that involve dialoguing, interacting, and collaborating with others who have shared comparable or similar experiences toward jointly constructing new understanding of those experiences (pp. 12-13).

Illumination “involves exploring the subjective experience of a particular phenomenon within a purposive sample of individuals” (Sultan, 2018, p. 9). For this qualitative research phase, I was encouraged by Dr. Gyorgyi Szabo to select

and recruit three individuals (research partners) who participated in the Teotihuacán apology ceremony. I interviewed Will Taegel, who facilitated and grounded the apology, Carol Flake Chapman³², who was one of the North-American participants, and Alberto Hernández, another participant from Mexico. I could not interview Pedro Díaz, the Mexica dancer who received the apology, as “*he is a very private person*” (Alberto Hernández, p.c., 2020). I also conducted a self-interview with the same questions I used with the research partners.

The interviews were done via Zoom in the fall of 2020. All participants consented to be recorded, and none requested anonymity or confidentiality. Each interview lasted about one hour. There were 17 questions (The interviews protocols are included in the Appendices of this work).

Conducting the interviews was a very moving exercise. As proposed by Clements (2004) and Sultan (2018), before each interview, I meditated, prayed, created a small altar, and lit a candle. These practices helped create a coherent space for an open, heart-centered exchange. Four years had passed since the apology ceremony, but the memories and narratives of the research partners were vivid, emotional, and genuine. They certainly showed me that the experience in Teotihuacán had not only been profound for me but for many others (even beyond the research partners). As proposed in the Heuristic method, the interviews became a central part of the study, along with my reflections and the literature review.

³² Carol Flake Chapman, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American poet and journalist who was one of the founding editors of Vanity Fair. She has written for many notable newspapers and magazines, including The New Yorker, the New York Times, U.S. News & World Report, The New Republic, and the Boston Globe.

5. *Explication*

Moustakas (1990) describes a process of analysis for each research partner's data that mirrors the phases of HI: Gathering all the information, entering into "timeless" immersion with the material (including intuitive and contemplative processes), stepping away from the analysis, coming back with fresh eyes, and synthesizing the material. (p. 51).

For me, transcribing and analyzing the interviews was as profound an experience as conducting them. The process of transcription (and translation to English in the case of Hernández) became a sort of spiritual practice. In preparing to transcribe the text, I used the same techniques I utilized when writing and researching: gratitude, *Ho'oponopono*, and meditation. Listening to the voices of the research partners and their remarkable wisdom was inspiring and comforting. Transforming their words to text became a transcendent exercise.

Sultan (2018) writes that during *Explication*, "the researcher prepares an individual depiction of the core themes illuminated from each [research partner's] raw data to construct a holistic explanation that served to present the findings of the study" (p. 98). I spent many hours reading and rereading the interview transcripts as common topics started to arise. I began to comprehend the experience and impact of the apology from different angles, and at the same time, I could find a powerful coherence from each of the interviews. Once the themes emerged, I went back to the literature, as recommended by Sultan (2018), to compare the experiential evidence of the research partners with the scholastic,

contextual, and experiential published evidence. I expanded the original review to reveal commonalities and differences.

6. *Creative Synthesis*

The last phase of Heuristic Inquiry is the creative synthesis of the material, where “the various strands of the experience and the understanding the researcher has gleaned from the research process are integrated” (Sultan, 2018, p. 98). “Once the researcher has mastered knowledge of the material that illuminates and explicates the question, the researcher is challenged to put the components and core themes into a creative synthesis” (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 31-32).

Moustakas (1990) suggests that “a period of solitude and meditation focusing on the topic and question are the essential preparatory steps for the inspiration that eventually enables a creative synthesis” (p. 32). I was fortunate to spend a week on my own in a cabin in rural Northern Michigan (overlooking a magnificent lake) to revise the complete first draft of this dissertation and prepare for and develop the creative synthesis. Once again, I experienced this time as a spiritual retreat that allowed me to commune with and refine the material into its final form. I was blessed by the presence of a red-tailed hawk that regularly stood on a telephone pole a few yards from where I was working.³³

D. Validation

In Heuristic Inquiry, validation is integrated into the research methods. The researcher starts with an all-inclusive examination of his or her own

³³ Unusually close encounters with red-tailed hawks and red foxes in a nature preserve near my home in Massachusetts and elsewhere have been common during the writing of this dissertation.

subjective experience. Then, she or he compares it with the research partners' perceptions of their own experiences, methodically looking for commonalities and divergences. Next, the researcher goes back to the literature review, which provides a more objective framework to interpret the study results. The researcher keeps on going back to the question, "Does the ultimate depiction of the experience derived from one's own rigorous, exhaustive self-searching and from the explications of others present comprehensively, vividly, and accurately the meanings and essences of the experience?" (Moustakas, 1990, p. 32).

Organic Inquiry offers additional methods of validation, which I found especially relevant to my work. In particular, I adapted the concept of transformational validity, which relies on the emotional reactions of early readers of a work as confirming signals (Braud, 2004). Clements (2004) writes that "validity is measured by asking the question, 'Is this useful to me?'" (p. 43).

A study has transformative validity when it succeeds in affecting the individual reader through identification with and change of her or his prevailing story, probably in the areas of self, Spirit, and service. The responses of early readers (...) can give some indication of a study's potential transformative validity (Clements, 2004, p. 43).

In the case of my study, instead of using a group of early readers, I utilized people's emotional reactions after hearing the story of the apology in Teotihuacán. The apology circles I have facilitated have provided much information to include as transformational validity. Additionally, a video of my narration of the ceremony posted on YouTube in March 2020 has gathered 3500 views and more than 150 comments as of September 2021. I describe the validation process for this study in Chapter XII.

Chapter V: What is an Authentic Apology?

When reviewing the literature on apologies, a universal theme emerged: Not all apologies are the same. Moreover, there is consensus among experts that if apologies have any chance of succeeding, they need to be sincere and authentic. Thus, the question of what constitutes a genuine apology must be central to the study of the phenomenon. It became one of my support research questions.

Most researchers are less interested in a concise definition and more focused on the concrete steps necessary for an apology to be authentic, often in a specific order. (Many authors also spend significant time exploring what is *not* a genuine apology, which is basically not following the proposed steps).

The first known step-by-step codification of what could be considered an apology was written in the 12th century by the great Spanish Sephardic rabbi Maimonides³⁴. As part of his *magnus opus*, the *Mishneh Torah*, “a massive compendium of Jewish law, based on Biblical and Talmudic sources” (Abramson, 2017, p. 7), he wrote *Hilkhos Teshuvah*, often translated as The Ways or Laws of Repentance. The word *teshuvah* literally means “return” in Hebrew, denoting that those who practice it “have returned to the tradition of their forebears” (Danzig & Sands, 2007). Even though Maimonides does not use the word apology in his work, his description of the steps of *teshuvah* perfectly aligns with modern codifications of the act of apology. Most scholars agree that the essential steps of

³⁴ Moses ben Maimon (1138–1204), commonly known as Maimonides, was a medieval Spanish Sephardic Jewish philosopher who became one of the most prolific and influential Torah scholars of the Middle Ages.

teshuvah are: recognition of one's sins as sins, remorse, desisting from sin, restitution where possible, and confession (Blumenthal, 1998).

There are dozens of modern books and articles that codify apology in a similar step-by-step fashion, sometimes with some added elements. After analyzing the available literature, I developed a chart (see Table 1) that helped me determine what most authors think are the critical elements of an authentic apology. I am obviously not including every author who has written about the subject. My review achieved saturation at some point: After adding 18 books and articles, I found no additional writings that contributed new elements to the process. In addition to codifying the steps with a high degree of agreement, I also explored other unique aspects proposed by some authors.

A. Fundamental Elements of an Authentic Apology

My review of the literature determined that there are five steps that most authors consider fundamental for an apology to be authentic:

1. Acknowledgment of harm
2. Expression of remorse, regret, or repentance
3. Acceptance of full responsibility
4. Commitment to change and to act differently in the future
5. Compensation or reparation

I will explore each element in detail and discuss how my apology in Teotihuacán aligns with it.

Table 1 – Comparison of Fundamental Steps of Apologies

SOURCES	ELEMENTS OF APOLOGY	Self-Reflection	Acknowledgment of Harm	Expression of Remorse, Regret, or Repentance	Acceptance of Full Responsibility	Commitment to Change and to Act Differently in the Future	Compensation of Reparation	Request for Forgiveness	Offering an Explanation	Renew or Release the Relationship
AA Steps (1976)		X	X				X			
Battistella (2014)			X	X		X	X			
Chapman (2008)			X	X	X		X	X		
Cohen (2017)			X	X	X					
Engel (2001)				X	X		X			
Engert (2016)			X	X		X	X			
Ensler (2019)		X	X	X	X	X	X			
Howes (2020)		X	X	X		X	X			
Irani (2006)			X				X			
Kador (2009)			X	X	X	X	X			
Lazare (2005)			X				X		X	
Lewicki (2016)			X	X	X		X	X	X	
Maimonides (Rye, 2000)			X	X		X	X	X		
Mingus (2019)		X	X	X		X	X			
Tavuchis (1991)			X	X						
Tutu & Tutu (2014)			X	X				X		X
Weyeneth (2001)			X	X						
Wohl et al. (2011)			X	X			X			

1. Acknowledgment of Harm

It seems logical that almost every author who has methodized the apology process considers naming the trespass the first step. “Recognition – acknowledging the offense- is the first dimension of apology” (Kador, 2009, p. 49). Many authors use the word *acknowledgment*, followed by various terms, such as *offense* (Lazare, 2005), *responsibility* (Lewicki et al., 2016), *wrong* (Weyeneth, 2001), *sin* (Maimonides translated and interpreted by Abramson, 2017, p. 44), or *the rule of conduct that was violated* (Battistella, 2014). Some others use variations, like *naming the hurt* (Mingus, 2019), *identifying the transgression* (Cohen, 2017; Tavuchis, 1991), or *admitting wrongs* (Tutu & Tutu, 2014). The last description echoes the language of the fifth step of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which requires admitting “to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs” (Wilson, 1976, p. 55).³⁵

Eve Ensler³⁶ (2019a), who wrote an extensive apology from her deceased father’s perspective for the horrific abuse he perpetrated on her, concluded that “there is no apology without meticulous accounting” of the harm (p. 45). She has said that:

Details are critical because liberation only comes through the details. Your accounting cannot be vague. “I hurt you,” or “I’m sorry,” or “I’m sorry if I sexually abused you” just doesn’t do it. Those words don’t mean anything. One must say what actually happened. “Then I grabbed you by your hair, and I beat your head over and over against the wall” (Ensler, 2019b).

³⁵ The 12-steps of AA are not an apology per se but a widely used method of recovery from addiction. I included it here because some of the steps parallel the essential stages of apology, and “making amends” is at the heart of such recovery.

³⁶ Eve Ensler (1953-) is an American playwright, performer, and activist on behalf of women’s rights. She is the author of *The Vagina Monologues* and *The Apology*.

Many authors agree with Ensler that apologies often fail because of vague or in-existent descriptions of the offenses and the damage inflicted (Howes, 2020; Lazare, 2005).

Ensler (2019b) is one of the few authors who explicitly spells out a stage that needs to precede acknowledgment of harm, which is “willingness to self-interrogate, to delve into the origins of your being.” Molly Howes³⁷ (2020) considers understanding the other person's injury and the effects of the trespass an essential step of apology. Similarly, the field of Transformative Justice sees self-reflection as a necessary part of accountability (Mingus, 2019). This is comparable to the fourth step of Alcoholics Anonymous, which involves making “a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves” (Wilson, 1976, p. 42). It makes sense that before acknowledging the wrongs we have done to someone else, we should embark on a profound, internal reckoning.

Since AA is originally based on Christian theology (Kurtz, 2010), it is not surprising that many of the steps echo biblical passages. In the case of the fifth step, the connection with James 5:16 is obvious: “Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed” (*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 2007). One could conclude that the religious concept of confession is the same as acknowledging harm in the apology process; however, confession is often directed to a third party, not necessarily to the harmed person or group. In various Christian traditions, confession could be

³⁷ Molly Howes, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American clinical psychologist and writer. Following a Clinical Fellowship at Harvard Medical School, she completed her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from Florida State University and a Postdoctoral Fellowship at Harvard Community Health Plan.

made directly and privately to God or confidentially to a priest (Engert, 2014). Even though confession has value in helping the offender come to terms with the offense, it is different from what most authors consider acknowledging of harm, which, if possible, should be directed to the person or group who has been harmed either privately or publicly.

Maimonides actually separates the stage of admitting wrongs into two different steps. The first one involves acknowledgment that one has done something wrong (which could be interpreted as an internal action). The second, a “public confession of one’s wrongdoing to both God and the community,” presumably including the victim of the trespass (Rye et al., 2000).

In my apology in Teotihuacán, I acknowledged some of the harm my people caused by saying, “*My ancestors were welcomed on this land. And we paid you back for your generosity by killing your men, raping your women, and slaving your children. We tortured, we mutilated, we tried to destroy your culture.*”

2. Expression of Remorse, Regret, or Repentance

Many authors consider that emotional manifestations that demonstrate shame or guilt for the wrongdoing and/or empathy or compassion for the victim are vital to the apology process. There are various ways to describe this step, including *expressing regret* (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Engel, 2002; Howes, 2020; Lewicki et al., 2016; Weyeneth, 2001); *feeling remorse* (Friedman, 2006; Kador, 2009; Lazare, 2005); and *repenting* (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Lewicki et al., 2016).

Even though some authors use regret and remorse as synonyms, John Kador³⁸ (2009) makes a clear distinction between the two: “Remorse is concerned with right versus wrong *action*. Regret is concerned with good versus bad *consequences*” (p. 86). I agree with Kador that public apologies often fail because they focus on his definition of regret. People often express distress not about what they did but about having been caught doing it. A genuine apology requires true remorse, which Kador (2009) defines as “the feeling that we get when we realize that something we did hurt someone and was wrong, and we wish we could undo what we did” (p. 110).

I think that the emphasis on *feeling* is essential in this step. A genuine apology is not only about words, thoughts, and even action but also about deep feelings. Most authors connect authentic apologies with feelings of guilt and shame³⁹ (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Howes, 2020) and the development of compassion (Taegel, 2019) and empathy (Howes, 2020). Desmond Tutu⁴⁰ and

³⁸ John Kador (1950-) is an American author and journalist focused on business leadership, finance, careers, and business. He’s the author or co-author of over 25 books.

³⁹ Howes (2020) provides an excellent explanation of the difference between shame and guilt: “Many psychologists make a fundamental distinction between guilt, which is feeling bad about something you’ve done, and shame, which is feeling bad about who you are. The two arise along distinct developmental paths and can lead to quite different outcomes. Shame tends to motivate people to hide, escape, deny, or sometimes blame another person. According to bestselling author and research professor Brené Brown shame correlates positively with many serious mental health and social disorders, whereas guilt is inversely related to the same problems. Shame, that most wasteful of emotions, rarely leads to effective repairs, whereas guilt can lead to genuine accountability” (p. 76). At least one scholastic study found that “guilt (but not shame) and empathy emerged as predictors of apology” (see Howell, A. J., Turowski, J. B., & Buro, K. (2012). Guilt, empathy, and apology. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 53(7), 917-922).

⁴⁰ Rev. Desmond Mpilo Tutu (1931-) is a South African Anglican cleric and theologian known as an anti-apartheid and human rights activist. He was the first Black Archbishop of Cape Town, led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after apartheid, and won the Peace Nobel Prize in 1984.

Mpho Tutu⁴¹ (2014) write about the need for the offenders to witness the anguish of the victims to fully absorb the impact of their actions. And Nick Smith⁴² adds that sometimes it is crucial that transgressors “look the victims in the eye” to “see and feel the damage they have caused” (Cohen, 2017). This is an integral part of the Truth and Reconciliation processes that Rev. Tutu helped design in South Africa, as well as of Restorative and Transformative Justice processes (Avruch & Vejarano, 2001; Umbreit et al., 2007). Ensler (2019b) emphasizes the emotional reckoning that has to be at the center of a genuine apology. She describes this process as

opening your heart and being, and allowing yourself to feel what your victim felt as you were abusing her, allowing your heart to break, allowing yourself to feel the nightmare that got created inside her, and the betrayal and the horror, and then allowing yourself to see and feel and know the long-term impact of your violation.

Even before reading this expressive description by Ensler, I concluded from my personal experience in Teotihuacán that sorrow and grief have to be at the center of a genuine apology. Interestingly, only a few authors identify specifically the feelings of grief and sorrow as part of the apology process (Páez, 2010; Schmidt, 2010). A notable exception is Nicholas Tavuchis⁴³ (1991), who wrote one of the first modern scholarly books on apology. He mentions sorrow multiple times, considering it “the centerpiece” of an apology (p. 23). From a

⁴¹ Rev. Mpho Andrea Tutu van Furth (1963-) is a South African pastor, author, and activist. She was the founding director of the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation and served as executive director from 2011 to 2016.

⁴² Nick Smith, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American assistant professor of philosophy at the University of New Hampshire. He specializes in the philosophy of Law, Politics, and Society and he writes on and teaches aesthetics.

⁴³ Nicholas Tavuchis, Ph.D., (1934-2015) was an American scholar and teacher. He lectured on Sociology at Cornell University and at the University of Manitoba.

Christian perspective, Stefan Engert⁴⁴ (2014) writes that during contrition, “the process of honest soul-searching and a deep-seated, heartfelt sorrow for one’s former misdeeds is an essential component in the quest for absolution” (p. 98).

Some other scholars have identified the role of sorrow both in interpersonal and intergroup apologies. In the first category, Stephen Fife⁴⁵ and colleagues (2013) found that “if sincerely offered, an apology by unfaithful partners that includes an expression of sorrow and emotional distress over their damaging actions is likely to invite softening and increased empathy from the betrayed spouse” (p. 359). In the second category, Elazar Barkan⁴⁶ and Alexander Karn⁴⁷ (2006) write, “While trauma may diminish the ability of victims to hear an apology in its fullness, a potential for reconciliation still exists as long as adversaries can manage to communicate their sorrow and remorse effectively” (p. 14). They add, “apology often can help to move along the process of mourning where other vocabularies and discourses encounter resistance” (p. 27).

Of course, the words “I’m sorry” are universally recognized as part of an apology in the English language. Most of us use this expression regularly without thinking about its original meaning. In fact, the word “sorry” comes from the old English word “*sarig*,” which means “distressed, grieved, full of sorrow” (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.-a). Similarly, one of the expressions used in Spanish to apologize is “*lo lamento*” (I lament it). The French say, “*je suis désolé*” (I am

⁴⁴ Stefan Engert, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a visiting lecturer at the University of Potsdam.

⁴⁵ Stephen Fife, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Assistant Professor and Doctoral Program Director at Texas Tech University.

⁴⁶ Elazar Barkan, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of History and Cultural Studies at Claremont Graduate University.

⁴⁷ Alexander Karn, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Associate Professor of History at Colgate University. He lectures on history, international relations, peace and conflict studies.

desolated). From an etymological perspective, some of the words we use to apologize are deeply rooted in sorrow and grief.⁴⁸

When I first wrote about my experience in Teotihuacán, I stated that what moved me to pursue the apology was emotional and cognitive dissonance. As I have delved into self-reflection, it has become clear that the prevailing emotion was grief (see Chapter XI). In fact, I did identify such feelings during the actual apology: *“I come with great humility to tell you how sorry I am for what happened. It deeply pains me to see the hurt and suffering caused by my people.”*

My experience is not unlike the story of filmmaker Katrina Browne⁴⁹. She created the powerful documentary *Traces of the Trade* (2008) after discovering that her New England descendants were deeply involved in buying and selling enslaved African people. In the movie, Browne states that after unearthing the family secret, she was moved to learn more about it and pursue healing not by guilt but by deep grief (Howes, 2020).

3. Acceptance of Full Responsibility

Kador (2009) believes that “the key to effective apology is taking responsibility for the consequences of your behavior” (p. 73). Most authors agree that this is an essential step in the process of apology (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Cohen, 2017; Engel, 2002; Ensler, 2019b; Lewicki et al., 2016).

⁴⁸ In English, we also use “I’m sorry” to express empathy, even when we are not apologizing (e.g., “I’m sorry for your loss”). This echoes the common expression in Spanish, “*lo siento*” (I feel it).

⁴⁹ Katrina Browne (dob unknown) is an American film producer and director. Her film, *Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North*, follows her and nine fellow descendants as they retrace the Triangle Trade, from New England, to Ghana, to Cuba, uncovering the vast extent of the North’s complicity in slavery, and grappling with questions of repair in the present day.

When dealing with a historical apology –such as the one in Teotihuacán– many people (and authors) are challenged by the concept of taking responsibility for something one’s ancestors did. There has been an ongoing philosophical debate about this issue since the end of the Nazi holocaust. The discussion also has political implications since it is often connected with the issue of reparations for atrocities that a country or government has perpetrated (I address reparations in a section below) (Marsoobian, 2009). Some scholars are unequivocal about their opinion:

Since present day U.S. citizens were not complicit in the crime of slavery [the] claim [that the US government bears any responsibility] can only be based on the morally repugnant idea that individuals can be burdened with the duties that other people incurred (Boxill, 2003, p. 71).

Other authors firmly believe that we are morally responsible “for the crimes of our ancestors if our ancestors, as a collectivity, were part of a community for whose sake and in whose name crimes were committed” (Marsoobian, 2009, p. 211).

Aaron Lazare⁵⁰ (2005) presents an interesting rationale in favor of assuming responsibility for ancestors, social groups, whole countries, and even sports teams:

Just as people take pride in things for which they had no responsibility (such as famous ancestors, national championships of their sports teams, and great accomplishments of their nation), so, too, must these people accept the shame (but not guilt) of their family, their athletic teams, and their nations. Accepting national pride must include willingness to accept national shame when one’s country has not measured up to reasonable standards (. . .). This accountability is what we mean when we speak of

⁵⁰ Aaron Lazare, M.D., (1935-2015), was Chancellor, Dean, and Professor of Psychiatry, at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

having a national identity, or a sense of national belonging, or a national soul (p. 41).

Howes (2020) agrees with Lazare's concept but distinguishes between accepting shame and assuming responsibility. "On larger scales, where your individual actions rarely seem connected to major negative outcomes, a crucial distinction exists between accepting blame for harmful actions and taking responsibility for addressing harm or its downstream effects" (p. 140).

Tutu and Tutu (2014) offer a different, equally engaging argument:

There are times when we truly did nothing as when a stranger robs us, but even then, we had a role in permitting or participating in a society where such desperation exists (...). Each of us does have a role in the society we have created. We can take responsibility for our part in a way that frees us from being a victim and allows us to open our hearts (...). *Ubuntu* says that we all have a part in creating a society that created a perpetrator. Therefore, I have a part not only in every conflict I may find myself in personally but in every conflict happening right now in my family, my community, and around the globe (pp. 150-151).

A powerful example of this concept comes from Azim Khamisa⁵¹ (2012), whose teenage son was murdered by a 14-year old gang member in San Diego, California. He did not only forgive the perpetrator but assumed responsibility for having created a society that allows "children to kill children" (p. xix).

Hishori Motoyama⁵² (2009) adds a spiritual Shinto perspective to the debate:

In this modern scientific age, it is very difficult for people to accept the fact that they are responsible to their ancestors, that they are actually liable

⁵¹ Azim Khamisa (1959-) is a Kenyan-American author and activist. He was the Chairman, CEO, and Founder of the Tariq Khamisa Foundation and Founder and National Director of the Constant And Never Ending Improvement program.

⁵² Hishori Motoyama, Ph.D., (1925–2015) was a Japanese parapsychologist, spiritual instructor, and author. His primary topic was spiritual self-cultivation and the relationship between the mind and body. He was the Head Priest of the Shinto Tamamitsu sect of Japan.

for the actions of their ancestors if the resulting karma has not yet been dissolved. Many find it absurd to think that the actions of an unknown ancestor could possibly have anything to do with what is happening to them today. But time and again, when investigating someone's karma, I find problems that stretch back generations (p. 52).

The practice of *Ho'oponopono* is, at its core, a ritual that achieves spiritual healing and clearing by practicing taking full responsibility for our actions and the acts of our families, relatives, and ancestors (Siemona, 1980). This practice became a significant inspiration on how to offer the apology in Teotihuacán. There was never a doubt in my mind that I needed to take complete responsibility for the atrocities that the Spanish committed in Mexico. Doing so was a powerful exercise in humility and strength (see Chapter X), and it resulted in unexpected healing for me and others (see Chapter XI).

4. Commitment to Change and to Act Differently in the Future

Another critical step of the apology process identified by some authors is committing to change the offensive behavior, including a convincing plan on how the change will be achieved and, of course, following through with the plan (Howes, 2020; Kador, 2009; Mingus, 2019).

In the field where I work, preventing domestic violence, there is a lot of skepticism about the process of apology, mainly because of this step. Abusive partners often apologize for their destructive behavior, sometimes acknowledging some of the harm, expressing remorse or regret, and taking some degree of responsibility. But most of the time, they go back to behaving abusively,

rendering the apologies worthless. Leonore Walker⁵³ proposed that there is, in fact, an ongoing, cyclical nature to this phenomenon, which she called the cycle of violence (Walker, 2009). She wrote that there are at least three stages of this cycle: the tension-building phase, the acute battering incident, and the honeymoon phase (Wilson, 2019). Apologies often happen in the latter stage, with promises that the behavior won't happen again.

Walker's framework has been critiqued for not being universal (Dutton, 2009). Yet, my personal experience working with abusive partners confirmed that the cycle of violence is fairly common and that apologies become meaningless if there is no behavior change. What usually is missing is a realistic plan (or any plan) to tackle the conduct modification. Personal transformation is complex, and it doesn't happen automatically; it requires effort and, often, outside help in the form of therapy or a support and accountability mechanism (such as an Alcoholics Anonymous group) (Mingus, 2019).

Some authors identify two different, related steps concerning behavior change. The first one is a verbalized commitment or promise to change, which usually happens at the time of the apology (Lazare, 2005). The second one is the actual demonstration that the offenders have “undergone a deep and profound experience that has changed [them] and made it impossible for [them] to ever repeat [their] behavior” (Ensler, 2019b). This step is obviously part of a long-term process of healing after the apology.

⁵³ Lenore Edna Walker, Ed.D., (1942-) is an American psychologist who founded the Domestic Violence Institute, documented the cycle of abuse and wrote the classic book *The Battered Woman*.

Interestingly, Maimonides, as part of his steps for *teshuvah*, identified three different actions related to behavior change: A public announcement of the offender's resolve not to repeat the sin again, avoidance of the conditions that caused the offense in the first place, and acting differently when confronted with the same situation (Rye et al., 2000).

In the context of my apology in Teotihuacán, it didn't make sense to commit to change my behavior as I did not personally perpetrate the atrocities for which I apologized. However, in the ceremony's aftermath, I realized how much I had learned to dehumanize Mexican Indigenous people (see Chapter VII). I made a personal commitment to change that behavior. I elaborate on this process in Chapter X.

5. Compensation or Reparation

There is a strong consensus among experts that apologies should be accompanied by compensation to the victim of the offense. Authors frame it as *reparation* (Howes, 2020; Lazare, 2005; Lewicki et al., 2016; Mingus, 2019), *restitution* (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Kador, 2009), *remedy* (Engel, 2002), and *making amends* (Abramson, 2017; Bioneers, 2019; Wilson, 1976).

Restitution is often interpreted as financial compensation, which introduces the complex question of how much reparation is worth in dollars and cents. This question can be more easily answered when the offense is relatively small, such as replacing or repairing property that has been damaged. It becomes much more difficult to answer when the trespasses involve serious harm to people

or nations, as is the case with domestic and sexual violence, war, and genocide, to give some micro and macro examples.

For instance, there is an ongoing, robust debate on whether financial reparations should be offered to descendants of Africans who were slaved in the United States (regardless of whether the compensation is accompanied by an apology or not). I support reparations for slavery (as well as other human rights violations), and I also agree with some authors in recognizing that if reparations are offered, there would be many complex questions, such as, “To who are reparations owed? How should the damage and suffering be measured? What would count as adequate reparations? And how could reparations change the social conditions that perpetuated the offense?” (Lazare, 2005, p. 132).

I had to grapple with some of these questions in the aftermath of my apology in Teotihuacán. As an individual, how could I ever offer any kind of restitution commensurate to the harm my people caused in Mexico? The simple answer is that I cannot, and in truth, it is not my individual responsibility to do so.⁵⁴ However, I still felt that it was imperative to complete some version of this step, even symbolically. The opportunity arose when some leaders of the EarthTribe decided to organize a fundraiser to help the Mexica dancers buy a new vehicle and replace some of their ritual vestments. I contributed a significant

⁵⁴ The current president of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has requested an apology and reparations from the Spanish government for the conquest of Mexico, which were recently denied (see Minder, R., & Malkin, E. (2019). Mexican Call for Conquest Apology Ruffles Feathers in Spain. And Mexico. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/27/world/americas/mexico-spain-apology.html>).

amount (proportionate to my means) and saw this act as a symbolic contribution to promote the culture and practices that my people tried to eradicate.

Will Taegel (personal communication, 2019) has suggested that my recounting the story of the Teotihuacán apology (in apology circles, public videos, personal communications, and in this dissertation) is in and of itself a form of reparation. He considers it an *apologia* in the word's original sense: A defense of oneself or others (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a). In telling my story, I am defending the Mexicas' ontology -their way of being in the world- and sharing how it helped me connect with my humanity. And I am inviting other colonizers to do the same.

Other scholars concur that reparations are not only financial or material.⁵⁵ In fact, according to Kador (2009), regardless of quantifiable compensation, “victims look for the restitution dimension of the apology [among other things] to be made whole insofar as that is possible” (p. 131). Obviously, to be made whole emotionally and spiritually is more complicated than materially (and the latter is often a proxy for the former). Every injured person wants healing, closure, and the opportunity to go on with their lives. Ultimately, victims need to take charge of their recovery, but offenders can be part of emotional and spiritual reparation by genuinely listening and understanding what the victim needs and wants. Every victim's requests will be different, but they often want some or all the steps described in this chapter; in some cases, they also long to be heard by the offender

⁵⁵ The results of one experimental study of victim group reactions “do not support [other researcher's] contention that an apology for a historical injustice will be deemed inadequate if it fails to include financial compensation” (see Blatz, C. W., Schumann, K., & Ross, M. (2009). Government apologies for historical injustices. *Political Psychology*, 30(2), 219-241).

and others. For instance, the voices of the victims of atrocities are at the center of Restorative and Transformative Justice practices and Truth and Reconciliation procedures. For many practitioners, that is considered a crucial part of their healing process (Androff, 2012; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2008; Umbreit et al., 2007).

Interestingly, only a few experts on apology discuss deep, non-defensive listening to the victim as a form of emotional and spiritual reparation, even though the literature on forgiveness emphasizes being listened to as central to the healing of the forgiver (Cherry, 2012; Tutu & Tutu, 2014). One notable exception is Harriet Lerner⁵⁶ (2017), who believes that “non-defensive listening is at the heart of offering a sincere apology” (p. 48). She adds, “there is no greater challenge than that of listening without defensiveness, especially when we don’t want to hear what the other person is telling us” (p. 47).

One of the most moving examples of non-material reparation comes from the records of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, as related by Ellaine Prevallet⁵⁷ (2005):

An elderly black woman faced several white security officers, one of whom, Mr. Van de Broek, had just confessed to the brutal murders of both the woman’s son and her husband a few years before (...) A member of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had turned to her asked, “What do you want? How should justice be done to this man who has so brutally destroyed your family?” She replied, “I want three things. I want first to be taken to the place where my husband’s body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial.”

⁵⁶ Harriet Lerner, Ph.D., (1944-) is an American psychologist and author known for her work on women and family relationships. She served as a staff psychologist at the Menninger Clinic for several decades.

⁵⁷ Sister Elaine M. Prevallet (1957-) is an American author and retreat director with the Sisters of Loretto in Kentucky.

She paused, then continued: “My husband and son were my only family. I want, secondly, therefore, for Mr. Van de Broek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out to him whatever love I have still remaining with me. And finally, I want a third thing. I would like Mr. Van de Broek to know that I offer him my forgiveness (...). And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and let me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr. Van de Broek in my arms, embrace him, and let him know that he’s truly forgiven.”

As the court assistants came to lead the elderly woman across the room Mr. Van de Broek, overwhelmed by what he had just heard, fainted. As he did, those in the courtroom –friends, family, neighbors... all victims of decades of oppression and injustice- began to sing, softly, but assuredly, “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me” (pp. 67-68).

B. Additional Elements of Authentic Apologies

1. Request for Forgiveness

There are several other elements of authentic apologies mentioned by some sources without broad consensus on their importance. The most prominent is whether an apology should include a request for forgiveness. Maimonides added this step in his *Hilkhot Teshuvah* and framed it as a “sincere request of forgiveness from the victim” (Rye et al., 2000). Many contemporary authors agree with Maimonides (Chapman & Thomas, 2008; Lewicki et al., 2016; Taegel, 2019). Tutu and Tutu (2014) write:

We often wonder if it is selfish to ask for forgiveness. Are we asking to be let off the hook, to not pay our debts to society, or to not be held accountable for our actions? It is not selfish to ask for forgiveness, and in truth it is the highest form of accountability. By asking for forgiveness, we are committing ourselves to the possibility of change. We are signing up for the hard work of transformation (p. 182).

On the opposite end, Lerner (2017) opines that “a true apology does not ask the other person to do anything—not even to forgive” (p. 129). She believes

that a request for forgiveness can muddle the message of a genuine apology.

Kador (2009) concurs and writes that asking for forgiveness should not be part of an apology, at least not at the beginning.

I think that there is no harm in asking for forgiveness during an apology, as long as there is no expectation that it will be granted. For me, it is a manifestation of humility. During my apology in Teotihuacán, it felt natural to ask for forgiveness without expecting to receive it (in fact, I did not wish to receive anything). I ended the whole apology by kneeling and saying: *Humbly, I ask you for your forgiveness, even if it is a small gesture compared to the enormity of the mayhem that took place here.* It proved to be a powerful gesture.

Lazare (2005) writes that requesting forgiveness, in fact, creates an exchange of humiliation and power:

The offenders initially humiliate the victims and render them powerless to avoid humiliation. The apology process reverses the situation by transferring the humiliation from the victims to the offenders, who then become (...) the immoral ones. Originally having had the power to hurt, the offender now gives the power to forgive or not to forgive to the offended party. This exchange of humiliation and power between the offender and the offended may be the clearest way of explaining how some apologies heal by restoring dignity and self-respect (p. 52).

2. Offering an Explanation

Another debated element of apology is whether an explanation of the misbehavior should be part of an apology. Many authors do not include an explanation as a step in the apology process. Others see it as very important for victims (Ensler, 2019b; Lewicki et al., 2016). Lazare (2005) writes, “offended parties often regard an apology as unsatisfactory if it does not include an explanation. They view the explanation as part of the debt owed to them” (p.

119). Yet, a few others see explanations as not useful (Kador, 2009) and even detrimental. Carter⁵⁸ (2015) opines that “trying to explain away our actions can seem like we’re being defensive, or making excuses.”

In this case, I agree with the authors who think an explanation is not necessary and may get in the way of taking full responsibility. I did not include an explanation in my apology to the Mexica dancers.

3. Renewing or Releasing the Relationship

Most authors see apologies as a way to heal relationships (interpersonal and intergroup) that have been damaged by harm. Still, Tutu and Tutu (2014) believe that a crucial element of apology (and forgiveness) is the decision by the victim to either renew or release the relationship. They write:

Sometimes you cannot create something new from the wreckage of the past, but we still must move forward into the possibilities of the future. None of us can force a relationship. If the person you have harmed chooses not to have a relationship with you, that is the person’s choice (...). You must honor that person’s decision to release you and the relationship (p. 188).

C. Ceremonial and Ritual Apologies

My search of the literature for apologies as part of a ceremony or ritual yielded relatively few results, especially in the context of spirituality. Ritual and ceremony are mentioned by a few sources as secular events. For instance, Gibney⁵⁹ and Roxtrom⁶⁰ (2001) suggest a list of standards for successful political

⁵⁸ Christine Carter, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American scholar and a Senior Fellow at the Greater Good Science Center.

⁵⁹ Mark Gibney, J.D., Ph.D. (dob unknown) is an American scholar. He is a professor at the University of North Carolina Asheville and an affiliated professor at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute in Lund, Sweden.

apologies that includes “ceremonial character.” Celermajer⁶¹ (2006) writes that “the apology movement is a gesture toward finding rituals or institutions which can pick up that aspect of responsibility for systematic political violations that the collective does” (p. 179). And Tavuchis (1991) adds that genuine apologies “may be taken as symbolic foci of secular (...) rituals” (p. 13).

Kampf⁶² and Löwenheim⁶³ (2012) explain the concept of secular ritual as follows:

The moment of apology may be understood as a ritual, in that it contains repetitive patterns (...). Patterns include fixed social roles for the participants as "offender" and "offended" parties (...). Other ritualistic patterns of apologies include a speech act or gesture, reflecting and reconstructing political perceptions and relationships. The elements of rituals -- the vividness of the symbolic gestures, and the emotional response to these symbols -- play a key role in what makes a ritual effective. Lastly, ritual has a formal quality, as it follows highly structured, standardized sequences and is often enacted at certain places and times that are themselves endowed with special symbolic meaning (p. 7).

1. Sacred Ceremonies and Rituals

Spiritual or sacred rituals and ceremonies contain some of the elements spelled out by Kampf and Löwenheim, particularly repetitive patterns, symbolic speech and gestures, and often, standardized sequences. In my opinion, a primary difference between secular and sacred rituals and ceremonies is that in the former,

⁶⁰ Erik Roxtrom, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a lecturer in law at the Bergen School of Law.

⁶¹ Danielle Celermajer, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Sydney and an executive member of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights.

⁶² Zohar Kampf, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an Israeli scholar. He is an associate professor of Language and Communication and Vice-Dean for Teaching Affairs in the Faculty of Social Sciences, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

⁶³ Nava Löwenheim, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an Israeli researcher at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

these elements are considered “symbolic” (Tavuchis, 1991). In contrast, in the latter, they are seen as literal ways to invite the mystical realm (e.g., God, angels, guides, ancestors) to be part of the healing process (Mokgobi, 2014; Somé, 1997).

The Native-American scholar Rebecca Tsosie⁶⁴ (2006) writes, referring to ancestral apologies,

I would like to suggest that the process of healing from historic trauma has intangible and tangible components. The emotional and spiritual (intangible) components of healing must be experienced for the healing to be complete. In that sense, even material (tangible) reparations made to a group without the necessary spiritual and emotional components would be insufficient to heal the wounds (p. 199).

Renee Kemp⁶⁵ (1995) offers an example of a powerful sacred apology ceremony she witnessed in West Africa.

When tribal leaders from various chiefdoms across Ghana performed a traditional ceremony of atonement for their role in the slave trade, they asked first for forgiveness for the horrors of slavery and their complicity in them. After chanting, ceremonial dancing and the rhythmic beating of drums⁶⁶, they marched through the streets of Accra, wearing the red and black robes of mourning, then shed those robes to reveal robes of white underneath. These simple acts of contrition were designed to represent a new beginning, while acknowledging the horrors of slavery and the webs of complicity that supported the practice in all their complexity.

Most religions and wisdom traditions have codified spiritual rituals and ceremonies designed to achieve healing and forgiveness in the community. The word apology may not be often used, but the processes and steps utilized are similar to those described earlier in this chapter. They are often described as ceremonies of atonement, contrition, repentance, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

⁶⁴ Rebecca Tsosie, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a Regents Professor at the James E. Rogers College of Law at the University of Arizona.

⁶⁵ Renee Kemp (dob unknown) is an American Emmy Award-winning reporter with special emphasis and experience in enterprise reporting and international assignments.

⁶⁶ Note the similarities between this ritual and the ceremony in Teotihuacán.

The rituals may include prayer, self-reflection (in the form of contemplation or meditation), confession, purification (sometimes by fasting), chanting, and sometimes dancing and drumming as was the case in the ceremony in Ghana described above and the one in Teotihuacán.

George Irani⁶⁷ (2006) offers examples of ceremonies and rituals from the Arab Muslim tradition: *sulh* (settlement) and *musalaha* (reconciliation):

The process of *sulh* consists of three stages. In the initial stage, respected mediators (*muslihs*) are selected by the families of the victim and the victimizer. The goal is to acknowledge that a crime was committed. The second stage is that of the *musalaha* itself, which is characterized by a pardon and settlement between the parties. The key here is that the parties' honor and dignity have been restored and upheld. The final stage is a public ritual that brings together the community as the main guarantor of the forgiveness reached between the disputants (p. 132-133).

Most Christian denominations have rituals of contrition. They are based on the theological concept that “confessing one’s sins enables the faithful to obtain divine mercy as well as spiritual and psychological relief from having failed to live up to God’s expectations and having violated the ethical codes that regulate social life” (Engert, 2014, p. 97). The three essential ritual elements of contrition are parallel (but not exactly the same) to some steps of apology: *Contritio cordis* (true and honest remorse), *Confessio oris* (audible confession of sins), and *Satisfactio operis* (penance) (Engert, 2014).

In Judaism, *Yom Kippur* comes at the end of a forty-day period that “encompasses the penitential month of *Elul* and the Ten Days of Repentance.” During this most sacred day of the year, observant Jews ritually abstain from

⁶⁷ George Irani, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Professor of Conflict Analysis and Management at Royal Roads University.

“eating, drinking, and other physical pleasures” and practice “communal confession and individual petitions for forgiveness” as they strive “for a rapprochement with the Almighty” (Goodman, 2018, p. 1).

In Chinese Buddhism, “sincere remorse is also called for in the process of repentance, which is a way to cleanse negative karma and purify one’s mind (...) After remorse for past wrongdoing, Chinese Buddhists must change their future behavior” (Howes, 2020) (p. 64). Jack Kornfield⁶⁸ (2009) describes one particular ritual of atonement:

Twice a month, at the full and new moon, the monks and nuns of the [Jalini] forest monastery seek release from the past misconduct through formal practices of confession. They ritually gather together under the canopy of trees to confess their mistakes, seek understanding and ask for forgiveness. Each confession ends with a commitment to start anew (p. 340).

Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu’s *The Book of Forgiveness* (2014) is unique among the literature I reviewed. It is not an academic book but rather a manual on how to forgive and apologize, deeply rooted in experience and spirituality. They include prayer, meditation, and ritual in each chapter, powerfully modeling the importance of such practices. I listened to the work as an audiobook and hearing Mpho Tutu pray and lead the meditation and rituals often transported me to a deeper level of communion with their ideas.

Another experiential source of ceremonial apologizing is the series of apologies that Will Taegel (2019) led as part of the Earth Citizen Meditations, broadcasted via video-conferencing. During these ceremonies, he was very

⁶⁸ Jack Kornfield (1945-) is an American author and teacher in the vipassana meditation movement in American Theravada Buddhism. He is one of the founders of the Insight Meditation Society.

intentional in including prayer, chanting, smudging, calling directions and ancestors, and meditating. He also identified additional steps in the apology process, namely self-forgiveness, gratitude for the situation and the healing, and the immersion in the “Circle of One,” which involves accepting union with all sentient beings.

2. Establishing Coherence

Taegel (2019) talks about the imperative of establishing coherence as the first step of an apology. In physics, coherence is created when energy waves have the same phase difference, wavelength, and

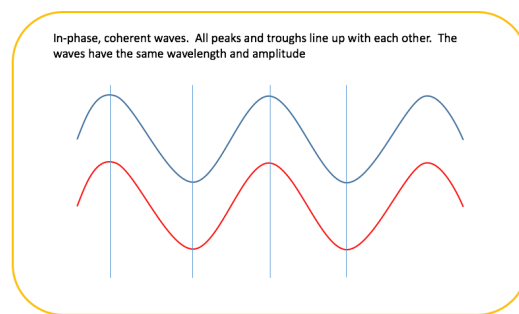


Figure 11 - Coherence

frequency, in other words, when they move exactly in parallel paths (see Figure 11). The word coherence is used in many different fields (logic, mathematics, literature, music) to denote the quality of forming a logical, consistent, and unified whole (Vilhena, 2019).

It has a similar meaning in the spiritual realm. Thomas Hübl⁶⁹ (2020) considers coherence essential in the process of community trauma integration he has developed. He sees it as a practice of alignment with other humans, as well as with Spirit (p. 199). Taegel (2019) includes all sentient beings in his concept of coherence.

⁶⁹ Thomas Hübl (1971-) is an Austrian teacher, author, and facilitator whose lifelong work integrates the core insights of the great wisdom traditions and mysticism with scientific discoveries. He founded the Academy of Inner Science and the Pocket Project.

Hübl (2020) believes that “trauma creates incoherence, fracturing us from ourselves and separating us from others” (p. 32) and adds that establishing coherence “reduces separation and increases transcendence, offering a higher perspective on life” (p. 125). He has worked with large groups of people who have experienced historical trauma –particularly, but not exclusively, Germans and Jews- in a process of integration and healing. He calls these events workshops, but clearly uses some elements and rituals that create a ceremonial space. Hübl starts his workshops by “cohering the group” using meditation and contemplation practices, relational exercises among group members, subtle attunement practices (being highly present to one’s body and emotions), group witnessing activities (holding strong presence as other people share), and movement exercises, such synchronized dance (p. 128). These practices “are designed to assist the collective body to breathe and become present and embodied” (pp. 126-127).

He describes how “once enough presence and coherence has been established (...), most participants will discover that they are carrying energy (information) about ancestral or cultural trauma within them” (p. 130). As Hübl describes the process of trauma integration, including participants exploring deep wounds, he emphasizes the imperative “to keep bringing participants back into cohesion through the techniques described above” (p.135).

Some religions also embrace the concept of spiritual coherence. Shaikh Kabir Helminski⁷⁰ (2020) writes that in Sufism,

coherence is an aspect of the Divine Reality that we will increasingly embody. Coherence of community can facilitate the experience of the divine. Like an arrangement of antennas or transceivers in a phased array, our vibration is strengthened far beyond the capacity of any individual. Through this common vibration we are given a taste of the divine that would be very rarely experienced alone.

He goes on to say that “our tradition offers us practices and ceremonies of coherence: *salaat* [prayers offered five times per day], *sema* [listening to music and chanting to reinforce ecstasy and induce mystical trance], as well as *muraqaba* [meditation], and *adab* [ethical conduct].”

Other spiritual and religious traditions may not use the word coherence but aim to connect with the Divine, other humans, and Nature. They refer to this practice as Divine connection, integration, harmony, grounding, and similar terms.

Francesca Mason Boring⁷¹ (2012) has written that she prepares for her workshops/ceremonies by meditating, fasting, or walking in the woods. She uses smudging and prayer to create intention and integrity in the process, which is very similar to the concept of coherence. “Prayer for me today involves a plea for help and a way to express gratitude for and acknowledgment of the intentions that my ancestors and I have set in motion” (p. 57). She adds, “it’s helpful if there is

⁷⁰ Kabir Helminski (1947-) is an American Shaikh of the Mevlevi Order of Sufis, which traces its inspiration to Jelaluddin Rumi.

⁷¹ Francesca Mason Boring (dob unknown) is a bicultural American woman enrolled with the Western Shoshone Tribe. She is an author, facilitator, teacher, and lecturer, working with universal indigenous fields in family constellations. She has supported the development of constellations as ceremonies, community constellations, and nature constellations.

drumming. The drum represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth, and there are times when it is good to be supported by something so fundamental” (p. 156).

Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) thinks that what creates a ceremony is ritual:

And to make it a ritual there must be something sacred, whether is an altar or songs, music, dancing, something to make it out of the ordinary and essentially, consciousness-raising. It opens you up, not an everyday thing. It doesn't have to be in a sanctuary, with a roof over your head and stained glass. You can create that space anywhere, really, with intention and seriousness of purpose and awareness that this is something really ancient, that you are following in ancient footsteps, even if you are doing something different and new. It's multigenerational; it goes beyond the present, something that is beyond the present moment.

In the Teotihuacán ceremony, the Mexica dancers established spiritual coherence by calling the directions, inviting the ancestors and the Creator in the form of *Ometeotl*, smudging participants, and performing intense synchronized movement. Even before the ceremony, I established my own coherence through intensive meditation and prayer, breathing.

Hernández (p.c., 2020) believes that for a ceremony to be authentic, everyone must become an active participant, not only a spectator. *“If you prepare [a ceremony] like a show, it will become a show, but there will be no connection; you won't feel anything.”* Mason Boring echoes this belief in her family constellations work: “The circle of participants is a circle of healers (...). This posture means that no one is there as an observer” (2012, p. 32). Thus, in Teotihuacán, the dancers needed to include us all in the ceremony, first by smudging everyone, and later, by inviting us to dance with them. After the apology, it was clear to me that everyone in the circle was an essential participant. It was the collective energy that allowed the healing to happen.

3. Personal Coherence

One of the most valuable lessons that I learned from my time in the WSGS and One Spirit is the importance of having a robust daily spiritual practice, especially in the morning, to renew my connection with the Divine and establish personal coherence for the rest of the day. There have been times when I have been very busy with work and bypassed my daily practice for a few days, and I can immediately see the impact: I become less grounded and balanced and more irritable and unfocused.

Establishing personal coherence has also greatly enhanced my work, mainly when I facilitate trainings or meetings. In addition to my morning practice, I usually meditate and pray right before springing into action. I sometimes practice *Ho'oponopono* when meeting participants are introducing themselves (sending love and apologies to each person). One dramatic example of the power of coherence came shortly after the Teotihuacán experience in January 2017. I co-facilitated a two-day roundtable at the US Department of Justice (DOJ) in Washington DC along with a Native-American woman who also has a solid personal spiritual practice. We did not talk about our intangible preparations to each other or to the meeting participants (there were a lot of federal government officials). Still, the energy and quality of the roundtable were noticeably different than other similar gatherings. After a while, people started sharing from the heart, and emotional safety and trust developed. This led to new and exciting “out-of-the-box” ideas. Many participants noticed the heightened environment without understanding what was going on. The highest-ranking DOJ officer in attendance

closed the roundtable by saying: “I don’t know what happened here, but this is the most remarkable meeting I have attended in my 21 years of work in the government.” I have no doubt that this was due to the spiritual preparation that my co-facilitator and I did to establish coherence. Since then, I have had frequent similar experiences.

Two of my spiritual practices come from traditions that center on rituals of atonement and apology. One has been *A Course in Miracles* (Foundation for Inner Peace, 1996). Its practice is based on daily readings, prayers, and meditations that I have experienced as powerful heart-opening rituals.

The other practice is the twelve steps of *Ho’Oponopono*. The ritual includes statements of self-forgiveness and self-affirmation; Ha breathing, which is a type of square breathing; opening and closing prayers; an apology to the Divine Creator; the actual act of *Ho’oponopono*, which is an apology to anyone and anything that comes to mind; and practices of release, cleansing, and transmutation. It ends with an acknowledgment to the Divine Creator (Siemona, 1980). *Ho’Oponopono* has been profoundly transformational in my life and has helped me heal important relationships.

D. Reflection

The literature I reviewed to answer the support research question *What are the fundamental elements of an authentic apology?* yielded rich and valuable information. I confirmed that the apology that I offered to the Mexica dancers in Teotihuacán intuitively included all the essential elements of authentic apologies. The research also validated the importance of feelings and not only words and

actions. The literature on sacred ceremonial apologies provided examples of practices of rituals commonly used to establish spiritual coherence during an event, many of which were represented in the ceremony in Mexico.

Chapter VI: Wounding and Trauma

My experience in Teotihuacán made me realize that I inherited emotional and spiritual wounding from the perpetration of atrocities and embracing of racism by my ancestors. As a result of these wounds, I have experienced the pain of spiritual separation from Indigenous Mexicans (and other groups), as well as shame, guilt, remorse, and deep grief (see Chapter VII). These personal observations led me to explore two additional support questions for this dissertation: *Can the perpetration of violence cause wounding in the perpetrator? And if so, can perpetration wounding be passed on ancestrally, and what are its emotional and spiritual consequences?*

Research that directly answers these questions is limited, so I had to rely on literature that focuses on related questions and make certain inferences: *What are emotional and spiritual wounds/traumas? Can wounding/trauma be passed on intergenerationally? What are historical and community wounds/traumas? And what is perpetration wounding/trauma?*

A. Emotional and Spiritual Trauma/Wounding

When I first articulated my research questions, I used “wounding” to refer to my experience of inherited pain. In reviewing the literature, the preferred word for emotional and spiritual injuries is “trauma,” so I’m using both terms interchangeably. In fact, the word trauma means physical wound in ancient Greek (Online Etymology Dictionary, n.d.-b). In modern times, the term has taken

different meanings, depending on the context. The Merriam-Webster Online

Dictionary (n.d.-c) offers 3 definitions:

1. An injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent.
2. A disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury.
3. An emotional upset.

For most of history, trauma referred primarily to physical injuries, as illustrated in the first definition, and it is still used as such primarily in the medical field. The term was first used to describe the aftermath of sexual abuse in 1894 (Janssen, 2019). Since then, the word's usage focusing on the emotional impact of an event, as exemplified in the second and third definitions above, has exponentially grown and become common in everyday use (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c). Still, the difference between these two definitions is significant and shows no consensus on the word's precise meaning when referring to emotional trauma.

For this dissertation, I am using a combination of an expanded version of the American Psychological Association's (n.d.) definition and a description offered by Rachel Yehuda⁷² (Frankel, 2019): Trauma is an emotional and spiritual response to an adverse watershed event or series of events (like an accident, rape or natural disaster, child abuse, intimate partner violence, war, or genocide) that defines a person's or a community's life and divides it into a "before" and "after." It is important to

⁷² Rachael Yehuda, Ph.D., (1959-) is an American professor of psychiatry and neuroscience. She is Vice-Chair for Veterans Affairs in the Psychiatry Department and the director of the Traumatic Stress Studies Division at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

emphasize that trauma is not an event or multiple events themselves but the emotional response to those events.⁷³

In addition to physical and psychological trauma, the academic world is beginning to recognize what Indigenous people have known for millennia: There is also spiritual trauma, also known as soul wounding (Duran et al., 1998; Duran & Ivey, 2019). Edward Kruk⁷⁴ (2019) defines spiritual trauma as “an experience of violation of the spiritual or ‘sacred’ core in human beings, harm at the innermost level, by an external ‘social’ source.” Gabor Maté⁷⁵ affirms that “trauma is the antithesis of spirituality” because it fundamentally creates separation from God both in the victims and the perpetrators of violence (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 71). Taegel (p.c., 2021) has a different view:

There is (...) a very significant oral tradition in the Indigenous world that the soul is an implant of the beloved Divine and can, therefore, never be damaged. What is known as soul retrieval is actually a retrieving of parts of the self that live next to the soul. The soul is ever-present (...). What happens is that the soul is covered over by clusters of selves involved in the trauma and various attempts at healing. Developmental selves, such as little boys and girls who didn’t know how to process the events, are spun off into the hidden world and need retrieving to their rightful place next to our beloved souls.

⁷³ Will Taegel (personal communication, October 2, 2021) does not believe trauma can be separated in external and internal events. “This epistemology is part of the binary thinking that keeps us from an experience of the larger whole. I would say the process that wounding/trauma attempts to describe is a profound interweaving of the internal/external events that hold in their hands the possibility of an opening of us to a larger purpose.”

⁷⁴ Edward Kruk, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a Canadian scholar. He is an associate professor at the University of British Columbia, School of Social Work and Family Studies in Vancouver.

⁷⁵ Gabor Maté, M.D., (1944-) is a Hungarian-Canadian physician. He has a background in family practice and a particular interest in childhood development and trauma.

B. Intergenerational Trauma/Wounding

Most of the literature on trauma has focused on the personal exposure to a watershed event, either as a direct victim or as a witness or bystander (Agaibi & Wilson, 2005). In the last few decades, there has been more research on intergenerational trauma (also called transgenerational, multigenerational, or inherited family trauma), defined as “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding that is transmitted from one generation to the next” (Rakoff et al., 1966, p. 24). In the 1960s, psychologists noticed that descendants of holocaust survivors displayed trauma symptoms even if they had not directly experienced the Nazi genocide (Dass-Brailsford, 2007). As more anecdotal accounts of intergenerational trauma emerged in the following decades, researchers conducted clinical trials (Portney, 2003). Since then, hundreds of articles have been published on the topic (Felsen, 1998). In a literature review of empirical studies, Irit Felsen⁷⁶ (1998) found that

many findings point to measurable differences between holocaust offspring and controls, suggesting a psychological profile typical of holocaust offspring that includes lesser differentiation from their parents, lesser feelings of autonomy and independence, elevated anxiety, guilt and depressive experiences, and more difficulties in the regulation of aggression (p. 57).

Most of the early research on intergenerational trauma focused on the psychological effects of the Holocaust (Jacobs, 2016); more recently, it has been expanded to other watershed events (Danieli, 1998). Starting in the 1990s, Yehuda and her colleagues began researching the possibility that trauma can be transmitted from parents to offspring not only psychologically but also biologically (Yehuda et al., 2018). Though she still considers the results limited and preliminary, her team’s 25

⁷⁶ Irit Felsen, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American clinical psychologist. She is an expert on the impact of the Holocaust on children of survivors.

years of research have indicated that “if traumatic events occurring prior to conception are somehow encoded in the parent, this may shape biological predispositions in the offspring” (p. 2). This transmission happens not at a genetic level but at an epigenetic level. “An epigenetic trait is a stably heritable phenotype resulting from changes in a chromosome without alterations in the DNA sequence” (Berger et al., 2009). Chris Mason’s⁷⁷ simplified definition of epigenetics is “the study of the biological control mechanisms of DNA—the light switches that turn genes on or off” (Erdelyi, 2020).

When applied to intergenerational trauma, research shows that an adverse watershed event can “turn on and off the light switches” of specific genes not only for the direct survivors but also for their descendants (Carey, 2018). This can result in lower levels of cortisol (a hormone that allows the body to return to normal after a watershed event) (Rodriguez, 2015). It can also predispose to psychological vulnerabilities, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, clinical depression, anxiety disorders, and schizophrenia, and physical problems, such as obesity, hypertension, type-2 diabetes, and shortened life expectancy (Hübl et al., 2020).

Yehuda’s research has been replicated with other populations exposed to atrocities with similar results, including survivors of the Dutch Hunger Winter of 1944–1945, a 6-month famine at the end of World War II (Heijmans et al., 2008; Tobi et al., 2018), and ex-prisoners of war during the American Civil War (Costa et al., 2018).

⁷⁷ Chris Mason, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Associate Professor at Weill Cornell Medicine, with appointments at the Tri-Institutional Program in Computational Biology and Medicine between Cornell, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, and Rockefeller University, and Director of the Mason Lab.

C. Historical and Community Trauma/Wounding

Whether solely through psychological channels or biological mechanisms, the Western world is coming to terms with the idea that trauma can be transmitted across many generations. For time immemorial, Indigenous cultures worldwide have been aware of the impact of personal and ancestral wounding. They have also recognized another kind of injury: Trauma experienced and passed on to future generations within entire communities. The Native-American researcher Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart⁷⁸ (1998) was the first to document this phenomenon in Western academic journals, calling it historical trauma. In particular, Brave Heart believes that the Lakota people in South Dakota have high rates of alcoholism and suicide because of unresolved historical grief that originated in the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890.⁷⁹

Tessa Evans-Campbell⁸⁰ (2008) defines historical trauma as “a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation” (p. 320). Historical trauma includes the following elements:

1. Many people in the community experienced or were affected by the adverse watershed event or events;

⁷⁸ Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Ph.D., (1953-) is a Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota scholar. She is president of the Takini Institute, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry, and the Director of Native American and Disparities Research at the University of New Mexico in the Center for Rural and Community Behavioral Health.

⁷⁹ On December 29, 1890, U.S. troops killed more than 250 unarmed Oglala Lakota men, women, and children in South Dakota.

⁸⁰ Tessa Evans-Campbell, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an associate professor and associate dean for academic affairs at the University of Washington School of Social Work.

2. The events generated high levels of collective distress and contemporary mourning (demonstrated both empirically and narratively); and

3. The events were perpetrated by outsiders with a purposely destructive intent – often a genocidal intent, making them particularly devastating (Evans-Campbell, 2008; Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010).

Based on this definition, Evan-Campbell suggests that all colonized, Indigenous peoples have been victims of historical trauma (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010).

Thomas Hübl (2020) has studied for decades the same phenomenon, which he calls collective trauma. He believes that all cultures suffer some degree of collective trauma, though those cultures that have been victims of genocide experience a particularly severe kind of traumatization.

The United Nations (1948) defines genocide as “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group” (p. 1). Examples of genocides abound in recorded history, from ancient eras, such as the Mongol conquests and Punic wars to the modern times, e.g., the German Holocaust, the Turkish extermination of Armenians, and the Rwandan genocide, to name just a few (Chalk et al., 1990).

The largest genocide in history happened in the Americas, which is still broadly denied in the U.S. (Churchill & Books, 1997; Taegel, 2017). Estimates of the number of inhabitants in the Americas before the arrival of Columbus vary widely, from a few million to more than a hundred million. These numbers are

still the subject of intense debate (Cave, 2008). A recent comprehensive meta-analysis (a study of 119 studies) placed the number at 60.5 million (Koch et al., 2019). “There is general agreement that, whatever their precise pre-contact numbers, Indigenous populations within a century after contact were reduced by 90% or more” (Cave, 2008, p. 273). In fact, the depopulation of the Americas was so extreme that Koch⁸¹ and colleagues (2019) believe it resulted in a reduction of global temperatures in the late 1500s and early 1600s due to massive abandonment of agricultural lands. Most Indigenous Americans died from diseases introduced by the Europeans, but many others were victims of famine and murder at the hands of the colonizers (Cave, 2008). The proportion of this genocidal event has no match in human history.

It was not enough for the European colonizers of the Americas to exterminate the great majority of the population; their purpose was to obliterate the Indigenous cultures completely. In North America, the invaders (primarily English and French) tried to do so by implementing brutal practices, such as slavery, ethnic cleansing through forced relocation, forced removal of children from their families to impose assimilation, and prohibiting spiritual and cultural practices (Gallay, 2009; Stannard, 1993).

In Latin America, the intent of the Spanish and Portuguese Conquistadores was the same, though some of the methods to eliminate Native cultures were different from the English and French. They used Indian forced

⁸¹ Alexander Koch, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Hong Kong. He studies the influence of human-induced changes of the land surface on the Earth System.

labor, known as “*encomienda*,” widespread rape and forced marriage of Indigenous women to European men, and forceful imposition of the Catholic faith (Schwaller, 2000; Simpson, 1982; Tortorici, 2015). The invaders also destroyed Nature all over the continent, seeking to exploit her riches (Taegel, 2012).

The widespread societal denial and minimization of the atrocities committed by the Europeans in North America (Churchill & Books, 1997) contrast with the way that Mexico looks at its history and teaches it to its children. History textbooks (which are standardized nationally) teach that “the encounter between the two worlds was devastating for the inhabitants of the New World” (Carretero et al., 2002, p. 661). They describe the appropriation of lands, forced labor, imposed religion, and the introduction of infectious diseases that devastated the Indigenous population (Carretero et al., 2002).



Figure 12 - Exploitation of Mexico by Spanish Conquistadores by Diego Rivera

As an elementary school pupil, I remember feeling a cognitive dissonance when learning Mexican history, which described my ancestors as brutal invaders (which is accurate). This collided with my experience of my Spanish grandparents as loving and generous.

In addition to school textbooks, Mexicans are regularly exposed to the history of the atrocities of the conquistadores through graphic depictions in mural paintings (see Figure 12), which are ubiquitous in many Mexican cities and towns. The mural I encountered in the Otumba municipal museum near Teotihuacán is an example of this artistic genre (see Chapter II). In fact, the national textbooks and the muralist movement originated from the same source: After the 1910 revolution, Mexican intellectuals and artists aimed to develop a nationalistic narrative that exalted the country's pre-Hispanic past, rejected foreign intervention, and dreamed of a utopian future (Sampaio Amaro, 2004).

D. Impact of Historical Trauma/Wounding

Despite the differences between how the United States and Mexico look at and teach their national histories, the effects of their parallel colonizations are similar. Indigenous people in both countries (as well as in the rest of the Americas and many other parts of the world) continue to be marginalized and suffer the ongoing impact of the historical trauma prompted by colonization (Duran et al., 1998). “Just as a child’s growth is impacted by developmental trauma, so a culture’s evolution is shaped by historical trauma” (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 92).

For example, in the U.S., the death rate of alcohol-related causes is five times higher in Native Americans than European Americans. The rate of suicide

in Indigenous peoples is 50% higher than the general population, suggesting widespread mental health issues (Brave Heart et al., 2011). Native Americans also die at higher rates than other Americans due to various diseases, including chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and, more recently, COVID-19 (Indian Health Services, 2019).

In Mexico, 70% of Indigenous people live in extreme poverty compared with 39% of the general population (CONEVAL, 2019). In contrast with the rest of the country, Indigenous Mexicans have significantly lower life expectancy rates and higher child and adult mortality rates due to various maladies, including diarrheic, cardiovascular, and perinatal diseases, pneumonia, malnutrition, and tuberculosis (Torres et al., 2003). Indigenous populations in Mexico are also found to have high rates of alcoholism and depression (Lerín & Ríos, 2007).

In both the U.S. and Mexico, historical trauma continues to be reinforced through personal and institutional racism (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010). In the U.S., the episodic reckonings with a legacy of racism and white supremacy have concentrated mainly on the treatment of African-Americans. They have generally sidelined the realities of Native Americans (Berger, 2008).

Even though there is a general acknowledgment of the atrocities committed by the Spanish in Mexico, there is the pervasive denial that racism exists, as social inequalities are generally attributed just to classism (Suárez Meaney et al., 2018). However, it is very common to encounter contemporary individual narratives of racism, as illustrated by Alberto Hernández (p.c., 2020) when he talks about his indigenous grandmother: *“She lived it as a young woman,*

as a girl, the constant problem of being called ‘india’ as an insult, -not ‘indígena,’ but ‘india’- the use of insulting words, very offensive, in a very bad way.”

E. Perpetrator Trauma/Moral Injury

Naturally, the study of trauma and its effects has focused on victims and survivors of adverse watershed events. In the last decades, the literature has expanded to include trauma caused by exposure to violence. Many studies have shown that witnessing or being a bystander during violent events without getting physically injured can be as traumatic as experiencing the violence directly (Finkelhor, 2009; Margolin & Gordis, 2004; Osofsky, 1999). Most exposure research has centered on children and adolescents living with domestic and community violence (Glodich, 1998) and war veterans’ exposure to combat (Sheffler et al., 2016). The study of combat exposure has led to a nascent category of research: trauma caused by the perpetration of violence (McGlothlin, 2020; Morag, 2018).

Elaborating on the definition offered at the beginning of this chapter, perpetrator trauma could be described as an emotional and spiritual response to the infliction of harm on others, defining a person’s or a community’s life and dividing it into a “before” and “after.” Saira Mohamed⁸² (2015) states that “perpetrators can experience their crimes as trauma—that is, that commission of

⁸² Saira Mohamed, J.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of law at Berkeley Law School. Her primary interests are criminal law and human rights, with her research focused on responses to mass atrocity.

the crime itself causes a psychological injury to the perpetrator, which can result in particular adverse physical, social, or emotional consequences” (p. 1162).

Although the research of perpetration trauma is limited to date, a growing number of studies show that the effects of perpetrator trauma are similar to those experienced by victims and bystanders of adverse watershed events. They can include anxiety, panic, depression, irritability, and physical complaints (McGlothlin, 2020), as well as paranoia, dissociation, functional impairment, violent behaviors, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Glover, 1985; Maguen et al., 2009). Rachel MacNair⁸³ (2005) has proposed a subcategory of PTSD called Perpetration-Induced Trauma Stress. She argues that it is crucial to distinguish the etiology (causes) of trauma to develop effective individual and societal responses.

Other practitioners and researchers have developed parallel frameworks to conceptualize the wounding of perpetration, predominantly in the context of war. One model that has received considerable attention in the last decade is the concept of moral injury. In just the last 12 years, more than one hundred articles have been focusing on this topic (Griffin et al., 2019). One definition of moral injury includes “perpetrating (...) acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 697). Proponents of moral injury differentiate it from trauma (particularly from PTSD) by pointing out that its core emotions are shame, guilt, anguish, and remorse. In contrast, trauma and PTSD are rooted in an overwhelming experience of fear (Antal & Winings, 2015).

⁸³ Rachel MacNair, Ph.D., (1958-) is an American sociologist and psychologist. She is the director of the Institute for Integrated Social Analysis.

“If PTSD can be triggered by experiencing fear and bearing witness to the horrors of war, moral injury can be triggered by taking actions or making choices that conflict with one’s own moral convictions” (Purcell, Burkman, et al., 2018). PTSD symptoms include “exaggerated startle reflex, memory loss, flashbacks, nightmares, and insomnia;” whereas moral injury symptoms include “guilt, shame, anger, anhedonia [inability to feel pleasure], and social alienation.” (Griffin et al., 2019). Some researchers affirm that the symptomology of perpetrator trauma and moral injury can overlap, and both phenomena can co-occur in individuals (Barnes et al., 2019).

Unlike the literature on perpetrator trauma, which centers almost exclusively on the psychological and physical impact of adverse watershed events, proponents of moral injury have included spiritual/existential issues (Barnes et al., 2019). Even though the term originated in the health field, “medical professionals admit they cannot adequately address what they are calling ‘moral injury,’ and are reaching out to religious leaders and communities for help” (Antal & Winings, 2015, p. 383). Jonathan Shay⁸⁴ (2003), a psychiatrist who has worked for decades with combat veterans, states that “religious and cultural therapies are not only possible but may well be superior to what mental health professionals conventionally offer” (p. 152). In response to Shay, Chris Antal⁸⁵ and Kathy

⁸⁴ Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D., (1941-) is an American doctor and clinical psychiatrist. He is best known for his publications comparing the experiences of Vietnam veterans with the descriptions of war and homecoming in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

⁸⁵ Chris Antal, D.Min., (dob unknown) is a clinical staff chaplain at the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs.

Winings⁸⁶ (2015) have proposed that the study of moral injury should be central to clinical pastoral education. This is especially true for military chaplains so that they learn how to create “a space for grace for both returning veterans and the wider community to heal and be reconciled with God” (p. 392). Rita Nakashima Brock⁸⁷ and Gabriella Lettini⁸⁸ (2012) have developed a recovery model from moral injury called “soul repair,” partly directed to clergy and religious congregations.

The religious responses to moral injury so far have been rooted in traditional Christian theology and tend to frame it as the consequence of sin, which is subject to the judgment of God (Antal & Winings, 2015). I prefer to see perpetration wounding through the lens of Christian mysticism. Like other mystical and Indigenous traditions, it holds as a fundamental principle the oneness of all beings with the Creator and with each other (Soltes, 2008; Taegel, 2010). We violate this sacred principle when we harm others, which is a primary cause of spiritual trauma. Gabor Maté expresses it this way:

With every infliction of trauma—whether on the individual level or at the collective level—there is a belief in separateness. True spirituality would be what Moses taught or what Jesus taught or what the Buddha taught or what Mohammed taught, which really is that there’s only one God. There’s only one reality. We all share it; we are all manifestations of it. And if you actually believe that I am the manifestation, the same reality, and the same truths as other creatures, other forms, then how can you inflict suffering on me? (...). It doesn’t matter what the person who’s committing the trauma believes consciously; on the unconscious level,

⁸⁶ Kathy Winings, Ed.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of Religious Studies at Unification Theological Seminary.

⁸⁷ Rita Nakashima Brock, Ph.D., (1950-) Rita Nakashima Brock is a Japanese-American feminist scholar, Protestant theologian, activist, and nonprofit organization leader.

⁸⁸ Gabriella Lettini, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Dean of Faculty, Professor of Theological Ethics, and Director of Studies in Public Ministry at the Starr King School for the Ministry, Graduate Theological Union.

they believe in separation. If they didn't, they wouldn't traumatize anyone (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 71).

From an Indigenous perspective, Eduardo Duran⁸⁹ refers to spiritual trauma as a “soul wound.” He teaches that the act of violence is a spiritual intrusion both for the victims and the perpetrators. “In traditional healing, the spirit of the perpetrator also needs to heal” (Einhaeuser, 2015). Mason Boring (2012) writes, “victims and perpetrators at times share, at a deep soul level, the experience of their shared horror, and subsequent generations may incorporate one or both aspects of that experience” (p. 18).

The concept of healing from the perpetration of violence is still controversial in the Western world. Kjell Anderson⁹⁰ (2017) opines that there is a dearth of literature on perpetrator wounding because most trauma researchers believe that “the act of perpetration is itself morally repugnant, and thus it seems dissonant to consider the trauma suffered by some perpetrators as being worthy of concern” (p. 226). This is true both at the macro level when dealing with perpetrators of mass atrocities, such as war and genocide (MacNair, 2005), and at the micro-level, as is the case with people who cause harm in their intimate relationships. My own work (Areán & Davis, 2007) on reparations between fathers who renounced their violence and their children has elicited strong criticism (Klein, 2003; Safe Horizon, 2007).

⁸⁹ Eduardo Duran, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American Vietnam Veteran who started his academic training after being discharged from the US Navy. He has worked in Indigenous communities most of his professional life.

⁹⁰ Kjell Anderson, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an assistant law professor at the University of Manitoba. He is a jurist and social scientist specializing in human rights, mass violence, and mass atrocities.

However, the truth is that many victims and survivors of violence want the perpetrators not only to take responsibility for the harm but to embark on a journey of healing (Hübl et al., 2020; Philpart et al., 2019). As more practitioners, researchers, and policymakers genuinely listen to the voices of victims and survivors of violence, alternatives to punitive and retributive justice are becoming more common. This is true at the macro-level (mass violence), exemplified by various Truth and Reconciliation processes worldwide (Avruch & Vejarano, 2001). And also, at the micro-level (interpersonal violence), as demonstrated by the rising use of restorative justice, transformative justice, and community accountability practices (Sullivan & Tifft, 2007).

Not surprisingly, many of these reparative methods are based on Indigenous systems of justice around the world, which have traditionally focused on rehabilitation rather than retribution when dealing with people who use violence. These justice systems tend to be deeply rooted in spirituality, particularly in the concept that we all are connected. It follows that when someone is harmed, everybody is hurt in the community (Sullivan & Tifft, 2007).

For instance, the African principle of *Ubuntu* was used as a foundation for the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (and the interim South African Constitution) (Louw, 2006). *Ubuntu* asserts that “our humanity is bound in one another, and any tear in the fabric of connection between us must be repaired for us all to be made whole” (Tutu & Tutu, 2014, p. 8). Restorative Justice has also been rooted in *Ubuntu* and Maori, Navajo, and other Indigenous conflict resolution systems (Maxwell et al., 2006).

Another reason to pursue the healing of perpetrator trauma/moral injury is the possibility that it can be passed on to the descendants and the communities of the perpetrators. Even though research about these phenomena is limited, it seems likely that if victim and bystander traumas can be inherited psychologically and biologically, perpetrator trauma may also be transmissible in such ways. Gabriele Schwab⁹¹ (2004) is one of the few scholars who has discussed the intergenerational transmission of perpetrator trauma from a personal experience. She was born in Germany right after World War II, “among a generation of children of a perpetrator nation” (p. 177). Even though her parents were not directly involved in the war or the Holocaust, she describes how she and her peers inherited the collective shame, guilt, and grief derived from the perpetration of atrocities. Based on her own life experience and her research, Schwab believes that “traumatic historical legacies may be transmitted individually via unconscious fantasies of parents and grandparents as well as collectively through the cultural unconscious” (p. 184). Gertrude Hardtmann⁹² (1998), a psychologist who worked with hundreds of children and grandchildren of Nazi officers and sympathizers, observed that this legacy profoundly affected her patients. She affirms they lived in their forbearers' distorted, quasi-psychotic world and often became incapable of finding an independent identity of their own. Bernhard Giesen⁹³ (2004) has

⁹¹ Gabriele Schwab, Ph.D., (1946-) is a Distinguished Professor at the University of California, Irvine. She holds appointments in the departments of Comparative Literature, Anthropology, English and European Languages, and Studies.

⁹² Gertrud Hardtmann, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a German scholar and professor at the Technical University, Berlin.

⁹³ Bernhard Giesen, Ph.D., (1948-2020) was a German sociologist who held the Chair of Macrosociology at the University of Konstanz and was a fellow at the Center for Cultural Sociology at Yale University.

written about perpetrator trauma from the Holocaust to explain Germany's present national identity from a sociological perspective.

Schwab (2004) argues that we need to address the individual and collective impact of both victim and perpetrator trauma to achieve societal healing.

We have arrived at a place in history where we can no longer afford to deal with the histories of victims and perpetrators in isolation. The damages and cultural deformations of these violent histories of colonialism, imperialism, war, genocide and slavery manifest themselves on both sides of the divide, and only if both sides work through the legacies of these histories can the vicious cycle of repetition be disrupted (p. 188).

Another personal account of the intergenerational transmission of perpetrator trauma comes from Bradley Upton, the great-great-grandson of Gen. James Forsyth, the commander responsible for the Wounded Knee massacre. Upton learned about the atrocities of his forbearer when he was 16 years old and knew immediately that Forsyth's actions had been criminal. He reports feeling deep sadness, shame, and "incredible heaviness." He believes that "the impact of the massacre can be seen throughout his family tree, which has been plagued by alcoholism, abuse, and betrayal" (O'Brien & Keith, 2019). Upton recently apologized on behalf of his family to the direct descendants of the massacre victims at their home on the Cheyenne River Reservation in South Dakota.

Thomas Hübl (2020) has placed both victims and perpetrators at the center of his Collective Trauma Integration Process.⁹⁴ He writes,

whether we refer to a person as victim or victimizer, oppressor or oppressed, it appears that no one, given time, remains untouched by

⁹⁴ The Collective Trauma Integration Process is described in Chapter VIII.

collective suffering (...). To improve the health and well-being of all people and the planet we call home, we must raise public consciousness on the nature and impact of collective trauma. (...). We must act as surgeons of consciousness and go within, directly attending to our karmic past as one, holding space for perpetrator as well as victim, for bystanders and descendants. For all of us. (pp. 78 & 199).

F. Reflection

Violence can create emotional and spiritual wounding and trauma both in victims and perpetrators. Perpetrator trauma is caused, in part, by the violation of the sacred principle of unity of life: We are all one, and when we hurt others, we also injure ourselves. Wounding can be inherited emotionally, spiritually, and physically (epigenetically). It can become intergenerational, historical, and/or ancestral trauma.

I can personally relate to Schwab's and Upton's stories described above. Even though, as far as I know, I am not a direct descendant of the Spanish invaders, what prompted me to apologize to the Mexica dancers were the same feelings of shame, guilt, remorse, and grief they describe (see Chapter II). I got in touch with my own emotional and spiritual perpetrator trauma both through an intergenerational source (as a product of my colonial upbringing) and a historical or community source (as someone of Spanish heritage). The feelings became so palpable that I needed to address them in some way. This is what eventually led me to offer the apology.

G. Resilience

The study of trauma in all its manifestations can be demoralizing. However, there is hope. When I write or teach about the effects of trauma, I find it

essential to always include information about resilience, a phenomenon that has received much attention in the past few years.

Since every person is different, the response to a traumatic event depends on the individual (Bonura, 2016). “The effects from trauma will be different for each person depending on character, the type of event, developmental processing, interpretation of the trauma, and sociocultural factors” (Thayer, 2019, pp. 37-38). The combination of these characteristics constitutes resilience, which has been defined as “the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity” (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 259). Studies have shown that resilience is not something static; various protective factors can be developed to buffer the effects of a traumatic event and boost resilience in individuals. These include “social/interpersonal strengths such as social skills, family cohesion, and the availability of social resources, as well as cognitive/individual strengths such as planning behavior, self-efficacy, goal efficacy, and control” (Ponce-Garcia et al., 2015). Recent research has shown that spirituality (defined as “deeply personal beliefs and practices that transcend the regular activities of this world”) is a fundamental protective factor for some people (Madsen & Abell, 2010, p. 225).

Most of the research has centered on individual resilience and protective factors, but some scholars have started to consider resilience as a familial and intergenerational experience (Denov et al., 2019). From an epistemological perspective, Yehuda (2018) writes that “the notion that trauma effects may reach into subsequent generations also points to the possibility of resilience, flexibility, and wisdom in survivors’ offspring, not just vulnerability and damage” (p. 2).

Like individuals and families, societies can survive and thrive despite enormous adversity; therefore, resilience also manifests at the community level (Ungar, 2011). In some way, this is the ultimate manifestation of hope: Against all odds, and in spite of brutal oppression, genocide, and cultural devastation, many civilizations endure and resurrect. This is certainly true of the Mexicas, as demonstrated by the dancers in Teotihuacán. Right after the apology ceremony, the oldest group member recited a well-known anonymous Mexica poem about trauma and resilience in Nahuatl.⁹⁵ It ends like this:

*Arrancaron nuestros frutos,
Cortaron nuestras ramas,
Quemaron nuestro tronco,
Pero no pudieron matar nuestras raíces.*

They yanked out our fruit,
They chopped off our branches,
They burned our trunk,
But they could never kill our roots. (Pimentel, 2005, p. 16)

⁹⁵ Nahuatl was “the language of the Aztec empire and a lingua franca across Mesoamerica.” It is still spoken by more than a million people in Mexico (see Olko, J., & Sullivan, J. (2014). Toward a comprehensive model for Nahuatl language research and revitalization. *Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, 40, 369-397).

Chapter VII: My Wounding: Growing Up White in Mexico

Heuristic and Organic Inquiry methodologies take the researcher's personal experiences as a point of departure and require deep self-reflection and self-examination. A particularly challenging (and liberating) part of the journey of writing this dissertation has been to critically investigate my own and my family's history of prejudice and racism. Becoming more aware and committing to work with my biases has been an essential outcome of the Teotihuacán ceremony. I thought it was necessary to include a chapter in this work to provide the background on my socialization and examine where my prejudices came from.

A. My Childhood

I grew up in a household that was at the same time very loving and very patriarchal. I am fortunate to say that I never doubted that I was deeply loved and cherished by my parents and my maternal grandfather, Luis Alvarez Pastor. We all lived in a sizeable multigenerational house that my grandfather built in the 1950s in one of the most beautiful neighborhoods in Mexico City. My childhood was very sheltered, and I always had everything I needed and, by and large, what I wanted.

Because my father was very busy with his work as a civil engineer, I spent a lot of time with my grandfather, whom I called Tata. He naturally became my primary male role model. I recall spending long afternoons with him in his bedroom, watching TV together. I remember cuddling with him; he was a large man, and he felt like a giant living pillow, which gave me a lot of comfort. As a good grandparent, he assumed his role as a "spoiler" of his grandchildren. He was

a very generous man and gifted us with all kinds of toys and books. More importantly, he also gifted us with his unconditional love. Nothing I could do was wrong in his eyes. While my parents provided needed discipline, Tata just gave us approval. It was a great balance.

Tata was a very exuberant, expressive man. He was a published poet and loved to regale his friends by reciting his verses. He spoke loudly, ate and drank with great gusto, and laughed with revelry. I also saw him crying without excuses a few times, which became significant as I learned early on that men could have a range of emotions; this clearly influenced who I became as a man later on.

As is often the case with people who have great light, my grandfather also had a large shadow. He was the personification of a benign patriarch, very generous with others as long as they respected his authority. This included our servants (like many Mexican middle-class families, we had a few) and family members. My mother was an only child who lost her own mother when she was seven years old. My grandfather was very protective of her; he even challenged men who would lustfully look at her on the street. He was also extremely controlling. When my mother got married, my grandfather made it abundantly clear that my father had to live under my grandfather's roof and authority. The alternative was nothing less than family estrangement.

My parents' and grandfather's gender roles were very traditionally defined. My father and grandfather were the breadwinners and protectors (my grandfather never retired and worked until the day he died, when he was in his 70s). My mother was in charge of the household (she didn't have to cook or clean

because we had servants, but her role was to supervise the “staff”). Even though she is a brilliant woman, my mother had to quit university when she married. She had majored in chemistry and was a straight-A student. Later in life, she considered going back to college, but my father discouraged her, telling her that he didn’t want her to work outside the home.

The Black feminist scholar bell hooks⁹⁶ (2000) sees white supremacy as an inseparable element of patriarchy. This was certainly true in my household. I clearly learned not only that men were socially above women but that people of European descent were superior to Native Mexican people (and other ethnic groups, such as Blacks and Jews). My ancestry on both sides of the family can be traced directly to Spain. My father was born in Morocco (then a Spanish colony) of Galician and Andalusian parents. My mother was born in Mexico, but her father came from Madrid and her mother from Cuba, of Asturian parents. My DNA test shows that I am 70% Iberian and 98% Western European. This makes my family and me the equivalent of being (very) White in the US. Although this is not the label used in Latin America, racial oppression and privilege manifest in similar ways in Mexico as in the US. However, this fact is categorically denied by most Mexicans of European heritage (van Dijk, 2005).

A few years ago, I went to see the American movie *The Help* (Taylor, 2011), based on a novel by Kathryn Stockett⁹⁷ (2009). It shows the life of middle-class White families in the American South in the 1960s, viewed from the

⁹⁶ Gloria Jean Watkins, Ph.D., (1952-), better known by her pen name bell hooks, is an American author, professor, feminist, and social activist.

⁹⁷ Kathryn Stockett (1969-) is an American novelist.

standpoint of the families' Black maids. The movie illustrates the daily hardships that an overtly racist society imposes on the servants. A central part of the plot is that the maids are not allowed to use the families' bathroom, which is highly humiliating.

I was shocked to see these scenes because I grew up in that exact situation. There was a strict separation between the lives of the servants and the family members. And in the movie, as well as in my personal experience, the prohibition of using the bathroom –the toilet in particular- powerfully symbolized the rationale for the separation. The servants were inferior to us and unclean. As a child, I recall occasionally using the servants' bathroom for convenience and feeling worried that I would catch some strange disease.

This is just one example of situations that were very confusing because the servants were a vital part of our daily lives, and some of them lived in our house for decades. As a child, I genuinely loved these kind, hard-working people but was taught to see them as separate and less worthy than me. I also learned to never completely trust them and, in fact, to be suspicious of and fear them.

When I was about 6 years old, two of my Tata's best friends –a wealthy White couple- were brutally murdered in their sleep by the family's chauffeur. My grandfather and parents were already afraid of possible violence rooted in the deep inequality of our society, but this took it to a different level. From that moment on, my brothers and I were directed to lock our bedrooms at night. Constant fear is the consequence of living in an unjust society.

B. The Legacy

I have had to grapple with the painful legacy of racism⁹⁸ all my life. As a teenager, I became involved in left-wing politics and learned all about the oppression and exploitation of the working class. The progressive perspective in Mexico emphasized then and now classism over other types of oppression; racism was and continues to be seen primarily as an American problem (van Dijk, 2005). But it was impossible not to observe that race played some role in the inequity.

My new political consciousness created a lot of conflict with my parents (my grandfather had passed away a few years back), and through the years, we have learned how to agree to disagree about politics. At the same time, I found myself imitating some of the behaviors I saw in my grandfather and parents. Sometimes, I spoke demandingly to our servants and other Indigenous Mexicans; I often looked down on them. I was an example of what some scholars call internalized domination (Tappan, 2006).

I moved to the US to study music when I was 20 years old and soon began developing a new awareness of the corrosive impact of racism (and other types of oppression). A few years later, I was guided to abandon my professional musical career and become a gender and race equity activist. As part of doing this work for 30 years, I have participated in dozens of conversations about oppression, privilege, bias, and prejudice. All along, I have had to confront the racist ideology that was drilled on me. It is shameful to acknowledge, but even after so many years of self-work, I sometimes catch myself entertaining racist thoughts: “*What*

⁹⁸ This is also true of sexism and other types of oppression, but for the purpose of this dissertation, I will focus on racism.

is this woman doing in my neighborhood? Why are all these men not working? That man looks dangerous.” Occasionally, especially when I’m visiting Mexico, I can revert to treating Indigenous people with disdain.

All these thoughts and actions are based exclusively on the race and appearance of the person. They are pure and simple prejudices based on my internalized White superiority. Even though I have learned how to work with, contradict, and diminished my prejudicial negative self-talk, it still can appear unexpectedly. It has undoubtedly lessened, but I don’t know it will ever completely go away.⁹⁹

Pheterson¹⁰⁰ (1986) affirms that internalized domination does not only perpetuate the oppression of others but also creates alienation from oneself by either denying or degrading all but a narrow range of human possibilities. One’s own humanity is thus internally restricted and one’s qualities of empathy, trust, love, and openness to others and to life-enhancing work become rigid and repressed (p. 35).

I have found this to be true in my personal journey of liberation from racism (and other forms of oppression). The grief and sorrow I experienced during the intensive at Teotihuacán were a profound recognition of the harm my people, family, and I perpetrated in Mexico. But it was also a realization of how

⁹⁹ Will Taegel (p.c., October 2, 2021) sees the self-talk as “voices of inner selves” that grab the inner microphone. “In my view, we can never erase those voices. Indeed, we have to learn to listen to them. They even have information from time to time. If we try to erase them, they just go into our shadows and come back to bite us on the butt. Owning them is a step to apology. So, the balance is to listen to them without their dominating our choices and not denying them that it is nearly impossible to completely get rid of our negative self-talk, but with hard work and time, it becomes less powerful.”

¹⁰⁰ Gail Pheterson, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an associate professor of social psychology at the University of Picardie Jules Verne and a psychotherapist in private practice.

my racism limited my humanity and the possibility to experience oneness with “the other,” which was a longing I had in my heart since my first pilgrimage to Chartres three years before. As I describe in Chapter XI, my apology to the Mexicas in Teotihuacán allowed me to fulfill that desire.

Chapter VIII: Healing

In Chapter VI, I established that there is such thing as perpetration wounding/trauma and that it may be passed on generationally and ancestrally. My next support research questions are, *how can ancestral perpetration trauma be healed, and can a sacred ceremonial apology contribute to such healing?*

The Nahuatl poem quoted at the end of Chapter VI uses a beautiful tree metaphor to describe historical trauma (the destruction of fruit, branches, and trunk) and community resilience (the survival of the roots). Continuing with this analogy, we could say that healing creates the right conditions for those roots to grow back new, healthy trunks, branches, and fruits. This aligns with most definitions of healing which speak of returning to wholeness after a rupture (such as trauma or wounding) in the physical, emotional, and/or spiritual realms (Hahn, 1995). I resonate with the mystical perspective, which sees such rupture as a perceived separation from our oneness with the Divine and all living beings. It follows that “healing is the work of opening or returning to connection” with God and all living things (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 4).

I start this chapter by looking at the literature on healing individual perpetrator trauma and moral injury, a vibrant, emergent field. I continue with the literature on healing ancestral perpetrator trauma, which is more limited. It also becomes harder to separate the healing of perpetrators from that of victims as most researchers and practitioners tend to address them together. I end the chapter by looking at the role of ceremony and ritual and the ancestors in healing personal and ancestral trauma.

A. Healing Perpetrator Trauma/Moral Injury

As mentioned in Chapter VI, perpetrator trauma and moral injury are just beginning to be widely studied. Some scholars who have written about perpetrator trauma have covered its etiology (causes) and symptomology but not its treatment (McGlothlin, 2020; Morag, 2018). Mohamed (2015) argues that healing perpetrator trauma ought to be part of rehabilitation, but as a lawyer, she does not offer details on treating people who have used violence.

MacNair (2005), who proposed Perpetration-Induced Trauma Stress (PITS) as a subcategory of PTSD, writes that in addition to other PTSD established psychological treatments, “perpetrators of violence can benefit from processes that involve atonement, repentance and forgiveness, and re-identifying one’s self as a different person than the one who committed the violence (as in being ‘born again’). Edna Foa¹⁰¹ and Elizabeth Meadows¹⁰² (1997) add bearing witness and making reparations to this list.

The concept of moral injury, which was introduced in the literature more recently than perpetrator trauma, has generated more documentation of possible treatments, especially for war veterans. Several practitioners and researchers have written about “alternative and adjunctive treatments that are distinct from the fear-based aspects of PTSD” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 354). Some of these treatments include Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, which has proven effective in healing shame and fostering forgiveness (Nieuwsma et al., 2015); Adaptive

¹⁰¹ Edna Foa, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of Clinical Psychology in Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania and Director of the Center for the Treatment and Study of Anxiety.

¹⁰² Elizabeth Meadows, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of Clinical Psychology at the College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences at Central Michigan University.

Disclosure, which “promotes therapeutic change by targeting recognized mechanisms of moral repair, including a secular confession process designed to open up the possibility for compassion, forgiveness, and reparative action” (Griffin et al., 2019, p. 354); and Impact of Killing Treatment, which has helped veterans “to acknowledge their grief, shame, and distress (...) and make strides toward acceptance, reconciliation, and forgiveness” (Purcell, Burkman, et al., 2018, p. 1). Researchers who evaluated the Impact of Killing Treatment found that self-forgiveness and amend-making are potent interventions that can facilitate healing from moral injury (Maguen et al., 2017; Purcell, Griffin, et al., 2018).

As described in Chapter VI, moral injury has bridged the fields of psychology and religion. Antal and Winings (2015) believe that “patience, confession, and forgiveness are all essential to reconciling the morally wounded back to God and community” (p. 390) and that the role of clergy and congregations is to create a place for grace to facilitate such reconciliation. Nakashima Brock and Lettini (2012) see this place of grace as a larger container where veterans of war and their communities can heal together. Carrie Doehring¹⁰³ (2019) believes that religious leaders and chaplains have to get in touch with their own mourning to share with the veterans the “anguish of lament” that can lead to the healing of moral injury. Wortmann¹⁰⁴ and colleagues (2017) propose religious practices from diverse traditions for spiritually healing moral

¹⁰³ Carrie Doehring, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a professor of Pastoral Care and Counseling at Iliff School of Theology.

¹⁰⁴ Jennifer Wortmann, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a clinical psychologist, instructor, and consultant to chaplains at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

injury. They include repenting and making amends, and seeking Divine forgiveness, forgiveness from others, and self-forgiveness.

B. Healing Ancestral and Historical Trauma

The literature on healing ancestral and historical wounding of perpetration is even more limited. Most of it has been generated by Indigenous researchers. Naturally, it does not tend to focus on individual remedies but rather on collective and intergenerational emotional and spiritual healing, including victims and the whole community (Einhaeuser, 2015).

From a Native-American perspective, Duran and Firehammer¹⁰⁵ (2010) consider that violence causes a spiritual “soul wound” (p. 163) in victims, perpetrators, and other members of the community. They describe how “Native communities have begun to deal with the effects of collective trauma by developing collective community healing ceremonies” (p. 170). These include ceremonies of forgiveness and reconciliation, which are healing to “both the injured and those who caused the historical injury” (p. 170). Denise Lajimodiere¹⁰⁶ (2012) movingly describes how she participated in a forgiveness ceremony designed to raise awareness of and heal the human rights violations caused by Indian boarding school abuses in the US. Her father was a survivor of a boarding school.

¹⁰⁵ Judith Firehammer, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American clinical psychologist.

¹⁰⁶ Denise Lajimodiere, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Pembina Chippewa and an assistant professor in the School of Education, Educational Leadership, North Dakota State University, Fargo.

Mason Boring (2012) believes that Family Systems Constellations effectively address transgenerational trauma in both victims and perpetrators. “Coupled with the indigenous awareness and inclusion of nature and her teaching, it may be that Native American healing traditions and indigenous ritual hold the key to a very organic human journey of healing” (p. 63). She explains how inherited perpetrator trauma manifests in the context of a Family Constellation Ceremony:

Sometimes, even generations later, at the level of the soul, descendants of [perpetrators of violence] attempt to make amends by unconsciously standing with the victims. Perhaps in limiting their own opportunities, perhaps in having difficulty experiencing joy, perhaps through illness, one attempts to bring back a balance, to rectify the wrongs that were done to another in good conscience under the family name. Through Constellation work, the spirits of victims who are not at rest can find peace. The descendants of the perpetrators can finally step away from the family guilt and acknowledge their own human bond with both victims and perpetrators of family traumas” (p. 25).

Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (1998) has focused her groundbreaking historical trauma research on the descendants of victims of the Native American genocide. Her work has shown that “the historical trauma response is always accompanied by a personal and collective sense of ‘unresolved grief’ related to the original mass trauma” (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 74). She designed a psycho-educational intervention to help tribe members cope with their unresolved ancestral trauma, resulting, among other things on “a reduction in grief effects, a more positive identity, and a commitment to individual and community healing”

(Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010, p. 130). Rosemary Wanganen¹⁰⁷ (2010) has expanded the treatment of suppressed unresolved grief to include Australian Aboriginal perpetrators of violence.

C. Healing Community Trauma

Like some of the aforementioned Indigenous practitioners and researchers, Thomas Hübl and colleagues (2020) believe that “trauma is never purely an individual problem” (p. xvi), so they created a process for integrating collective trauma. As part of this process, they also work with the release of unresolved grief.

A great deal of human suffering exists because of the denial of the past and an inability to acknowledge and integrate it. But when the decision is made to finally look at and feel the past, everything shifts. For example, if I or my ancestors have been suppressing grief, and this deep sadness is allowed to come forward so that I begin to authentically feel it, it will be painful, yes, and yet the more I allow its honest expression, I will almost certainly also experience a release. And if I continue to make this process a conscious practice, I have begun the work of healing integration (p. 60).

Hübl and his team have worked with thousands of people who inherited unresolved grief from their forbearers' historical victimization and perpetration. This work started by bringing Germans and Israelis together to process their shared traumatic history and has continued to develop as they work with many other demographic groups. The methodology that Hübl developed is called Collective Trauma Integration Process, and it includes the following core six core stages:

¹⁰⁷ Rosemary Wanganen (dob unknown) is an Aboriginal Australian griefologist, educator, presenter, assessor, and loss & grief counselor. She founded the Sacred Site Within Healing Centre in 1993, and the Australian Institute for Loss and Grief in 2005.

Forming relational coherence as a group; accessing denial or repression of the trauma; becoming a conduit for the collective past to be voiced, expressed and witnessed; tracking the specificity of individual and collective voices that arise during the process; synchronizing body, emotions, mind and spirit to begin integration; and transpersonal witnessing and integration of the process (The Pocket Project, 2020).

When reviewing the research on individual and collective perpetrator healing, it is remarkable to notice the parallels with the literature on the fundamental elements of an authentic apology. Without using the word apology, some of the authors cited in this chapter write about confession (acknowledgment of harm) (Antal & Winings, 2015); atonement, repentance, mourning, grief, shame, and distress (expression of remorse, regret, or repentance) (Brave Heart, 1998; Doehring, 2019; Hübl et al., 2020; MacNair, 2005; Purcell, Griffin, et al., 2018; Wortmann et al., 2017); and bearing witness, making amends and reparations, and reconciliation (acceptance of full responsibility, and offering compensation or reparation) (Boring, 2012; Duran & Firehammer, 2010; Foa & Meadows, 1997; Maguen et al., 2017; Wortmann et al., 2017). Most authors also emphasize the importance of self-forgiveness, forgiveness from others, and/or Divine forgiveness (Antal & Winings, 2015; Duran & Firehammer, 2010; MacNair, 2005; Maguen et al., 2017; Purcell, Burkman, et al., 2018; Wortmann et al., 2017).

D. The Role of Ceremony and Ritual

Virtually all the literature that addresses the spiritual healing of trauma includes the use of ceremony and/or ritual. This is particularly true of Native American writings on soul trauma/wounding. “Ceremony is an important way, in

tribal culture, to make something meaningful or to signify that something has meaning” (Tippett, 2017). But ceremony and ritual are also central in other spiritual healing methods and in the aforementioned work of Hübl and colleagues. Some psychologists have used secularized versions of ceremony and ritual to treat PTSD in American Vietnam veterans (Johnson et al., 1995). Opus Peace is a US non-profit organization that offers ceremonies to heal soul injury in war veterans by “liberating unmourned loss/hurt and unforgiven guilt/shame” (Opus Peace, 2020).

Given my previous exposure to the power of ritual and ceremony, I knew that it had been crucial for the apology in Teotihuacán to happen in the context of a ceremonial container. As I describe in my self-interview (April 19, 2020):

The creation of a sacred space was essential for me. I was grateful that the Mexica dancers called the directions and the ancestors and smudged everyone. The sacred dances were also important. Once I joined in, I started to feel more relaxed. I was able to really surrender to the experience (...). I don't think my apology would have been nearly as powerful had it not been offered as part of an intentional ceremony.

The other participants I interviewed agreed that the ceremony created by the dancers was critical to move the apology to a higher level. Taegel (personal communication, June 18, 2020) shared that

[Pedro Díaz, the leader of the Mexica dancers,] wanted to have this apology very much in the context of the experience of the dance, in the experience of the directions. So, it was not an add-on or a P.S., but very much indigenous to the experience.

Flake Chapman (personal communication, November 28th, 2020) added:

It's clear that that kind of ceremonial approach is the way to go because if it were just you asking Pedro, "please forgive me," that would have passed, it would not have rippled. It needs the ceremonial container, I think, because that sends it back for generations and sends it forward.

That's the whole thing about ceremony and ritual, they are kind of timeless. I thought there was something ancient, really ancient, going on there.

Hernández (p.c., 2020) agreed that if the apology had happened at some other point (outside of a ceremonial context), it would not have been “believable.” He thought that the ceremony lifted the energetic frequencies at such a level that everyone became connected. In his view, that is what ceremonies are for: “to handle and move energy” so that connection is created “with [one’s] spirit, interior, and energy” but also to create a “connection chain” with each other. “This is how ceremonies were originally” (in ancient times). He adds about the ceremony in Teotihuacán:

If we had been able to watch the energy moving around and above us, I assure you that it would have been a very radiant energy (...). There was a connection with everybody because there were channels that opened which had never been opened before. I can also tell you that I have been in ceremonies where those spaces, those portals of energy, are not opened. Because at that moment, you were not the only person who felt something; there were lots of people who felt it. I could see that people were crying, I saw people who were happy, others were yelling. The reactions were very diverse but very, very connected. (Hernández, p.c., 2020).

Hübl (2020) describes his community trauma integration workshops similarly: “These are the peak moments (...), often felt as a kind of collaborative ‘high,’ when everyone is strongly present and aligned. These bright collective states are beautiful vibrational experiences” (p. 125).

Eduardo Duran believes that ritual and ceremonies are critical to the healing of soul wounds.

Conventional therapies focus on ego understanding and insight into the trauma. Although this is a good approach, it leaves the spiritual aspect without attention. Ritual allows for us to transcend ego at the moment and allow the opening of the soul’s door into greater understanding and

connection to the Great Mystery. Without the connection through ceremony, we merely walk in our ego understanding of reality which most of the time is delusional and lacking in bringing balance and harmony to spirit/soul aspects of who we are (Einhaeuser, 2015).

Mason Boring (2012) writes that everyone in her family “understood the concept that there could be ceremonies that would shift the energy and change the events in someone’s life for the better” (p. 14). She uses family constellations in the context of ceremony to “unravel those barriers in life that people carry as a result of historical or trans-generational trauma” (p. 20).

Taegel (p.c., 2020) described the Teotihuacán ceremony as an “ecodrama” and explained that “*the function of ecodrama is for the implicate to become explicate in consciousness.*”¹⁰⁸ In fact, Taegel believes the purpose of ceremony is to make explicit what has been implicit and adds,

A ceremony is an energetic context, where the aspiration of the ceremonialist and the people is for consciousness to be enlarged through sign bearing acts, symbolic acts. And it is the metaphorical, symbolic act [that make] a ceremony different from a seminar.

Taegel (p.c., 2020) gave an example of a symbolic act when I knelt in front of Pedro at the end of the apology.

[Pedro had to] adjust himself in the ecodrama of the moment to experience that. At first, he was reluctant, but he allowed himself to move, and as he allowed himself to experience the symbolic act of kneeling (...), the implicate or unconscious [became] explicate in aware, present moment consciousness. That happened to almost everybody there.

¹⁰⁸ Taegel has written that “ecodrama offers us a primary tool that recognizes the root of human suffering as feeling a separation from the core of Nature” (see Taegel, W. (2017). *Walking with Bears: On Bridges to Earth's New Era*. 2nd Tier Publishing. p. 231). Other psychologists have used similar frameworks, such as psychodrama and sociodrama (including the use of ritual) to heal collective trauma (see Leveton, E. (2010). *Healing Collective Trauma Using Sociodrama and Drama Therapy*. Springer Publishing Company).

Hernández (p.c., 2020) believes that it was important that the ceremony developed in a “natural” way, that is, spontaneously. Events like this need to develop naturally as the energy starts to build up in a way that is impossible to stop. At some point, there is so much energy that it “touches everyone’s heart.” He thinks that through ceremony, “hearts can be healed,” not only of racism, but also of other “internal hatreds we have about others, parents, siblings, and other relatives.” This healing liberates us and makes us happy, which has a ripple effect on others:

A happy person will make many other people happy. Happy energy, highly positive energy, well synchronized, will grow the energy of people around you. I have always thought that energy is the most vital thing that human beings can have and when it connects, and when it manifests, and when it is synchronized and connected with other people, it flows like water into the ocean. It is really that way.

Hernández (p.c., 2020) sees the Mexica ceremonies as an internal battle:

You become a warrior who has to work and fight with your inner being to remove all the energetic trash you carry -those [negative] thoughts- and dispose of it. And then, you start with a different energy, the energy from the heart, the energy that sees things in a totally different way than what your eyes allow you to see.

You must allow your body to react to this kind of ceremony, let it talk, let it ask for what it needs (...). Some people express their feelings by crying, singing, yelling, running (...). People are liberated from many things, a lot of freedom is achieved, and this kind of work deeply helps people, it opens the mind of many people, so that they can see life and things differently (...) no more pain, just forgiveness, and no more rancor. This is the goal of these ceremonies.

E. The Role of the Ancestors

The literature that discusses ceremony and ritual as part of spiritual healing often includes ancestors' involvement in the healing process. For instance, when Mason Boring (2012) travels to give a family constellations workshop, she

first talks to the ancestors of the place where she is going and asks for permission to create the ceremony. She believes that the ancestors are always present, so she invites them to contribute as active healers in her workshops and circles.

Malidoma Somé¹⁰⁹ (1997) affirms that African cultures believe “the ancestors are not dead. They live in the spirit of the community” (p. 52). When performing a ritual, the ancestors’ spirits are called into the circle of people “in order to achieve goals that cannot be achieved in any other way” (p. 38).

These beliefs and practices are common in many traditional cultures (Edwards et al., 2009). The Mexica dancers in Teotihuacán were no exception: They opened their ceremony by inviting all of our ancestors to join us. The ancestors were called to help heal the ceremony participants, but by healing ourselves, we were also healing our ancestors (as well as our descendants). As Duran puts it,

we deal with at least 7 generations of healing and trauma (...). The 7 generations are not just moving forward. We also are healing 7 generations of ancestors who may not have had the chance to heal themselves at the time that the trauma was occurring (Einhaeuser, 2015).

He adds, “when trauma is not dealt with in previous generations, it has to be dealt with in subsequent generations” (Duran & Ivey, 2019, p. 18).

Hübl (2020) affirms that the lives and experiences of our ancestors “can be accessed, and their karmic patterns can be cleared” (p. 122). He writes,

We can connect consciously with the living presence of our ancestors and stand with them in an experience of suffering. We can witness a wound in time from our national or racial memory, and we can tune the dial of our nervous system to that of a friend, loved one, or client to connect with an

¹⁰⁹ Malidoma Patrice Somé, Ph.D., (1956-) is a Burkinabé writer and workshop leader, primarily focusing on West African spirituality.

early point of trauma within them, in order to hold it together with presence and witness and healing intention. (p. 121).

Patrick Dougherty¹¹⁰, a therapist and Vietnam veteran who works with Hübl, adds a personal perspective. He affirms that in meditation, he connects with the presence of his ancestors and participates in a “conscious and mutual act of love and repair.” He believes that the personal healing he does also heals his ancestors. “I’ve heard them say to me, ‘You are the one we’ve been waiting for’” (Hübl et al., 2020, p. 115).

From my own experience in Teotihuacán, I have no doubt that I participated in a healing that was both personal and ancestral. The perpetrator wounding I inherited from my grandfather and other family members prompted me to offer the apology. As I was doing it, I could feel the energy of my people behind me. And I received a powerful confirmation that ancestral healing had taken place when the Canadian participant transmitted a direct message from my grandfather (see Chapter II). This moment also allowed me to fully express some of the grief I had been carrying.

The week after the ceremony, my wife, who is a spiritual channel (see Chapter IX), joined me in Mexico. During a meditation, she gave me another, more detailed message from my grandfather. He communicated that he was sorry for any damage he had caused and acknowledged that he did not know better at the time. I was able to tell him I forgave him and thanked him for all he did for

¹¹⁰ Patrick Dougherty, M.A., (dob unknown) is an American licensed psychologist with 40 years of clinical work and social activism. He is part of an international group working with and developing models dealing with collective trauma.

me, especially his unconditional love. It was another moving opportunity for ancestral healing.

I was not the only person to embody the Teotihuacán event as an ancestral healing. In fact, all the participants I interviewed had similar experiences. Taegel (p.c., 2020) told me that during the ceremony, he went back to his family history:

[I was] calling on my ancestors, healing the division in my own family, my own ancestors, my great-grandmother who was a slave, and my great-grandfather who was a slave trader (...) We were in the presence of ancestors at Teotihuacán. I expect that was more the spirit of Pedro's inviting us to be a part of a Mexica ceremony for a moment, the ancestors coming together.

Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) agreed that an ancestral healing took place and added:

In healing our wounds and our own transgressions –both wounds and transgressions- we heal those of our ancestors. We put an end, we can stop it, we can stop that chain of misery, shall we say. By accepting it, taking it within ourselves, and doing something about it.

Hernández (p.c., 2020) described the moment I apologized as follows:

A frequency opened up, which was so big, so interesting, that I can tell you it was not only your grandfather who became manifest. There were other [spirit] manifestations all around us, even if we couldn't see them (...). Many people felt different things from what one feels in an ordinary ceremony (...), each giving their own offering to those loved ones who are no longer with us.

Finally, the ancestors and other people who come from other times, like your grandfather, at that moment became manifest, and with all certainty, they were celebrating with us. Indeed, they were feeling happy.

F. Reflection

My support research questions for this chapter were *How can ancestral perpetration trauma be healed, and can a sacred ceremonial apology contribute to such healing?* It is evident from my experience, the testimonies of my research

partners, and the available literature that individual and collective perpetrator trauma can be healed in similar ways that all wounding is healed. We need to go right into the experience and feel all the grief, shame, and guilt we carry. We have to face ugly parts of ourselves and our families. We have to forgive ourselves and others.

The experiential and scholastic evidence shows that going through a process of authentic apology –whether it is called such or not- facilitates the healing of perpetrator trauma. Moreover, when the apology happens in the context of a sacred ceremony, healing can be enhanced by the presence of the Divine Source, ancestors, guides, and other healing energies. Ancestors not only aid in the healing of participants but are often healed themselves by the process.

Chapter IX: My Healing, A Spiritual Journey

Of course, the ceremony in Teotihuacán was only one step in my spiritual life and healing journey, but it was definitively a seminal one. It felt like the culmination of a critical leg of the trip, which started with my first UU intensive at Chartres in 2013. To better understand the whole journey, I found it necessary to trace a map of every stage of the trip since my birth.

A. My Childhood and Adolescence

I was born in an unusual family for Mexican standards. My father and his family were refugees from the Spanish Civil War, where the Catholic Church supported the fascist insurgents (Raguer, 2007). My paternal grandfather, Gumersindo Areán, an Air Force officer who fought to defend the Republic, once heard a priest say that all the “Reds” should be killed. He was utilizing the pejorative fascist label to describe the Republican side. After that, my grandfather swore never to set foot in a church again, and he never did.

My mother’s side was a more typical Spanish family. My maternal grandfather, Luis Alvarez Pastor, emigrated from Spain to Cuba and then to Mexico. He and my mother were practicing Catholics, though not as devout as many Mexican families are. We went to Mass with some regularity, and my brothers and I received the sacraments of baptism and first communion. After my grandfather died, when I was 8 years old, my mother had a negative interaction with the local priest. He told her that she was barred from taking communion if she was using “artificial” birth control. She was furious, and we stopped going to

church at that point. My brothers and I were thrilled to let go of what felt like just an obligation.

When I did my first communion, I remember noticing the tension between the two sides of my family. It was not explicit as they loved and respected each other and never spoke about religion. Still, the dissonance was apparent: My maternal grandfather was my communion Godfather and stood at my side during the ceremony, whereas my parental grandfather waited outside the church. I didn't understand this dynamic until years later, after I had adopted the viewpoint of the agnostic side of the family. Furthermore, during adolescence, I became very involved in left-wing politics and came to consider religion (particularly Catholicism) an obstacle to achieving a just and equitable society.

B. The Holy Encounter

When I was 20 years old, I traveled to New York City to study musical composition. During my senior year in college, I met my wife Nancy, who had been on an intentional spiritual path since she was a girl. She had had regular paranormal experiences and precognitive dreams when she was growing up. A few months after we starting dating, she introduced me to the work of Bob Monroe¹¹¹, a well-known author who wrote about his out-of-body experiences and astral voyages (Monroe, 2014). Nancy attended a workshop at the Monroe Institute¹¹² and learned how to use Monroe's method of brain regulation to induce

¹¹¹ Robert Allan Monroe (1915 –1995) was an American radio broadcasting executive who founded The Monroe Institute to research altered consciousness and out-of-body experiences.

¹¹² The Monroe Institute is a nonprofit education and research organization devoted to exploring human consciousness, based in Faber, Virginia, United States.

deep levels of meditation. She introduced me to a series of cassettes tapes used to enhance the meditation process. Even though I had never meditated before, I found the practice very relaxing and grounding.

Next, Nancy shared with me another series of tapes from the Monroe Institute, which featured channeling sessions recorded in its labs. Using a scientific experimental approach, the Institute audio-recorded individuals who could channel non-physical entities. These tapes fascinated me as they opened a whole new world in my awareness. The content of the recordings was varied, but many of them focused on what they called “earth changes,” cataclysmic events that were going to change the course of civilization. At that point, in the mid-1980s, I had no idea what these entities were talking about. Thirty-five years later, when humanity is on the verge of environmental catastrophe and in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, the prophetic nature of those channeling sessions has become more than obvious.

Nancy and I listened to the Monroe tapes and meditated together, which had a magnifying effect on us. At some point, Nancy felt that she was getting messages from non-physical entities and started sharing them with me. They were very profound and clearly not coming from her conscious self. One day, the entities started talking directly through her voice and identified themselves as our guides. Several different guides spoke with different intonations and cadences, though they never used names. Their messages were always very loving and supportive, and during these channeling sessions, we often felt that they were healing us.

Eventually, Nancy and I got married and had children, and our focus shifted to creating a family. For several years, we paused the channeling but continued to have various spiritual practices, which helped us tremendously during very challenging times in our family life.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001, in New York, Nancy decided to go to seminary and earned a Master of Divinity from Harvard Divinity School. She became a hospital and hospice chaplain. A few years after she graduated, I also started to feel the call to go back to school and pursue some kind of theological degree. At that point, I also started to feel a conscious longing to experience oneness with the Divine Source and with other human beings, especially the many people I considered “the other.” I explored the possibility of attending one of the several seminaries in New England, but none of them felt like the right fit.

C. The Revelation

One day, while reading Matthew Fox’s¹¹³ *The Hidden Spirituality of Men* (2009), I became curious about his recent whereabouts. I looked at his Wikipedia page and saw that he had founded the University of Creation Spirituality in 1996, which was renamed Wisdom University after Fox left in 2005 (Wikipedia, n.d.). The article provided a hyperlink to the university's website, which was more recently re-baptized Ubiquity University (UU).

¹¹³ Timothy James Fox Ph.D., (1940-) is an American priest, theologian, author, and teacher. Formerly a member of the Dominican Order within the Catholic Church, he became a member of the Episcopal Church following his expulsion from the order in 1993.

When I landed on the UU's Wisdom School of Graduate Studies web page, I knew this was the school I wanted to attend. I was particularly attracted to one of the intensive courses, *Grammatica: Illumining the Language of Divine Consciousness*, offered as part of the New Chartres Academy, which meets in France for a week every summer. I saw on the website that there was an upcoming informational call about the intensive. I immediately signed up for the call.

A week or so later, I joined the call while taking a hike in the beautiful hills behind our home in Western Massachusetts. I was fascinated by the description of the Academy experience provided by some of the faculty: Jim Garrison¹¹⁴, Carolyn Myss¹¹⁵, and Andrew Harvey. As the call ended, I was on top of a hill. At the very moment the sun was setting, Apela Colorado¹¹⁶ offered a closing prayer, creating a blessed, magical moment. I was deeply moved and inspired. I immediately called Nancy and just told her, "we are going to France this summer!"

I was certain I was supposed to attend the Chartres Academy, even though we did not have money to pay for the trip. I calculated that we would need about \$8000 to cover all expenses for both of us. A few weeks later, I received two offers to do consulting jobs, which provided additional income beyond our

¹¹⁴ James Garrison, PhD., (1951-) is a professor and author and the founder and president of Ubiquity University. He has spent his entire professional life in executive leadership, including as co-founder and president of the Gorbachev Foundation/USA and State of the World Forum.

¹¹⁵ Caroline Myss, Ph.D., (1952-) is an American mystic, teacher, medical intuitive, and author of numerous books and audiotapes, including five New York Times Best Sellers.

¹¹⁶ Apela Colorado, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Oneida-Gaul and a traditional cultural practitioner and indigenous scientist. She is dedicated to bridging dialogue between Western thought and indigenous worldview. She founded the Worldwide Indigenous Science Network in 1989.

salaries. One was for \$3000 and the other for \$5000. At this point, it became evident that a force bigger than me was orchestrating all of this. I was being led every step of the way.

D. The Pilgrimage

Going to the New Chartres Academy ended up being one of the most impactful experiences in my life. There were many significant moments during that miraculous week. First and foremost, during a group meditation in the Chartres Cathedral crypt, in front of a venerated statue of the Black Madonna, *Notre Dame Sous Terre* (see Figure 13), I clearly heard the voice of the Divine Mother saying, “You need to follow the light. You need to follow me, or you will die. I will show you the way.” I was totally astonished. I had never had a direct experience like that on my own. I felt blessed and uplifted and, frankly, a little scared.



Figure 13 – Notre Dame Sous Terre

Nevertheless, I never hesitated to take the next step. I unequivocally said yes to the Mother without quite knowing what that meant. I understood that the death She referred to was more spiritual than literal, but that didn’t make a difference; I needed to follow her wherever she took me.

Later that week, Carolyn Myss was offering a lecture. She said something that seemed directed at me: “You have to decide whether spirituality is a hobby for you or the center of your life. These are the two only options” (Myss, personal communication, July 2013). At that moment, it became clear that this was what the Divine Mother was asking. Spirituality had to become the most important part

of my life. In all honesty, I knew that it had been more like a hobby up to that time.

The central ritual of the New Academy is to walk the 800-year-old labyrinth at the core of the Chartres Cathedral (see Figure 14). This is a profound experience, done in the evening after the Cathedral has been closed to the general public. It happens by candlelight, with a small choir singing plainchant. It is hard not to be transported to a mystical realm under these conditions. As I got ready to enter the labyrinth, something unexpected happened. I was terrified. I was afraid



Figure 14 – Chartres Labyrinth

that I would get lost and never find my way, even though the labyrinth is not a maze; it had only one way to go in and out. I recognized this to be a symbolic fear. After being blessed by the Divine Mother's message only two days before, now I was feeling the terror of having to surrender to Her. This is the nature of the journey in the

labyrinth of life.

After a few minutes walking the labyrinth, I felt again the energy of the Mother. She was telling me –without words- to breathe deeply and just take one step and a time. She was already guiding me. Her grace allowed me to calm down and be totally present in this powerful ceremony.

E. Letting Go

Nancy and I returned transformed from the Chartres intensive (she also had several powerful experiences). We were both ready to surrender and follow Divine guidance. I had attended the Chartres intensive as an auditor to see if UU was a good fit for me, prompted by Will Taegel, then dean of the WSGS. After such a powerful experience, it was evident that I should enroll as a Ph.D. student.

The most dramatic development after coming back from France was that, during meditation, Nancy and I were told to sell our house and move to Mexico City. This was a totally unexpected situation. We had lived in Western Massachusetts for more than 18 years and had raised our children there amongst a beautiful and supportive community of friends. For the previous five years, we had been living in our “dream house.” We were sure this was the last house we would ever need to buy. It had everything we wanted and more. We thought we could grow old here and have plenty of room for our children to visit with their families.

At first, when we got the message, I was in shock. At the same time, I recognized the possibility of freedom in that bold action. We put the house on the market, and within a week, we had a full offer.

The next question was what to do with the belongings we had accumulated over the last 25 years of marriage. The house was fully furnished, and we had plenty of storage space. Again, during meditation, we received another startling message: We were to get rid of most of our belongings and only take with us what

we could carry in a few suitcases. Along with selling our beloved house, this next step became a powerful exercise in non-attachment.

We started selling some and giving away most of what we owned: beautiful furniture (including family heirlooms), books, CDs, mattresses, washer and dryer, bicycles, a car. I have never been a person who values material things, so in general, it was not very hard to let go of 98% of what I owned. But then, I got to the last 2%: My musical compositions manuscripts from my previous career, a beloved collection of Mexican Indigenous masks that I have gathered over decades, my framed diplomas and awards from my college years. I had already decided I could find a way to store these “prized” possessions when I came across a book by Wayne Dyer¹¹⁷, where he introduced an interesting exercise. He said that to fully have the life we wanted, we shouldn’t create a list of things we were willing to do; instead, we should have a list of things we were *unwilling* to do and that such a list should be empty. Only then would we have the freedom to pursue who we really were supposed to be (Dyer, 2013).

Receiving such a message at this time was an amazing synchronicity. It was what I needed to hear. Interestingly, the objects I was trying to keep represented aspects of my past that I needed to release: the classical composer with great aspirations that never materialized; the star student trying to please his father; the vulnerable man hiding behind many masks. As I moved forward, I no longer needed any of those identities. I needed to find out who I was at the present moment.

¹¹⁷ Wayne Walter Dyer, Ph.D., (1940–2015) was an American self-help and spiritual author and a motivational speaker who wrote more than 30 books, including many best-sellers.

F. Fear and Grace

The experience of releasing the house, letting go of our possessions, and saying goodbye to our loved ones proved to be transformative. While my unwilling list is not empty yet (will it ever be?), I learned unattachment at a profound level. In truth, it was also a difficult and scary process. Shortly after we sold the house and before we went to Mexico, I went on a business trip with Nancy. For the first time in my life, I experienced panic attacks. They overtook me at night. I could not lie down in bed. I felt I was suffocating. For three interminable days, I stayed up all night, pacing a small hotel room, trying to lie down, and immediately having to stand up. At times, I sat down on the floor in the corner of the room, hoping to get some sleep.

I had to go to work during the day and was feeling exhausted. I felt enormous anxiety just thinking about the approaching evening and having to live through another night of anguish. By the third day, I was desperate and went to a doctor to get sleeping pills. They did not work. That night, I was as terrified as before but also felt groggy. As the hours passed, in a state of stupor, I remembered the message from the Divine Mother. She said she would help me find my way in the labyrinth.

Andrew Harvey (1999) has written that “there is no faster or more powerful way of remaining in the presence of the Divine Mother as Mary than saying the prayer she [gave] to Saint Dominic in the thirteenth century, the Hail Mary” (p. 238). At that moment of misery, this was the practice that came to me. I started praying in Spanish to the Divine Mother, using the Hail Mary as a mantra,

echoing how millions of Catholics recite the rosary, except that I repeated it hundreds of times. After hours of practice, I started to sense a feeling of calm descending upon me; it felt like the Divine Mother was enveloping me with her grace. I was finally able to go to sleep.

The next evening, the night terrors were gone. They did revisit me now and then in the following months, but I've always been able to calm down by praying the Hail Mary. It has become my go-to practice when I am in distress.

G. A New Cycle

Moving back to Mexico City was a dream come true for me. I left as a 20-year-old and had always harbored the desire to spend more time there, especially in my childhood neighborhood of Coyoacán. I now was coming back as a 52-year-old man, which was significant because, in Mesoamerican cosmology, fifty-two years marked the completion of a life cycle and the beginning of a new one. At that point in time, the ancient Mexicans celebrated the New Fire ceremony; its purpose “was none other than to renew the sun and ensure another 52-year cycle” (Cartwright, 2016). Part of that ceremony involved the destruction of ceramic pots and other household items, a ritual that beautifully paralleled the process of releasing my belongings. Going to Chartres a month after my 52nd birthday and what has followed since certainly feels like a new cycle in my life.

We ended up spending five beautiful months in a lovely, small apartment in Coyoacán, the oldest colonial neighborhood in the city. We considered staying longer but were keenly aware that we were not in charge; we needed to allow Spirit to lead.

As is often the case, we didn't understand why we needed to live in Mexico until after the fact. For me, on the surface, it was a time to deeply reconnect with my hometown, my family, and friends and experience as an adult what it is like to live in that enormous metropolis (not always easy). At a deeper level, there was another purpose I didn't know. I had to go further in my unwilling list and let go of the idea that I would be happier living in Mexico than in the US. I had to release my attachment to the place and the people, my family, and my friends.

This didn't become evident until the end of my stay there. The apartment we rented was about a mile away from the house where I grew up and spent the first 20 years of my life. My grandfather, Luis Alvarez Pastor, built that house and lived there until his death when I was 8 years old. As I have described before, I was very close to him, and his death was a devastating blow for me. When I visited Mexico in the past, I always drove by the house, which no longer belonged to my family. Going out of my way, I would always stop and observe it, usually with poignant nostalgia. That home represented my happy childhood, my loss of innocence when I lost my Tata, my coming of age, and much more. I was intensely attached to it and to the memory of my grandfather.

Two weeks before leaving Mexico, I had a very vivid dream. I walked around my childhood home and noticed that every room had been renovated, except for my grandfather's bedroom. It looked exactly the same as when he was alive. When I woke up, I had the realization that even though I had released many things, my attachment to my past (Mexico, the house, my grandfather) was

weighing me down. I went into meditation to better understand the dream's meaning.

One of the few heirlooms I had kept after letting go of my possessions was a beautiful, valuable ring that had belonged to my grandfather. It was made of solid gold and was quite large, resembling a bishop's ring. It was actually too flashy for me to wear, but I kept it because it was small enough to carry with me, and it was my only material connection to my beloved ancestor. During meditation, I got a clear message: "You need to let go of the ring." I tried to do some bargaining with my guides by asking: "Can I sell it?" The definite answer was no. "Can I pass it on to one of my brothers?" No! I was told, "you have to go to the park and bury it." That was it. The mandate couldn't be more explicit.

I finished my meditation, got dressed, found the ring, and headed to the park. I had been given the image of which particular park needed to be the repository for the ring, a gorgeous arboretum where I spent countless hours as a child, sometimes with my grandfather. I walked to and into the park as if I were in a sacred pilgrimage. I strolled around the ancient, familiar trees until I found the right spot to bury the ring. Once I found it, I prayed to the Divine Mother to help me release any attachments to the land, my childhood, my friends and relatives. I made a deep hole in the ground with my bare hands, deposited the heirloom, and covered it with soil.

A few days later, we left Mexico City for our new destination, New York City. It had been a rich and beautiful time, and my relationship with my former home totally changed. In the past, every time I left, I felt sad and incomplete.

Now, those feelings were gone. I told Nancy that it would be fine if I never went back. I still have that feeling today, six years later.

H. Opening my Heart

After five months in Mexico, we were once again directed to move, this time to New York City, where Nancy and I had met and lived for several years in our 20s. But before that, we went back to France. That year, in addition to attending the New Chartres Academy, we enrolled in another course called Mystical Paris. This pilgrimage was not as dramatic as the first one, but it was full of moments of grace and synchronicities. I was eager to go back to the Cathedral's crypt and commune with the Black Madonna. This time she spoke to me again during the ritual meditation. She said, "*You need to open your heart.*" That was all; there were no more instructions.

As part of the Mystical Paris course, Andrew Harvey took us to the church of Saint Sulpice. He told us the story of Saint Marguerite Marie Alacoque¹¹⁸, who had a magnificent vision in 1673 in which Jesus appeared to her, showed her his open, burning heart, took her heart, and joined it with his in an act of purification, and put it back in her chest. Jesus told her that "he wanted his heart manifested everywhere with all its treasures of love, mercy, graces, and power of sanctification" (Harvey, 1999, p. 231).

Harvey (1999) has written that "nothing is more important on the path to Christhood than awakening [the] heart, opening it to God and keeping it open" (p.

¹¹⁸ St. Marguerite Marie Alacoque (1647 –1690) was a French Roman Catholic Visitation nun and mystic who promoted devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in its modern form.

207). By taking us to St. Sulpice, he was leading us precisely in that process. He recommended that we meditate in the chapel of the *Sacre Couer*, inside the church. I sat in one of the old chairs facing a beautiful statue of Jesus, standing on top of the world



Figure 15 – Sacre Couer

with his arms wide open (see Figure 15). The sculpture was all white, probably crafted in marble, except for the Sacred Heart in the middle of his chest, which seemed to be made of gold. During the meditation, I opened my eyes and saw a light beam coming out of Jesus' heart and connecting directly to mine. I felt full of love and grace. Mary had asked me to open my heart, and Jesus had done it for me. I was blessed beyond my wildest dreams.

Another of the activities planned for the Mystical Paris class was to descend to the city's catacombs. I had never been there, and someone had described it as a place not suited for claustrophobes. The entrance is a very small spiral staircase that seems to go on forever. After that, one has to slowly walk for about 15 minutes in a hallway so narrow that at times a person barely fits between the walls and a very low ceiling. Meanwhile, there are hundreds of people ahead of you and behind you. In case of panic, there is literally nowhere to go.

When I heard this warning, I was terrified. Since I was a child, I have had some claustrophobia episodes that had gotten worse since I experienced panic attacks. Participation in this activity was optional, so I decided to opt-out, though a part of me knew that this could be an important experience. The morning before

heading to the catacombs, Harvey spoke to the class and told us that this was the opportunity to face intense fears. He probably was referring to facing death by witnessing the piles of bones of millions of people buried there. That didn't bother me; my terror was about being trapped, but clearly, the message applied to me. This was the time to face my terror. I needed to do it. Fortunately, Harvey offered us a tool to deal with the anxiety. A brief prayer or mantra that we were to repeat incessantly: "More and more love; more and more surrender."

This prayer was invaluable as I found myself descending the interminable stairs and walking the hallway, where my shoulders touched both walls, and my head almost reached the ceiling. I breathed deeply and repeated the mantra. By the time I got to the open chamber where the bones were stacked, all I felt was relief and gratitude. Getting there was the challenge; being with the dead seemed like encountering old friends. Since I had that amazing experience, I have used the mantra –along with the Hail Mary- to appease my fears.

Another significant synchronicity happened during this trip. I was chatting with a fellow student in Chartres and mentioned that Nancy and I were considering moving to New York City. She immediately said that I should check out One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, where she had been ordained as an interfaith minister a few years back. She called her involvement "the most significant learning experience in my life" (Laura Preves, personal communication, July 2014). I wrote the name of the school down and put it away. The following week in Paris, I was talking to Andrew Harvey, and again, I mentioned moving to New York. To my surprise, he also told me to check out One Spirit, where he

occasionally taught. He said it was an amazing spiritual community in the city. This second reference made me realize that I had to pay attention to this message; I immediately checked One Spirit's webpage. Not unlike when I discovered WSGS more than a year before, I strongly felt I needed to enroll in the interfaith ministry training program. As a matter of fact, I applied the next day and did my entrance interview via videoconference from my Paris hotel room. Later on, I found out that Ubiquity University had a formal academic agreement with One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, which allowed my seminary studies to be counted as credits towards my Ph.D. It could not have been more perfect.

I. Sacred Space

When it was time to settle in New York, everything was given to us without any effort on our part. In a city where finding a place to live is notoriously tricky, we got the perfect apartment right away, precisely in the neighborhood we wanted. The previous tenant was moving in with his girlfriend, so he sold us his furniture for a meager price. We ended moving into a fully furnished apartment. At the same time, one of our friend's daughters was moving out of her home in New Jersey and getting rid of most of her houseware. We were able to go to her apartment and pick up whatever we needed. It all felt like a miracle and the confirmation that we were in the right place.

Going to One Spirit Interfaith Seminary was also exactly what I needed at that time. It was a thriving spiritual community where I felt strongly connected to other people. It was also a solid learning environment. Like the WSGS, in addition to the "book learning," there was a deeper layer of knowledge

transmission based on spiritual practice, devotion, ceremony, and ritual. Maybe the most important skill I learned was how to hold sacred space, which now I understand as establishing coherence through spiritual techniques, such as prayer, meditation, and smudging (see Chapter V).

I was ordained as an interfaith minister in June 2016, five months before traveling to Teotihuacán. During that time, another significant event happened: I attended a workshop that introduced me to *Ho'oponopono*. One of its central practices, based on the act of apology, proved to be very influential for my experience in Mexico.

When seen in perspective, it is clear that the three-and-a-half years of my doctoral course work (including two years in seminary) provided the perfect preparation for the event in Teotihuacán. From the moment I said yes to the Divine Mother and decided to make spirituality the center of life, She fulfilled her promise, guiding me every step of the way and giving me everything I needed at the right time.

The journey has been like an epic poem: Waking up and saying yes to a new life; radically trusting and surrendering to the mystery of Spirit; letting go of all my possessions and my old life; facing deep fears with faith and prayer; opening my heart and loving more deeply; learning the power of ceremony, ritual, and devotional practice; and discovering the miracle of apology.

As the journey continues, I am filled with awe and curiosity. And I am deeply, deeply grateful for all the learnings, miracles, and blessings in my life.

J. Wisdom Traditions

Many traditions have enriched my spiritual journey, including *Ho'oponopono*, *A Course in Miracles*, Sufism, and Toltec spirituality. Still, the tradition that has been seminal in my development for the last 8 years has been undoubtedly Christian Mysticism. My spiritual awakening started with a mystical experience in a Catholic Cathedral, in which the Divine Mother communicated to me through the vessel of Mary, mother of Jesus. She has directed my every step, assuming different shapes, primarily as the Black Madonna at Chartres and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. The energy of Jesus opened my heart in a mystical experience in another Catholic Church in France. I confronted a deep fear in a Christian cemetery, the catacombs of Paris. When panic attacks overwhelmed me, the Hail Mary, a fundamental Catholic prayer to the Mary, healed me.

I find it both ironic and comforting to have been brought back to the tradition of my birth. Even though I did not grow up in a devout Catholic family, we did partake in enough Christian traditions to make a lasting impression on me. Christmas was a major holiday for my family. In preparation for my first communion, I had to attend catechism classes for a year. As a child, I remember times in which I felt very close and comforted by God.

In fact, the story of Jesus' life has always deeply moved me, especially the passion (the last week of his life). My favorite piece of classical music is Johan Sebastian Bach's *The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the Evangelist Matthew*, commonly known as *St. Matthew's Passion*. I have listened to it many times, live and recorded, and it often brings tears to my eyes. During

one semi-staged performance by the Berlin Philharmonic in New York, I could not stop myself from quietly sobbing upon witnessing the story.

Before my first pilgrimage to Chartres, listening to *St. Matthew's Passion* was the closest I had ever been to a mystical religious experience. Otherwise, the Catholicism of my childhood lacked any mystery. That's one of the reasons I turned away from it: It only offered me arbitrary antiquated rules but no comfort. There were so many precepts with which I disagreed: the concept of original sin, the self-denigration, the devaluation of women, the twisted approach to sex. I still do not embrace many of these teachings, so I don't consider myself a Catholic. Still, the New Chartres Academy opened the door to a new way to embrace Christianity, which included direct communication with Spirit, celebration of the Divine Feminine, and commitment to spiritual growth through the practices of meditation (including walking a labyrinth), contemplation, prayer (including using a rosary), and chanting.

At WSGC and One Spirit, I got acquainted with the writings of ancient Christian mystics, such as Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Julian of Norwich, Meister Eckhart, and Hildegard of Bingen. I learned about the alternative Christianity of the original Chartres teachers. I also had the privilege to study with modern Christian mystics, such as Andrew Harvey and David Wallace¹¹⁹. They espoused a kind of Christianity that was radically different from the Catholicism of my childhood.

¹¹⁹ Rev. David Wallace (dob unknown) is an American interfaith minister. He is a dean and senior teacher for One Spirit Interfaith Seminary in New York City.

In my rejection of Catholicism as an adolescent, I became aware of its use to subjugate non-European people. Most students in Mexico learn how the Spanish Conquistadores used Catholic doctrine to slave and kill Indigenous people (Castillo, 2017). When I met my wife, Nancy, I also discovered how Christianity and other Abrahamic religions have systematically oppressed and belittled women. It wasn't until I took my first courses at WSGS that I learned that the same theology has been utilized to justify the desecration of nature. In my 2014 final paper for the New Chartres Academy, I wrote,

the work of Jim Garrison -strengthened by Anne Baring's and Andrew Harvey's teachings- has opened my eyes to the fact that the environmental crisis in which we are living is also the product of the ideology of the solar era, which proclaims men's superiority, not only over women, children, and other men but also over nature and all other species. I was aware –to a certain degree- of the terrible effects of climate change, but frankly, I had not traced the cause to the same ideology of male supremacy that I have studied for years (Areán, 2014).

WSGS and One Spirit also introduced me to earth-based religions, of which I knew very little. Jim Garrison (personal communication, July 2013) often mentions that Chartres Cathedral was built on the site the ancient druids considered the most sacred place in Europe. In fact, they gathered every Spring to honor the Sacred Feminine energy in a cave that later became the crypt of the cathedral, where I had my first mystical experience (Querido, 1987).

At One Spirit, I studied what Huston Smith (1991) calls the “Primal Religions,” particularly introductions to African Yoruba and Northeastern North American spiritualities. Later on, as I prepared for my pilgrimage to Teotihuacán, I learned more about earth-based spirituality by reading the works of Will Taegel,

particularly *The Mother Tongue* (2012), and subsequently, *Walking with Bears* (2017) and Heather Ash Amara's *The Toltec Path of Transformation* (2012).

In my process of rediscovering and embracing Christianity from a mystical perspective, I found aspects of it that were compatible with my rejection of misogyny and racism. Still, before my trip to Teotihuacán, I had not deeply thought about how it could be reconciled with my love and respect for the earth. Most mystical traditions seem to emphasize the transcendent over the immanent, and in my study of the historical Christian mystics, I had not encountered earth-centered writings.

This changed in my fourth pilgrimage to Chartres in 2019, when I felt guided to visit Italy for the first time in my life. I was particularly interested in visiting Assisi. Since my childhood, I had admired St. Francis when I saw Franco Zeffirelli's¹²⁰ 1972 classic film *Brother Sun, Sister Moon*. Almost 50 years later, I wanted to see and feel the places where his life unfolded.

In preparation for the visit, I read Francis' biography (Chesterton, 2009) and was again moved by his generosity and devotion. But reading about him did not prepare me for the intense emotion I felt when retracing his steps. I felt a deep kinship with his Spirit when I meditated in his childhood home (now a church) and the Basilica where he is buried.

The pilgrimage to Assisi gifted me with what I had been looking for: The example of an ancient Christian mystic who was directly connected to the world of Spirit (the transcendent) and also deeply communed with all of earth's

¹²⁰ Franco Zeffirelli (1923-2019) was an Italian director and producer of operas, films, and television.

creatures (the immanent). The next day, I woke up early and sat outside to meditate on our hotel's terrace. I was feeling the energy and grace of St. Francis very strongly when I suddenly felt a presence. I opened my eyes, and there was a red fox, sitting like a dog, looking at me from five feet away. We looked at each other for a while and then, she left, leaving me astonished and blessed. I immediately knew that this was a gift from Francis, a demonstration of the profound beauty of the Nature he loved. It was not until later that I understood a deeper meaning of the encounter. Not unlike the union I experienced when I looked into Pedro's eyes in Teotihuacán, symbolizing the connection with all humans, looking into the fox's gaze offered me communion with all sentient beings.¹²¹

¹²¹ Will Taegel (p.c., 2020) shared with me that the fox symbolizes “a bridge to a new era.” It is not lost to me that my Chartres adventure started with the guidance of another fox: Reading *The Hidden Spirituality of Men* by Matthew Fox.

Chapter X: The Experience of Apology

This dissertation examines two primary research questions that are distinct but related and sometimes overlapping. The first one is about the *experience* of apology, which focuses on exploring the state of mind, heart, and spirit that participants may embody *during* the moment an apology takes place. The second is about the *impact* of apology, which relates to the consequences that apologizing has on participants *after the fact*. There is abundant literature on the effects of apology, which will be explored in the next chapter. There is much less written about the actual experience of apology (particularly in scholastic articles and books), so this chapter will primarily rely on my own experience in Teotihuacán and the interviews with other participants. The specific research question is “*How do I (and other people) perceive and describe the experience of sacred ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm?*”

A. Humility

Will Taegel (p.c., 2020) affirms that “*the role of humans in apology is to experience humility.*” Humility is, in fact, the most quoted condition in both the apology literature and the interviews I conducted. Ensler (2019) writes that an apology “is a humbling. It is an admission of wrongdoings and a surrender. It is an act of intimacy and connection which requires great self-knowledge and insight” (p. 9). Engel (2002) adds, “when we apologize, we humble ourselves before the person we have harmed, and this helps us to regain our dignity and our

humanity” (p. 9). From the perspective of a political apology (in this case, from the Australian government to Aboriginal people), Fagenblat¹²² (2008) writes:

Apology of a sovereign nation, whether in Australia or elsewhere, so strikingly new in political history and political theology is that here, finally, sovereignty has deployed its transcendence with respect to the law in order to practice humility rather than violence (p. 28).

Kador (2009) states that “what makes apology work is the dramatic evidence of the offender figuratively (and sometimes literally) prostrating himself or herself” (p. 33). This resonates with my experience in Teotihuacán. Even though I did not prostrate myself, I did go down on one knee, which had a similar symbolic effect. Carol Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) felt that *“when you got down on your knee, that was the key (...). It [came] from a place of humility (...). [It was] a very liberating thing for both the asker and the recipient of the request.”*

B. Other Emotions

Interviewees described having many other intense emotions and thoughts during the ceremony. Taegel (p.c., 2020) related his experience as follows:

I would identify and access the experience through Pedro and the elders. So, I would feel like, ‘Oh! The colonizers, the slave traders, are apologizing to me.’ And even when I say that now I feel tears. Here is a reconciliation from my story. But then, at other times, I would access the experience through you, as the apologizer, and I would be the slave trader apologizing. So, I would role reverse, go from one side to the other. Though that was not so much conscious as it was in reflecting.

When I was on the Indigenous side, I felt the tears of grief and joy as an Indigenous person. On the slave trader side, I felt relief and a moment of release, relinquishing, letting go of something that needed to be done.

¹²² Michael Fagenblat, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a lecturer in the Australian Centre for Jewish Civilisation, School of Historical Studies, Monash University. He teaches classical Jewish thought and literature.

Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) had an experience similar to Taegel:

It was really one of the most memorable events that I can remember. I remember a lot of it physically. I can even bring it back; I can see it right now, I can envision it right now. It was so vivid and still vivid in my memory.

I felt gratified to be included, and my emotions were very close to the surface. It was very emotional, extremely emotional for me. It went down to the core of my bones. And I'm not sure if someone not of Native heritage felt exactly the way that I felt. It was a very deep experience for me, emotionally (...). I'm White, I'm Native American, and I'm also Black. This is a wild heritage, isn't it? So, all of these things are warring inside of me. So, is the White person asking forgiveness of the Black person or the Native person inside of me? Very interesting.

When asked about his experience as a participant, Hernández (p.c., 2020) first spoke about what he saw in me during the ceremony, and then, he expanded the answer to include the rest of the group and himself.

In my 58 years of life, I had never heard of such a thing (...). I had never heard of someone who dared to ask for forgiveness for all those things that happened, in this case, when people arrived from Spain to Mexico.

There is something very important: [The apology] came from you in a very real, very original way; it was born from the heart at that moment. It flooded people with feeling, it opened their skin (because the pores open up), and they could feel that energy of feeling someone at that moment with such great love and heart. You demonstrated it to [Pedro] and in front of all of us who were there. And it was not only him who felt it, but all the people there, the dancers, and everyone who participated in the ceremony. [It was] something that for me touched my heart.

Hernández (p.c., 2020) also shared with me what Pedro Diaz said to him right after the ceremony:

Pedro took [the apology] as a very big thing. I have to tell you something important: He took it that way, very much from the heart, because he's a very real person. Pedro said: "I am surprised. Truly, I have no words to describe it." In fact, he is someone who talks very little, but he did say: "How amazing! How great!"

The interviewees described that experiencing the apology elicited powerful emotional states, such as grief, joy, and release (Taegel), gratefulness (Flake Chapman), and love (Hernández), resulting in reconciliation and liberation (some of which are in the category of impact and will be discussed in the next chapter).

Some of the authors who write about the emotional aspect of apologizing echo these expressive qualities. Ensler (2019b) describes that writing an apology from her father's perspective was "a profound, excruciating, and ultimately liberating experience."

The literature and the interviews identify other emotional qualities needed in an apology such as vulnerability (Battistella, 2014; Ensler, 2019; Lerner, 2017), integrity (Bloom, 2014; Kador, 2009; Simpson, 2005), and authenticity (Ellwanger, 2009; Schmidt, 2010) (Hernández, p.c., 2020).

C. Fear and Courage

In addition to humility, many sources also name courage (Battistella, 2014; Howes, 2020; MacLachlan, 2014; Simpson, 2005; Taft, 2005b) as a critical emotional element in apology. Kador (2009) writes that "apology is the bravest gesture we can make to the unknown. If you think about it, the unknown is exactly what we enter whenever we apologize" (p. 44). And Taft¹²³ (2005a), in the context of medical apologies, affirms that "authentic apology is reserved for the morally courageous who seek for themselves and their patients the deep

¹²³ Lee Taft, J.D., M.Div., (dob unknown) is an American lawyer and teacher. He has integrated his expertise in law and ethics to create a client-centered alternative to litigation based on fairness, transparency, and accountability.

healing an authentic apology inspires” (p.79). During his interview, Hernández (p.c., 2020) mentioned the word “dare” five times, as in “you dared to ask for forgiveness,” also implying the element of courage.

When I share the Teotihuacán story in the apology circles I have led, participants often characterize my actions as courageous, which is interesting because I don’t usually think of myself as a fearless person. Maybe this has to do with a misconception that courage implies not been afraid, but as Ambrose Redmoon¹²⁴ (1991) wrote, “courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than one's fear” (p. 40). I can relate to this quote. In fact, for me, a constant feeling in the experience of apology was fear. I was afraid the moment the concept of apologizing appeared in my mind. The anxiety increased gradually as I shared the idea with Will; as he expressed enthusiasm for the concept; as he told me he had communicated with the Mexica dancers and they were willing to entertain the idea; as I talked to Pedro Díaz about my intention; during the waiting period before the ceremony, and during the ceremony itself. In experiencing all this anxiety, I knew that the only remedy was to pray to the Divine Mother. Repeating the Hail Mary as a mantra was the only thing that had helped me overcome panic attacks in the past, and I knew that this was what I needed at that moment, particularly because I could sense that She was guiding me through the whole process. So, I spent a fair amount of time alone in my room praying, and the Mother responded by assuring me that She would walk with me every step of the way and showed me that

¹²⁴ Ambrose Redmoon was the nom de plume of James Neil Hollingworth (1933–1996), an American writer and rock band manager.

saying yes to what was just in front of me was indeed more important than my fear. She gifted me with courage.

My reliance on prayer is echoed by Abramson (2017) in his commentary on Maimonides' process of *teshuvah* or repentance:

Teshuvah seems like a solitary enterprise, sinking to the bottom of the ocean in a pressurized suit to investigate the roots of our darkest fears and insecurities, revisiting our worst moments. Prayer is the tether, the oxygen line that connects us to the surface. There is work to be done in the dark crevasses of our soul, difficult and even frightening labor, but we can't forget to breathe (p. 48).

D. Grief

During my time in Teotihuacán, another emotion was more potent than fear: the enormous grief I felt for the harm my people, family, and I had perpetrated against Mexico and its inhabitants. My sorrow grew every passing day, and it peaked during the apology delivery and afterward when I received the channeled message from my grandfather. I finally started sobbing at that moment while a group of participants held me and sang to me. I once again felt unconditionally loved by my Tata and by everyone around me.

As I write in Chapter V, some authors, such as Tavuchis (1991), place sorrow at the center of the experience of apology. As I explored my feelings during and after the ceremony, I understood that my personal pain and shared grief with Pedro and the other dancers were crucial for the event's power and the participants' healing.

E. Love

Simpson¹²⁵ (2005) opines that apology “is one of *the* most important expressions of love...love for one’s wholeness and integrity, and love for the well-being of others” (p. 18). In fact, deep love was another of the feelings I felt during the apology. As I described it in my self-interview (2020): “*After I delivered the apology and looked into Pedro’s eyes, the sorrow turned into pure, unconditional love. For the first time in my life, I felt absolute union with a “stranger” and therefore, with all of humanity.*” This profound experience has had a lasting impact on my psyche, which I describe in Chapter XI, and it aligns with what Taegel (2019) sees as the final step of an authentic apology, the “immersion in the Circle of One.”

F. Integrity/Integration

One more feeling quality that stood out when I made the apology has to do with integrity, though not only in the sense of a “firm adherence to a code of (...) values,” but also as in “the quality or state of being complete or undivided” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b). I wrote in my self-interview (2020):

Right before offering the apology, as I was walking to the center of the circle, I had a strong sensation that I had achieved at that moment a perfect balance between masculine and feminine energies. I felt I embodied what Anne Baring¹²⁶ (2019) calls “the Cosmic Marriage,” which embodies archetypal characteristics of the Sacred Masculine and the Divine Feminine.¹²⁷ It was a powerful feeling that I won’t forget.

¹²⁵ Sheila Quinn Simpson, M.A., (dob unknown) is an American speech pathologist and hospice and university administrator.

¹²⁶ Anne Baring, Ph.D., (1931-) is a British teacher, Jungian analyst, author, and co-author of seven books.

¹²⁷ Some scholars consider these traits socially constructed and changeable depending on time and place (see Tolley, R. (2003). Gender Archetypes. *American Masculinities: A Historical Encyclopedia*, 198-199).

In a significant synchronicity, during the ceremony before the apology, the Mexica dancers repeatedly invoked the name of *Ometeotl*. Only later I found out that *Ometeotl* is a primary Mexica deity that embodies absolute duality (Rodríguez Hernández, 2019), “good and evil, male and female, light and darkness, fire and water” (Price & Zamudio, n.d.).

G. From the Emotional to the Mystical

From my description of my feelings before, during, and after the apology, it is clear that my experience expanded from the purely emotional realm to what Ruth Tietjen¹²⁸ (2017) calls a “mystical state of mind.” She defines it as “a state in which we transcend ourselves in the face of the universe (...). It is a feeling of an all-encompassing unity (...), a feeling of love, joy, and peace of mind” (p. 1623).

It is interesting to notice that, when describing the experience of apology and its elements, some authors occasionally use spiritual language. However, few of them delve into what they mean when using such language. For instance, Engel (2002) writes, “when an apology is received as the gift that it is, and reciprocated by the gift of forgiveness, it is nothing short of a miracle” (p. 13). Lerner (2017) affirms that “to listen with an open heart and ask questions to better help us understand the other person is a spiritual exercise, in the truest sense of the word” (p. 43). Ensler (2019b) has described apology as “a sacred commitment,” which creates a profound transformation which she calls “alchemy.” Howes (2020) shares that she has “witnessed a deep spiritual lifting of burdens and an opening

¹²⁸ Ruth Rebecca Tietjen, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Philosophy of the University of Vienna, working on religious zeal and fanaticism phenomena.

of hearts when people faced a previous hurt with courage and humility” (p. 13). And Tavuchis (1991) attributes “mysterious” and “talismanic qualities [to] this human faculty” (p. 5).

Taft (1999) believes that “it is important for those who enter into apologetic discourse to recall that they have entered into a sacred space” (p. 1158) and adds,

I am a proponent of apologetic discourse. Indeed, I have experienced and witnessed the healing mysteries of this sacred process many times in my life. I use "sacred" here to call attention to the fact that, from my perspective, apology and the moral process outlined in this Essay are embraced by the meanings that the word suggests (p. 1157).

Other participants in the apology also described their experience in spiritual terms: Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) thought that the ceremonial apology altered our consciousness and opened us up to the Divine. *“If we bring the Divine, it helps us. It’s asking for help.”* Alberto Hernández (p.c., 2020) added, *“there was a very high connection, and the energy frequencies became so elevated that everyone felt connected.”*

H. The Energy of Ceremonial Apology

During my interview with Hernández (p.c., 2020), he frequently spoke in terms of energy. He shared that *“when a frequency opens up, if someone connects with that frequency, (...), it covers everyone present.”* This is one way to understand how everyone in attendance was transformed by the ceremony.

After I came back to the US, I noticed something interesting: People became connected to the energy of the ceremony, even if they had not been present. All that was needed to conjure the energy was sharing the story in a

heartfelt way. At first, I told the story to close friends and observed that they frequently were moved to tears just by hearing about it. After I shared it with one of them, she offered to organize a gathering so that more people could learn about the experience. I agreed to share it as long as it was done in some kind of sacred circle. Together, we designed an event that included ritual elements, such as invocation, prayer, and meditation. I told the apology story and showed some of the excellent pictures taken by Libby Choate (see Chapter II). Then, I led the group in a guided meditation, inviting them to offer a mental apology to the people they had harmed in the past in any way. It was a powerful experience. Most people cried when listening to the story; many were called to offer their own apologies or to forgive people in their lives. Since then, I have led other circles that generated similar reactions.

This potent energy was even present when the story was not told in person. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I started leading circles via video conferencing, and the response was comparable. Moreover, my son co-produced a video where I related the story and posted it on YouTube, and again, some viewers have commented that watching the video was very moving.

I. Reflection

The first primary research question for this dissertation is *How do I (and other people) perceive and describe the experience of sacred ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm?* The literature has limited answers, especially when narrowing the question to sacred ceremonial apologies. Still, a few authors have written about the thoughts, feelings, and conditions central to

the experience of apology. These included humility, courage, integrity, authenticity, vulnerability, grief, and love. Participants in the Teotihuacán ceremony also spoke of humility, courage, grief, and love and added joy, release, gratefulness, Divine inspiration, altered states of mind, and elevated energies.

I experienced a combination of many of these states of mind, heart, and soul. Fear was central to the experience, which I had to face with divinely inspired courage. Humility was essential. But the most powerful feelings were grief and unconditional love. It is what ultimately profoundly connected me with Pedro and the other Mexica dancers. We became one with each other in our shared feelings.

Chapter XI: The Impact of Apology

The previous chapter delved into the experience of apology at the moment when it happens. This chapter will explore the impact (the cognitive, emotional, and spiritual effects) of apologies after the fact on the apologizer, the apology recipient, and other participants and witnesses. The specific research question is: *What is my (and other people's) perception of the impact of sacred ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, their families, and communities?*

Almost every book and article I read focused on or included the impact of apology. There seems to be an almost universal consensus among authors that authentic apologies positively affect the apology recipient and/or the apologizer. There is also an ongoing discussion in the literature about the fact that many, if not most, apologies fail. This is not due to the futility of the act itself but because they are perceived as insincere, incomplete, or inept. Volkan¹²⁹ (2006) writes, “expressions of apology and corresponding feelings of forgiveness [are] not always followed by positive outcomes [primarily because] “some such apologies [are] experienced as genuine, while others [are] perceived as empty gestures” (p. 117). At least one empirical study has found that an insincere apology can increase blame towards the offender (Zechmeister et al., 2004).

I devoted part of Chapter V to determine what the experts think are the fundamental elements of an authentic apology. Most authors who have codified

¹²⁹ Vamık Volkan, M.D., (1932-) is a Turkish Cypriot psychiatrist internationally known for his 40 years of work bringing together conflictual groups for dialogue and mutual understanding.

the steps of a genuine apology believe that mishandling any of the steps leads to a failed apology (Howes, 2020; Lewicki et al., 2016; Mingus, 2019; Scher & Darley, 1997). Lazare (2005) writes,

People who offer a pseudo-apology are unwilling to take the steps necessary for a genuine apology (...). To undertake them requires honesty, generosity, humility, commitment, courage, and sacrifice. In other words, the rewards of an effective apology can only be earned. They cannot be stolen (p. 9).

Philpot¹³⁰ and colleagues' (2008) research found that intergroup apologies effectively promote perceptions of remorse and increase satisfaction with the offending group's response to their offenses. However, these benefits do not necessarily translate into greater forgiveness. This is because they have not been accompanied by other gestures, such as assurances that the apologizers will not re-offend in the future (which many scholars consider an essential step of the apology process; see Chapter V).

The effects of apology on the person or people who have been harmed are the foci of most academic studies, as scholars seek to discover whether such acts advance the healing of victims/survivors and the reconciliation between survivors and perpetrators of harm. A smaller subset of studies has also looked at the apology's impact on the person who caused the injury. To date, I have not found any studies that analyze the consequences of witnessing or holding space for an apology. As described in Chapter X, my own experience led me to believe that authentic apologies can generate an energy that is healing even for people who are not the main participants.

¹³⁰ Catherine Philpot, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is a postdoctoral fellow in the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland.

Researchers have established that the process and impact of apologies may vary according to various classifications. The most common categories in the literature are interpersonal apologies (involving individuals) and intergroup apologies (involving groups of people). I follow those groupings in this chapter.

A. The Impact of Interpersonal Apologies

The impact of interpersonal apologies, which generally happen between two individuals (such as intimate partners, friends, work colleagues, neighbors, and health care workers and patients), are the easiest to measure because of the narrowness of the research subjects. The literature is full of examples of successful (and unsuccessful) apologies based on qualitative research and experiential evidence. Several laboratory experiments have tried to measure the effects of apologies. Even though some experts favor scholastic evidence (such as randomized control trials), it is relevant to point out that laboratory-based studies often are conducted in artificial conditions. For instance, the subjects may read about an offense and a corresponding apology, or researchers may purposefully transgress against the subjects during the experiment. Certainly, experiments can produce some valuable information; however, in the case of apologies, I tend to rely more on experiential evidence, which is usually based on real-life apologies for actual trespasses and amends.¹³¹

¹³¹ For a discussion on the various types of evidence, see Chapter I.

1. Scholastic Evidence

Most academic studies have found a positive impact in interpersonal apologies, as long as the recipient perceives them as genuine. For instance, in a study of 263 individuals who were harmed by what an intimate partner said or did, “when hurt individuals believed the partner had sincerely apologized, they were more likely to grant forgiveness” (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006). Experiments have also demonstrated other positive effects, such as healing the victim’s pain (Oliner, 2009), repair of trust between victim and perpetrator (Kim et al., 2004; Ma et al., 2018), a greater willingness to reconcile (Tomlinson et al., 2004), and victim’s reduction of severe aggression against perpetrators (Ohbuchi et al., 1989).

Some researchers have focused on variables that can improve the effectiveness of apologies. Examples include timing (Frantz & Bennis, 2005, p. 206), alignment between the apology and the victims’ self-construals (Fehr & Gelfand, 2010), and the quality of the relationship between the parties before the apology (Schumann, 2012).

Other studies have concentrated on particular populations or contexts. For example, one study looked at the effects of apologies from business leaders to subordinates. It highlighted “the powerful role of leader apologies following transgressions in the workplace for both leader and follower well-being” (Byrne et al., 2014, p. 15). Other research has looked at medical disclosures and apologies after malpractice and found that they may prevent “both meritorious and nonmeritorious claims from becoming expensive lawsuits,” a common

obstacle for medicals personnel and facilities to acknowledge errors and offer apologies (Kachalia et al., 2010, p. 220). Taft (2005a) opines that “there should be an unequivocal admission of error communicated by the physician or health care provider responsible for the error, so the healing dimension of the authentic expression of remorse can be fully experienced by patient and provider alike” (p. 39).

2. Experiential Evidence

Most of the books and some of the articles written on interpersonal apologies fall under the category of experiential evidence. Many were written by therapists and other practitioners who offer numerous examples (case studies) of successful and unsuccessful interpersonal apologies. For instance, Fife (2013) and colleagues developed a model for facilitating forgiveness in treating infidelity in couples. They concluded that “an apology can be a deciding event during [therapeutic] forgiveness work” (p. 359).

Experiential evidence aligns with scholastic evidence in identifying the positive effects of a genuine apology on the recipient of the apology but often also expands the exploration to include the benefits for the apologizer. Engel¹³² (2002) writes that the act of apology “in itself will be good for you [the apologizer], no matter what the outcome” (p. 76). Tutu and Tutu (2014) agree: “There is something magical about saying ‘I am sorry.’ There is healing in the very utterance” (p. 180). Taft (2005a) adds that apologies are “healing for the party

¹³² Beverly Engel, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American psychotherapist, author, and advocate for sexual, physical, and emotional abuse victims.

who has erred because the one who risks apology demonstrates moral courage by speaking a truth that carries potentially grave consequences” (p. 71). Simpson (2005) opines that “while you may not see immediate healing and reconciliation, your apology is still honorable and loving and right. Your courage and respect for others, through your sincere apology, will work toward the greater good – eventually” (p.66).

In the world of business, Kador (2009) affirms that “apology restores integrity” (p. 30), and Hershey Friedman¹³³ (2006) adds that an apology “provides an individual, a leader, an organization, and even an entire country with the ability to purify and renew itself” (p. 10). Erin O’Hara¹³⁴ (2004) offers a legalistic point of view: “much of the civil litigation that clogs court dockets in America today could be avoided with a simple, heartfelt apology. Although sometimes difficult to offer, these expressions of remorse are profoundly powerful and valuable for humans as social animals” (p.1089).

Ensler (2019b), in writing an apology from her father’s point of view, found that

there is an alchemy that occurs with a true apology, where your rancor and your bitterness and your anger and your hate releases when someone truly, truly apologizes (...). The apology frees the victim, but it also frees the perpetrator, allowing them deep reflection and ability to finally change their ways and their life (...). I honestly believe that apologies, deep, sacred apologies are the pathway to healing and inviting in the New World.

¹³³ Hershey Friedman, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an author and a professor of business as well as the director of business programs at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York.

¹³⁴ Erin O’Hara, J.D., (dob unknown) is an American scholar in several areas, including conflict of laws, arbitration, and the law market. She is a dean and law professor at Florida State University College of Law.

B. The Impact of Intergroup Apologies

Most scholastic writings about apologies focus on intergroup political apologies, that is, apologies offered by one national, cultural, or social group (through a representative of the group or government) to another such group. Most of them fall under the category of contextual evidence. “Historically, intergroup apologies were very rare occurrences” (Wohl et al., 2011, p. 74). Still, since World War II, as we have entered what some scholars have called “the Age of Apology” (Gibney et al., 2008), they have become much more common, especially in the last 20 years (Horelt, 2019). In fact, whereas a political apology was “formerly associated with weakness, [it] is nowadays perceived as a marker of moral strength” (Mihai & Thaler, 2014, p. 1).

Researchers acknowledge that the impact of intergroup apologies is much more difficult to evaluate than the effects of interpersonal apologies. One reason is that “the deliverer of the apology is a representative of the group rather than the actual offender” (Wohl et al., 2011, p. 72). Even if that representative can express regret and remorse, how can that be translated to a whole group? “Can the state as an institution be sincerely sorry for something that happened in the past?” (Mihai & Thaler, 2014, p. 3).

Another reason is that the apology recipients often are not the direct victims of the offense, but their descendants (Tsosie, 2006). Even if the recipients are direct victims, “when an apology is directed to an entire community, who is empowered to accept it?” (Battistella, 2014, p. 25).

These and other problems stem from the fact that intergroup apologies by definition involve collectives and not individuals. In truth, it is nearly impossible to achieve any kind of consensus on either the victim or the perpetrator groups on how apologies are experienced and perceived (Brophy, 2006). As an example, one case study that has been analyzed by several scholars is the apology that Kevin Gover¹³⁵, a Pawnee Indian, offered to Native Americans when he was US Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs during the Clinton Administration.

At an event held on September 8, 2000, to commemorate the 175th anniversary of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Gover opened the ceremonies with a thoughtful apology for the “historical conduct of this agency.” In a formal statement, Gover rehearsed the policies and programs which the BIA had pursued to “destroy all things Indian” (Barkan & Karn 2006, p. 17).

He concluded with a pledge to never repeat the destructive actions and policies of the past. Some tribal leaders saw Gover’s apology as hollow “because it came from the wrong person [and] it was not accompanied by substantive action to remedy the injustices that it cited” (Barkan & Karn, 2006, p. 18). Other Native Americans felt that the apology had positive outcomes. Rebecca Tsosie (2006), a scholar of Yaqui descent, writes that the “Gover’s apology opened the door to an intercultural dialogue on reconciliation, and thus, started the process of healing” (p. 207). Christopher Buck¹³⁶ (2006) goes further, arguing that “Gover’s

¹³⁵ Kevin Gover, J.D., (1955-) is currently the U.S. Under Secretary for Museums and Culture at the Smithsonian Institute. He served from 2007 until January 2021 as the director of the National Museum of the American Indian. He is a citizen of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma.

¹³⁶ Christopher Buck, Ph.D., J.D., (1950-) is an American attorney, independent scholar, faculty instructor at the Wilmette Institute, and former professor at Michigan State University, Quincy University, Millikin University, and Carleton University.

speech should be brought back to intellectual and institutional life, to become the gold standard by which progress may be measured in Indian affairs” (p. 123).

Despite all the obstacles, researchers have not been dissuaded from exploring the impact of intergroup apology. As Cohen¹³⁷ (2017) writes:

Moral repair is a difficult business for which there is no exact recipe. Sometimes repair is impossible or only partially possible. Victims or transgressors might die; resources can be destroyed or unalterably changed. Offenders or persons acting on their behalves might nevertheless provide some moral repair. They can identify a wrong, express regret, accept culpability, and offer victims and third parties reasons to forgive and trust the offender.

Acts that fulfill apologetic functions can vindicate a victim’s value as someone who was due different treatment. Sometimes offenders can fulfill such functions through third-party agents. Having vicarious elements does not necessarily undermine the reparative reasons an offender hopes to provide (p. 373).

1. Contextual Evidence

There are several academic books (edited and by a single author) and a growing number of articles on intergroup apology, generally focusing on particular historical events. *Taking wrongs seriously: apologies and reconciliation* is a collection of essays that illustrate the power of political apologies to “amend the past, so that it resonates differently in the present for those who feel aggrieved by it or responsible for it.” (Barkan & Karn, 2006, p. 8). It includes case studies of apologies to the Australian Aboriginal people by the Australian government, the aforementioned US Bureau of Indian Affairs apology to Native-Americans, various apologies to the victims of the Holocaust by the

¹³⁷ Andrew I. Cohen, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is an American professor of philosophy and director of the JBB Center for Ethics at Georgia State University.

German government, an official French apology for the Vichy's government complicity in the Holocaust, and US apologies for slavery, the Tulsa massacre, and the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past (Gibney et al., 2008) is another anthology of essays on political apologies, which states that “sincere apologies may be part of healing old wounds, but only if combined with measures to achieve global justice” (Freeman, 2008, p. 57). It includes examples of apologies from nation to nation, Belgium to Rwanda and the Congo, Germany to Namibia, the Netherlands for their role in the slave trade, and Japan to its neighbors. It also covers internal apologies by states to marginalized citizens in Canada, New Zealand, and the United States.

On the Uses and Abuses of Political Apologies (Mihai & Thaler, 2014) is a more recent collection of essays that acknowledge the importance of intergroup apologies as diplomatic tools. The volume includes examples of state apologies from Australia, Canada, and Brazil. It also provides some good insights into ritual and ceremony in apology, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

There are other books dedicated to intergroup political apologies, including *The Sins of the Nation and the Ritual of Apologies* (Celermajer, 2009), which uses various examples of apologies by the Australian government, and argues that

the apologetic phenomenon marks a new stage in our recognition of the importance of collective responsibility, the place of ritual in addressing national wrongs, and the contribution that practices that once belonged in the religious sphere might make to contemporary politics (p. 1).

Sins of the Parents: Politics of National Apologies in the US (Weiner, 2009) focuses on two particular cases involving the US government: land claims by the Oneida First Nations and the requests for reparations by Japanese Americans interned during World War II and concludes that “a national apology, under the right circumstances and performed in the right manner, can be meaningful and transformative” (p. 24).

There are also a growing number of academic journal articles that examine the contextual impact of intergroup apology, usually centering in particular cases. For instance, the slave trade in the United States (Davis, 2014) or the forced internment of Aboriginal children in boarding schools in Australia (Philpot et al., 2013) and Canada (Dorrell, 2009).

2. Scholastic Evidence

A few experimental studies on intergroup apologies arrive at similar conclusions as the investigations on the effects of interpersonal apologies (and have comparable limitations, e.g., being conducted in an artificial setting). One such study found that “in an intergroup context (...) apology both reduced retribution and increased forgiveness” (Leonard et al., 2011, p. 1205). Another concluded that “after an intergroup apology, the historically victimized group often waits to see if the apology produces behavioral change before granting forgiveness” (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013, p. 86). A survey with 543 men and women looked at variables that increase the effects of apology: “the best predictive equation for beliefs facilitating apology and forgiveness included age, secure

attachment, religiosity, (in)tolerance for governmental aggression, and advocacy of nonviolence” (Ashy et al., 2010, p. 17).

3. Experiential Evidence

A powerful example of practitioner-generated evidence (part of experiential evidence) is the labor of the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), which works for justice “in countries that have endured massive human rights abuses under repression and in conflict. [They] work with victims, civil society groups, national, and international organizations to ensure redress for victims and to help prevent atrocities from happening again” (International Center for Transitional Justice, n.d.). ICTJ has operated in dozens of countries, particularly in the Global South.

In 2015, based on their extensive field experience, they published the report *More than words: Apologies as a form of reparation* (Carranza et al., 2015), which states,

As a symbolic rather than a material form of redress, apologies are particularly important in contexts where human rights violations have occurred on a massive scale and cannot be made good by restitution or compensation. They are a form of moral reparation that offers great promise for victims as carriers of meaning. By acknowledging wrongs that were perpetrated and addressing the consequences of that wrongful conduct, apologies address moral damages, including such things as mental suffering, loss of a loved one, humiliation, and personal affront associated with an intrusion on one’s home or private life. This is true whether the apology is expressed through speech or in ritual or through combinations of different meaningful gestures that do not necessarily have economic value (p. 8).

C. The Impact of Ritual and Ceremonial Apologies

When writing about sacred rituals and ceremonies in apology, some authors mention the event's power to heal (Taft, 1999; Tutu & Tutu, 2014). However, almost no scholastic studies have explicitly addressed the impact of such ritual and ceremonial elements. One notable exception is the work of Michel-André Horelt¹³⁸, who has conducted empirical research on this subject. In fact, Horelt (2014) believes that the research in this area is limited because in “the literature on public apologies, observers and social scientists tend to reduce the concept of ‘ritual’ to an insignificant, residual category” (p. 76). Nevertheless, his work has demonstrated that “rituals and their ceremonial mode of presentation do have their specific efficacy” (p. 76). He has specialized in studying apologies between countries, including Montenegro and Croatia, Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and France and Algeria (Daase et al., 2015; Horelt, 2019).

In one of his articles, Horelt describes a ceremonial apology offered by Russia to Poland for the massacre of 4,500 Polish intellectuals and Army officers in the forest near the town of Katyn at the beginning of World War II. The ceremony, which took place in 2010 and was led by Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, included a religious service with “Russian Orthodox priests [intoning] prayers for the dead [and] Russian and Polish soldiers [laying] wreaths at the base of a towering red Orthodox cross” (Horelt, 2014, p. 84). He adds that

the recipients of the apology reacted positively to the ceremony and used frames and metaphors in their receptions that clearly reflected the change and alteration of the relationship between Russia and Poland. [Polish

¹³⁸ Michel-André Horelt, Ph.D., (dob unknown) is Assistant Professor at the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute for Political Science at the Ludwig-Maximilian-University of Munich.

Prime Minister] Donald Tusk considered the ceremony as marking a 'turning point' in relations with the Russian Federation (Horelt, 2014, p. 86).

One fascinating example of the impact of a ceremonial apology on the apologizer comes from 17th century New England. Battistella¹³⁹ (2014) recounts the case of Samuel Sewall, which was one of the judges in the infamous Salem Witch Trials. "As the excesses of the witch trials unfolded, Sewall came to have doubts about the court's work and especially about the evidence used to convict women of witchcraft" (p. 11). He later ceremonially apologized for his role in the trials and convinced the Massachusetts legislature to create a day of ritual fasting and atonement. "Sewall was ostracized for his apology (...). But the apology was transformative for him, and he devoted much of his life from that point forward to making amends, writing in opposition to colonial treatment of Indians and slaves" (p. 12).

In reviewing the categories of apologies delineated in the literature, I found it challenging to locate my apology to the Mexica dancers. It is undoubtedly not an interpersonal apology between two people or a public apology for personal wrongdoing. It fits somewhat better in the classification of intergroup apologies. However, in virtually every illustration of these categories in the literature, the apologizer is a group's designated representative (Cohen, 2017), which was not my case. The closest examples I have found come from recent journalistic accounts of non-official apologies, usually in the context of ritual or

¹³⁹ Edwin Battistella, Ph.D., (1955-) is an American linguist and author known for his work on markedness, syntax, and language attitudes. He is a professor of Humanities and Culture at Southern Oregon University.

ceremony. These include military veterans apologizing to the Indigenous Communities at Standing Rock, North Dakota in December 2016, which happened right after the Teotihuacán apology and was remarkably similar (Tolan, 2016); White people apologizing to African-Americans in various events led by author Marianne Williamson¹⁴⁰, who also called for reparations for slavery in her 2020 US presidential candidacy (Sewing, 2020); Benin’s Ambassador to the US Hector Posset’s ritual apology for his country’s role in the slave trade (he did not act in an official capacity) (Raines, 2018); Will Taegel (2019) ceremonial apologies to the Earth, the buffalo and other animal species, and the trees as part of the Earth Citizens Meditations; the great-great-grandson of Gen. James Forsyth, the commander who ordered the Wounded Knee massacre, asking forgiveness to the descendants of the victims (O'Brien & Keith, 2019) (see Chapter X); and White church members in Houston kneeling and asking for forgiveness for the “sin of racism” from Black congregants in the same area, right after the murder of George Floyd (Barajas, 2020).

Generally, the articles describe the events in superlative terms, using words like “healing” (Tolan, 2016), “powerful” (Barajas, 2020), and “profound” (Raines, 2018). Still, there are limited accounts of the experiences and impact of these apologies.¹⁴¹ In the case of Standing Rock, the article mentions that during the apology, in which the former soldiers got down on one knee, “hardened veterans wept openly (...) their faces twisted with emotion” (Tolan, 2016). A

¹⁴⁰ Marianne Williamson (1952-) is an American best-selling author, spiritual leader, teacher, and political activist.

¹⁴¹ My original dissertation proposal included interviews with some of the people who participated in these apologies, but after various attempts, I was unsuccessful securing any more information.

former Marine said he cried like a child and added, “the idea of shared suffering reinforces the fundamental principle of us all being in this together” (Tolan, 2016).

Joy Sewing¹⁴² (2020), a reporter for the Houston Chronicle who identifies as Black, did write about her personal experience after participating in one of the apologies led by Marianne Williamson:

With nearly 200 black people in the audience on their feet, Williamson apologized for slavery, lynching, murders, rapes of black women, destruction of the black family, mass incarceration of black men, being called the N-word, and systemic and institutionalized racism, and more.

As she continued for what seemed like forever, I felt a rage boiling inside of me that was followed by [crying].

I never thought I needed an apology from white people, but it felt like I was crying for my grandmother, my great-grandmother, and all my people who endured and died because of hate in this country.

I cried for all of the times I've felt marginalized, discriminated against, and invisible because of the color of my skin, even in my own industry.

I cried for all of the times I've watched black children, especially girls, had their esteem beaten down to nothing because they didn't fit the standard of white beauty.

I cried because I didn't know how deep the hurt was.

I could not stop crying.

I opened my eyes to see everyone around me — white, black, Asian (...) — crying, too. I nearly collapsed to the floor from the emotional weight I was feeling.

But the harder I cried, the tighter [a] white woman and girl [seated behind me] held on to [my hand].

¹⁴² Joy Sewing (dob unknown) is the Houston Chronicle's lifestyle and culture columnist, focusing on pop culture, style, parenting, social justice and race. She also is the founder of Year Of Joy, a nonprofit organization, to spread joy to children from underserved communities.

It was one of the most powerful spiritual experiences I have ever had.

On my way out, I whispered "thank you" to the white woman and girl who held onto me so tightly. They had kind eyes and thanked me back.

Marianne Williamson is right. We need healing. We need real talk about racism in this country. It's time for white people to get it.

An apology is a start.

D. The Impact of the Teotihuacán Ceremony

The three research partners I interviewed vividly described the impact of the apology ceremony on themselves and other participants. As Carol Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) puts it: *"I felt that this ripples out; every time there is a ceremony like this, it ripples out."*

1. Personal Impact

In my self-interview (2020), I stated the following:

The grief and the unconditional love I felt during the ceremony have helped me examine the ways in which I have been –and continue to be– unkind to others, especially people I learned to see as inferior, Native Mexicans, Blacks, Jews, to name a few. When I see Pedro's eyes in my mind and think about ways in which I and others have mistreated people because of their ethnicity, I am overcome with sorrow. Recently, I have caught myself in small acts of unkindness and have stopped and sometimes apologized to the other person.

I also have had to dig deeper into my family's history of racism and internalized superiority. I have written or spoken about it publicly, facing deep fears of judgment from my loved ones. Ultimately, I believe the apology in Teotihuacán has made me a more loving, empathic, compassionate, humble, and courageous person and a better activist for social change.

During his interview, Will Taegel (p.c., 2020) spoke in similar terms about the impact of the apologies he offered to Mother Earth as part of the Citizen Meditations of the EarthTribe (Taegel, 2019).

On an energetic level, I would say they have liberated me and freed me up to be more creative, so I'm not dragging around this identity of regret. So, it's freed me. Another [impact] is just a slow opening of compassion. An opening of doors into other domains of communicating with the other than the human world.

Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) also talked about liberation and healing as she described the impact of the ceremony from her perspective as a participant:

It has really instilled in me how important these acts of contrition are (...). It is a very liberating thing for both the asker and the recipient of the request. As I said, I think it ripples out beyond that situation. There's something about it that accumulates.

What I remember being so moving about the ceremony where you apologized, when Pedro brought the elder, and he said, "the Spanish might have chopped out our culture, but the roots are still there, the roots grew back." I just felt, "Oh my God," that was healing for me. That was incredibly healing for me, that profound sense of loss, you know, not to dwell in it because the green stuff grows back.

Alberto Hernández (p.c., 2020) emphasized how the ceremony made him feel proud of his culture and the importance of preserving it:

[The ceremony] really touched a part of my heart (...). I will not forget it because it made me feel prouder and stronger; it strengthened that part of la tradición, which is about preserving what we can from our people, our origin.

I have told some people: There was a person in such a year, and such date, who manifested himself in a way that no other person has done. I have talked about it with as many people as possible, and we discuss the subject. So, it left a mark, really a mark that clearly says that there is someone who has that possibility in the heart to manifest and express what they feel in the moment that they receive the connection with the work they are doing. Because the work opens up, the spaces open up like a portal; they open at that moment precisely because of the work that is being done.

2. Impact on Others

During the interviews, Taegel and Flake Chapman also shared conversations they had had with other ceremony participants. Both used superlative terms when describing the impact of the apology:

Through the years, people from the EarthTribe who were there have talked to me about it as being a pivotal moment in their lives (...). Nearly everybody over there has a colonizer in their background. And many people there have Indigenous blood in their background. So, through the years, this was a pivotal moment (Taegel, p.c., 2020).

I just know that when the subject comes up, everyone is, “Oh, it was the most profound deep experience.” It really, really affected people and probably each person in a different way, depending on their history and their background (Flake Chapman, p.c., 2020).

A few times during his interview, Hernández (p.c., 2020) shared that he has spoken about the apology to many people, emphasizing that they were interested because it came from an authentic and loving place:

I have talked about it with a lot of people. In fact, with people who are inside la tradición and I share it because it was so important, so interesting that there was someone that really dared to do something like this. Now, as I told you, this all happened naturally and from the heart, and I think that things like that are well received. I think it is very, very important.

This echoes my own experience. As I described in Chapter X, when I began to relate the story to selected family members and friends (the ones I knew would understand it), I immediately realized that sharing the tale generated powerful energy. This energy was not unlike the one generated during the actual event. People were very moved when they heard the story and often cried. Many spoke about the apology in similar terms as Flake Chapman (p.c., 2020) did during her interview: “*We need desperately to do this in our country. We have so*

much to ask forgiveness for, and we need to forgive ourselves; it's a huge part of it."

Facilitating apology circles has amplified the effects that the ceremony had on me. For one, as I have talked about it and answered questions from participants, I have been able to better understand and articulate how the apology changed me. It has also pushed me to become public with many details of my spirituality and my journey of healing from racism. I have had to face deep-rooted fear about been rejected and ridiculed, especially by my family. It has been an important process of healing.

E. Healing

There is a vast field of study focusing on forgiveness (much larger than the research on apology), and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explore it in detail. Most authors agree with Tutu and Tutu (2014) when they state that

without forgiving, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us. We are bound with chains of bitterness, tied together, trapped. (...). When we forgive, we take back control of our fate and our feelings. We become our own liberators. We don't forgive to help the other person. We forgive for ourselves (p. 16).

Apology and forgiveness are strongly related, but they are not inseparable. There is agreement among experts that forgiveness can happen without an apology (Hoffman, 2008) and that apology can be beneficial without forgiveness (Brudholm, 2020). Of course, when they occur together, they can create "*an intimacy that would promote the healing*" (Taegel, p.c., 2020).

Besides forgiveness, a word that many experts use when describing the impact of both apology and forgiveness is healing. It may be a more

encompassing, appropriate term to describe the effects of these phenomena. In fact, in the apology in Teotihuacán, I asked for forgiveness, but Pedro or the other dancers never said, “you are forgiven.” It didn’t seem fitting. But clearly, deeply emotional and spiritual healing had taken place.

Recently, I had another personal experience that helped me understand the impact of ancestral apologies on the apology recipient. A man who had watched my story on YouTube and had been very touched by it unexpectedly contacted me. His name is Angel. We corresponded for a while, and he told me that he was Spanish and had lived in Massachusetts for a long time, not far from where I presently live. Angel said that the energy of the apology had moved him to tears and made him consider doing something similar. He also shared that his maternal grandfather had been a Nationalist military officer during the Spanish Civil War, which meant that he had been an enemy of my paternal grandfather, Gumersindo Areán, who fought to defend the Republic.

As I write in Chapter VII, my family firmly retained its Spanish identity, even after decades of living in Mexico. On my father’s side, we were also taught to be very proud of our legacy as refugees of an unjust war; we clearly believed we had been on the right side. We were *republicanos*, good people, and the heirs of a democratic, anti-royalist movement. In contrast, the other side, the *franquistas*, who had staged a coup de état, were considered traitors, evil people.

I started to do video calls with Angel and his wife, Laura, who had written a book about Angel’s mother’s experience during the war. Reading the book and dialoguing with Angel gave me a new perspective about the conflict. It wasn’t as

black and white as I had been taught. Both sides committed terrible atrocities, and for the first time, I started to understand what it was like to be “on the other side.” In fact, Angel’s grandfather had been imprisoned for several years and tortured by the republican side.

Angel and Laura were also very interested to hear my family’s side of the story. I shared how my grandfather’s airplane had been downed and how he had to escape to France, walking across the Pyrenees in the middle of winter (like many other thousands of refugees). In France, he was put in a concentration camp. During the Nazi invasion of that country, he was almost sent back to Spain, where he would have surely been executed. Instead, he was able to leave the camp and join the rest of his family in Algeria, where my grandmother and their children had escaped at the end of the Civil War. Eventually, the whole family was able to migrate to Mexico as refugees.

The story has a good ending, as my grandparents were able to rebuild their lives in Mexico, and all of their children prospered and had good marriages and families. However, my grandfather Gumersindo never really got over the war and was very bitter about the injustices of the Republican defeat, including the fact that he lost multiple properties, all his savings, and dear friends and family. He lived in Mexico for 40 years and never wanted to go back to Spain.

As I told this story to Angel, I could tell he was very moved. He said that, like me, he had never considered the war from the other side's perspective. The next time we had a call, he shared he had been reflecting on my family’s story and felt very pained about what had happened. Recognizing that my grandfather and

his grandfather had been enemies, he apologized for any suffering his family had inflicted on my family.

He said the apology had been inspired by the ceremony in Mexico; it was totally unexpected and very moving for me. I thanked him at the moment but didn't know how else to respond. After doing some reflecting, I wrote to Angel the next day:

I want to thank you again for the apology that you offered me yesterday. It was a very moving moment for me, a powerful feeling that has continued to accompany me today. This was the first time I received an ancestral apology, and it helped me better understand its healing power. I could tell that you were feeling grief, joining my family (and yours?) in the terrible sorrows of the war and its aftermath. Such shared grief is at the center of an authentic apology and the healing that follows.

I didn't specifically tell you that I accepted the apology, but I hope you know I did with great gratitude and a wide-open heart. In fact, responding "I forgive you and your family" doesn't seem right in this situation. Who am I to forgive something that happened so long ago? It seems more appropriate to respond by saying, "I love you and your family," because I know that your apology destroyed a barrier between "the two sides." I think this is the real power of apology: to help us realize that we are one, that you and I are brothers (personal communication, August 9, 2021).

F. Reflection

In addressing my second primary research question -*What is my (and other people's) perception of the impact of sacred ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, their families, and communities?* -, the literature shows that authentic and complete apologies can have diverse and profound effects on victims of harm. These effects include facilitating forgiveness, reconciliation, moral reparation, renovation of trust, transformation, healing of pain, and pride in one's heritage. Apologies can also significantly

impact the apologizers, catalyzing healing, purification, transformation, and liberation and restoring their integrity, moral strength, compassion, and empathy.

During the apology in Teotihuacán (and when Angel apologized to me and my family), I experienced many of these effects. I discovered that personally, the most vital impact of the apologies was the feeling of unconditional love for “the other.” When I looked into Pedro’s eyes, all I experienced was total union and love for him. I can conjure that sense of union when I remember that moment. This feeling has helped me heal the painful legacy of racism and spiritual separation I inherited at a very deep level. I believe it has also helped heal my grandfather and other ancestors.

Chapter XII: Creative Synthesis

Writing this dissertation has been a transformative process, blessed by the guidance of the Divine Mother every step of the way. It has considerably deepened my understanding of the apology ceremony in Teotihuacán, and what came before and after it. It has also helped my healing process from ancestral wounding derived from the perpetration of racism and other types of violence and prejudice by my family and my people.

Reflecting on and sharing my story of growing up White in Mexico was painful and scary, as well as therapeutic and liberating. Chronicling my spiritual journey helped me grasp the big picture of how I have been Divinely directed at every turn of the path. It also assisted me in recognizing the way that Christianity, my birth's tradition, has come back to my life to help me grow in a new way.

After the apology ceremony, I was both full of awe and confusion about its meaning. Using Heuristic and Organic Inquiry frameworks for the research in this dissertation allowed me to structure and explore my questions about the event in a systematic and yet flexible way. The literature review and my qualitative research helped confirm and clarify my questions and observations.

A. Primary Findings

The primary questions for this dissertation were:

- How do I (and other people) perceive and describe the *experience* of sacred ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm?

- What is my (and other people's) perception of the *impact* of such sacred ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, their families, and communities?

1. The Experience of Apology

The literature shows that the experience of apologies (state of mind, heart, and soul during the event) includes humility, courage, integrity, authenticity, vulnerability, grief, and love. Research partners also spoke of joy, release, gratefulness, Divine inspiration, altered states of mind, and elevated energies.

During the sacred ceremony in Teotihuacán, the most powerful feelings that emerged for me were grief and unconditional love. These feelings were what ultimately helped me deeply connect with Pedro and the other Mexica dancers.

2. The Impact of Apology

Authentic and complete apologies can significantly impact harm victims, including supporting forgiveness, reconciliation, moral reparation, renovation of trust, transformation, healing of pain, and pride in one's heritage. Apologies can also substantially affect the apologizers, assisting healing, purification, transformation, liberation, and restoring their integrity, moral strength, and compassion.

After the apology ceremony, I discovered that the grief and unconditional love I shared with Pedro and the other dancers created the mystical impact I had been seeking for years: The feeling of oneness with everyone present, especially those I had considered "the other."

B. Support Findings

To better answer the primary questions of this dissertation, I also had to explore additional questions. The literature review showed me that there is consensus among scholars that apologies can have significant positive effects on the offended party and also on the offender, with the caveat that the apology has to be perceived as authentic and complete. It followed that I needed to explore what experts consider the fundamental elements of a genuine apology.

Most researchers and practitioners mentioned the following steps as essential for an authentic apology: Acknowledgment of harm; expression of remorse, regret, or repentance; acceptance of full responsibility; commitment to change and acting differently in the future; and compensation or reparation.

Most experts also agreed that apologies often fail because they don't follow all or most of these steps. The literature review confirmed that my apology to the Mexica dancers included all of these elements.

There were other questions I needed to answer in support of the primary queries. I had to determine if perpetration of violence could cause wounding in the perpetrator and, if so, whether such wounding could be passed on ancestrally and what its emotional and spiritual consequences could be.

The literature review revealed emerging research showing that violence can cause physical, emotional, and spiritual trauma and wounding not only to victims but also to perpetrators. There is also evidence that emotional and spiritual victimization trauma and wounding can be passed on intergenerationally and ancestrally. Therefore, it is highly probable that such is the case also with

perpetration trauma and wounding. The guilt, remorse, and grief I experienced in Teotihuacán seemed to come from ancestral perpetrator trauma.

I also needed to explore how personal and ancestral perpetration wounding could be healed and whether a sacred ceremonial apology could contribute to the healing. There is ample evidence demonstrating that authentic and complete apologies can help heal wounding in victims and perpetrators of violence and other offenses. There is also documentation that sacred ritual and ceremony have been traditional and Indigenous ways to effectively heal ancestral and intergenerational trauma in both victims and perpetrators for millennia. The Teotihuacán experience (and others like it) brought together both paradigms. It suggested that sacred ceremonies can enhance the power of ancestral apologies and generate profound healing for the people receiving the apology, the apologizer, other people witnessing and holding the space of the ceremony, and even people who hear about it after the fact.

C. Conclusion

Sacred ceremonial apologies –when complete and authentic- can assist in the healing of ancestral victim and perpetrator wounding. Grief and unconditional love were at the center of my personal healing experience during my apology in Teotihuacán, resulting in an impactful feeling of spiritual union with people I have excluded from my life in the past.

D. Validation

1. Heuristic Validation

As described in the introduction, in Heuristic Inquiry, validation is integrated into the research process. During the Initial Engagement, Immersion, and Incubation steps, researchers focus on their own subjective experience. During the Illumination phase, they compare their experience with the research partners' perceptions of their own experiences, methodically looking for points of commonality and divergence. Then, during Explication, researchers go back to and expand the literature review, which provides a more objective framework to interpret the study results. The last two steps provide the basis for validation in HI.

My subjective experience was confirmed in the study by the research partners' interviews and the literature review. My feeling of having inherited perpetrator trauma resonated with recent research on the topic. The evidence also shows that inherited trauma can be healed using ceremony and ritual, aligning with what I felt happened during and after the ceremony. The research partners' interviews contributed to validate the idea that the ceremonial apology was a seminal event for many participants and that my feeling of grief, unconditional love, and finally, union were shared by others.

2. Organic Validation

I found Organic Inquiry's concept of transformational validity particularly useful for my study. It relies on the emotional reactions of people exposed to the research material as confirming signals. Transformational validity focuses on the

changes experienced by the individual information recipient. At the same time, it recognizes that every person “is on a unique path so the valid transformative outcome for one [person] will necessarily be distinct from that of another. Consensus is not likely unless the number of [people] is strictly limited.” (Clements, 2004, p. 43).

3. Confirming Signals

I am fortunate to have two significant sources where people have been exposed to the story of the Teotihuacán ceremony and where I have had access to some of their reactions and feedback. The first one is the apology circles I have led. Some of the responses to listening to the story have been remarkable.

As I have mentioned before, it is pretty common for participants to openly cry while I relate the event and share afterward how moved they were by hearing about it. The circles often become experiences of shared grief, just like the original ceremony. Many people also mention the courage displayed; some focus on the unconditional love in the story. One participant told me, “you responded to great hatred with great love” (personal communication, January 2018).

During a guided meditation, participants have been able to apologize for the trespasses they committed, but as often, people have also been directed to forgive others for their trespasses. This confirms the powerful connection between the energies of apology and forgiveness. In one circle, after the meditation, an older African American woman said that she had been able to forgive White people for all the suffering she and her family had endured (personal communication, March 2018). In another one, at the end of the session, a woman

who identified as both African American and Native American shared that the experience had “changed her life” (personal communication, January 2020). In yet another circle, a woman started sobbing after the meditation. She later mentioned that she had been contemplating committing suicide and had changed her mind after listening to another participant's testimony (personal communication, April 2018).

Some of these apology circles took place in locations where spiritual coherence could be established by openly offering invocations and prayers, and others in contexts where that was not possible (at least overtly). I observed that creating coherence openly often enhanced the power of the circles, confirming the relevance of ceremonial and ritual containers.

The other source for transformational validity is a 20-minute video, co-produced by my son Alejandro Raines, where I share the context and the story of the ceremonial apology. The video was posted on YouTube in March 2020. It has gathered more than 3500 views and over 150 comments as of September 2021 (Without Fear, 2020). It has received 157 thumbs up (likes) and 15 thumbs down (dislikes). As Clements suggests, a consensus is not likely in a large sample, so naturally, there are negative comments (e.g., “Give us our stolen artifacts back.” Or “[Did] the Mexicas ever apologize to the tribes they enslaved?”). However, the majority of comments are positive. Here are some examples:

My soul needed to hear this.

I cried when I heard, "you are a wonderful grandson."

As a Spaniard, this brought tears to my eyes.

Respect to this man.

Truly beautiful video. Blessings to you and yours.

One of the most appealing examples of a person being transformed by listening to the Teotihuacán story is the case of Angel, which I shared at the end of Chapter XI. He told me that he felt guided by God to contact me after watching the video on YouTube and was inspired by the story to apologize for the suffering that his family had caused to my family during the Spanish Civil War. Receiving the gift of Angel's apology gave me a different, insightful perspective about the phenomenon. It validated what I had discovered as the apologizer: The healing power of apology is based on shared grief and unconditional love, and its fundamental impact is spiritual union with "the other."

E. Limitations and Future Directions

The subjective nature of Heuristic Inquiry and the limited number of research partners make it difficult to broadly generalize the results of this study. Some of the findings are personal and have served to support my healing. Others are more universal, supported by the extensive literature. In any case, further research is needed, particularly focusing on specific gaps: the intergenerational and ancestral transmission of perpetrator trauma, the role of sacred ceremonial apologies in healing ancestral victimization and perpetration trauma, and the impact of apologies on witnesses/participants and on people who are one step removed (and learn about the apology by reading or listening to the story).

Personally, I am considering writing a non-academic book based on what I learned from researching and writing this dissertation and expand the inquiry by

interviewing other people who have participated in ceremonial apologies similar to the one in Teotihuacán. I also plan to lead more apology circles and continue sharing the powerful healing energy of apology.

Glossary

Ancestral apologies are “apologies allowing one to speak with, to confront the dead and reconcile with those no longer living, in order to heal harms that continue to live on beyond the passing of the harmed or harm-doer. These apologies allow a process of healing in both directions. It heals toward the past and toward the future” (Tanis, n.d.).

Creative Synthesis is the sixth and final phase of Heuristic Inquiry (HI), when the various strands of the research are integrated into a coherent whole.

Explication is the fifth phase of HI, consisting of a complete examination of the various layers of meaning after gathering all the data, including the research partners’ interviews.

Ho’Oponopono is a traditional Hawai’ian practice of apology, clearing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Illumination is the fourth phase of HI, which expands the research to include interviews with other people who have had a similar experience.

Immersion is the second phase of HI, involving an intensive process of self-examination.

Incubation is the third phase of HI, happening concurrently with Immersion as it involves retreating from that process at times to intuitively process the information.

Initial Engagement is the first phase of HI, in which the researcher selects a topic of study based on a deep, personal experience.

Internalized domination is “the incorporation and acceptance by individuals within a dominant group of prejudices against others. Internalized domination is likely to consist of feelings of superiority, normalcy, and self-righteousness, together with guilt, fear, projection, denial of reality, and alienation from one’s body and from nature” (Pheterson, 1986, p. 35).

La Tradición is the contemporary Mexican movement to revive and reclaim traditional pre-Hispanic spirituality, beliefs, and customs.

Mysticism “is the sense of some form of contact with the divine or transcendent, often understood in Christian tradition as involving union with God” (Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d.).

Ometeotl is an important Mexica deity that embodies absolute duality (Rodríguez Hernández, 2019).

Research Partners is the name that HI uses for what is traditionally called study subjects.

Spiritual Coherence is the state of alignment with the Divine, other humans, and all sentient beings through the use of ceremony and ritual (Hübl et al., 2020; Taegel, 2019).

Sacred Ceremonies are events where intentional spiritual coherence is cultivated using various rituals.

Ubuntu is the African principle of caring for each other’s wellbeing in a spirit of mutual support. It is based on the idea that humans are humans through their relationships with other humans (Louw, 2006).

Appendices

Appendix A: Dissertation Interview Invitation/Cover Letter¹⁴³

Dear XXX,

My name is Juan Carlos Areán, and I am a doctoral candidate at the Wisdom School for Graduate Studies, Ubiquity University. For my doctoral dissertation, I am conducting a research study titled *The Experience and Impact of Ceremonial Apologies: A Colonizer's Journey of Personal, Community, and Ancestral Healing*. The purpose of this study is to research the experience and impact of ceremonial apologies for historical and ancestral harm. I am seeking research partners who would allow me to interview them regarding this kind of experience. I invite you to consider participating in this research study.

Those who participate in the study will: (a) describe how they perceive the experience of ceremonial apologies for historical perpetration of harm; (b) describe the perceived impact of such ceremonial apologies on the apologizer, the recipient of the apology, and/or their families and communities; (c) offer their definition of what constitutes an authentic apology; (d) share their perspective on the relationship between apology and forgiveness; and (f) address their perceived significance of offering this apology during a ceremony.

The interview is expected to last from 60 to 90 minutes. It will be digitally audio-recorded using technology that safeguards confidentiality (if requested),

¹⁴³ This letter was adapted from Sultan, N. (2018). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically*. SAGE Publications.

transcribed verbatim, and verified (and modified if needed) by the respondent. The content of the interview will constitute the raw data of the study.

Relevant themes and patterns will be identified from this information, culminating in a creative synthesis of the essence of research partners' collective experience. Research partners will be given the options of either remain anonymous or be quoted and cited on the record. If they choose anonymity, research partners will choose their own pseudonyms. Using pseudonyms will allow me to determine themes without identifying research partners by name.

There are minimal risks to participating in this study. There is a slight possibility of psychological or emotional discomfort and/or loss of privacy. Psychological risks include the production of negative affective states due to the reliving of a traumatic experience. Also, some people might surmise the identity of participants, even if they ask for anonymity.

Benefits of participation include contributing to the existing body of empirical research on apology and having an opportunity to assimilate and integrate lived experiences. It will add to the understanding of the experience and impact of ceremonial apologies. You will not be compensated for your participation.

To be included in the study, the research partners must have directly participated in an apology for historical or ancestral harm, as apologizers, people receiving the apology, and/or witnesses/observers. The researcher is interested in interviewing people who participated in an apology in the context of a ceremony.

If you meet the above criteria and are interested in participating in the study, please respond to this email. I will then send you a brief description of the study, a consent form, a demographic information form, the interview protocol, and a few possible times for the interview, along with instructions on how to connect with me for the interview. Please know that you may ask questions about the study at any time.

The data collected from this inquiry will be used for education and publication purposes. If you choose to remain anonymous, reported findings will not be identified with you personally. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I may remove you from the study at any time for reasons such as communications or language difficulties.

Any questions about the study or related concerns may be directed to the principal researcher, Juan Carlos Areán, at 413-345-1906 or jcarean@yahoo.com.

Any questions about your rights as a research partner or concerns about this research study may be directed to Dr. Gyorgyi Szabo, Dean of Graduate Studies at Ubiquity University, at g.szabo@ubiquityuniversity.org.

Thank you for considering participating in this research. I value the unique contribution you can make to this study and the understanding and evidence base of ceremonial apology. I am excited about the possibility of your participation and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Juan Carlos Areán

Appendix B: Dissertation Research Consent Form¹⁴⁴

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether you wish to participate in this research study.

Purpose of the research: To explore the experience and impact of ceremonial apologies for historical and ancestral harm.

What you will do in this research: This study will involve your participation in a one-time digitally audio-recorded telephone interview.

Time required: Interview: 60 to 90 minutes.

Transcript and emergent theme verification: This will vary depending on your schedule. **Risks:** There are minimal risks to participating in this study. There is a slight possibility of psychological or emotional discomfort and/or loss of privacy. Psychological risks include the production of negative affective states due to the reliving of a traumatic experience. Some people might surmise your identity, even if you ask for confidentiality.

Benefits: Benefits of participation include contributing to the existing body of empirical research on apology and having an opportunity to assimilate and integrate lived experience.

Compensation: You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality: You will have the option of being cited by your real name and title (on the record), by a pseudonym (anonymously, off the record), or a combination of both. You can modify these choices at any point in the study before the submission of the dissertation to the University. Unless you wave

¹⁴⁴ This consent form has been adapted from Sultan, N. (2018). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically*. SAGE Publications.

confidentiality, your participation in this study is entirely confidential, and your identity will not be stored with your data. All responses will be assigned a pseudonym of your choice. If you do not select a pseudonym, I will choose one for you. The list of research partners connecting your name with your pseudonym will remain confidential and will be stored in a password-protected, encrypted thumb drive to which only the principal researcher will have access.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary; you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If you wish to withdraw, please inform the principal researcher (no questions asked).

How to contact the principal researcher: Any questions about this study or related concerns may be directed to the principal researcher, Juan Carlos Areán, at 413-345-1906 or at jcarean@yahoo.com.

Whom to contact about your rights in this research: Any questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about this research study may be directed to Dr. Gyorgyi Szabo, Dean of Graduate Studies at Ubiquity University at g.szabo@ubiquityuniversity.org.

Oral informed consent: If you agree with all this information, you will be asked to read the following statement at the beginning of the interview so that it can be audio-recorded: *The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained. I agree to participate in this study and to allow the researcher to digitally audio-record the interview. I understand that I am free to ask the researcher questions about this research study at any time and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without incurring any penalty. I also*

understand that the researcher may remove me from the study at any time for reasons such as communication or language difficulties.

Appendix C: Dissertation Research Interview Protocol¹⁴⁵

1. After greeting and thanking the research partner, ask for permission to do a brief grounding exercise.
2. If the research partner agrees, do the exercise
3. Ask for permission to audio-record the interview and start recording devices.
4. Review Informed Consent Form and obtain oral informed consent for participation.
5. Go over demographic information and ask research partner whether they want to be on the record or remain anonymous and specify that they can change this choice at any point in the study before the submission of the dissertation to the University.
6. Engage in dialogue, answer questions, and so forth to “break the ice” and create relational flow.
7. Orient research partner to interview questions, for example:

I'm interested in your personal experience of apology for the historical perpetration of harm. I would like for us to explore what it means for you to have participated in such an apology, whether you were the apologizer, the person receiving the apology, or a witness to the apology. Please remember that if you feel distressed at any point during the interview, we can pause or stop, and I am here to support you.
8. Conduct interview using the following guiding, open-ended questions:

¹⁴⁵ This protocol has been adapted from Sultan, N. (2018). *Heuristic inquiry: Researching human experience holistically*. SAGE Publications.

- *Tell me the story of the apology event in which you participated (including what was your role, who was present, and when and where it took place)*
- *What motivated you to participate in this event? (Why did you participate?)*
- *What was it like for you to participate? (What was the experience like?)*
- *Do you know what it was like for other people who participated? (the person(s) who received the apology, the person(s) who apologized, people who witness the apology)*
- *In your opinion, what are the elements of an authentic apology? (What makes an authentic apology?)*
- *In your opinion, what is the relationship between apology and forgiveness?*
- *Does an apology require forgiveness from someone else? Does forgiveness require an apology from someone else?*
- *[If the apology was offered during a ceremony]: What was the significance of offering this apology during a ceremony? In your opinion, what made it different from an apology offered outside a ceremony?*
- *What is your definition of a ceremony?*
- *What has been the impact of this event in your life? (What has changed in your life because of this event?)*

- *Do you know what the impact has been in the lives of other people who participated? (the person(s) who received the apology, the person(s) who apologized, people who witness the apology)*
 - *What else would you like to share about this experience?*
9. Listen to the research partner with empathy and a relational attitude.
 10. Respond, prompt, and clarify when necessary with empathy and relational attitude.
 11. Once all the questions have been answered, ask if the research partner has any final thoughts to share.
 - *Were there any topics regarding apology that you wanted to discuss but that we did not get around to today?*
 - *Let's take a moment to see if it feels right to end our conversation here or if there is something else you would like to add (pause for a moment).*
 - *Do you have any questions for me as we end our time together?*
 - *What was it like for you to speak with me about your experience with apology? How are you feeling at this moment?*
 - *[If the research partner is feeling distressed]: Is there something I can do to support you at this moment? I am happy to stay on the line until you feel better or recommend a helpline where you can talk to someone who can help you. [If research partner asks for a helpline, refer or connect him/her to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (1-*

800-950-6264) or the National Institute of Mental Health: (1-866-615-6464).

- [If the research partner is not distressed, end with the following question]: *Do you know of anyone else who has had a similar experience as you or who was part of the event in which you participated and whom you are willing to speak with about volunteering participation in the study?*
12. Thank research partner again for volunteering to participate and taking the time for the interview.
 13. Remind research partner that the interview transcript and findings will be sent to her/him for verification (and suggested modifications if needed).
 14. End telephone interview; stop recording devices.
 15. Document thoughts, feelings, sensations, and impressions in a journal promptly.

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