CRUSHING COLONIALISM

THE MAGAZINE

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REVIVING IFA'S HERITAGE

Reclamation and healing in the diaspora

MEDITATIONS ON TIME, MEMORY, AND LOVE

Daily rituals of spiritual connection

LIFE CYCLE

A poem on Indigenous spirituality

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,

As the world turns its gaze towards modernity, we often forget the timeless threads that weave communities together—threads of spirituality, belief, and connection. For Indigenous communities, spirituality is not just a practice; it's a living, breathing relationship with the land, ancestors, and cosmos. This issue of *The Magazine* is dedicated to exploring the profound role spirituality plays in Indigenous lives, especially in the face of centuries of colonial attempts to suppress, erase, or commodify these sacred traditions.

For Indigenous people, spirituality is inseparable from identity, health, and resistance. It is not confined to ceremonial spaces but infused into daily life—from planting crops to telling stories, from mourning losses to celebrating new beginnings. Yet colonialism has often tried to fragment this holistic view. From forced conversions to systemic bans on spiritual practices, Indigenous communities have faced relentless opposition to their ways of being. The resilience of these communities, however, speaks to the enduring power of their beliefs.

In this issue, we are honored to share stories reflecting the richness and diversity of Indigenous spirituality. From Nigeria, we delve into the revival of Ifa, a West African spiritual tradition of the Yoruba people. Ifa's resurgence among Black and Indigenous practitioners in the diaspora is a powerful act of reclamation and healing, bridging continents and generations.

We also explore the intersections of spirituality and mental health. Indigenous wellness frameworks often emphasize the spiritual dimensions of healing—an approach that challenges Western mental health paradigms. Decolonizing mental health by incorporating spiritual traditions is not just necessary; it's transformative. These practices remind us that true healing addresses the soul as much as the body and mind.

The stories in this issue invite us to question what we think we know about spirituality. They ask us to listen to the wisdom of those who have kept their traditions alive despite incredible odds. They urge us to see spirituality not as something abstract or esoteric but as something rooted in justice, identity, and survival.

As you read, I hope you feel inspired to reflect on your own life's spiritual dimensions and consider how colonial histories have shaped the world's understanding of belief and practice. Most importantly, I hope these stories spark a deeper appreciation for the spiritual resilience of Indigenous communities and the lessons they offer to a world in search of balance.

Thank you for joining us on this journey.

In solidarity,



Isabel María Riofrío Miranda
Editor-in-Chief
The Magazine





A cross-section of new initiates during Itefa (Ifá initiation) at a secret, undisclosed location. Photo credit: Olaifa Apapoodu, December 17, 2024.

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Cover photo credit: Judy Campa, June 2023.

**Throughout The Magazine, we default to using Indigenous place names unless otherwise stated. Colonial names are indicated in quotation marks for context.*

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REVIVING IFA'S HERITAGE

BY TUNJI OFFEYI

Two years ago, when I heard that the Nigerian gospel artist Gloria Doyle had left Christianity to become an Ifá priestess, I quickly called her and requested an interview. During the interview, Doyle said, "God told me there is a better way for me to connect to him . . . You do not need to go through the pastors to see God, but if religion is warm, you feel your inner peace when practicing it. I cannot leave a place where I find peace to a place where there is war and bitterness; you stick there where you find peace."

I agree with Doyle that peace is crucial in this life's journey. Whenever the Yoruba phrase "*Ifá Olokun aso ro dayo*" ("Ifa, the owner of the ocean that speaks of happiness and fortune") is mentioned, it brings calmness and optimism in a world engulfed by strife and turmoil. It brings hope. The hope for lasting joy is rooted in the Indigenous knowledge embedded in Ifa, the Yoruba divination system. According to Professor Wande Abimbola, the *Awise Agbaye* (worldwide spokesperson for the Yoruba religion), Ifá offers clarity in times of despair. Abimbola shared these insights during the closing plenary of the 2021 Parliament of the World's Religions, emphasizing the importance of Ifá in providing clarity in times of despair. ''Ifá is a comprehensive system of knowledge, offering solutions to many personal and communal troubles, such as war, famine, financial depression, sickness, disease, anxiety, and mental health issues."

Ifá is a complex and ancient divination, learning, and spirituality system. It encompasses a vast body of wisdom, including philosophy, medicine, ethics, and cosmology. Central to Ifá is the belief in a supreme deity, *Olodumare,* and a pantheon of gods known as *Orisas* (also spelled *Orishas* in the diaspora) who govern various aspects of the world and human life. It revolves around the divination of the *Odu Ifá,* a corpus of 256 sacred texts containing mythology, history, and ethics. The *Odu Ifá* believed to contain the wisdom of the *Orisas,* plays a central role in Ifá divination, serving as a guide for the *Babalawo* or *Iyanifa* in interpreting the messages from the *Orisa* gods. Ifá provides guidance and insight into life's complexities. Unlike the Bible or the Quran, Ifá is not codified in a book or single document but resides in the hearts of its devotees.

Historically, Ifá has served as the moral and spiritual foundation of the Yoruba people of West Africa, specifically in Nigeria, Benin, and Togo. However, with colonization and the spread of Christianity and Islam, many Indigenous practices, including Ifá, were suppressed. For centuries, these traditions persisted quietly, passed down through oral teachings within families and small communities. Missionaries and colonial authorities often discouraged or banned traditional spiritual activities.

According to the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia,* both colonial and missionary efforts promoted Islam and Christianity at the expense of African traditional religions, leading to the marginalization of Indigenous practices.

After Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, there was a modest revival of interest in traditional practices, including Ifá, as the nation sought to reclaim its cultural identity. However, Christianity and Islam continued to dominate the religious landscape, limiting the resurgence of Indigenous religions. Scholars have noted that while there was some revival, broader societal shifts still favored foreign faiths. For instance, according to the *Oxford Journal of Law and Religion,* Nigeria has struggled to clearly articulate the relationship between religion and the state since its independence, with Christianity and Islam exerting significant influence over the nation's political and social spheres at the expense of traditional religions.



A cross-section of new initiates during Itefa (Ifá initiation) at a secret, undisclosed location. Photo credit: Olaifa Apapoodu, December 17, 2024.



A Babalawo (Ifá priest) and an apprentice Ifá devotee during Ifá divination in Osogbo, Osun State, South West Nigeria. Photo credit: Thandiwe Osuntoki Awoniran, March 7, 2023.

In the 1990s, Ifá experienced a noticeable resurgence, driven by a growing sense of cultural pride and a desire among Nigerians to reconnect with their ancestral roots. This revival was not a solitary effort but a collective one characterized by the concerted actions of cultural movements to resist the dominance of foreign religions and preserve Yoruba traditions. Scholars such as Jacob Olupona and Wande Abimbola's efforts are believed to have highlighted the pivotal role of these cultural movements in fostering renewed interest in Yoruba spiritual practices. These efforts were part of a broader wave of cultural reawakening, uniting people to revitalize Indigenous practices.

In the early 21st century, the resurgence of Ifá accelerated, supported by traditional leaders and practitioners who promoted its preservation through festivals, ceremonies, and educational initiatives. The internet and social media have also spread awareness and connected practitioners worldwide.
In 2008, UNESCO recognized the Ifá divination system as an intangible cultural heritage, a testament to its global significance and a source of pride for its practitioners and supporters. In recent years, interest in Ifá has been resurgent, particularly among the younger generation, as they seek to reconnect with their cultural heritage and traditional practices. Nigeria's Isese Welfare Association has proactively supported the *Isese* movement amidst growing challenges. A notable example is their defense of prominent *Isese* activist Abdulazeez Adegbola, widely known as Tani Olohun. His case, detailed in the article “How Tani Olohun Was Nabbed” and the ordeal of his 92-day detention captured in “Tani Olohun Regains Freedom,” has become a reference point for the challenges faced by Ifá practitioners in a secular state like Nigeria.

To understand further why and how this was achieved, I spoke to a prominent *Babalawo* (Priest), Olúwo Jògbòdó Òrúnmìlà, who explained that the reason why he practiced Ifá is that he was born into it and learned about it. “It is my life's work and practice. As a Yoruba man, it is the right thing to do. Following the way of my ancestors rather than being a slave to foreign ideas and alien religion.'' People sustain this practice because it is their heritage and a cultural reaction to the impositions of foreign religions.

The global population of Ifá worshippers is estimated to be in the millions. This includes practitioners primarily in West Africa, as well as in the Americas and Europe. The exact number is complex to determine due to the diverse and widespread nature of the practice. Shaweel Weels Abimbola, a Panafricanist and Traditionalist explained that ''Ifá is a divination tool for folks to worship *Olodumare* (God) and venerate gods given power over aspects of nature by *Olodumare*. I am a traditionalist, and I choose that because *Olodumare* created my existence in Africa (and Yoruba, to be precise). Instead, I would follow my ancestral ways rather than alien ones brought to us through severe injustices."

At its core, Ifá celebrates the interconnectedness of humanity, nature, and the cosmos and is deeply rooted in the Yoruba Indigenous knowledge it represents. The practice of Ifá involves a sacred commune with the gods using rituals. This comes in the form of divination, which involves the *Babalawo* (priest) using tools like the *Opele* (divination chain) or *Ikin* (palm nuts) to communicate with the *Orisas* and provide guidance. Offerings like food, drinks, and other items are presented to seek favor or show gratitude. Rituals to Ifá include prayers, incantations, and chants to invoke the *Orisas'* blessings, often accompanied by traditional music and dance. These elements honor the *Orisas* and infuse the practice with vibrancy and liveliness, creating a spiritual atmosphere. Cleansing and purification methods, such as herbs, water, and other natural elements, help remove negative energies and create a spiritually harmonious environment to gain insights and guidance from the divine.

Professor Wande Abimbola emphasizes that Ifá is not just for the Yoruba people but for all of humanity. He advocates for recognizing all religions' validity and encourages sharing beliefs without forceful conversion. Ifá's significance in today's world lies in its holistic understanding of interconnectedness. This perspective is particularly relevant today, as environmental degradation, climate change, and social inequality are pressing issues. Ifá's celebration of interconnectedness makes us all part of a larger whole, fostering a sense of inclusion and shared responsibility. Practicing Ifá in daily life offers practical guidance and a sense of grounding, as it emphasizes communal values and community, especially amongst the Yoruba Indigenous people of West Africa and the diaspora. The ethics of Ifá emphasize the importance of moral values and ethical behavior. They teach principles such as honesty, integrity, and respect for others. Ifá's ethical teachings guide individuals in making righteous decisions and living harmoniously within their communities.

Through metaphysics, Ifá delves into the nature of existence and the universe. It explores concepts such as the cyclical nature of life and the balance between opposing forces. Ifá's metaphysical teachings provide a framework for understanding the world and one's place within it. The epistemology of Ifá also offers a unique approach to knowledge and wisdom. It emphasizes the importance of experiential learning, oral traditions, and divination. Its epistemological teachings highlight the value of intuition, observation, and the transmission of knowledge through generations.



A group photograph of new Ifá initiates during Itefa (Ifá initiation) in Miami, Florida. Photo credit: Agboola Joe Eduardo, April 9, 2023.

The comeback of Ifá is part of a broader movement to reassert the value and significance of African Indigenous practices in the face of historical and ongoing marginalization. By situating Ifá and other African traditions at the center of civilization, adherents are challenging the dominance of foreign religious and cultural influences and affirming the importance of their heritage. In an interview with CNN's Larry Madowo, Nigerian writer and Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka expressed his preference for *Orisa* worship, describing it as cultural, creative, and mysterious. He appreciates *Orisa* worship's nonviolent and ecumenical nature. Soyinka's reflections underscore the cultural and spiritual richness of *Orisa* worship, aligning with broader efforts to preserve African spiritual heritage.

Funmilayo Fakankun, a young Christian who studied Ifá in 2022, appreciates its philosophical insights. She shared how Ifá strengthened her belief in reincarnation and deepened her understanding of identity and history. In an interview with Punch Newspaper, she said she began studying Ifá out of curiosity. "Formally, I started learning about Ifá in 2022. I have learned so far that it teaches that life is in circles. Also, it made me know that what one does is what one gets and that one's reward and punishment are here on earth. It solidified my faith in reincarnation, and I do not believe in hellfire. The philosophical aspect of Ifá is insightful and very beautiful." Similarly, African-American rapper 21 Savage (born Shayaa Bin Abraham-Joseph), an Ifá worshiper, said when speaking to TheBreakfast Club, "I always said that (I'm here for a reason), even when I was in the hospital, I used to say that . . . I'm spiritual, I'm Ifá, my religion is Ifá . . . It's a Nigerian religion."

For Ifá adherents, the faith offers practical guidance and a sense of grounding. Awo Falokun wrote, '"Thanks to the patient efforts of several Ifá priests, I was eventually able to appreciate the idea that true wisdom only comes through the integration of thought and emotion. This integration usually occurs during those real-life encounters that force us to transform our relationship with self and the world. For many years, I considered myself fearless when dealing with Spiritual Forces. That was before I was introduced to real Spiritual Power. Once those doors had been opened, I was forced to confront the real experience of fear. This confrontation further confirmed that an understanding of my relationship with *Orisa* could not be illuminated by books alone."

Nonetheless, the opposition to *Isese Day* (Yoruba Religion Day) celebrations illustrates Nigeria's broader struggle for religious tolerance. Ongoing efforts to mediate and resolve these conflicts are crucial. This context highlights the challenges of the Ifá religion and its adherents in modern times, particularly in regions where Islam and Christianity dominate. Why now? For many, embracing Ifá is a way to decolonize their identity and challenge narratives that once vilified their ancestral beliefs. Marginalization and stereotyping of Ifá worship, describing it as primitive and superstitious, is ongoing in Nigeria specifically. This perception, perpetuated by colonial education systems, undermines the value and significance of these traditions.

Understanding the challenges Ifá practitioners face, such as the lack of establishment support and the threat of religious intolerance, can foster empathy and a deeper appreciation for their resilience in adversity. Equally, there is a lack of institutional support for Ifá practices within educational and governmental institutions. Integrating Ifá teachings into the curriculum and gaining broader acceptance is challenging yet crucial for preserving this rich cultural heritage. The rapid pace of modernization and urbanization in Nigeria and wider West Africa has led to the erosion of traditional practices and values among its Indigenous people. This shift can be attributed to the allure of modern lifestyles, the influence of global cultures, and the perceived irrelevance of traditional practices in contemporary settings.

Nevertheless, Ifá is experiencing a revival, partly due to global movements reclaiming Indigenous knowledge and African spirituality. In Nigeria, people openly celebrate Ifá festivals, blending rituals with artistic expression. Likewise, Afro-descendant communities in Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, and the United States reconnected with their Yoruba roots through Ifá practices, as seen in Brazil's Candomblé and Cuba's Santeria. Diasporic celebrations are also held in cities like London and New York. However, challenges remain. Addressing these requires integrating Ifá teachings into mainstream education, encouraging continuous community participation, and mentorship from elders. Support and legal protection from the Nigerian government are crucial, including recognizing *Isese Day* (*Yoruba* Religion Day) and potentially sponsoring diaspora pilgrimage to Ile-Ife, the ancestral home of the Yorubas and Ifá practice.

About the author

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INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY: RESILIENCE IN DECOLONIZING MENTAL HEALTH

BY MARK STANDING EAGLE BAEZ PHD, LSP, LCDC, CART, MS/MA

As a psychologist and researcher working across Indian country for the past 15 years, notwithstanding significant historical trauma and ongoing systemic challenges, Indigenous people in the so-called "United States" demonstrate remarkable resilience, often drawing strength from their deep connection to land, culture, community, and spiritual practices, even while reporting high rates of psychological distress due to the impacts of colonization and dispossession. This resilience is evident in their ability to maintain cultural identity, adapt to changing environments, and advocate for their communities despite adversity.

Decolonizing mental health requires being open to understanding that spiritual forces require constant and careful attention. "Decolonizing mental health" means approaching therapy by acknowledging and addressing the historical impacts of colonialism on individuals and communities, often incorporating spiritual practices from Indigenous cultures to promote holistic healing rather than depending solely on Western psychological models. This encompasses actively integrating a person's spirituality into their treatment plan when appropriate, recognizing that spirituality can be a vital source of strength and resilience for many people.

Indigenous mental health providers and healers have diverse healing traditions that have endured despite the oppression of colonization. Indigenous spiritual resilience in the treatment of Indigenous people actively incorporating traditional spiritual beliefs and practices into the Indigenous healing process, often as a form of resistance against the assimilationist tendencies of Western healthcare systems that may disregard or devalue Indigenous cultural identity and spirituality, thereby reclaiming agency and power over their wellbeing.

To incorporate spirituality into treatment for Indigenous clients, practitioners can actively learn about the client's specific tribal traditions, consider incorporating elements like prayer, ceremonies, connection to nature, storytelling, and community support into the therapeutic process, always ensuring respect for the client's individual beliefs and practices while acknowledging the central role spirituality plays in their healing journey.

In my language (Skén: nen), peace is not a concept but a way of life, a state of harmony with oneself and others. This happens when everyone works together to benefit everyone, including those yet to come.

Decolonizing mental health and therapy is a process that challenges the legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and systemic oppression in mental health and healing. Recognizing the impact of colonization and decolonizing mental health involves acknowledging the ways that Western psychiatric knowledge has marginalized non-Western models of healing. Thus, decolonizing mental health is critical because it seeks to address the legacy of colonialism and imperialism in psychology and mental health. Decolonization seeks to reverse colonization's impact on minoritized groups. Decolonization reaches beyond increasing inclusivity and aims to re-establish history through the experiences and perspectives of those most affected. However, few alterations have happened in mental health and psychology. Still, approaches fail to target the root of the problem (i.e., the need for authors to use more culturally sensitive language assessments and culturally sensitive wording).

To reverse the effects of colonization within theoretical applications, it would be necessary to re-evaluate Westernized history and teach past events through the experiences of those who suffered. Comprehensive research into decolonization is essential to effectively eliminate colonial practices globally. This is particularly important for Indigenous populations as the incorporation of Indigenous methodologies into mental health care can play a significant role in addressing mental health issues in these communities. Indigenous knowledge can create culturally centered health promotion initiatives by drawing on their cultural identity, community renewal, and self-determination. Indigenous methodologies can help address social and psychological factors that impact a community, limit Western concepts' influence, and develop socially appropriate methods. Actively dismantling coloniality within the mental health and psychology field necessitates recognizing how it forms the profession's bedrock.

Historically, the field of mental health and psychology has been used to justify and provide "'scientific' rationalization" for white supremacy (American Psychological Association [APA], 2023b, p. 12). Psychologists were the "leading eugenicists" post-World War II, with intelligence cited as the primary construct supporting white supremacy (Zuberi, 2001, p. 56). The widely used Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales were revised and published by past APA president and eugenicist Lewis Terman, essentially to create test results that gave credibility to white supremacy, an act of scientific racism (Winston, 2020).

Of Indigenous peoples, Terman wrote, "their dullness seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come." He goes on to state that Indigenous children are ineducable and "constitute a grave problem" (Terman, 1916, pp. 91-92). APA PsycNet, APA's online search platform, still describes Terman's publication as a helpful text (APA, 2022) with no mention of what Terman himself writes is a "eugenic point of view" (Terman, 1916, p. 92).



A photo of brothers Spotted-Eagle Baez-Smith and Eagle Talon Baez (Mohawk/Navajo/Coahuiltecan). Curcie illustrates the importance of healing through the eagle dance. Photo credit: Judy Campa, June 2023.

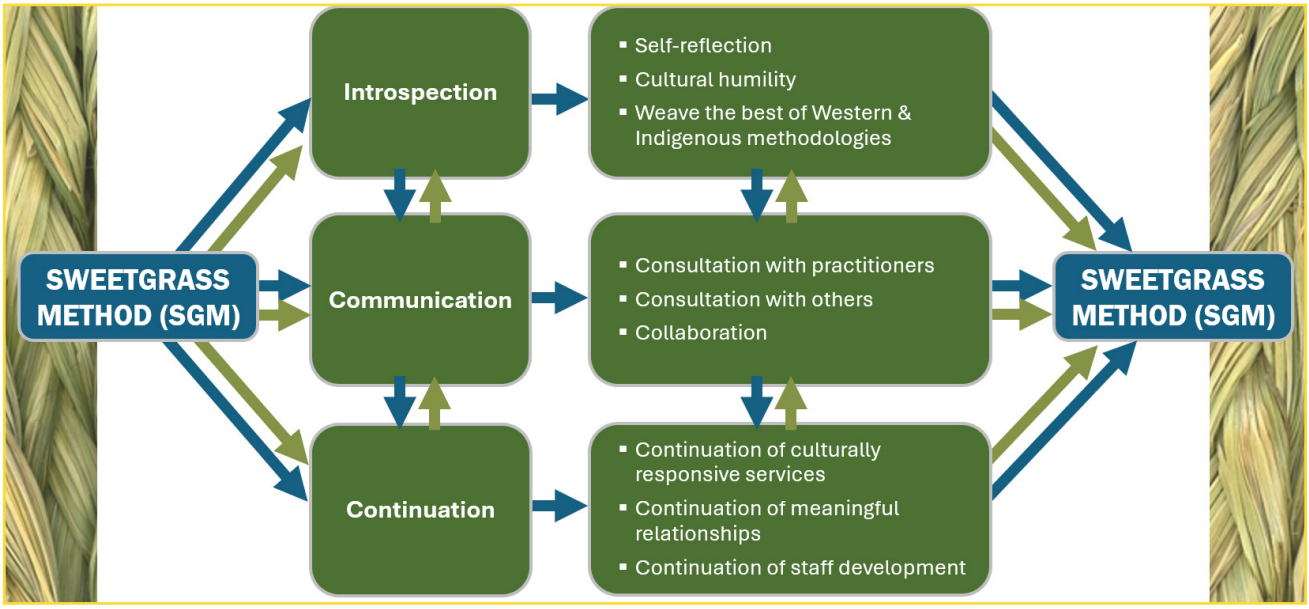
Similarly, relationality and Indigenous ways of knowing are notably absent from psychology's major schools of thought. Traditional theoretical orientations to psychological practice typically include psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive behavioral, biological, and ecological systems perspectives. Indigenous methodologies and frameworks, such as *visiting* (Gaudet, 2019; Tuck et al., 2023), are not often acknowledged or respected in the field (APA, 2023b; Grayshield et al., 2010). The Visiting Way is an Indigenous research method emphasizing reciprocal relationships and authentic dialogue. It's different from traditional interviews and focus groups because it allows conversations to flow naturally. Rather than acknowledging Indigenous ways of knowing as valid and worthy, psychology assumes that Western interventions need to be adapted to suit Indigenous clients, failing to recognize that Indigenous communities have healing practices that have been serving them well since time immemorial (King, 2022; Somerville et al., 2016).

Indigenous people embrace the whole person, which means honoring all of the person, their gifts, strengths, and areas of being different. The relationship between non-Native practitioners and Indigenous clients will continue to struggle if practitioners only address the negative valence of their mental health and wellness. Working with Indigenous clients, the practitioner must incorporate spiritual/cultural intelligence into the initial dialogue and service plan. For example, sharing about what tribe the client is from and what traditional ways the client participates in uses culturally relevant and appropriate assessments that incorporate and honor culture.

In that case, the struggle for a successful outcome will continue (Baez & Baez, 2023). Western models have interfered with Indigenous survival methods and the sharing of knowledge, in addition to the responsibilities to one another (Baez & Dirth, 2024). The Indigenous ways of learning and knowing, together with each other, continue to nourish and sustain. Indigenous societies have long practiced Indigenous ways of knowing, incorporating cultural-based and applied learning approaches that have helped the next generation comprehend the meaning of living with all living beings (Baez & Dirth, 2024).

While some Western interventions may demonstrate success with Indigenous clients after being culturally adapted, it remains that these interventions were adapted. Hence, they rest on the notion that the Western way is the norm and the Indigenous way is the alternative. Indigenized mental health frameworks will provide healthy relational steps that are culturally relevant, sensitive, and appropriate for professionals providing services.

In addition, broadening awareness and appreciation of Indigenous models is essential in moving forward with culturally responsive approaches (Baez & Dirth, 2024). For Indigenous people, spirituality is considered a crucial aspect of healing, which, when integrated into therapy through traditional ceremonies, rituals, and practices that aim to restore the balance between the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person (i.e., talking feather, pipe ceremony, naming ceremony, blessing-way ceremony, smoke ceremony, Native American Church ceremony, etc.), will connect them to their community and the natural world. Appreciating that mental health is an experience that must be understood in context, so too is the meaningfulness of mental health models largely dictated within cultural context.



Practitioners can use the three interwoven strands of the Sweetgrass Method (SMG) Model (Copyright © 2011, 2022, 2023 Baez) to address mental health concerns through introspection, communication, and continuity (Baez, 2011; Baez & Isaac, 2013; Baez et al., 2016; Baez, 2023).

Towards setting a solid foundation for a method that incorporates Western approaches and Indigenous methodologies (i.e., Sweetgrass Method), to working with AI/AN people and their families in the context of a cultural approach to healing, the breadth of mental health models can allow for more attentiveness to the unique cultural context of clients and their families rather than forcing them into a limited Western paradigm. The Sweetgrass Method (SGM) framework examines Indigenous methodologies and Western approaches to client/student services. It provides a Culturally Responsive framework for addressing mental and behavioral health concerns for Indigenous people.

Indigenized mental health strategies foster balancing approaches to cultural responsiveness within therapeutic practice. Culturally responsive frameworks encompass balance where two systems come together as equals to benefit all (Lavallie et al., 2021). In the end, by incorporating cultural methods into the initial supports/strategies for the individual, we are more likely to see better outcomes. Understanding Indigenous is essential to begin a dialogue between mental health and cultural practices for healing. This also permits the opportunities to develop approaches to mental health and wellness that are culturally responsive for Indigenous clients.

Indigenous communities are eager to advance effective solutions for behavioral strategies. Sacred herbs such as tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar have long been sacred to American Indian/Alaska Native communities. Anything that impacts the sacred will cause other things to go out of balance. Thus, I not only share with my clients the reasons for my evidence-based decisions, but I also weave in the spiritual.

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Dr. Mark Standing Eagle Baez is a Coahuiltecan member, as well as a Mohawk and Pawnee Descendant. Dr. Mark Standing Eagle Baez, the president-elect of the Society of Indian Psychologists and an associate professor at Bemidji State University, is in the clinical and counseling program. Dr. Baez is a licensed psychologist with a small private practice. With over 18 years of experience in mental health and wellness and impactful research among Indigenous people across the lifespan, it has inspired significant change in the field of Indigenous mental health. Dr. Baez has advocated for cultural, strengths-based approaches to Indigenous people and hopes to change community-based approaches among AI/AN peoples by weaving culture, Traditional methods, and Western approaches to improve Indigenous well-being.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE

A DAY AS A LIFE: MEDITATIONS ON TIME, MEMORY, AND LOVE

BY MARIANA MOSCOSO

> *"Even a wounded world is feeding us. Even a wounded world holds us, giving us moments of wonder and joy. I choose joy over despair. Not because I have my head in the sand, but because joy is what the earth gives me daily and I must return the gift."*
>
> — Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

My mornings are very predictable. I wake up before sunrise even if I do not entirely want to. I claim to be a morning person but my body strongly resists the idea. In the last few years, getting out of bed has become literally painful with my limbs often disobeying my brain's command for motion. As soon as my feet touch the floor, I feel like I'm on Jupiter carrying 500 pounds instead of just over 200 Earth pounds, a lesson teaching me that weight is just gravitational pull. And just as I have come to embody that weight is relative, I have learned that time is too.

Maya cosmology has multiple temporalities with five ways to measure time. Each one is a cycle of various durations that all happen simultaneously, each one interacting with the other. There's a deep teaching embedded in the cycles: separation is an illusion, and that every single action causes a ripple effect that changes reality in ways we might not be able to see or measure. The gentle caress of your fingers against the tassels of maize releases pollen into the wind and makes new life possible in maize silk nearby. Every action in the cosmic fabric is essential. We humans have just forgotten that we are not the center but a note in the harmony.

According to the *Ajq'ijab*[1], who have become my teachers in *Iximuleuw*[2], prayer and meditation are the same practice. It is pre-colonial and invites us to contemplate our connection to Creation and the Cosmos. While I do not believe that our ancestors need Western academic approval to be valid, in my journey, I have found a few studies that support this notion.

A study titled "Similarities between Prehispanic Wisdom in Mesoamerica and the Philosophies of Asia," by Dr. Víctor Kerber explores analogies between Mesoamerican cosmology and Eastern philosophies. The research highlights how concepts such as cyclical movement and permanent change are central to both the I-Ching and Mesoamerican thought. Further, Kerber suggests that since teachings from the I-Ching apply to meditation, it indicates that ancient Mesoamerican practices may have also included meditative elements.[3]

Additionally, "An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica" by Stephen D. Houston and Karl A. Taube examines how the ancient Maya and other Mesoamerican peoples showed an intense interest in evoking the senses, especially hearing, sight, and smell. The authors suggest how sensory experiences were integral to rituals and daily life, which may have included meditative aspects.[4]

As a reconnecting Indigenous person, several years ago I started to meditate as a daily ritual to connect me deeper with the energies related to one of the five cycles, the *Cholq'ij*[5]. The *Cholq'ij* is a 260-day count used by my people that is based on 20 day-energies and 13 tonalities. This count is tied to human life, it symbolizes the nine months of human gestation, and serves as a spiritual guide to rituals, and how to live daily life. The *Cholq'ij* is a tool for understanding one's life path, the natural rhythms of the earth, and cosmic forces that influence our lives. Through meditation, I have connected deeper with this cosmological view. It has taught me that every day—is a single cycle of one—where every action within the day alters the tapestry of reality. That reality is both shaping and being shaped by us. It is how I have come to understand that perhaps my clarity or compassion from meditation will later shape how I speak or show up for others, how I parent, or how I write. I say *I* but it's not really *me*, it's not really *mariana*. The *I* is a conduit channeling something much greater that we are all a part of.

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[1]An Ajq'ij, singular for Ajq'ijab, are spiritual guides, daykeepers, and healers that utilize the Cholq'ij (see footnote 5 for an explanation of the Cholq'ij) to bring harmony between humans, the spiritual realm, nature, and the cosmos.

[2]Iximulew is a contemporary K'iche' Maya name for Guatemala that means "Land of Corn." It represents the deep cultural and spiritual significance of corn in Mesoamerica.

[3]Víctor Kerber, "Similarities between Prehispanic Wisdom in Mesoamerica and the Philosophies of Asia," *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: D History, Archaeology & Anthropology* 20, no. 3 (2020): 1-24.

[4]Houston, Stephen D., and Karl A. Taube. "An Archaeology of the Senses: Perception and Cultural Expression in Ancient Mesoamerica." *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 10, no. 2 (2000): 261–294.

So, every morning, I wake up before sunrise to meditate, against my body's wishes. I light the altar candle and burn a single white sage leaf from my yard. I look at pictures of my grandparents, whom I barely knew. I put on my headphones, turn on some music, place myself on my meditation cushion, and let my body settle. This is my ritual to connect with the ancestral knowledge of Maya spirituality.

When I first sit, I immediately notice how stiff I feel, how my left shoulder aches, and how I am always clenching my jaw. *Focus*, I think as I begin to tune into my breath:

in
out

in
out

rhythmic

my breath

is ocean waves

And then thoughts start to flood my mind: *When is that report due? Palestinians are returning home only to find rubble and devastation. Child slave labor in the Congo. I am complicit. Indigenous children in cages at the U.S. border crying for their parents. I was an "anchor baby." Two-spirit and transgender youth taking their own lives because they're denied the medical care they need. Fish dying in the Coachella Valley. Fires in Southern California. Climate chaos. Death. War. Destruction. Oligarchs.*

Breathe, mariana, I remind myself. *Deep inhale. Exhale. I am still here.* Lately, I have meditated with Bad Bunny playing because "DeBí TiRAR MáS FOtoS" was written for my grief, too.

> ***"This pattern serves as a reminder that time is not a neat, linear path. Instead, it spirals, offering us glimpses of our past, each time with a new perspective."***

It's easy to feel small and powerless in the face of such immense suffering. The atrocities and pain of the world exist in juxtaposition to the stillness of my cushion. It hurts to observe what is. In these moments, I gravitate to the lessons of ceremony, ritual, and community. The gift of learning from ancestors, elders, teachers, family, and friends. Reconnecting with my ancestral roots. This path has given me so much.

ONE DAY AS ONE LIFE

Each day is one life. Life is not about the accumulation of days in a linear sense, but about how each morning is a new opportunity, a new birth. At night, when we drift into the dream realm, we experience a sort of death where we traverse the nine levels of *Xibalba*. *Xibalba* is the place of frights, the realm of trials and challenges, and there's no guarantee we'll return. *The Popol Wuj*[6] reminds us every sunrise symbolizes the victory of the Hero Twins outsmarting the Lords of *Xibalba*. In other words, each time the sun rises, our next chance to live life rises, too.

When I sit on my cushion, I connect with the primordial energy of *Imox*—water, ocean, intuition—recognizing that my identity, "mariana," is just a singular story and an illusion. By coming into silence, I see that life is so much bigger than my personal narrative or my daily aches and pains. Amid massive grief, I also experience being alive. I am safe, in a warm home surrounded by family (humans, cats, and plant relatives) with a body that still gets to run, swim, and lift weights. I get to do impermanent things. Like me. This realization invites gratitude, it invites me to recognize that each breath is a gift, each day a microcosm of existence. I get to be here, in this microcosm to make the small changes that bring liberation to the present.

LAYERS OF MEMORY

Mamí has dementia. This simple thought carries so many complex emotions within it, and they all rush in every time I say it. Dementia has its own cycles, repeating stories sometimes in contradictory ways. One version of a memory surfaces in one moment, and then a few minutes later, the same memory emerges slightly altered or sometimes vastly different. And yet, each time, it feels valid. Each iteration reveals a new detail or emotion.

This pattern serves as a reminder that time is not a neat, linear path. Instead, it spirals, offering us glimpses of our past, each time with a new perspective. When my daughter and I talk about Mamí's dementia, we notice how multiple truths can co-exist. We can feel immense grief as we watch her slip away, while simultaneously reliving joyful moments with her in the present even as they evaporate. Those memories live in us, the vibrations of our laughter and tears will forever change the structure of the universe. This is how memory works for me now, I know somehow we are always entering each other's timelines. Our memories are not in the past, they exist in their telling in the present as well.

Meditation has taught me the cyclical nature of time. That sense of time folding and unfolding on itself helps me sit with the daily grief and heartache of Mamí's disappearing. She is dying. Her spirit slowly untethering from this reality. It reminds me of when you're a kid with a helium-filled balloon and the string slips from your hands. You are painfully constrained, a helpless bystander witnessing it fly away into the distance. I can't stop dementia but I can breathe into the spaciousness. I sit with each cycle of presence with Mamí as long as possible until the cycle restarts again. In the spaciousness of that present moment, I let immense love guide me toward acceptance of the inevitable truth that soon this moment of clarity will end. Today I allowed the tears to flow as I held her hand and caressed it. I told her how much I miss her constant presence. I acknowledged the immeasurable gift of having been her child, of still being her child. How I will always be her child. And then, she was gone again and she asked me who I was. Another death, another opportunity for life.

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[5]"The Maya sacred calendar is called Tzolk'in in Yucatec Mayan and Chol Q'ij in K'iche' Mayan. This calendar is not divided into months. Instead, it is made from a succession of 20 day glyphs in combination with the numbers 1 to 13, and produces 260 unique days."

[6]The Popol Wuj is one of the remaining pre-colonial texts of the K'iche' Maya that contains the creation story, cosmology, genealogy that had been passed down through oral storytelling and was transcribed in the 16th century.



TIME

This digital collage by mariana Aq'ab'al moscoso is composed of photographs of flowers from her garden and cutouts from family images: on the right, mariana is shown with her mother in 1982; on the left, mariana is with her daughter Yasmin in 2003.

ACCEPTANCE IN THE FACE OF EVERYTHING

Meditation has taught me acceptance. Sometimes I catch myself thinking: *How can I sit here, with my candle and my music, while the world bleeds?* The truth is, none of us can solve every tragedy single-handedly but this doesn't mean we're powerless. It means our greatest strength is realizing we are never alone, that we are all part of a greater whole. It's like how Mamí is not really gone, she is caught in shorter cycles of renewal. When I become present, I can choose my actions to embody liberation. Doesn't it sound beautiful? The possibility that already exists in every moment? Sitting in meditation each morning might seem insignificant but it has given me the spaciousness to go deep.

The eurocentric worldview and colonial ways of structuring time as purely linear can make us feel powerless as if we're just marching forward to an end, collecting achievements or losses.The cyclical perspective that I'm learning and relearning daily is different. Mamí's dementia teaches me that time is relative. It reminds me that every day, every moment, we have the chance to be reborn, to redefine how we love, create, and fight for justice. We're not stuck in an unstoppable forward march; we're in a dance of returns and renewals.

> *"We're not stuck in an unstoppable forward march; we're in a dance of returns and renewals."*

CIRCLING BACK TO LOVE

Watching Mamí's memory unravel has forced me to see that life is not defined by a single continuity of facts or stories. It is more complex than that. Life is how we feel, how we connect, and how we show up in each moment. Some days, I wish I could talk to Mamí as she once was because I just need a mom. So often I live in contradictions too, I want to hold her in my arms and cry over the grief and heartbreak of her eventual passing, and laugh with her about how I am actually more like her than I care to admit. I want her to know she was so vital in shaping me to be who I am. But time doesn't work like that anymore—not for her or me. We're in a new cycle. We now live in days made up of intermittent moments of life, death, and rebirth.

I do, however, find comfort in this truth: love is timeless. It remains even when memory fades. It remains in the ways I've grown, in how I raise my daughter, and in every breath I take as I greet the morning. It's woven into every new cycle of the sun's return, existing in the spaces that transcend logic or linear time.

I'm learning to live each day as if it were the only one, balancing grief for the world with gratitude for dementia and my life in this body. Is it paradoxical? Absolutely. Paradox is where the deepest truths often lie. The past, present,and future co-exist. Each time I rise in the morning, I get the chance to shift the entire universe simply by being here—by appreciating the ground beneath my feet, listening to the meows of my insistent cats, loving Mamí in her altered state, being witnessed by and loving my daughter, and refusing to yield to despair and the immense grief that cohabitates with us in this world.

THIS IS MY CYCLE OF ONE

I wake up. I meditate. I feel grief. I am grateful. I remember that it's all interconnected. I do the best I can with what is in front of me. And tomorrow, if I am lucky enough to rise again, I'll do it again. Perhaps with more compassion for myself and for the world. Remembering one day my cycle of one will come to an end, too. The sun rises on a new day. I tumble with curiosity toward the next cycle, ready for the unknown.

About the author

Mariana Aq'ab'al moscoso (ja'/elle/they) is a nonbinary reconnecting Indigenous queer of Achi (Maya), Nicānāhuac, and Afro-Indigenous roots living near the Kum Sayo River on the traditional lands of the Nisenan, Maidu, Miwok, and Pawtin peoples. They are a cultural practitioner, narrative strategist, facilitator, storyteller, digital artist, zine maker, and emerging weaver whose work is deeply rooted in Maya Cosmology. A published writer and artist, their work appears in *Mujeres de Maíz en Movimiento: Spiritual Artivism, Healing Justice, and Feminist Praxis and Weaving Our Stories: Return to Belonging.* **Mariana is a co-visionary of Toj + Tijax: The Ritual of Myth Making, a creative Indigenous queer healing space, and serves as a Senior Program Officer at the California Humanities. Connect with them on Instagram (@aq_ab_al) and Bluesky (@aqabal.bsky.social).**

ILLUSTRATIONS

BRIDGES BETWEEN WORLDS: ANCESTRAL SPIRITUALITY

BY LAURA MARTÍNEZ

Art can translate the invisible, taking us to places where words do not always reach. These illustrations invite you to contemplate the world from a spiritual dimension inspired by Indigenous wisdom: the moon as a guide and the third eye as a door to intangible realities.

The spiritual beliefs of Indigenous peoples still challenge us in the modern world. Although daily life is deeply influenced by world transformations, ancestral teachings continue to be a source of wisdom and balance.

THE THIRD EYE

The third eye, with roots in ancient spiritual traditions, represents a vital connection to the universe. It is the channel through which the visible and the invisible meet. Although its origins are in Eastern traditions, many Amazonian communities in Colombia, Brazil, and Peru also associate it with the ability to perceive the “invisible fabric” that connects all beings: not only humans but also animals, plants, elements of nature, and even the memories of those who are no longer physically present.

This connection reflects the idea that everything in the universe is interrelated and that the spiritual is not a distant abstraction, but something that can be tangibly experienced. This illustration captures a concept but also proposes a deep look at what links us to the cosmos. In Indigenous traditions, this vision is not a privilege, but a latent possibility in each of us, waiting to be cultivated through sensitivity and an open spirit.





CHÍA

Chía, the lunar goddess of the Muiscas, illuminates the night, guides travelers, and controls the tides and crop growth. The Muiscas, an Indigenous community from the Cundiboyacense highlands in Colombia, revered Chía as a symbol of balance and clarity. Her name, which in the Muisca language means “light” or “clarity,” was central to the Muisca agricultural rituals and ceremonies led by the *Xeques*, or priests.

Ancient myths describe her as a protective deity capable of controlling the flow of water and bringing prosperity. Her presence transcends these stories and continues to be a relevant symbol in the city of Chía, near Bogotá, which bears Chía’s name as a testimony to a heritage that invites us to reflect on the balance between modernity and ancestral wisdom. Although direct worship of the goddess has diminished, many communities continue to recognize her symbolism as an emblem of the spiritual connection with nature.

About the artist

Laura Martínez was born and raised in the Colombian Caribbean and identifies herself as a sentimental artist. Her work stands as a political bet, where social criticism and protest art are the pillars on which she builds her narrative.

Laura firmly believes in the transformative power of art and in the capacity of each individual to contribute to social change. She has a clear commitment to what she loves and believes in and therefore trusts in the construction (for many utopian) of a better future. “The social function of the artist is to provoke and encourage humanity, that's why I decided from full awareness that my task in this world is to CREATE instead of answering.”

POEM

MY INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY: LIFE CYCLE

BY EMP

Learning how to drum and how to be in ceremony.
Making my own drum,
from deer hide and sinew, guided by the wise hands and watchful eyes of an elder.
Feasting my drum, following protocol.
Caring for my drum, wrapping her in beautiful natural red fabric.
Offering tobacco, learning
respect through my drum.
Smudging myself and my drum, gaining clarity and feeling renewed.

Drumming in community,
In cozy circles and in raucous circles, with babies and with elders.
Drumming on my own to connect, outside with wind, snow, rain falling gently on my face.
Drumming in the forest and noticing that deer were not startled by me or by my drum.

Drumming in safe places.
Drumming in colonizer's spaces.
Drumming as resistance.

Drumming with joy.
Drumming in grief.
Drumming for comfort.

Feeling safe and connected and free.
Learning songs of my people.
Finding my voice, in chorus with others.

Knowing my drum as my grandmother - a kind relationship.
Appreciating the skill of an elder who sewed and mended my torn drum.
Deeply understanding the lessons my drum has taught me.

Relying on my drum for survival.
Feeling the deep pain when a malevolent colonizer destroyed my drum.
Unfixable drum, that saved me.

Ceremony for my broken drum.
Mourning the loss of my drum.
Remembering to breathe to the rhythm of my heart and of life and of my drum.

About the author

Emp is a Mi'kmaw woman whose family has been deeply impacted by colonization. She has a varied background in education, healing work, arts, and science. Emp resides on Turtle Island and is grateful for the gifts that she has co-created through drum circles over the years.

About the poem

The drum is an important spiritual, ceremonial, and traditional item in many Indigenous communities. I can only speak to some of the teachings that I have received, as there are specific protocols for drum use that vary from community to community It is important to smudge oneself and one's drum prior to drumming, usually with sweet grass, or other sacred medicines like sage or cedar. It is important to come to the drum and the drum circle with good intentions and be mindful of the energy that is being shared. For many folks, drumming is a form of connection, with community and with Creator. The drum represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth and drum ceremony involves calling in the ancestors, for healing and for celebration.

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL TEACHING IN SCHOOLS: A PATH TO RECONCILIATION AND INCLUSION

BY CRUSHING COLONIALISM

As Canada continues its journey toward truth and reconciliation, Indigenous spiritual teachings are gaining recognition as valuable components of school curricula. A recent article in *The Conversation*, a non-profit independent news source, highlights how integrating Indigenous knowledge and spirituality into education can foster a more inclusive and respectful learning environment (*The Conversation*, 2023).

Historically, Canadian schools have often marginalized Indigenous perspectives, enforcing Eurocentric worldviews and sidelining Indigenous ways of knowing. However, incorporating spiritual teachings—such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe, emphasizing wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth—could help bridge this gap. These teachings promote ethical decision-making, self-awareness, and respect for all living beings, aligning with values that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

The inclusion of Indigenous spirituality in education aligns with the calls to action from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which urges educational institutions to integrate Indigenous knowledge systems. This approach acknowledges Indigenous heritage and provides students with a holistic understanding of history, culture, and identity.

Educators who embrace these teachings report improved student engagement, stronger community connections, and a deeper sense of belonging among Indigenous youth. However, challenges remain, including the need for proper teacher training and overcoming resistance from those who may see spirituality in education as controversial.

By fostering a greater understanding of Indigenous worldviews, schools can become spaces of reconciliation and empowerment. Recognizing Indigenous spiritual teachings as part of education is not just an act of inclusion—it is a step toward justice and healing.

For more insights, read the original article on The Conversation: *https://theconversation.com/indigenous-spiritual-teaching-in-schools-can-foster-reconciliation-and-inclusion-194324*

Call for submissions!

The Magazine is seeking submissions for our June issue, which will focus on the Indigenous 2SLGBTQIA+ community. We invite Indigenous Journalists, artists, and content creators to submit pitches for thought-provoking stories, insightful articles, artistic creations and powerful narratives that embody this topic. Submit your pitches to: *iriofrio@crushingcolonialism.org*

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A Babalawo (Ifá priest) and an apprentice Ifá devotee during Ifá divination in Osogbo, Osun State, South West Nigeria. Photo credit: Thandiwe Osuntoki Awoniran, March 7, 2023.

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