



Paula Graciela Kahn

## United to Cure Planetary PTSD: Advancing the Movement in 2019

PAULA GRACIELA KAHN

FOR THE NEW YEAR, I INVITE the MAPS community to join me in practicing accountability and healing justice. Let's turn up our presence in listening to the testimonies of those most impacted by the war on drugs, state violence, armed conflict, forced migration, immigrant detention, mass incarceration, the extractive industries, lack of access to healthcare, and poverty. May we listen with empathy and identify the calls to action for us to play a role of support and service to humanity.

When I attended last February's *Plantas Sagradas en las Americas* conference in Ajijic, near Guadalajara, Mexico, I heard two members of indigenous communities clearly state what their visions and needs were: to preserve and protect cultural knowledge and populations of endangered, sacred, psychoactive plants, *teonanacatl* (psilocybin mushroom) and *hikuri* (peyote). Some members of the audience missed those calls to action, choosing instead to focus on the inevitability of Western psychedelic tourism, or to justify and seek validation for their own spiritually-driven consumption, attempting to distinguish it from the greater trends of plunder and extraction. Some attendees' inability to listen to and center indigenous people's struggles and requests was deeply concerning.

After each of these presentations, I reached out to the presenters and said, "I see your vision as well. I will support you in fundraising through my networks in California. I work with immigrant communities and activists." We all agreed that humanity desperately needs access to plant medicines. We also came to the conclusion that humanity's access depends on our will power to center indigenous voices and enforce their rights.

A month later, we co-founded *Cosmovisiones Ancestrales* (Ancestral Cosmovisions, [cosmovisiones.org](http://cosmovisiones.org)). We inherited our cosmovisions, or ecological awarenesses, from our ancestors, and we work towards symbiosis to be responsible and loving ancestors. Our roles in healing justice align with the fulfillment of the 7 Generations, 7 Fires, and Eagle and Condor prophecies delivered by the Kanien'kehake, Anishinaabe, and Inca peoples; our motto aligns with MAPS' own quest: "United to cure planetary post-traumatic stress disorder."

What is planetary post-traumatic stress disorder? I observe planetary PTSD as the manifestation of the intergenerational and collective trauma we have inherited from ongoing colonialism, slavery, globalized warfare, patriarchy, and homophobia. When we study treatment-resistant depression, acute anxiety, and/or PTSD, we must recognize that sometimes these human conditions are symptomatic of the internalization and normalization of the violent cultures we have absorbed through generations of epigenetically-transmitted trauma. When we refer to healing justice, we speak of the process of reckoning with our collective inheritance, bearing witness to testimonies of the most oppressed in society, and aligning ourselves with historically targeted communities to repair harms of colonialism and slavery.

At *Cosmovisiones Ancestrales*, we recognize that our liberation from planetary PTSD must be crafted through reciprocity; extractive and for-profit behaviors that exclude the most marginalized populations will inevitably prove to be unsustainable and harmful to our planet—one needs to look no further for proof than the evidence for climate change itself. We operate by building bridges amongst members of different global communities through processes of trust building, consultation, asking for consent, respecting boundaries, and forming socially responsible relationships. We center the experiences and needs of indigenous communities defending their land from extractive industries and governments.

In 2019, how will we ensure that psychedelic-assisted or sacred-plant assisted therapy is available to people in ongoing, multi-generational humanitarian and ecological crises?

Those of us who are positioned at greater distance from immediate threats of violence must leverage our privilege to ensure that we play a role in de-escalating violence and awakening from any complicity in violence. We each have a unique role to play in whistleblowing bystander behavior to prevent genocide and mass atrocities from continuing the perpetuation of planetary PTSD. While MAPS advances MDMA through Phase 3 clinical trials, *Cosmovisiones Ancestrales* reminds our networks that this historically significant progress should include a pro-



*(L to R) Cosmovisiones Ancestrales co-founder Inti García coordinates community education in his home to preserve Mazatec knowledge and culture amongst Huautla's youth.; Inti in front of the archive his father Renato García Dorantes initiated. Inti stewards vital information on Mazatec culture and Maria Sabina's life; Inti shows details of his father's archive on Mazatec culture. He emphasizes the value of preserving Mazatec culture to sustain a capacity for resilience and reclamation; founding members of Cosmovisiones Ancestrales view videos on mushroom cultivation techniques.*

cess of trust-building amongst diverse populations around the world to repair the harms of the colonization and prohibition of psychoactives—medicines that long were a form of preventative healthcare. We caution that this process runs the risk of becoming diluted or weakened if marginalized populations are not initially included or invited to actively participate in drafting the frameworks for psychedelic- or plant-assisted therapies.

Why? Because individually focused psychedelic therapy runs the risk of only treating the micro-symptoms of a larger unaddressed cause: centuries of globalized genocidal culture. Because clinical trials for MDMA-assisted therapy are first taking place in the global north—in nations that are economically advantaged due to the inheritance of colonialism, slavery, and harmful foreign policy, it would be most just for mission-driven organizations to build strategic partnerships with initiatives led by indigenous healers and allies in formerly and currently-colonized territories. These alliances can work to preserve plant medicine and collaboratively coordinate effective approaches to planetary healing. This would ensure multiple options for treatment and would expand accessibility for mass consumption amongst populations with acute PTSD as soon as possible. It is unethical to advance psychedelic therapy if we do not collectively take ownership for repairing the harms of the colonization of psychoactive plant medicines used in indigenous communities throughout history.

At Cosmovisiones Ancestrales, we address planetary PTSD by institutionalizing violence prevention into our framework.

We offer trainings in consent and anti-oppression to heal the race—and gender-based violence that we recognize to be entangled with environmental plunder and armed conflict. We recognize that this is a process of unlearning the spectrum of conscious, unconscious, subtle, and overt behaviors some of us have internalized through socialization. We call upon the psychedelic science and drug policy communities to listen to the constructive feedback of 2018.

In the era of #MeToo and #TimesUp, it is evident that our institutions and communities must formalize a protocol to build consent culture and tools to competently respond to reports of assault through restorative justice models. We must evolve our movement to listen to survivors of violence. We jeopardize the legitimacy of our institutions to heal planetary PTSD if we don't institutionalize violence prevention. For psychedelic-assisted therapy to authentically impact humanity, it must be built on a sturdy foundation that values sustaining truly safe spaces.

Building safer spaces in psychedelic science and drug policy institutions through enacting consent culture is in ethical alignment with the direction we must advance in trust-building processes with indigenous communities. Considering that the psychedelics and plant medicine movement would be non-existent without the knowledge of indigenous communities and ecosystems around the world, it would be just for the movement to center and uplift the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people, especially Article 19 on free, prior, and informed consent of indigenous peoples.





(L to R) A mural in Huautla's town center depicts Mazatec cosmología—the ecological relationships between youth, *psilocybe mexicana*, and life-force (heart); founding members of *Cosmovisiones Ancestrales* visit María Sabina's tomb to pay their respects, express gratitude for her healing work, to bless her, and ask for direction. Images from July 2018, Huautla de Jimenez, Oaxaca.

I observe many people with socio-economic privilege commodifying and profiting from plant medicines without transforming the relations of power between themselves and members of indigenous communities. In fact, through building partnerships with members of indigenous communities, I've learned about the harms caused by psychedelic tourism, such as the exploitation of the Mazatec mushroom priestess, María Sabina. During a recent visit to Huautla de Jimenez, I witnessed the consequences of 65 years of psychedelic tourism, including the endangerment of various species of *teonanacatl* (*psilocybin* mushrooms) due to climate change and severe extraction both by locals and foreigners. Poverty, survival sex work, and substance dependency destabilize Huautla de Jimenez and surrounding communities. Cartel violence and the extractive industries are also an ongoing threat, not just in Oaxaca but in all of Mesoamerica.

As a mixed GuateMayan-Jewish migration, genocide, and trauma scholar, witnessing the open-air prison my mother's homelands have become, I ask psychedelic science institutions and companies: What role are you playing in protecting the rights of indigenous peoples? It is important that we reflect on whether our approach to curing planetary PTSD undermines or enforces the rights of indigenous peoples. Commodification of life-saving, sacred, psychedelic medicine is a conversation that must include diverse perspectives from indigenous communities from around the world.

What message does the psychedelic science community

send to indigenous and migrant communities of the world when there is not enough accountability? If our affiliations and endorsements of funders or companies are linked to the suffering of indigenous and immigrant populations, we betray the survival and trust of the indigenous communities and territories the psychedelic movement would not exist without. In 2019, let's practice Article 19th of the UNDRIP by adopting a norm of consulting and cooperating with indigenous, immigrant, and historically-oppressed peoples to prevent cycles of violence. Without the consent of those most immediately threatened by violence, we are not fully advancing our vision for curing PTSD. 🌱

**Paula Graciela Kahn** is a migrant justice community organizer, consent & anti-oppression educator, conflict-mediator, and a performance artist. Paula loves building bridges between individuals, groups, and movements. Inspired by the raver principles Peace Love Unity Respect (PLUR), psychoactives, and the liberating power of music & dance, Paula is inspired to innovate demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration processes in contexts of armed conflict. Paula wishes to explore the role of entheogens in processes of historical memory, accountability, reparations, reconciliation, and transformative justice. She initiated *Cosmovisiones Ancestrales* in honor of her parents, envisioning popular access to preventative healthcare and holistic healing from PTSD and intergenerational trauma. Paula loves gothic music, reggaethon, and the supernatural. She can be reached at [pau.graciela@gmail.com](mailto:pau.graciela@gmail.com).