

## Article

# Generational and Ancestral Healing in Community: Urban Atabex Herstory

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**Abstract:** When we take the time to face internalized oppression, anything we want becomes possible. Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network invites organizers and agents of change to be in community, to heal from internalized oppression, and to create another world that we know is possible, for ourselves, family, community, and the world. Through community healing circles and liberation workshops, this work is dedicated to ending violence against women of color and fighting to end the triple threat of patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism. The emotional release model is a framework and set of practices for self-healing from internalized oppression and liberation, by centering indigenous earth-based spirituality, Paulo Freire's methodology, and spirit guided energy work. This orientation to healing creates transformative possibilities and opportunities for intentional community care. Over the past ten years, the workshops and trainings have expanded the collective to include men of color, queer and trans people, and people of European descent in the fight for our liberation. This work has created the possibility of peace and justice in our lifetime.

**Keywords:** healing in community; internalized oppression; earth-based spirituality; indigenous traditions; energy work; emotional release; education for liberation



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My Sisters  
I miss my big-haired sisters  
My happy-haired  
My curly locked-haired sisters  
My dark as night  
My brown  
My cocoa-bean sisters  
clean faces and ample bosom  
smooth skin and wrinkled bellies  
Free breasts and silver threaded sisters  
I miss my soft spoken sisters  
My angry sisters  
My quiet sisters  
My crone  
My baby sisters  
My Christian and Santera sisters  
My Buddhist, Yoga sisters,  
My Reiki sisters  
My healer sisters  
I miss those who held my hand under the full moon  
holding me tight as I poured old pain through my eyes.  
I miss the scent of sisterhood in Somalie Rose and Jazmin.  
I miss the "Go deeper" command,  
and the reassurance of "That's where you need to be . . . "

Within the circle's embrace.  
 I miss the sisters who encouraged me to cry,  
 To heal through righteous pain and anger to reach the other side of joy  
 The ecstasy of letting go.  
 Oh, I really miss my sisters  
 My fire, sweat and vision-quest sisters  
 My water, ocean moon sisters  
 My earth, first blood offering sisters  
 The sisters who embraced new warrior-esses names  
 The ones who released restrictive mores  
 And named themselves after freedom.  
 The ones that chanted, prayed, and silently walked away  
 I miss the ones who patiently waited for the universe to act  
 And having no answer, took justice in their hands  
 I miss the city sisters, the organizer sisters  
 The mother sisters, the daughter sisters,  
 The comrade and the friend sisters  
 The poet sisters, the dancing sisters  
 The drummer sisters,  
 the ones who lifted their eyes  
 and vowed always to cry, to feel,  
 and never again allow no one to hinder their flight.  
 I miss, I miss  
 But my sisters are with me.  
 Each tear Each sorrow Each happiness and wisdom are being carried within as  
 the circle widens  
 Every prayer, every breath  
 Are extended in the four directions paths on which we walk today.  
 And the ones who have transcended  
 Have taken this circle of light back to the ancestresses  
 And our circle still remains  
 Lighting up  
 Wherever we may be, wherever we may go  
 Wherever we may open our hearts and arms  
 to our never-ending circle sisters.

Dedicated to my First World Healing Circle Sisters  
 —Sandra Nía Rodríguez, circle sister

## 1. Introduction

Too many Black, Latina, and other women of color in our communities face ongoing systemic violence or intrapersonal violence while trying to support their families or just live in this world without succumbing to the daily oppression in our lives. Internalized oppression can manifest in people's lives in the form of anxiety, overeating or undereating, past traumas or abuses, depression, grief, substance addiction, alcoholism, self-doubt, and even the death of those we love and the sorrow that often comes with that. It is through healing circles and gatherings that the community comes together and unites, to powerfully face the collective oppression using the power of love, light, presence, and possibility. Through community, any of these conditions can be healed completely, and the systems of oppression no longer control our lives.

In this article we will explore the *ourstory* (the terms "ourstory" and "herstory" will be used in resistance to the patriarchal notion of the term "history"), the genealogy and origins of Urban Atabex Organizing and Self-Healing in Community Network (Urban Atabex). The genealogical and historical narrative is part of the legacy of this work that continues to be passed down to future generations of organizers and healers. Urban Atabex is a woman

of color-led community built through the teachings and synthesis of Eastern medicine, contemporary Marxism, and many generations of earth-based indigenous practice—one's spiritual and cultural connection to the Earth and its traditions and rituals. The network has built a powerful community centered on ending violence against women and ending the triple threat of capitalism (capitalism we define as an ideology where capital holds power; the ideology of profits over people), patriarchy (patriarchy we define as an ideology where cis-men (men assigned male at birth) hold power), and white supremacy (white supremacy we define as an ideology where White people hold power) in our lifetime. In this model, facilitators and healers do not seek to heal anyone, but provide the tools and safe space for people to choose to take on their life and healing powerfully. This model of healing and community building is what we define as self-healing in community.

While there is growing interest and emphasis on personal and collective healing, academic literature has historically ignored or appropriated healing models from working-class communities of color. This study seeks to uplift the contributions of Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other women of color in the history of collective community-healing and political organizing. This project includes offerings in the form of photos, artwork, and testimonies from generations of people who have participated and built this network.

Participant observation research is also at the center of this paper, as the authors are creators, have been trained, and continue to be organizers, facilitators, and healers of this model. Therefore, throughout this piece we will be using “our” and “we”, as the writers continue to be a part of the Network and are co-creating this work together. In creating this piece, we intentionally brought together the voices and experiences of our network to write, edit, and share the stories that make this publication possible. As a network, it is important that, in spite, and because of, our different positionalities and personal circumstances, we see the success and triumphs of this work as collective. In building the model over the past thirty-three years, we know that the success of this work requires us to always build and create collaboratively and learn from our personal and collective healing journeys.

This article will trace the origins, development, and organizing principles of an innovative community organizing and healing method. We begin with a chronology of the historical foundation and influences of the work. Next, we offer the distinctions of the emotional release model and how the lessons of the work have created transformative possibilities in the lives of our communities. Finally, we will share the possibilities of the work.

## 2. Ourstory/Legacy

Urban Atabex Organizing and Self-Healing in Community Network began as a movement in 1987 at the First World Women of Color Self-Healing Circle. In that space, Latina, Black, lesbian, and straight women brought together spiritual traditions from the African diaspora and Indigenous traditions of healing from each participant's cultures. Urban Atabex has been a vital part in transforming the lives of women of color, and it continues today to heal with the addition of circles led by, and for, queer and transgender people of color and men of color, being closely guided by the spiritual insight and steadfast guidance of Esperanza Martell, whose vision and commitment to their own healing and transformation, as well as the healing and of their community and world, led this movement and we discuss her more later in the article.

The legacy of this work is grounded in our collective re-claiming and re-membling (the use of “re-membling” comes from narrative therapy and it is used to describe a process of recollecting our personal history that best serves us and our healing. It recognizes that our “remembering” are stories that impact our lives now and the act of “re-membling” gives us an opportunity to realign with our truth, our history, and our identity (Russell and Carey 2002)) of each of our Indigenous roots before colonization and capitalism, which robbed us of our collective practices of healing in community. Collectively, we are a group with participants who have gotten in touch with their own culture's spiritual practices. The participants have roots in Egypt, China, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto

Rico, Mexico, Thailand, Saint Vincent, Jamaica, and parts of Europe. In spite of all that we have faced as Black and Brown (brown in our text primarily refers to Afro Latinos, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and an umbrella term for Latinx ppl.) people, we know that each step forward in our healing creates the possibilities our ancestors have hoped for: the re-membling of working through pain, hurt, loss, heartache, sadness, depression, or the death of a loved one that would have us gather in a circle around a fire together.

As we build towards healing in community, it is essential that we uplift the legacy of collective struggle and community care that comes from all our people's history of movement building and continued liberation work. Across the United States, major social, political, and cultural changes were occurring throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Revolutionaries of color began to link racism to colonialism and class exploitation under capitalism and identified them as barriers to building a liberated society (Fernandez 2020, p. 5). In New York City, the struggle for liberation was happening as oppressed and marginalized communities were rising up and fighting for their lives. The capitalist, white supremacist, and patriarchal systems had oppressed and killed too many people, and now more than ever, poor and working-class people of color, being predominantly led by youth, began to organize as a result of these attacks by the State. Among the many revolutionary youth organizations were El Komite, who were fighting for their homes and housing rights on the Upper West Side of Manhattan but also building strong leadership, led by women, and addressing women's issues, like reproductive rights and sterilization (Pastor 2021; Muzio 2017). The healing circle work comes out of this political struggle of Black and Brown people, women, and LGBTQ people of color.

On 14 July 1970, members of the Young Lords and the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement executed a takeover of Lincoln Hospital, the only major health institution serving the African-American and Latin-American community in the South Bronx (Omotosho 2015). They set up and ran different health programs, including tuberculosis and lead poisoning detection clinics and withdrawal treatment centers. These Black and Brown youth ran these programs for 24 h until NYPD surrounded the hospital and a peaceful de-escalation was negotiated. On 10 November 1970, Lincoln Hospital was once again occupied by the Young Lords and Black Panthers to set up a drug detoxification program. "Having established overnight control of the sixth floor, the activists sought to 'implement a drug program that would serve the community effectively and be run by the community'. At noon on 11 November, '35 addicts along with workers from the hospital and community people' established what they called The People's Program" (Blanchard 2018). Dr. Walter Bosque and Dr. Mutulu Shakur (Dr. Mutulu Shakur is a political prisoner currently fighting for parole and immediate compassionate release. Please learn more about Dr. Shakur here: <http://mutulushakur.com/site/about/>) (accessed on 2 February 2021) were two of the community organizers and acupuncture practitioners at the Lincoln Detox Community Program. Dr. Shakur was part of the Black Liberation Army, was involved in the liberation of Assata Shakur to Cuba, and has been imprisoned for over 30 years. In the fight against colonization and systemic oppression, our communities have always organized collective liberation. The historical and cultural legacy of women of color led healing movements in poor and working-class communities is apparent from the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement, Black Panther Party, Young Lords Party, and El Komite to the many Marxist revolutionary movements around the world.

In the early 1970s, the worldwide Women's Liberation movement impacted the Young Lords Party and other Puerto Rican Left organizations to stand up against machismo/sexism and male violence. Dr. Helen Rodriguez, among many, organized against sterilization abuse, the Vietnam War, and for Reproductive Rights and equality. From 1975 to 1978, Puerto Rican and other Latin American women from left organizations took on racism in the white feminist movement and reclaimed International Working Women's Day. Emerging during this time (1975), the Latin Women's Collective (LWC) main objective was to organize Latin American/Caribbean women workers to develop leadership skills to transform their community in the areas of education, housing, employment, and health (Oboler

and González 2005, p. 480). The key to the work during this time was political activism, reclaiming culture, and studying women of color history and self-healing. Most of the founders were Puerto Rican, with a few Dominican, Cuban, Chicana, and Colombian women. The organizers came from political and social justice organizations: El Comité MINP, Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CASA), Movimiento Popular Dominicano (MPD), The Young Lords, and student and community groups. Although “Liberación De La Mujer A Través De La Lucha Obrera” (“Women’s liberation through the working-class struggle”) underscored that working-class women were the backbone of most political and community organizations, they often never received credit for their hard work. To create leaders, the LWC taught writing, speaking, analytical skills, and the courage to take up the struggle against sexism and racism within the movement, our community, and ourselves. During this process, the women looked to their culture and ancestral rituals for healing and grounding. This sisterhood of collective work, learning, and activism began undoing internalized racist and sexist oppression.

In 1983, the largest gathering of women of color met at City College to organize a conference for International Working Women’s Day (Crawford 2020) (Esperanza Martell, personal communication, 14 September 2020). The women, who were developing strategic plans to take back their communities, were all members of social political movements and organizations against police brutality, health, education, housing, labor, and the fight for liberation of Puerto Rico, Palestine, Ireland, South Africa, and all political prisoners. Although these women were creating powerful change and organizing in their communities, they were wrestling with the impacts of oppression on their daily lives by self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, being in violent relationships, and other harmful methods of coping that were causing illness, disease, and death. These women started to question, “How can we powerfully organize when we are dealing with the same illnesses and addictions as our communities?” The healing circle work was the answer.

### *2.1. First World Womyn of Color Self-Healing Circle*

In 1987, the healing circles for women of color began by Esperanza Martell an Afro-Taino, Puerto Rican, human rights activist with a strong working-class background who had been organizing women since the 1970’s with El Comité. In a conversation with Esperanza Martell (Crawford 2020), she shares the herstory of the inspirations and the foundation that created this work and those powerful brothers and sisters that played a major role in continuing the work. Patricia Robinson, a Marxist clinical social worker and organizer, and a mentor of, charged the women in her life to pay it forward when she retired and created women of color-centered, self-healing and transformative organizing, anti-capitalist groups. After years of organizing and healing from the ills of capitalism, Esperanza wanted to share her healing experience with other organizers and create self-healing support circles for her community and herself. With the support from her mentor and friends, Esperanza explored energy work, emotional release work, meditation, and other forms of alternative healing. She combined her Marxist political training with re-evaluation counseling techniques (<https://www.rc.org/>, accessed on 4 February 2021) meditation, visualization, breath and bodywork, cultural magic, and honoring the Earth Mother/Goddess. This model was created to build community and a safe space for the women of color that were suffering from physical and emotional pain. It was designed to be a place to go that was an alternative to conventional therapy or medicine, which was expensive and did not address or understand the needs of women of color from a cultural and political perspective. Women who were suffering from internalized oppression and coping through self-harm, addictions, and abusive relationships could come to a healing circle and learn the tools to heal and be their powerful selves while organizing. Esperanza continued to run monthly community healing circles expanding the circles to include retreats and expanding the number of women that were involved. From 1987–1990, Esperanza worked out of Daya Associates, a yoga and meditation alternative healing center in Harlem and the People’s Acupuncture Center in St. Anne’s Church in the South Bronx. Circles were always connected to the community



and they took place in the community. By 1990, a group of women, including Nakawe Cuebas, Sylvia Ellie, Beverly Hutchinson, Haydee Morales, Sandra Rodriguez, Yolanda Rosado, Nifa Mercedes Sanchez, Opal Sparks, Brenda Stanton, Dr. Urayoana Trinidad, and Tati Ventura, were organizing retreats and monthly circles while being trained to facilitate the healing circles. From its beginning in 1987, the circles and community continued to grow, but, by 1994, the First World Women of Color Self-Healing Circles ended its run. See Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** First World Women of Color Self-Healing Circle Retreat. 1992. Picture by Esperanza Martell Archives.

## 2.2. Casa Atabex Ache (House of Womyn Power)

The continuation of the healing circle work came in the form of the dream of three young Puerto Rican women, Haydee Morales, Emily Lopez, and Marta Morales, who were organizers, educators, and healers committed to end male violence, poverty, and racism. After three years of looking for a space to call home, with the support of community leader Sandra Hernandez, in 1997 the healing circle work continued in a space on 140th Street between Willis and Brook Avenue, then known as Casa Atabex Ache: The House of Womyn's (the spelling of "womyn" is used in resistance to the patriarchy notion of the word "women") Power, also referred to as Casa. The vision to see this healing circle model as a community non-profit became a reality. The commitment was to give free services to the women and children of that block, in particular the six buildings around Casa. A beautiful healing space was created in this South Bronx community where women of color could come and begin their healing process. Casa was created to train women in the skills to choose life, to let go of internalized oppression, to open up to possibilities, and realize their dreams. The organization was run by, and designed for, young women of color. The first Board of Casa was made up of multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-gender group of organizers, healers, and community members: Esperanza Martell, Akosua Tait, Haydee Morales, Emily Lopez, Marta Morales, Walter Bosque, Nakawe Cuebas, Churney Lloyd, Alfredo Miranda, and Dujardin Bonet. This was a women-centered space for women of color: African, Latin American, Asian, Indigenous, immigrants, lesbian, bisexual, etc., where women were reclaiming their cultural healing skills to heal and transform their own lives, and the lives of their community and the world. Casa was a space where all women of color came to heal from internalized oppression and release emotional hurts and trauma in community, with love and support. All the staff and board members were trained in the healing circle model. They supported women to look at how internalized oppression manifests in their lives as women of color from a race, class, and gender lens, and believed that self-healing is a political act and it was important for the community to release the

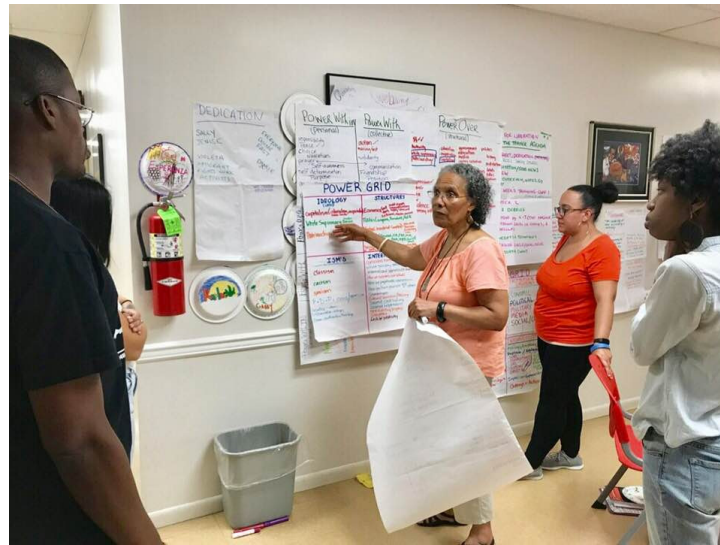
effects of systemic oppression and reclaim their cultural tools to heal. Casa closed its doors in the Fall of 2013, after 19 years of giving alternative services and empowering our community, local, citywide, national, and international, from the South Bronx to New Orleans, Vieques, Chiapas, Haiti, and Cuba. Under the direction and leadership of the founders, Board, and Directors; Haydee Morales, Luz Rodriguez, Aleeka Wade, Vanessa Tricoche, Dayanara Marte, Sharim Algarim, Seyi O. Adebajo (listed above are the Directors of Casa Atabex Ache; there are many womyn who held positions on staff, the Board and were community leaders, including Lillian Jimenez, Julie Novas, Anna Ortega-Williams, Tania Ramirez, Judith Lopez, Yvette Fernandez, Nilsa Delmasi, and Natalie LaAntigua. Even though there are many names not listed, we honor their contribution to the mission and vision of the organization), Casa Atabex Ache laid a powerful foundation of healing in community that would continue.

### 2.3. Education for Liberation: Power and Oppression

Throughout her early organizing and political work, Esperanza Martell continued to develop herself as a Marxist and take all of the readings and theories from Marxist thinkers, educators, and revolutionaries, like Paulo Freire, Franz Fanon, and Che Guevara, and developed a workshop to educate youth and other organizers on these Marxist ideas. The Education for Liberation Workshop is the political foundation of the healing circle work. To understand the feelings and emotions that we are dealing with, we have to understand how capitalism works and what causes the internalized oppression that we are working to heal from. This political education was important for people to recognize the larger systemic oppression that was happening to ourselves and our community. Esperanza took these theories and created workshops where people could learn about these ideas and analyze their own experience. Since 1987, these workshops have been a key component of the healing work. The Education for Liberation: Power and Oppression Workshops are based on Paulo Freire's methodology of dialogue and praxis. The workshops have been held twice a year, at Picture the Homeless and Casabe Houses in East Harlem, which is open to youth and adult organizers and educators committed to creating a different way of being with each other and transforming our world. See Figures 2 and 3. In alignment with the commitment to keep this work in the community, every workshop is held at a community organization that shares our Marxist, political views, where the fee for the workshop is donated to the organization to support their work. See Figure 4.



**Figure 2.** Facilitators at the Education for Liberation Workshop at Casabe Houses, East Harlem. 4 June 2017.



**Figure 3.** Facilitators, Esperanza Martell, Katheryn Crawford, Claude Copeland, and Stephanie Martinez, Esperanza preparing for an upcoming Education for Liberation Workshop at Casabe Houses, East Harlem. 19 September 2018.



**Figure 4.** Education for Liberation: Power and Oppression Workshop at FIERCE in the Bronx. 18 May 2019.

#### 2.4. Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network

In the Fall of 2010, a new group of women of color, committed to continuing the circle work, began training to facilitate community healing circles, becoming the Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network. Joining the group would be three men of color and a woman of European descent, making a commitment to end the patriarchy and white supremacy in their own lives to create a safe space for women of color. During this time, community healing circles were happening monthly for women of color, men of color, and women of European descent throughout New York City. This multi-racial, multi-gender group, which is also known as the network, spent a year building a community with each other and others, and healing from the internalized oppression that keeps people from being their most powerful selves. This year-long training that took place at Casa de las Americas in East Harlem was not easy; the group struggled with the patriarchy and



white supremacy that showed up within the group, and they were challenged to hold each other and themselves accountable to their commitment to the agreement and guidelines of the work. Many lessons were learned with this training as the healing circle work started to grow and evolve, including allies who were committed to creating safe space for women of color by taking on their own oppressive ways of being as the men of color and women of European descent.

Community circles continued throughout 2011–2014, introducing new brothers and sisters to the healing circle work and expanding the community. In 2014 and 2015, Esperanza Martell organized the first 13-Week Introduction to Self-Healing in Community Workshop held at Ta-Merry Temple in Harlem. The 13-week workshop creates a space for participants to begin addressing and healing from the impact of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. They are introduced to the emotional release work, the political context of the work and other alternative healing modalities. In 2014, at the height of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the attack of police on Black and Brown bodies, a call was made to hold healing circles with the intent to bring the community together to heal. The Network was called upon again to organize healing circles in 2016 when the shootings at Pulse Nightclub greatly impacted our LGBTQ sisters, brothers, and siblings.

In 2016, Esperanza continued to train women of color to organize and facilitate community healing circles. In addition to the training, the 13-week Introduction to Self-healing in Community Workshop for women of color continued at Casabe Houses in East Harlem. In addition to the healing work we (the authors of this paper are actively involved in the organizing of the Urban Atabex Network, which is the reason for the transition to first-person narrative) did as a community, we intentionally participated in protests and demonstrations as a community in order to be in action. Every year, workshop participants, friends, and family travelled to Plymouth, Massachusetts to join in solidarity with the National Day of Mourning; a day that honors the Indigenous communities and the struggles of the Indigenous people today. See Figure 5. Healing and community also took place at the seasonal celebrations, honoring the change of seasons throughout the year, as we came together to honor the Earth and create new possibilities into the coming season. See Figures 6 and 7.



**Figure 5.** Urban Atabex community at National Day of Mourning at Plymouth Massachusetts. 22 November 2018. Standing in solidarity with political prisoner Leonard Peltier (Leonard Peltier is an Indigenous freedom fighter political prisoner. Please learn more about him here: <https://www.whoisleonardpeltier.info/>) (accessed on 4 February 2021).



**Figure 6.** Community gathers at the river at Riverside Park, New York for a Summer Solstice Celebration to welcome in the new season. 20 June 2020.



**Figure 7.** The community altar at our Winter Solstice Tea Party at Casabe Houses. 21 December 2018.

As the workshop grew and expanded to include men of color, queer, and transgender people of color, so did the Urban Atabex Community Healing Circle Training. As new organizers were trained, the circle work was taken and adjusted to meet the needs of the organizer's own community and found a new home at FIERCE in the Bronx. The Urban Atabex emotional release healing circles continue to progress and transform to address the specific needs of different communities. Currently, community healing circles are happening monthly for women and gender non-conforming femmes of color, men of color, queer and transgender people of color, and they are open to all people of color. As more organizers take on their own healing process and their understanding of the impacts of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy in their own lives, we continue to be of service to our communities and work towards liberation. We can begin to transform the systems that have dehumanized us and reclaim our own humanity. Paulo Freire states, "Liberation is thus a childbirth, a painful one. Or, to put it another way, the solution of this [oppressor-oppressed] contradiction is born in the labor which brings into the world this new being: no longer oppressor nor longer oppressed, but human in the process of

achieving freedom” (Freire 2005, p. 49). The Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network is about achieving freedom and liberation through healing from the systems of oppression that alienate us from ourselves and others, while reclaiming our humanity through this process.

### 3. Key Urban Atabex Emotional Release Model Distinctions

As mentioned before, the Urban Atabex emotional release model was created to build community and safe space for women of color to heal from internalized oppression and release physical and emotional pain. It is a framework and set of practices for self-healing from internalized oppression and liberation. Based on participant observation and testimonies from participants, we have identified seven key distinctions of our work that lay a foundation and define the magic of this model for transformative possibilities and intentional community care:

- We are committed to end male violence in the lives of women of color in our lifetime.
- We use a race, class, and gender lens.
- We are guided by the Four Agreements (Ruiz 1997).
- Self-Healing is a revolutionary political act of resistance and freedom. We heal from internalized oppression in community.
- Our work is grounded in honoring Earth-based spirituality, and cultural traditions and magic.
- We stand by Paulo Freire Methodology/Praxis, See, Analyze, and Concepts: Humanization/Conscientizacao/Dialogue.
- Anything and Everything is Possible in Community.

The distinctions of our model will be described below using quotes from our community members, which illustrate key points. The quotes were collected in conversation with the network for the purpose of this manuscript in December 2020.

#### 3.1. *We Are Committed to End Male Violence in the Lives of Women of Color in Our Lifetime*

Anecdotally, we know that too many women and femmes in our communities are the healers, the breadwinners, the mothers, the aunties, the grandmothers, and many other roles that often get taken for granted. Those who need healing are often those who have been harmed by violence stemming from a pervasive system of patriarchy that has overtaken their lives. Too many transgender and queer people of color face down patriarchy in order to be fully self-expressed (Solnit 2020). It has been critical as we engage queer and trans people of color in healing circles that we look closely at how violence impacts the community in so many ways.

To be in a community of healing, we must confront how male violence and patriarchy have wreaked havoc on our spirits and physical bodies. It is this same violence that keeps us from finding freedom and liberation. It is this violence that is the basis of all misogyny, homophobia, and transphobia. In our community, we ask our participants to look at how patriarchy has interrupted their lives, impacted their gender identity and sexuality, and how it limits their capacity to seek fulfillment and liberation in their lifetimes.

Patriarchy is the single most life-threatening social disease assaulting the male body and spirit in our nation. Yet, most men do not use the word “patriarchy” in everyday life. Most men never think about patriarchy—what it means and how it is created and sustained. Many men in our nation would not be able to spell the word or pronounce it correctly (Hooks 2010, p. 1).

This work was started to create a safe space for women of color to heal from the personal and systemic patriarchal violence that impacts our lives. Since 2010, and more recently in the past four years, Urban Atabex has begun training men of color who are committed to ending patriarchy in their own lives and building intentional community to confront patriarchy amongst men of color. Through intentional training and healing circle created for men of color, we have been asking men to divest from patriarchy and to look at how it benefits them, especially “good men”. It has been critical as we build

the men of color circles that we are all in dialogue as a community regarding what ending patriarchy amongst people of all genders would look like and what it requires for each of us to change.

### 3.2. *We Use a Race, Class, and Gender Lens*

Capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy are the ideologies that work together to keep us oppressed and keep us from living fully expressed lives. It is important that we analyze how that shows up in order for us to build a world outside of that pattern. Using a tool, called the “power and oppression grid”, we show how these ideologies shape society, institutions, and creates tools that are used to perpetuate racism and sexism. These structures and tools are used to oppress communities of color and, because we internalize this oppression, feelings of depression, sadness, loneliness, hopelessness, etc., it can cause sickness and/or poor health and wellness. It is critical in our healing model that we learn to see the world as it is and be aware of how these ideologies limit the structures around us and can interfere with our own capacity to be fully human. Building a sustainable system of liberation and human dignity for all requires us to look deeply at what is possible for all. Urban Atabex facilitator and circle sister Michele shares that:

I have used this work in my teachings as a social work field instructor for community organizers by asking my students to use a gender, class, and race analysis in their organizing and constantly pointing out that what they comment on and see in their field placements are consequences of capitalism and all of the -isms that go with it. I have the same conversation with leaders in the philanthropic, nonprofit world, and with government officials.

I adore the trainings and continue to do them to keep them fresh and motivated to transform this world and bring the concepts mentioned above to as many people as possible. Additionally, leaning into the discomfort of being a White person showing up in a community of color grounds me in what I am committed to transforming, strengthens my conviction and ability to have the conversations that must be had with my White cohorts.

### 3.3. *We Are Guided by the Four Agreements*

We live in a world with a lot of rules, expectations, and unspoken agreements (Ruiz (1997) describes “agreements” as rules and beliefs we make with ourselves and others that rule our life). Drawing from Toltec wisdom of Don Miguel Ruiz (1997, p. 2), we are domesticated since birth to a specific “dream of the planet” that keep us from living our authentic lives. Through years of domestication, we have internalized an image of the world and of ourselves that is broken and unfixable. Especially for communities of color, we have been taught and have internalized that knowledge and healing is outside of us, and we must get it from outside experts, who are often White. Breaking from this agreement and story, we are creating a new agreement that our healing is our new commitment and priority in this world. When we come together in our circles, in our communities, we take a stand for new possibilities and new dreams of being whole and alive.

Who are you being? Ruiz’s four agreements are: (1) be impeccable with your word, (2) do not make assumptions, (3) do not take things personal, and (4) always do your best. The agreements give us guidance to create new agreements in our lives and build a new world that meets our need to be full humans. At the foundation and center of our new world is our integrity, and it starts with our word. We create new language for our world, and we speak truth and new possibilities into our lives knowing that language and our words are magic that shapes our images, thoughts, and actions (Ruiz 1997; Starhawk 1997). Creating our world with our words gives us the opportunity to align ourselves to our new way of being and have choice in what we do. We are also able to shed the judgement that we perceive from others. Ruiz (1997) argues that we often take things personally and make assumptions about others because we continue to operate in our domestication and internalize the agreements of others. When we honor our word and speak to our possibilities, we become conscious of whether our actions are in alignment with our intent. It holds us accountable to the new world and community that we have created.



When we break our integrity, our word to ourselves and others, it is an opportunity to learn from what is not working and acknowledge how our actions have impacted others and ourselves. We return to the possibility of being whole and complete when we restore our word to ourselves and to others. Integrity is not about being right or wrong, or internalizing more guilt and shame. The healing circle work is about releasing those feelings of shame, guilt, and judgement within ourselves, and when we honor our word, we honor our new possibilities of life. CC reflects on their experience with The Four Agreements:

The understanding of how to work the Four Agreements in my life, a book by Don Miguel Ruiz, has been challenging and very fruitful for myself when I remember to stay in line with them. Now, it doesn't mean that I get what I want or a desired result when sticking to them but I do feel for myself more fulfilled and in the right relationship with myself when I'm impeccable with my word or don't take things personally like he goes over in his book.

#### *3.4. Self-Healing Is a Revolutionary Political Act of Resistance and Freedom. We Heal from Internalized Oppression in Community*

From the inception of The United States, patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism have been the bedrock of our society's foundation. To this day, low-income people of color have been severely impacted by social, political, and economic policies that have resulted in major disparities. We also recognize that generational harm and continued "... stress, lack of resources, failing educational systems, violence, and prolonged exposure to trauma all diminishes the capacity to foster optimism, empowerment, and social change" (Chavez-Diaz and Lee 2015, p. 4). Additionally, colonizers, capitalists, and settlers have continued to convince people of color that they are inferior by nature and deserve continued subjugation by the ruling class. After years of systemic oppression and consistent societal education, people internalize racism, sexism, and classism as natural and start to contribute to the status quo that seeks to further exploit and violate them (Fanon 2008). Allowing internalized oppression to persist not only impacts individuals, but it feeds into the generations of trauma and the ability for communities to imagine a truly liberated world. Frantz Fanon states:

"The colonized subject then discovers that his life, his breathing and his heartbeats are the same as the colonist's. He discovers that the skin of the colonist is not worth more than the 'natives'. In other words, his world receives a fundamental jolt. The colonized's revolutionary new assurance stems from this. If, in fact, my life is worth as much as the colonist's, his look can no longer strike fear into me or nail me to the spot and his voice can no longer petrify me". (Fanon 2004, p. 10)

When the oppressed begin to realize that "trauma stems from long standing social institutions that have upheld these systems of oppression for generations" we are able to connect the trauma we experience in the present as well as those passed from previous generations (Chavez-Diaz and Lee 2015, p. 7). Healing becomes a necessary political act that disrupts cycles of trauma that is caused by the triple threat of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Gabrielle Cuesta states:

Using Urban Atabex's political analysis, I can quickly make connections between my unhealthy ways of coping and how they serve systems of oppression. A few examples include how it is easier for me to recognize when I am working longer hours and exhausting myself in an attempt to reach a white supremacist version of perfectionism and capitalist productivity as well as an attempt to distract myself from my deeper pain. I catch myself when my need to control is amplifying my disordered eating and body dysmorphia and how my behavior feeds white/patriarchal models of beauty.

Restorative Justice is then another foundation that we rely on to build greater balance in our lives. "Restorative justice asks who was harmed, what are the needs and obligations

of all affected, and how do they figure out how to heal the harm” (Davis 2014, p. 39). Our ability to be held accountable for the hurt that we enact on others, the community, and on nature, is a major piece of community healing and self-healing. In a capitalistic society that rewards individualism, it is a revolutionary act to take responsibility for our actions in relationship to others and Mother Earth. To create a world based on restorative justice, we must recognize the impact of the harm we might cause in the community and see the imbalance in nature that human greed and destruction of the Earth’s resources is creating. We must take collective steps toward the Earth’s healing and our own self-healing. Most recently, the COVID-19 pandemic brought to light the effects on society and nature. We take stock of the impacts of the coronavirus and recognize that, at the root, is an imbalance and consequence of continued violation of the earth. Vandana Shiva (2020) argues that:

The health emergency of the coronavirus is inseparable from the health emergency of extinction, the health emergency of biodiversity loss, and the health emergency of the climate crisis. All of these emergencies are rooted in a mechanistic, militaristic, anthropocentric worldview that considers humans separate from and superior to other beings. Beings we can own, manipulate, and control. All of these emergencies are rooted in an economic model based on the illusion of limitless growth and limitless greed, which violate planetary boundaries, and destroy the integrity of ecosystems and individual species.

### 3.5. Honoring Earth-Based Spirituality and Cultural Traditions and Magic

In all cultures and places, there are unique earth-based practices and indigenous traditions that respect and respond to the needs of all the spirits on the land. When capitalism and white supremacy ravaged the Americas and globalization spread across the world, we started to internalize the commodification of our bodies and estrangement to the earth so that the ruling class could continue to exploit for their benefit. Starhawk (1997), a White activist that draws from pagan/Wiccan teachings to inform activism, argues that political issues are all issues of spirit, as patriarchy has caused us to separate ourselves from the objects, the earth, and even each other, as all things that can be manipulated and dominated. To reclaim our humanity, we reconnect and commit back to the earth through earth-based spirituality and Indigenous traditions from our unique cultures, backgrounds, and positionalities. From the Taino Earth Mother Atabex, who gives us lessons to honor the gifts of the earth (Borrero 2006), to Chinese Five Element Theory (Haas 2003; Veith 2002), which teaches us to be in balance with the seasons and elements, and all other practices and traditions between and across the universe. We are all called to move with the Earth, listen to the Earth, and honor the gifts that it brings. We use meditation, altar building, eating with the seasons, seasonal rituals, smudging, and other indigenous teachings reflected in our cultural backgrounds to ground our healing in the wisdom of our ancestors, and spirits of the land. We dedicate our work to our ancestors, to the people who inspired us, or to people that we are thinking of, to remember that our work is not done in isolation, that our healing and our spirit is connected to our ancestors, to our community, to the spirits on this earth. The act of re-claiming and re-membering our own indigenous cultural roots is part of our own individual and collective healing journey. As circle sister 延祿 expressed:

This workshop imbued my bones with the re-membering of home, and awakened in me the deep desire to live in good relations and gave me the opportunity to know the bliss and darkness and the release of freedom, so that I would have something in my heart to check against in my spiritual journeys through various Buddhist temples with various degrees of un-examined colonialism, capitalism, colorism, sexism, classism, etc. Once I knew how freedom felt, I could measure my own freedom walk in this way.

As we continue the practice of re-claiming our culture, in the winter and to honor our Black-led political cultural traditions, we follow the seven Kwanzaa Principles: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith) (Karenga 1999). The holiday of Kwanzaa is a blend of the values and practices of Africans

on the Continent and the United States, put in action to live and experience a meaningful and productive life (Karenga 1998, pp. 15–16). We do not believe in healing in isolation from one another, which would be contrary to our greater purpose to free ourselves from capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Additionally, our principles require us to center the lives of womyn of color in our healing. We know that healing too often de-centers Blackness and the many traditions that we lost to colonization. We know that too often the Black women and femmes who hold up our communities do not get celebrated enough. When we enter the winter, we celebrate the many ways our community heals from trauma and confronts inner and outer darkness in our daily lives. As the holiday season has become overly commercialized, our Winter Solstice Goddess tea party honors the sacred goddess in all of us. We create altars to celebrate all of the cultural and spiritual elements of the season. We give books and teacups from our own homes to celebrate that each one of us has gifts to give. Many of us bring other gifts, such as songs, poems, or just an honest declaration of love, light, and liberation in our lifetimes. We use the beginning of the winter to honor the many battles our ancestors have walked towards freedom and liberation and that we do not go into the cold dark winter alone.

We call on our cultural magic as a source of “... power-from-within, because magic is the psychology/technology of immanence, of understanding that everything is connected” (Starhawk 1997, p. 13). The emotional release model starts from the knowing that we are all beings connected by energy. Recognizing that we are energetic beings gives us access to moving stagnant energy that can make us sick psychologically and physically (Haas 2003; Ruskan 2003). Emotion comes from the Latin derivative “emotere”, which translates back to energy in motion (Walding 2020, p. 134). In our society, we have labelled certain emotions as “bad” and certain emotions are “good”, but all emotions are neutral and contribute to our health. According to Five Element Theory, emotions flow like water and need to be constantly moving, there is nothing wrong with expressing any of our emotions: anger puts us in action with the season of spring and worry helps us to make plans with the season of fall (Haas 2003). To safely release our emotions, we use a combination of body and energy work that targets where and how our emotions are stored in our physical bodies and energetic center/ chakras (Brennan 1988; Ruskan 2003). We also use drawing, drumming, dancing, and other movement work to reconnect our “thinking” and “feeling” brains that support recovery from trauma causing hyperactive limbic system and right hemisphere (Malchiodi 2015). While we use different techniques, at the root emotional release is trusting and reclaiming tools that we are born knowing. Circle sister Maria Marasigan shared:

Coming back to the basics of what we used as babies to communicate what we needed by listening to our bodies and responding with movements, sounds, visualizations to release, rebalance, and recenter into ourselves has been so helpful when I’m in community and also when I’m alone, reflecting on what’s happening in my life that needs attention. The concept of the healing circle having a warrior, coach, and anchor and that it’s a rotation of collective responsibility to take on all those roles to support one another and to know we can and need to step into all of those roles, removing the hierarchies of healing, and attaching roles of who you are, and can be, was a powerful concept.

The minute that we were born, we knew exactly what we needed to release our emotions and share our voice with the world: what we call “the baby shake” (shaking, crying, laughing, screaming, and yawning). Somewhere along the way, we have internalized that emotions are best kept hidden and expressed in isolation. Encouraging our bodies, emotions, and energies to move gives us practice staying in action and flowing with the universe.

### 3.6. *We Stand by Paulo Freire Methodology/Praxis—See, Analyze, and Concepts: Humanization/Conscientizacao/Dialogue*

Readings and theories from Marxist thinkers, educators, and revolutionaries, like Paulo Freire, Franz Fanon, and Che Guevara, shape the healing work and its intent. Understanding how capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy have a profound impact on our lives, and the lives of our communities are just as important as the healing work itself. Communities of color face a number of barriers that impact their access to education, housing, healthcare, and economic advancement. The systemic oppression and dehumanizing forces in this society cause alienation and separation from others, from nature, and from ourselves. According to [Martin \(2008\)](#), [Marx] conceptualized alienation as constituting a profound separation of individuals from their true human nature—their natural experience of and relationships with themselves, their environment, their activities, and others. He argued that capitalist relations of production, in which workers do not own or control the labor process, necessarily produce many forms of alienation (p. 35). As Paulo Freire states, “But while both humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people’s vocation. This vocation is constantly negated, yet it is affirmed by that very negation. It is thwarted by injustice, exploitation, oppression, and the violence of the oppressors; it is affirmed by the yearning of the oppressed for freedom and justice, and by their struggle to recover their lost humanity” ([Freire 2005](#), pp. 43–44). This healing work is about the struggle to reclaim our humanity and liberation. In this work, it is also important to connect to our lived experiences.

In order to free ourselves from oppression, we have to engage in praxis. Freire states, “Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” ([Freire 2005](#), p. 51). We must be in the constant cycle of, both on a personal and societal level, seeing what the issue is, analyzing the root causes of the issue, and then acting to transform that issue. According to Freire, conscientizacao is the deepening of awareness regarding one’s experience of oppression ([Freire 2005](#), p. 109). The critical consciousness of one’s own situation can be reached, but it is only through the practice of reflection and action that authentic transformation happens. In reflection to work, 廷祿 shares that:

Thanks to all my classmates and teachers, I got to experience “conscientization: the process by which humans, not as a recipient, but as a knowing subject, reaches a deeper awareness of both the socio-cultural reality on which their life is built and their ability to transform reality”. As said by Paulo Freire. It was this sense of power, that did not come from politics, religion, or economics (authoritarian systems) that gave me the courage to come back to Taiwan/China to seek the Buddhist lineage of my great grandmother, grandmother, mother in the spirit of my father, grandfather, great grandfather who loved and protected this land. Conscientization that grew in circle work allowed me to check internally when something was off, and when the pedagogy was not one of freedom, but of suppression to keep seeking to honor what our sisters’ circle chanted together at the closing of every circle by Assata Shakur.

### 3.7. *Anything and Everything Is Possible in Community*

The majority of healing research and models focus on the individual. Therapy and Western medicine pathologizes trauma and pain, putting the responsibility of healing on the individual who must then heal in private. Our work centers the knowing that our community is our connection with a higher purpose and power. Embracing and reclaiming our right to “baby shake” and healing in community is a declaration and dedication to be our fully expressed selves and trusting that our community will have our back. The collective act disrupts capitalism’s goal to isolate us and restores power back to our natural right to feel, to live, and to be.



Through sharing space, time, and food, we reconnect our people back to possibility and knowing that we are abundant. When we are in community dreaming of a new world, we integrate our whole being. We decenter the importance of jobs as our source of identity, but rather center the need for balance in all areas of our lives: relationships, creativity/education, career/work, fun, finances, spirituality, home, health, and community service. When we are able to share our joys, our fears, our sadness, our anger, our worries, and our terror with our community, we are also able to share and enroll our community to dream possibilities: like the possibility of true transformative liberation.

Drawing from the teachings of [Landmark Worldwide \(2019\)](#), we must release the past and create our future from the present moment, create possibility, and make choices that are independent from reasons and excuses. Only when we are able to release the past, we can create a new world and play the game that we invent for ourselves, rather than the game of capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. In who we are being, we manifest our possibilities and create anything that we desire together. Circle sister Vetora shares:

When I first did the CIRCLE WORK [Vetora's emphasis], it broke open the hard shell that these toxic sufferings lived and tormented me. That began my lifelong journey to heal and release the psycho-trauma that haunted me. As a result, I started to take risks. I have been the proud owner of a holistic health business for the last 30 years. I service communities by giving nutritional consultations, colonics and teaching colon health. It's been truly a blessing and honor for me to service my community.

For circle sister Marie, her possibility looked like:

My body healed. I recalled and connected to my spirit and remembered who I am, whose I am and what I came to this world to do. A baby girl was born. We called her a Circle baby. Twenty-four years later I can see the influence of the Healing Circle in how she shows up on the world stage. She is because I am. A living legacy of the Womyn of Color Healing Circle. Ebun- her name means God's Gift.

In circle work, we each make a choice to create a new possibility for ourselves, our lives, and in extension our families, our communities, and our world. We stand in the possibility of being love, joy, compassion, and empathy.

#### 4. Next Steps and Conclusions

The possibility that we will heal ourselves, our families, our communities, and the planet is at the core of Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network. Through years of circle work, we have been able to witness the transformation of our circle family (see Appendix A for reflections). We have witnessed people letting go of the dream and investment in capitalism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. We have witnessed people let go of their secrets, shame, guilt, anger, and despair to embrace freedom. We have witnessed people embrace their cultures, indigenous traditions, and connection to the Earth Mother and Goddesses. We have witnessed people take a stand for joy and peace. We have witnessed communities organizing, fighting for transformation, and winning. We also recognize that circle work is not for everyone: many are called, and few take it on. We let go of the judgment and assumptions that our community might have of circle work and accept all with love, forgiveness, and gratitude. For us, it is all in the process of healing and growth.

Currently, as the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged the world and the specter of racialized police violence spurred months of protests that continue to this day, a safe space for self-healing has become more urgent than ever. As a network, we created a new way to be connected, virtually, and still be of service to our brothers and sisters who are greatly impacted by our current experience. This work can heal those in our community and it has been vital in transforming the lives of many community organizers, labor leaders, educators, working mothers, families, and youth organizers—many who may carry the

additional responsibilities of mothering, teaching, or building community while trying to heal themselves. By choosing to heal ourselves we are choosing with the intent to practice healing in our community and not in isolation. Urban Atabex has given many of us the strength to face our own internalized oppression and interrupt the cycle of state and intra-communal violence that has plagued our communities for generations.

In 2016, the learning within the Urban Atabex healing circle model was brought to FIERCE, a youth organizing group that started in 2000 that builds the collective power of LGBTQ youth of color. FIERCE's executive director, board members, youth leaders, and staff organizers have all attended healing circles and Urban Atabex trainings as a means of addressing their own internalized oppression. Many of FIERCE's leadership are impacted by systemic oppression in their daily lives and sought out the healing circles as a means to build healing into their daily lives. The majority of FIERCE's membership is low income, homeless, face some form of incarceration, and/or have been pushed out of their families of origin due to abuse, xenophobia, or stigma against LGBTQ people. Through the increased emphasis of deep healing through Urban Atabex's healing network, the staff and youth at FIERCE are inspired to use the tools learned through Urban Atabex to go deeper on their own path to healing, to build a culture that emphasizes community-based healing over surface based self-care, and it has helped us to build the internal capacity to support our youth and staff as they face the ongoing systemic impact and traumas of poverty, homophobia, and transphobia.

Structurally, this has impacted FIERCE in a few key ways. One way is in how staff are trained, evaluated, and supported; youth organizers are using some of the principles of communication, collective responsibility, and accountability that is embedded in the healing work. Additionally, this has opened up new thinking in creating more healing-based programming at the site, including monthly healing circles and increasing opportunities for wellness-based programming, such as meditation, which directly engages LGBTQ youth in the community. There has also been an addition of a new healing justice organizer on staff to further develop this type of programming. FIERCE believes that this can help to create a holistic environment for younger trans and queer organizers of color to grow from.

As increasing brothers, sisters and siblings continue to be introduced to circle work the network of healers and organizers continues to grow and transform their lives and the lives of their family and community. We all take from the work what is needed in the moment and what is needed in our communities. It can take the form of expanding this work "in the projects, in community centers, out in the parks and sidewalks of working class Black and Brown neighborhoods [with the dream that] when power is in the hands of the poor and we have fundamental social change throughout Turtle Island, that we use this as a means of collectively healing from all forms of white supremacy, patriarchy, and capitalism" (SM testimony, see Appendix A). It can take the form of healing ancestral and past life trauma to transform our lives, like circle sister Vetora's experience:

Many times during my past life regressions, I was able to see and experience the originating incidents that caused my suffering in my present life. Subsequently, I was able to let it go and move on without having that toxic software run my life. It gave me such a sense of freedom. Esperanza has been placed in my life so I CAN FULFILL THE DIVINELY DESIGN PLAN THAT THE UNIVERSE OR GOD HAS PUT THERE AT BIRTH [Vetora's emphasis].

In any form that it may take, the key to this work is who we are being rather than what we have to do to achieve healing.

As we continue to organize community healing circles and train new facilitators, this work expands to new communities, lives transform, and the "fear of freedom" turns into anything is possible! Esperanza Martell wrote:

Now it is our turn. Together with our youth we will find ways of freeing ourselves from internalized oppression and be the powerful people that we are. Capitalism and colonialism will lose their hold on us. We have the power to transform ourselves. I was able to rise from the depths of capitalism and so can all of us

who want a better world for ourselves and the generations to come. It takes time and patience to build a movement and sustain a revolution in our hearts and minds. But I know we can do it because we have been doing it. We do have the collective power within us to transform our lives and save our planet. We just need to believe that we will win! (Torres et al. 1998, p. 91)

## 5. Closing

In closing, we uplift the words of freedom fighter Assata Shakur. She was a member of the Black Liberation and Black Panther Party and continues to be a political warrior that is currently exiled in Cuba. We end all of our circles with Shakur's chant to ground our work in the collective struggle for freedom and uplift the importance of liberation in community. We say the chant three times: once in a whisper for our ancestors, the second time in a regular voice for ourselves and to each other, and the third time as loud as you can for the world.

It is our duty to fight for our freedom.  
It is our duty to win.  
We must love each other and support each other.  
We have nothing to lose but our chains. (Shakur 1987, p. 52)  
All power to the people!

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## Appendix A

This appendix contains reflections from our circle family. Reflections are written in different formats and hold personal experiences. Permission was granted for each participant to share these stories as a part of the oral history of Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing in Community Network.

### Appendix A.1. Sunshine

I am a Black Panamanian Woman who in the late 80's was looking to save myself, but instead I was going about it by saving the world.

I became involved in social and political activism. I was going to political meetings every night and was marching in all the demonstrations both near and far.

My journey delivered some blessings to me because I became involved with the 1st World Women of color self-healing circle. We saw our lives as a combination of spiritual and political action.

I was experiencing guilt, self-criticism, and resentment about my oppression. The women in the circle began to have discussions on how to go within to heal ourselves and our community. This led to my participation in yoga classes, psychotherapy, and healing retreats outside of the inner city and a network of supportive partnership with each other. These events were all designed and conducted by women of color, this minimized the burdens of sexism and racism.

I remember my first yoga class was on a second-floor landing at Daya Associates, a Healing Center on 125th Street. Amidst the noise, distractions, and disruption from the

community, with all that we remained focused to fulfill our intentions to achieve self-love, forgiveness, self-approval, and self-acceptance. I viewed the conditions of the environment as a helpful tool to help me with my transformation.

The retreats were organized by our sister Esperanza [Martell] who had begun the Healing Circles. There I learned Emotional Release Work, anger release exercises, meditation, body cleansing, and healthy eating.

Learning how to use journaling exercises and writing my feelings as honest as I could for my emotionally growth. Prior to participating in the healing circle, I viewed the world with blinders that stunted and delayed my progress to see a world that continues to challenge how I heal my life. I continued my life work of self-healing with Circle work at Casa Atabex Ache and with Unban Atabex. I attend Community Circles and the change of season events led by a new generation of healers and organizers. As long as we are oppressed, we will continue to heal ourselves, our families, community, and the world. Freedom is ours!

#### *Appendix A.2. Lillian Jimenez*

I worked with Casa Atabex Ache, a POC women's healing center in the South Bronx as a consultant on organizational development. And, I had met some requirements in order to work with them. I participated in circle work and learned so much from those experiences. I observed that some women who were deeply wounded would use the process for their own means—manipulate others to be “right”. But, thank goodness, they were in the minority. Other women participated with full hearts. We learned to give expression to our pain and to respect and honor our feelings and to hold them and release them. It was an extraordinary experience.

One day, I arrived at Casa and before our meeting, I listened to some voice messages, and heard that one of my friend/colleagues had died. I went into the bathroom to grieve and cry. I washed my face and thought (in the midst of pain and grief) that I would not tell anyone in spite of the fact that I was in shock and in pain. I walked into the room and started to cry. I asked for a “goddess moment” and was encircled by the sisters in the room. I thought where else could I ask for support at this most difficult moment? Where else could I discharge the pain and grief? As the sisters embraced me, I was asked to talk about my friend, to tell the group about him, to say why he meant so much to me, how he made me laugh. And, within about 15 min., I had processed his death and released my pain, sorrow, and grief. Now, my grief did not miraculously disappear, but it abated because my sisters had let me hold him in my heart. Once I had cleared all the emotions and feelings, we did the work.

Later in life, I would help others to process their grief in a similar manner by asking the person in grief to tell me about their loved one who had passed and helped others to process their pain, sorrow, and grief. Healing circles are indispensable in doing social justice work because so many of us have been wounded by poverty, racism, sexism, and capitalism. And, the circles allow us to reclaim all of our humanity and to give voice to our pain—release the toxicity that has been embedded in us for decades and to live our lives productively, in a healthy manner and accept ourselves for the spectacular women we are.

#### *Appendix A.3. Vetora Joseph*

I met Espe [Esperanza Martell] in 1990 at a holistic health organization that I trained at as a Colon Therapist/Nutritionist. We soon formed a lifetime friendship and Espe became my mentor. As a person who has experienced sexual, physical, and verbal abuse, consequently, I quietly suffered through my daily life with anxiety and sometimes panic attacks. I prayed for something or someone who could exonerate me from this toxic stalker called fear. Then, the universe sent me Espe. When I first did the CIRCLE WORK, it broke open the hard shell that these toxic sufferings lived and tormented me. That began my lifelong journey to heal and release the psycho-trauma haunted me. As a result, I started to take risks. I have been the proud owner of a holistic health business for the last 30 years.



I service communities by giving nutritional consultations, colonics, and teaching colon health. It's been truly a blessing and honor for me to service my community. Also, I've had past life regressions with Espe. Many times, during my past life regressions, I was able to see and experience the originating incidents that caused my suffering in my present life. Then, I was able to let it go and move on without having that toxic software run my life. It gave me such a sense of freedom. Esperanza has been placed in my life so I CAN FULFILL THE DIVINELY DESIGN PLAN THAT THE UNIVERSE OR GOD HAS PUT THERE AT BIRTH. Since I believe the purpose of LIFE is to be happy, we can discover our purpose. Then we can have our dreams fulfilled.

#### *Appendix A.4. Haydee Morales*

There is actually a photo of the moment my healing began. It's dated 16 June 1991. I was invited to a women's healing retreat by a trusted sister friend Marta Morales. An entire weekend had transpired where approximately 25 women released pain and trauma, cleansed with healthy seasonal food, detoxed from the city while at a retreat center in Northern NY, and connected to the earth. We were in the loving and capable care of women of color healers and activists. including Esperanza Martell, Urayoana Trinidad, Nakawe Cuebas, and others. I watched as others released pain and trauma, but I was too scared to do the same. My body, however, had other plans for me.

In the photo, taken after most of the cars and women left the retreat, I am seen sitting on a chair as Urayoana kneels in front of me to give me acupuncture for the relentless menstrual pain that had me miserable the entire weekend. Nakawe is three feet from me talking with the now late Fior Cruz. Immediately after Urayoana places a few needles in my feet, I begin to feel everything around me spin and I begin to pass out. Urayoana pushes a point above my lips, and I'm placed on the earth by the women, so I don't fall off the chair.

Now I have a circle of women around me, holding me safely as the earth below me also holds me securely. In front of me is Esperanza. I'd watch her the entire weekend. I saw her bring out unspeakable pain from every woman who stood before her. I too had an unspeakable shameful secret. Now my eyes were wide open watching her, but my secret had me clenching my jaw tightly shut. She tells me "open your mouth".

As I gained consciousness, I felt a woman behind me holding me and a circle of women around me. Women with knowing. I was now those same women I had watched all weekend. I was at the center of the circle. Esperanza tells me "OK you didn't want to do the work with all the other women in the room so do it now". Apparently, she'd been watching me too. "Tell me what's good" she began. And then she asked, "what's coming up?" as she pressed my lower abdomen with one hand and the center of my chest with another. I began to cry with no words. Tears of shame and tears of fear rolled out my eyes and down my face. I couldn't tell the unspeakable.

Marta was there and Fior, Ura, Nakawe, and Espe If you were going to have a circle this was the once in a lifetime team of healers to steward the pain. And then I closed my eyes and said my secret to a circle of women who held my pain and trauma, as I moved through the circle work, from victimization to shame to guilt to horror to terror. Esperanza was still there in front of me telling me I hit terror, assuring me I was doing fine, and moving the emotional energy so that I could be safe in the process.

The circle model was hers and it was her. Esperanza embodied it. It was organic and it felt like she knew what you were about to say even before you did. She took me to a place of the injustice of my experience. I went from a whimper of releasing my secret to a place of shouting the injustice. She had NO RIGHT! Then every woman in that circle shouted the same as I watched their conviction. Yes! She had NO RIGHT I yelled. Together we shouted "She had NO RIGHT!"

Moving from a narrative of victimization to a narrative of how what we, as women of color, experience our lives in a racist, sexist, patriarchy is how I would define circle work. The goal being to move from the individualized experience to understanding what

is happening to all of us as women who experience poverty, racism, colonialism, and more and then collectively taking action is how I would define the importance of the work. Also, central to the healing experience is the reclaiming of our traditional ways and the connection to the earth and its healing gifts. Lastly is the connection to each other as women who love each other with integrity and light.

This work 29 years later influences my personal life and my professional life. I dreamed, conceptualized, and created a women of color healing center in the South Bronx, called Casa Atabex Ache. I was part of the coordinating body of the First World Women of Color Healing Circle. I work every day to serve tens of thousands of young people, families, and communities in need from a place of love and integrity. I stand for justice in all my work and relations. I continue a lifelong friendship with Esperanza 29+ years and honor that she is the creator of the Womyn of Color Healing Circle model.

#### *Appendix A.5. Marie Nazon*

I was 30 when I began to look for God . . . in earnest. I grew up in a very Catholic, Haitian family. Church was an ingrained part of my life. My family gathered to praise de lord every Sunday. It was not if you were going to go to church, but what will you wear. Easter week, we were in church every single day. I heard about this God. Prayed to this God, but really did not know this entity, what that presence meant in my life or that I even needed God until I had a come to Jesus moment. At the age of 30 I was told I should consider a hysterectomy. Devastation does not quite capture how I felt at hearing this. As the 5th child of six, second daughter I always imagined that I would have a large family, a house full of children. The gynecologist was a Latina sister. I always try to use practitioners of color for my health care needs. How could this sister tell me to consider a hysterectomy? Merde! My womb was all messed up. An STD from an unsuspecting partner who cheated on me, an ovarian cyst, fibroids, and endometriosis. What baby wanted to marinate in that for nine months. I did not blame them for not wanting to come through. Was it the four abortions I had? Was it? Was God punishing me for getting rid of those babies? But I wasn't ready . . . except for the last one. I so wanted to keep the last one. I had to clean up my act and fast. My greatest fear and my deepest hope were in my womb. I found God/Goddess, my spiritual path while on my knees begging for a child. I had a lot of shit to clean up and it was not just my body. I was in a toxic relationship, of years of back and forth on and off. Emotionally I was a wreck and spiritually disconnected and it all showed up in my womb in a physical manifestation of disease. When you are brought to your knees by circumstances, you get down to the ground and bow down to mother earth. I was being called to get close and personal with myself and spirit. I was being called to get grounded so I can heal. There was work up a head for me and a child was waiting to be born. When I left the doctor's office that day never to return, unbeknownst to me I started my spiritual journey. I was clear I was not going to remove my womb. I was clear I was going to heal myself and I was clear whether it came through me or through another woman, I was going to be a mother. The dream of being a mother was in my bones, in my essences and God/Goddess had a plan for me. I was told if God/Goddess put a dream in your heart than it will manifest . . . I was holding on to that promise.

The journey of healing my body, my spirit, in the early 1990s, led me to a sisterhood unlike no other that spoke to my ancestors. My healing led me to Esperanza Martell and the Womyn of Color Healing Circle, a group of fierce, badass, passionate black and brown women supporting, respecting, and loving each other through the dark times and in the light. Got your belly, got your back. And indeed, the work we did, emotional release work was taught to us by Esperanza, lovingly called Espe. Practitioners now have fancy word for it, somatic therapy, helped heal my body. Each month on a Saturday afternoon we gathered at sisters' home or the office of one of our sisters, wearing our whites, smudging with white sage as we enter the sacred space emotional. Sisters literally had your belly and your back as you went through the cantharis of releasing current, years, ancient wounds, wounds that was yours and wounds that were your ancestors. The work was deep. In one

afternoon, some sisters healed seven generations in their past and seven generations in the future releasing emotional and spiritual trauma. It was through this work, this sisterhood I learn about energy work, became a Reiki practitioner, how to use crystals, massage therapy, colonics, new way of eating life force food and caring for my body as the sacred vessel it is. I learned radical self-care and love. At the foundation of the sisterhood was a clear sense of purpose and guidance from our ancestors framed with a social justice consciousness to reclaim our power as Black and Brown women walking this earth. We took our healing arts to the streets and in the communities that needed our wisdom. It is in this circle at one of our solstice retreats I learned to love and respect my cycle, my moon, the sacred blood that flows through my body every month. The first time I dared to stick my finger in my yoni and touch my menses, looked at it and understood that this blood made me a co-creator with God. This blood held power, my power. I was in my 30s. The wonderment of it all! It is in this sisterhood I learned to howl at the full moon and what magik she held. This was a whole new world for me, a brave new world. I stepped into the unknown to heal and held in sisterhood by women who looked like me. When you are ready the teacher will show up, they say. And they showed up. For me, my teachers were the womyn, the Womyn of Color Healing Circle. My body healed. I recalled and connected to my spirit and remembered who I am, whose I am, and what I came to this world to do. A baby girl was born. We called her a Circle baby. Twenty-four years later I can see the influence of the Healing Circle in how she shows up on the world stage. She is because I am. A living legacy of the Womyn of Color Healing Circle. Ebun- her name means God's Gift.

#### *Appendix A.6. AT*

Over my early years, my life was in shambles. I was a heavy drinker. However, I did dabble in other drugs. But alcohol was my drug of choice. Although my life was out of control people who knew me thought I had it all together. A good job, a nice home, a single mom, and I had lots of friends. The facade was so impressive I even started to believe it myself. Looking back at that time, I don't know what I told myself in order to buy into my own lie. But it worked for years. Yes, the mask I presented outwardly, was far from how I felt about myself, or my life.

One day I received a call from a sister who invited me to a healing circle. I'd never heard of such a thing and told her I wasn't interested. I thought to myself what's to heal after all my life was perfect? Oh, how I lied even to myself without knowing it. Anyway, she persisted over a period of weeks, until finally, I said yes. I packed my bag with what she told me I needed plus a small bottle of rum. I just knew these people I was to meet knew how to party also.

Well, when I arrived and entered the space, I saw a sea of women sitting in a circle dressed all in white. At that moment somewhere in my spirit, I knew these ladies were getting high on something I had never ingested. They welcomed me and asked me ever so gently what was troubling me? I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes. And although I tried to stop them, I just broke down. At that moment I felt something lift I didn't know was even there. That is when I realized no one ever asked me that question before.

That was in 1992. Well, I'm now decades away from that time in my life. And so much healing has happened and continues to happen. I didn't know then but healing ourselves so we can assist in the healing of others is a true blessing. In healing ourselves and others I've also realized how that energy heals the planet. Each time we touch, the lives of another lovingly Mother Nature smiles.

Being a part of the healing circle changed the trajectory of my life. With the tools I was given over the years, I've been able to stay on my path and share with others how to stay on theirs. Oh, I guess you're wondering whatever happened to that bottle of rum. Well, I buried it on that land and haven't put any mind-altering substances in my system since.

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't thank that Great Source that sent me to this planet in order to have these experiences. And for opening the door for me to meet those

sisters, I thank you all. Also, to the sister who I call my Angel who persisted and insisted I attend, I thank you.

Healing can be uncomfortable at times but with support of the community, believe me, it's so worth it. And as we heal, we begin to realize the purpose of it all.

#### *Appendix A.7. Maria Marasigan*

The healing circles have helped to remind me that we have everything we need to heal ourselves and that community can support us in that process in a way where no one who is all knowing comes to fix us. We come together to tune in together to tap into what we need, what we feel, release what's not ours, claim what is and who we are, and reconnect to trusting ourselves in finding our own possibilities. Coming back to the basics of what we used as babies to communicate what we needed by listening to our bodies and responding with movements, sounds, visualizations to release, rebalance, and recenter into ourselves has been so helpful when I'm in community and also when I'm alone and reflecting on what's happening in my life that needs attention. The concept of the healing circle having a warrior, coach, and anchor and that it's a rotation of collective responsibility to take on all those roles to support one another and to know we can and need to step into all of those roles, removing the hierarchies of healing, and attaching roles of who you are and can be was a powerful concept. The taking of turns to be vulnerable, to be guided, to be supported, and the shared time given to everyone, I think it is such a helpful way to understand and practice interdependence, rotating through being a holder of space and also being held. It becomes quite challenging when we/I forget and don't believe that we/I have the capacity to be a coach, that I could help someone else, especially during times of feeling broken and not enough. The circles help to remind me of reciprocity and that all of us are giving of the best of what we can and that we will also be receiving as we give, and no one gets left out of the benefits of the healing circle and no one gets left out of the burdens and hardships of the responsibility as well to one another, but because it's shared work, it uplifts all of us to be better individually and together. The deepening of the release work with the connections to anti-oppression concepts take things to a different level and really created an awareness of internalized oppression and where it stems from for me that really opened up my mind 10 years ago when I joined my first community healing circle. I'm still learning a lot about myself, my patterns, the things I still hold on to as I slowly come back to the circles. It's challenging to be consistent, but every time I do show up for myself and for others, there's more of myself that I am remembering and discovering. Thank you, Esperanza [Martell] and the leadership teams, that I have been blessed to have circled with to share in healing, celebrating, co-creating, and dismantling.

#### *Appendix A.8. Gabrielle Cuesta*

Urban Atabex has transformed all areas of my life; they all bleed into one another. It was really difficult to feel like I deserved healing, especially with the privileged identities I hold, inclusive of light skin/white-passing race privilege, class privilege, cis, and able-bodied privilege. Perhaps this was also an excuse to not go deep enough; if I believed that my privileged identities made me undeserving of healing, then I didn't have to go all the way in and fully give up the unhealthy coping ways that made/make me feel comfortable. The more I stay in guilt/shame, the more I am a cog in the wheel of oppression and not in action against these systems/working to transform them. This work has supported me in letting go of guilt/shame while also holding myself accountable to harm caused and a lifetime of unlearning/undoing. I more strongly believe I am worthy solely for who I am, unattached to the love of other people, while deeply connected to all beings. Due to this, I more strongly believe I deserve healing and that my healing is tied to the healing of others and further tied to the healing of the Earth. I talk more to my ancestors and to spirit; I see that I am never alone and try harder to soak in all the energy that is already around me in nature. Using Urban Atabex's political analysis, I can quickly make connections between my unhealthy ways of coping and how they serve systems of oppression. A few



examples include how it is easier for me to recognize when I am working longer hours and exhausting myself in an attempt to reach a white supremacist version of perfectionism and Capitalist productivity as well as an attempt to distract myself from my deeper pain. I catch myself when my need to control is amplifying my disordered eating and body dysmorphia and how my behavior feeds white/patriarchal models of beauty. I see how my desire to isolate when I am depressed leaves me enraged and taking no action towards liberation. Circle work has connected me to something bigger; when my healing is larger than me, I feel inspired and accountable to a community. I have seen a lot of the ugly parts of myself, confronted them, and learned to love them more. This work has also allowed me to be more in tune with the seasons and aware of my own energy changes with the Earth and how to align my behavior, body, and what I put into my body according to the time of year. Along with this, I am more deeply aware of intent; I consistently check in with myself and examine my behaviors and their alignment with my intent/the intent of this work. Overall, I feel a deeper sense of grounding to myself, others, the Earth, and spirit. This work is painful, scary, and hard. And, it is beautiful, powerful, and transformative. It has pushed me to stand in possibility when much of me wants to run away, hide, or give up. Here, possibility in the face of systemic oppression is resistance and where, I believe, lay the heart of liberatory work.

#### *Appendix A.9. CC*

I am still experiencing so much transformation in my life from what I've learned and still learning about how to deeply embody the work and teachings Espe has taught me while studying with her in the 13 week workshop and in our yearlong training. From the initial workshop I attended, my transition to a more plant-based diet has changed the way I have been in connection with my body. My first cleanse that I took on was so amazing to see how I could still be fully functional and present while just drinking liquids all day. At the end of it, I realized how rejuvenating that was for me and the practice of being in integrity, communication with my cleanse group and eye opening discovering what kind of relationship food had not only with my body but my emotions as well. I have come to be a regular user of essential oils in my day to day since it really helps to move me through challenging emotions like anxiety, anger, or frustration. The understanding of how to work the Four Agreements in my life, a book by Don Miguel Ruiz, has been challenging and very fruitful for myself when I remember to stay in line with them. Now, it doesn't mean that I get what I want or a desired result when sticking to them, but I do feel for myself more fulfilled and in the right relationship with myself when I'm impeccable with my word or don't take things personally like he goes over in his book.

Additionally, through this work I have developed a different relationship with death. Espe has provided a perspective, one that she made clear wasn't new or something she came up with, which has been held by our ancestors and in some cultures today, that death isn't only necessary but a friend and an ally. Death is not an enemy to fight back against or imagine we can avoid. Death has important lessons for us not only about accepting it but to learn how to live our lives more fully. Recently, a comrade took their own life and it really hit me hard, not only for the complete shock to learn about this person's death and how it came about but what old emotions and feelings it brought up in me.

As a veteran, suicide is something I have a constant fear around for myself and those in my community. I'm part of an anti-militarism organization, About Face: Veterans Against the War, where we have had members take their own life and it's documented how in a single day, there's at least one veteran who takes their own life almost every hour. When I first got back home from the military, the level of guilt and trauma I felt weren't things I was conscious to, but they still led me to behaviors which were harmful and helped me disconnect from those feelings at the same time. During that time, I had my own suicidal ideations or just ruminating about how death felt like the solution. If something was to happen to me during one of those nights when I was out partying and not caring about the

consequences, then I would be ok if my life ended since that would give me a way out of that pain, out of my body, out of my own life.

This training has shown me how the oppressions we experience give us this logic that suicide is a solution to the issues and problems that we have in our life. Suicide is the most extreme expression of self-harm. This work has made it clear that those feelings can be released from me and that I can continue to combat those feelings by fighting against the institutions and even more important, the ideas which make suicide seem like a choice to me by taking action against those institutions and 'isms which hold up White Supremacy, Capitalism, and Patriarchy.

Recently, as we closed out our year-long training, Espe encouraged me to share the learnings I had with our larger group and I had this statement to share with them, 'Sadness is my friend. I take pleasure in being alive. Death is my friend, but I fear dying unjustly. I will be a stand for my life and for the life of others'. I'm so grateful for this work since it has reminded me so powerfully, that I will always fight for my life because I love being alive.

#### *Appendix A.10. Michele*

I am a White privileged Jewish woman whose life has been transformed by my participation in Urban Atabex's trainings and healing circles. I've participated in activities run by Urban Atabex for the last ten years and constantly refer the following concepts and techniques that I learned there:

- Healing in community by sharing breakdowns and breakthroughs
- Emoting anger, sadness and feelings that can become strong and overwhelming
- The Oppression Grid, gender, class and race analysis are constantly front and present in my perception of everything
- Assessing and reassessing what I do and the way I show up
- The concept that there are no right or wrong answers
- Being vulnerable
- LOVE

However, being that I am human, I still have work to do to share my vulnerability, being with not knowing and going with the flow. It has also been challenging for me to occasionally be the only White person that shows up in a community of color, with an organization committed to healing people of color. And, this experience contributes to my seeing that my role is to work with my White cohorts to transform and heal them from oppression, colonialism and the ills of capitalism.

As part of this training, I have to include the education at Landmark since it is a quasi-requirement for the trainings. I am in constant transformation from being a quiet, shy, oppressed woman to a warrior for liberation and equity. I have used this work in my teachings as a social work field instructor for community organizers by asking my students to use a gender, class, and race analysis in their organizing and constantly pointing out that what they comment on and see in their field placements are consequences of capitalism and all the isms that go with it. I have the same conversation with leaders in the philanthropic, nonprofit world, and with government officials.

I adore the trainings and continue to do them to keep them fresh and motivated to transform this world and bring the concepts mentioned above to as many people as possible. Also, leaning into the discomfort of being a White person showing up in a community of color grounds me in what I am committed to transforming, strengthens my conviction and ability to have the conversations that must be had with my White cohorts.

And finally, I don't have the words to express how the LOVE within which this healing work is grounded has influenced my whole way of being.

I am so grateful to be part of the Urban Atabex Organizing and Healing Community.

#### *Appendix A.11. Linda Tigani*

This work has taught me how to build community grounded in healing for my soul. Two key concepts have stuck with me since being trained and participating in circle work.

First, it is possible to be overloaded with oppression. The idea of being a glass full with oppression that spills and harms me and the people around me was eye opening. It forced me to see that self-care and healing heals myself and those around me. Self-healing with a focus on addressing the impact of white supremacy, capitalism and patriarchy is stopping racism in the moment by preventing internalized oppression from taking over. The second concept was the understanding that pain in my body is internalized oppression. Prior to beginning this work, I suffered from sharp lower back pain. This pain would present whenever i cleaned my house—most often when washing the dishes. Through this work, I healed from the impact of patriarchy via gender roles I learned as a child.

My main challenge was developing a new lens with language that was easily understood within the healing community. This made it hard to talk to others outside of this community and create connections to other communities.

#### *Appendix A.12. Stephanie Martinez*

The biggest challenge for me was showing up to do circles and having other folks witnessing it. I had (and still working through) fear around what was gonna come up for me during circles, feeling judged by what comes up for me, feeling shame that I was being vulnerable, (especially as a working class black femme who was raised in not showing vulnerability), and fear around being unsupported by folks who were witnessing what was coming up for me. Circle work has transformed the ways in how to show up to other people in my life and support them by making me show up for myself. I still use baby shake as a technique, using different oils used in healing circles, and body work for my self-healing journey. My possibilities for the future of this work is that it expands in the projects, in community centers, out in the parks. and sidewalks of working-class Black and Brown neighborhoods. Eventually when power is in the hands of the poor and we have fundamental social change throughout Turtle Island, that we use this as a means to collectively heal from all forms of white supremacy, patriarchy and capitalism.

#### *Appendix A.13. 廷祿*

Gratitude to the Ts'ou peoples, who's land I am on as I write this, to the gold and wood, water, fire, and earth medicines, here on sweet potato island. Gratitude to the embodiment that is Esperanza, from her Taino lineages and her beloved homeland Puerto Rico currently occupied. Which, like so many colonized island, has similarities with Taiwan, such as hurricanes and being imperialized by the USA. Gratitude to the various Black, Indigenous, Brown, and Asian lineages that showed up in the Circle works.

I am here today, in this process of liberating my ancestors by liberating myself I am back with my feet in the lands and drinking in the djaloom/nanoon/atl/agua/water that grew my family for generations. I am here because of Circle work through the Education for Liberation and Healing in community Circle Workshops. This workshop imbued my bones with the re-memembering of home, and awakened in me the deep desire to live in good relations and gave me the opportunity to know the bliss and darkness and release of freedom, so that I would have something in my heart to check against in my spiritual journeys through various Buddhist temples with various degrees of un-examined colonialism, capitalism, colorism, sexism, classism, etc. Once I knew how freedom felt, I could measure my own freedom walk in this way.

Many of us in the Chinese/Taiwanese diaspora struggle with the constant feeling of seeking home without certainty where that is. That home without location became our relations in the immediate groups, our bodies, our immediacy, our release from painful narratives in our body during circle work. I will never forget a circle sister's release of their mother pain, as that energy pushed outwards of their body and held in the circle of women. It was transformative for all of us witnessing their deep work. It was something they had shared with me in our friendship, and in our frequent debriefs every night after Circle, walking through parks and laughing through the wild nights about the grace and mess of healing. Nor can I forget the ways I cried and choked and yelled, the intellectual content

misses me now, but I remember gut churning wailing and anger began to shake through my belly and through my throat and yells and, thus, since then, I have gotten much better, though still quite imperfect at expressing anger through outrage and not implosions. Each circle allowed me to emerge with a healthier faith in myself, through questions from the lower dantien, from the root and sacral chakras, from the womb, from the gut, and was a collective energy that healed a deep loss and repression from my family of origin. Thanks to all my classmates and teachers, I got to experience “conscientization: the process by which humans, not as a recipient, but as a knowing subject, reaches a deeper awareness of both the socio-cultural reality on which their life is built and their ability to transform reality”. As said by Paulo Freire. It was this sense of power, that did not come from politics, religion, or economics (authoritarian systems) that gave me the courage to come back to Taiwan/China to seek the Buddhist lineage of my great grandmother, grandmother, mother in the spirit of my father, grandfather, great grandfather who loved and protected this land. Conscientization that grew in Circle work allowed me to check internally when something was off, and when the pedagogy was not one of freedom, but of suppression and to keep seeking to honor what our sisters circle canted together at the closing of every Circle by Assata Shakur.

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