

Memorialab: Dialogue, Memory and Social Healing in the Basque Country: A Methodological Note

Iñigo Retolaza Eguren¹

What is asked for is not an integration of thought, or a kind of imposed unity, since any point of view imposed it would be in itself merely another fragment. Rather, all our different ways of seeing they have to be considered as different ways of looking at a single reality, each of them with a certain domain in which they are clear and adequate.

David Bohm,² (1917–1992) Physicist, philosopher and dialogue practitioner

BACKGROUND

The Basque Context

The end of the armed activity of ETA³ in 2011 marked a historic milestone in Basque society. Once the terrorist violence of ETA and the repressive response by the Spanish State de-escalated – decades after the ending of Franco's fascist dictatorship and the convulsive transition period afterwards – an opportunity came for promoting spaces wherein a diverse set of Basque citizens

could safely meet, talk openly, listen deeply, and make collective sense of what happened. De-escalation provided a chance for Basque citizens to share and process how they lived through all those decades of human rights violations and attacks against peaceful and democratic coexistence of citizens, including bombings, killings, kidnappings, extortions, police brutality, torture, parapolice activity and State terrorism, street violence, social fear and stigmatization. A possibility emerged to process how this violence had affected the configuration of individual and social identities – ideology, stereotypes, behavioural patterns, interpersonal and intra-family relationships, etc. – within Basque society.

For this social dialogue to become a reality, however, it would be necessary to create safe, healing spaces where different people could meet on the basis of mutual respect and a strong willingness to transcend, but not forget, a traumatic past. Memorialab was one such initiative that provided safe space and

dialogic methods that contributed to deep reflection and healing conversations towards creating renewed, non-violent identities moving forward.

Memorialab: A Dialogical Response to Long-lasting (Self) Imposed Silence

Memorialab is an initiative for the social construction of memory through dialogue among people who come from different places and ideologies. Although in most cases they do not know each other, they all share being affected in different ways by the political violence that transpired during the last five decades in the Basque Country. Memorialab begins from the assumption that it is from a shared ethical and moral basis of respect for life and human rights that a group of people will open to share their experiences – their ‘autobiographical memory’. When they are able to do so, an inclusive and healing collective social memory can be woven, taking as main threads a series of conflictual events that occurred in the past (conflict historiography). Memorialab seeks out an inclusive collective memory that can help generate a more democratic society and shared future that is based on peaceful coexistence, respect for diversity, and non-repetition of political violence. People who attend these intergenerational dialogues speak from and engage with each other’s personal experiences with mutual respect.

Memorialab begins by addressing what in the Basque context is referred to as *recent memory*; particularly the period 1960–2011, which are considered the violent years of ETA and Spanish State fierce repression against a significant part of the Basque population. We use recent memory as the starting point, the triggering element, to look at how this violent and intense period of Spanish history affected the Basque society and its relationships with the Spanish State and society. We then trace this memory all the way back to Republican times (1933–1936) and

the civil war (1936–1939), and then move forward from 1939 to the fierce political repression and cultural brainwashing and extermination that occurred during Franco’s dictatorship (1939–1975) and the violent democratic transition period that followed and beyond (1975–2011). It seems that collective construction of memory is not a linear process after all!

Memorialab is co-implemented by three Basque organizations – Gernika Gogoratuz Peace Reserch Center, Bakeola-EDE Foundation and Gernika Peace Museum – which have been working for many years in the field of human rights, collective memory, conflict transformation and culture of peace. In November 2013, Bakeola-EDE Foundation and Gernika Peace Museum felt the need to start promoting open citizen dialogues to address the consequences the conflict had had on Basque citizenship. They launched a pilot retreat with a group of practitioners and organizations working on human rights, coexistence, culture of peace and group process facilitation. An initial set of methods were tested during this two-day nature retreat. As a result of this event, Gernika Gogoratuz Peace Research Center and myself joined the initiative too. During the following months, the Memorialab method was further developed through a number of labs and workshops wherein different methods, research questions and international experiences were tested and incorporated (see next section for more details). All these workshops were self-funded by these three organizations and facilitated by me with initial assistance from a co-facilitator.

From 2014 to 2017, seven of these meetings took place in different formats (one- or two-day retreats) at various locations across Basque geography. Altogether, approximately 100 people, with a balanced intergenerational representation of men and women, directly participated in these encounters during its first phase (2013–2017). All retreats were co-funded by the Basque government and local municipalities wherein the retreats took place.

Who I am, the Facilitator

I am a 52-year-old Basque citizen who spent 20 years away from home as an adult, first working as a community development worker in Bolivia, and years later becoming a multi-stakeholder dialogue facilitator in a regional project run by the United Nations Development Programme in Latin America. Among other reasons, I came back to the Basque Country in 2012 to work on promoting the practice of dialogue, now that ETA was dismantled and opportunities for opening spaces for dialogue became a real possibility.

Initially, due to my experience as a multi-stakeholder dialogue facilitator, promoters of the initiative invited me to assist as a participant in the first Memorialab prototype cited in the previous section (November 2013). There I appreciated how Memorialab had the potential to create a space wherein I could work on myself to resolve the traumatic experiences I went through in my childhood, which happened in the last years of the dictatorship (1974–1978). Throughout those years a part of my family became politically engaged in fighting Franco's regime. My later youth occurred during democratic transition, which was also a conflictual period due to an increase in ETA's activities and the subsequent police repression and brutality all over the Basque Country, including my hometown. I personally never became engaged in political activities but suffered the consequences of political violence in different ways, as did most citizens at that time.

One of the reasons I became engaged with Memorialab was my need to continue to work on the strongly rooted stereotypes and negative imagery I had developed against Spanish identity since my childhood. Because I am a dialogue practitioner, I wanted to help others do the same to adapt to these new times and roles. And because Basque conflict is a social construct, I needed a group to work on part of my healing. So, I took a step forward and fully engaged with Memorialab. My personal and professional background has been

of enormous help for me when facilitating these dialogues, where such a diverse range of experiences and identities meet.

ORIGINS AND METHODOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT

Dialogue and Memory as a Way of Participatory Action Research

The Memorialab initiative uses dialogue and memory as a way to explore the main question driving this participatory action research: 'How did the conflict affect Basque citizenship and the way Basques relate to each other nowadays?' Based on this foundational research question, and thanks to the dialogical environment created by Memorialab, a group of diverse individuals explore this, and other emerging questions, in a genuine and healing way. We, the conveners, believe that due to the historical context, it is still quite difficult to explore these research questions collectively and publicly, unless (restorative) dialogue and memory are used as the main participatory action research methods.

Sources of Inspiration at Home and Abroad

When we began as methodological designers of Memorialab, we had to ask basic questions such as 'where do we begin, what methods might be relevant to our purposes – What really is our purpose?' First, we looked to home, the Basque Country, for inspiration, where we found several experiences related to ours, yet none based on open dialogue among citizens who did not know each other beforehand. Nevertheless, we did learn from some very meaningful and inspiring initiatives from Basque Country (Glencree initiative,⁴ Bakeaz Blai initiative⁵) and from abroad (Northern Ireland,⁶ Guatemala,⁷ El Salvador,⁸ South Africa⁹).

Methodological Beliefs and Building Blocks

I now briefly share the main premises that provide shape and content to the methodological approach and to its relevance and pertinence in the Basque context.

A systemic-complexity approach

From a systemic point of view, Memorialab’s initial premise is that if we work with a representative group of society and its interactions, we affect all society. That is, by transforming relationships happening in small groups we contribute to change relationships in the larger ecosystem to which this group belongs. From the perspective of a cognitive process, when the room contains a wider range of ways of looking at one reality, we can develop a more complex and deeper understanding of reality. We can also more easily challenge our own (old) stereotypes and assumptions about other people’s experiences with the conflict. So, we want to have as much diversity as possible in the room. From a healing and relational perspective, this means that every time a group processes wounds that are representative and meaningful to the society to which the group belongs, it can have a restorative and healing effect in all society, even if through small and localized impacts.

Three basic questions: Past, present and future

The whole design is based in three questions which relate to past, present and future (Table 42.1). These questions are worked

through using different methods, which will be explained in following sections.

Participants come to work on their past, learn about how that past affects their present, and imagine ways they can update their mindset and behavioural patterns into the future. We use this change-oriented approach because it makes sense when working on memory as a way of transforming traumatic and disturbing experiences that stick to our subconscious, into opportunities for personal growth, healing of wounds and restoration of lost relationships.

Three dimensions of reality

Arnold Mindell, founder of Process Oriented Psychology, talks about three levels of reality:¹⁰ Consensus Reality is about the inter-objective world, the one we all know about and tacitly agree upon (the system works ‘this’ way, my known and primary identity is a Basque teacher, this social group does not get along with that social group, etc.). Dreaming Reality relates to the world of emotions, fears, traumas, memory, feelings, intuition, perception, past experiences, body symptoms, etc. This is an (inter)subjective world that affects how we relate to our self and the world around us. Essence Reality is the deepest level that is connected to a wider transpersonal field or whole, something that’s bigger than our limited ego; a non-dualistic experience and level of reality connecting us to the whole group, and all the diversity in it. Memorialab uses methods that help participants generate dialogue between these dimensions to enhance deeper connection of experiences and feelings at group level.

Table 42.1 Guiding questions informing the design of Memorialab

<i>Time span</i>	<i>Guiding question</i>	<i>Methods used</i>
Past	What happened?	Entry object, circle of testimonies
Present	What are you becoming aware of?	Role analysis, circle of testimonies, dialogue in dyads, body-based awareness exercises, guided meditation
Future	How can you use what you learnt here?	Guided meditation, exit object

A combination of cognitive and embodied learning

Memorialab methodology combines a series of methodological disciplines in an innovative and pioneering way. It is pioneering because in the Basque context there are very few and limited experiences in creating spaces for open-ended citizen dialogue – that are not controlled by public institutions or political parties – regarding this topic. It is innovative because it blends a set of methods in a unique way. Some of these methods are already widely used in the field of memory and social healing (e.g. restorative circles, circle of testimonies, storytelling, meditative practices). Others come from other contexts (e.g. Theory U,¹¹ Process Work,¹² embodied learning and sentient methods,¹³ art-therapy,¹⁴ democratic dialogue,¹⁵ systemic coaching¹⁶).

The combination of these methods in the design and facilitation of the group process allows more effective integration of the mind (cognitive knowledge, belief systems) and the body (embodied knowledge, patterns of relationship at intra- and interpersonal and social level, feelings). Thoughts move as bodies move. Sentient methods, a combination of body–mind techniques, make explicit what the individuals of a group are thinking and feeling, helping us to become aware of our individual and collective mindsets and behaviours, and to unfold implicit stereotypes and assumptions as to why particular individuals believe and behave the way they do.

Dialogue, memory and intergenerational transmission

Because past and present are linked, present narratives about past events are transmitted through memory, family after family, generation after generation. The relationships a person has with the past and future are strongly influenced by the present condition of that individual. People don't relate to the past in the same ways when living in the midst of a conflict or growing up in a peaceful environment. Stories told by

grandparents of suffering due to political violence that happened in the family system resonate very differently from remembrances of growing up in a non-violent social/family environment.

Promoting spaces for intergenerational dialogue through social construction of memory can help a person realize how past events, even those that happened before being born, affected his or her present identity. For example, facilitating the Memorialab retreats I learnt that for some people it is easier to talk to a stranger instead of a relative about personal traumatic experiences related to political violence. Some participants, consciously or unconsciously, 'use' fellow participants as mirrors to 'symbolically talk' to their own relatives as a way to find out how to explain what happened to them. There have been cases in Memorialab where two generations of the same family came together to the space (mother–daughter, mother–son). Usually a younger generation coming as a support to the older generation. As we see, there are different ways of promoting intergenerational dialogue.

Linguistic coexistence

Nowadays there are two co-official languages in the Basque Country: *Euskara* (Basque language) and Castilian (Spanish language). Based on recent official data,¹⁷ 33.9% of Basque people living in the Autonomous Community of Basque Country¹⁸ know and use *Euskara* in their everyday life, 19.1% know *Euskara* but don't normally use it, and 47% of Basque citizens only speak Castilian. There is an asymmetrical relationship between these two languages in that Castilian is the dominant language in almost all Basque geography.

This has been one of the fundamental cleavages that sustained and fed the conflict during most of the past century. Creating space for both languages to be spoken when people feel or need to do so is therefore a crucial part of making a safe space for all (bilingual facilitation team, bilingual communication and

publications, etc.). We understand this as part of a restorative and coexistence-based practice, where the group self-manages the translation process with self-appointed translators.

Symbolic integration and artistic expression

After many years of working with illiterate people, traumatized populations, Indigenous communities and multicultural contexts, I learnt that creating objects that express complex ideas and interconnections helps a person communicate those feelings and experiences brought by memory. Sometimes these feelings are expressed in an altered state; which many times is more easily expressed and channelled through other means than plain words. An accumulation of these self-made artistic objects in the middle of the circle symbolizes the construction of a collective memory based and nurtured by an intertwining of a number of personal narratives.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY: FROM THE BACKPACK TO THE SUITCASE

In this section I share the effect this process had on one woman's personal journey to work on a heavy burden she carried through Memorialab.

Maite¹⁹ is a Basque woman in her late 40s, wife and mother, elected member of the municipal council in her hometown, and whose mother tongue is *Euskara (euskaldun)*. During the conflict she received death threats from ETA due to her non-nationalist ideology and political activity. As a consequence, she had to be escorted by bodyguards for eight years, which affected her and her family's everyday life in many ways. Maite came to a two-day Memorialab nature retreat accompanied by her husband, Koldo, who came as a personal support and because Maite was clear that working on this traumatic experience was not only a personal, but a family process too.

'I used to avoid the issue of the Basque conflict at home. But now I realize that by doing so things do not resolve, they become encysted and rot; and the pain stays inside, and you transmit it to others. It has been a challenge for me to participate, I did not know how to express everything that has happened to me'.

Maite

Initially, Maite's entry object (a bar of soap) was supposed to symbolize a bullet-proof vest. During the conflict when she would take her daily morning shower, she would tell herself that the soap would protect her throughout the day. This is the story she told to some members of the facilitation team before starting the process. Due to the heaviness of her experience and sense of vulnerability she felt at the early stages of the process, she told a different, slightly lighter story about the meaning of the soap during the circle of testimonies. It is common to have these two distinct memory processes going on at the same time – the intrapersonal memory and the social memory told to the group. This is one of the reasons why we use symbolic objects; they allow different stories to be told, different meanings to coexist, different dialogues to happen, different processes to unfold. Thanks to Maite and other participants I learnt that participants consciously or unconsciously regulate the story they tell around the object as they hear other people's previous testimonies. I also realized that all these stories find a common place to be expressed when feeling safe surrounded by an environment nurtured with empathy and compassion. They can intertwine with each other naturally and without effort or resistance, softly settling in the subconscious of the group as we move through the process. This is one of the reasons why the facilitator starts the round with his own account, modelling for others and helping them to dare to share their testimonies and experiences openly and deeply with the group.

The afternoon session on role analysis (see description in the next section) was quite intense for Maite and for Koldo. While going through the embodied exercise on roles and the conversation that followed, Koldo realized in a very vivid manner – as his body language and tense face showed – that in the past he had occupied the role of the perpetrator before Maite received death threats; yet, as a husband, he also became a victim when she later received threats. He told us that for many years he belonged to that part of society that supported the ideas of the independentist left (*ezker abertzalea*). I remember his disturbed face while he commented that he used to support independence before ETA's violence touched his family and he later became a victim of their violence. This shift of perception and positioning around the conflict and ideology as the years passed by is a phenomenon that happened to many Basques, me included. And because this experience was common to many, the group resonated strongly with it. For me, this was a major breakthrough in terms of collective awareness and healing because by acknowledging publicly about his shift in roles and positioning – a sort of taboo thing to do in Basque society – Koldo did the work for everybody in the room, including his family system and partner, Maite.

There was such a strong and intense energy in the room! My body was heating up and I realized it was difficult for me to stay calm and centred in the midst of a hurricane. Although I was the group facilitator, the whole group experience was strongly resonating in me too. I used this moment of self-awareness to centre myself and jump back into the group process by recalling that these shifts in perception and ideology may happen in long-lasting conflicts. I then asked people to raise hands if Koldo's story resonated with them. Many hands went up and a sort of tranquillity came into the group atmosphere. We were all in the same boat – part of the same conflict community. I also commented that we can inhabit and allow ourselves to move back and forth between roles, because these

are all roles that are present in our society. So, by framing Koldo not as a perpetrator as such, but as someone who inhabited that social role for years before moving to another social role (victim), we can transcend the dual dichotomy between victim and perpetrator and perhaps make it easier for Koldo to accept all the roles in him. Memorialab wants to move away from this dichotomy of 'good/victim' and 'bad/perpetrator', creating space for a more complex and non-judgemental understanding of the many roles people inhabited. We can also embrace a non-dual and complex understanding of the conflict and our (changing) roles in it, accepting we all belong to, affect and are affected by the same 'conflict community' or society.

The next morning, we had a group conversation to check-in how participants were feeling. A troubled Maite thinking of her daughter said, 'How will I tell her what happened to me?' Other participants also brought interesting dilemmas. The group decided to split into smaller groups to explore some of those questions, including one all-female group to help Maite figure out how she could tell her story to her daughter. This move to subgroups was unplanned, but it made sense to all of us, so I moved away from our initial outline and went with it. How we might communicate what happened during those violent years (including our roles) to current and future generations is a recurrent issue in Memorialab. Maite gained new insights and felt supported and motivated to take the step and tell her daughter about her past.

When the last session – the moment for integration – came and everybody was working on their exit objects, I noticed that Maite had left the venue, gone to her bedroom and returned with her suitcase. I wondered what that meant! When her turn came for her to share the exit object, she walked lightly around the room with her suitcase, which happened to have wheels, making it easy to manoeuvre and move around. Then she said: 'I can't change what happened to me, but now at least I don't have to carry all the burden on

my shoulders as in a backpack. Now I can go lighter in life carrying this in a wheeled suitcase.’ People laughed in a soft and lovely way. That was a beautiful and endearing moment for Maite and Koldo, and for the rest of us in the room too. Later on, Maite told us that she had needed some help to process and transcend such an experience; and that she found that support in Memorialab. A couple of years later I met Maite and she acknowledged that she had not yet told her daughter, but that she had really needed and appreciated the support she received at that time. Some changes take time ... and need lots of support and understanding along the way. Social healing in the making.

STRUCTURE AND FLOW OF THE PROCESS

We have tried two formats for Memorialab thus far. In two cases we have used two-day nature retreats, and in six cases we have used one-day urban retreats, including an event with Colombian citizens in Madrid (2018) and another one in Bogotá (2019). The composition of the group varies, from 15 to 25 people, and we use different strategies to convene it: direct invitation to key people by promoting organizations, open invitation through social networks, local activists and public institutions use their local networks to contact people who could be interested due

to their conflict experience and/or willingness to push for coexistence in their hometown. Some of the participants ask whether they can bring a relative as a support; we are happy to include them too, due to the systemic nature of the conflict. Once the list of participants is closed, we send an invitation letter with basic information (purpose, logistics, location, timetable, etc.) asking participants to bring their ‘entry object’ (see below for more details). This way people start reflecting on the topic in advance, as a preparation to the event. I now explain each session.

Session 1: Framing the Theme

The central issues of the exercise are introduced, and statements which have been placed on the floor are announced by the facilitator (see Table 42.2). The exercise invites participants to move physically to those spots which represent different statements within each topic (for example, End of conflict) and towards which they feel more affinity (the conflict ends with ETA, it does not end with ETA, I don’t know). Then we comment as a group about it. We then move to the next set of statements and repeat the process. This movement occurring in the room may also provoke different expressions of feelings, explicit or amplified body language, change of positions when hearing different arguments, change of group atmosphere, etc.

Table 42.2 Set of topics with conflicting statements

<i>Set of Topics and Statements</i>	<i>Set of Topics and Statements</i>
End of the conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflict ends with the end of ETA • The conflict doesn’t end with the end of ETA • I don’t know/I am not clear/Other options 	Privilege and victimhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a victim gives you privileges • Being a victim stigmatizes you • I don’t know/I am not clear/Other options
Rank and victimhood <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is first- and second-class victims ETA terrorism vs. Paramilitary and State terrorism • All victims are the same • I don’t know/I am not clear/Other options 	Change of perceptions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I never changed my mind throughout the conflict years • I changed my position or way of thinking throughout the years • I don’t know/I am not clear/Other options

Session 2: Remembering the Past

At this moment, the guiding question for the group process is ‘What happened?’. A circle of chairs is the container for deep listening to testimonies shared by all people present, although ‘I pass’ is also welcome. Testimonies of the past can come back to life when using a symbolic object brought by participants representing a significant moment lived at that time – what we call the ‘entry object’ (a bunch of broken glasses, a picture of a deceased family member, a stone, a CD, etc.). After the morning break, I explain how the present inner condition of a person affects the way she or he looks at past events; and how by looking at our past with empathy and deep listening helps in reconciling with parts of our past that still disturb us. In the process, feelings are also acknowledged, touched and embraced since many participants resonate with what they are hearing. Somebody may start crying when telling her story and the group stays in silence supporting the person giving her testimony. I may say something to help the group understand what’s happening and to encourage everyone to support everyone else when feeling overwhelmed telling or listening to testimonies.

The circle starts with my own testimony – used to help others to come forward with meaningful events and memories – and then others follow as they feel confident enough to share their story. In my case I comment on witnessing detention of relatives and visiting them in jail later in my early childhood. As we see, facilitators and participants are all part of the same relationship field, the same conflict community.

After every testimony is heard without being interrupted by others, the storyteller places the object in the spiral – for example, a pair of scissors representing a family fracture due to a relative having married a *Guardia Civil* (Spanish police). After placing the object, the person hits a meditation bell in the centre of the spiral, inviting participants

to listen deeply and empathetically to the testimony shared.

The sort of deep listening and silence that emerges in the room can connect the group at a transpersonal level (Essential Reality). At this point, many participants comment on how the conflict has affected them all in similar and different ways, irrespective of the political choices or life decisions they may have taken. I close the session going back to the initial comment about the real possibility we have of changing our relationship with past events when we look at them with other eyes now.

After this emotional and evocative session, we have lunch together. These informal moments around a table, very much appreciated in Basque culture, are very important after such a moving session. Participants set up the table and share the food in a jolly mood, nurturing social cohesion in the group.

Session 3: Exploring Roles in the Conflict

Different exercises help to realize and re-examine the different roles existing during a time of conflict (victim, perpetrator, advocate, witness, beneficiary, etc.). This moment helps participants better understand how these and other roles have affected their way of thinking and behaving with people and groups of the same and/or different ideology/identity. So, at this stage the guiding question is ‘What are you becoming aware of?’. To start with, four chairs are placed in the middle of the circle, each chair having a card naming the role represented by it: victim, perpetrator, advocate and witness. The facilitator starts walking around the chairs, speaking out whatever phrase symbolizing that role – ‘they deserve it’ for a perpetrator, or ‘why me?’ for a victim, and so on. Then participants are asked to walk slowly and individually around the chairs, speaking out whatever voice comes out of their mouth (‘this has nothing to do with me’, ‘ETA, kill



Figure 42.1 Circle of chairs for role analysis

them all!', 'now they will suffer as my family did before', 'better not to say anything', etc.). There is a moment when people stop walking around, partly overwhelmed by the polyphony of voices they hear, and partly because they want or need to rest (elderly people).

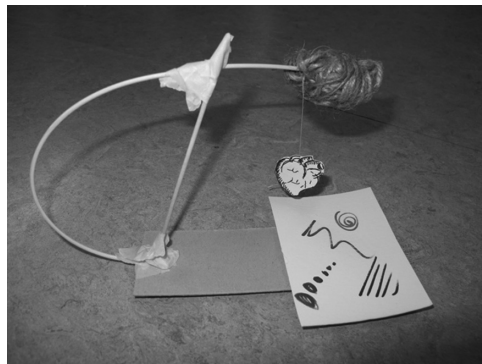
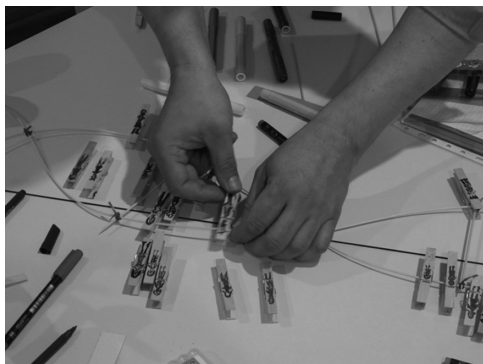
During the group dialogue, new roles emerge and sometimes more chairs are brought in (see Figure 42.1). At this point I comment on the fact that these are roles present in our society (fear to talk, shame, hatred, solidarity, empathy, etc.), and that we tend to consciously or unconsciously inhabit or marginalize some roles and not others depending on our position and experience of the conflict. Some people got stuck for years in one of the roles, and some were able to change and/or shift roles as the context changed.

Session 4: Integrating the Experience

The last session of the process sets the frame for a personal, intimate reflection, wherein each person constructs a new object-symbol of departure – the so-called 'exit object' – comprising and synthesizing main insights of the retreat. To begin with, the facilitator takes the group through a guided meditation, with

eyes closed and doing deep breathing, with each individual visualizing the different stages of the process and focusing on meaningful moments, comments, insights, etc. The meditation ends with the sound of the bell, and people share for a moment in pairs. This exercise allows participants to access deeper and more essential levels of human consciousness; integrating healing insights and experiences at a deeper level, not only rationally, but also emotionally. Then, we enter the final stage of building a new object.

The facilitator introduces the exercise by showing a table where a diverse and rich number of everyday objects and artistic elements are placed (colour stickers, old cables and cords, socks, scissors, dolls, matchboxes, tweezers, cloths, board cards, glue, markers, etc.). They are invited to create their own 'exit object' based on an initial question posed by the facilitator: 'What have you learnt that you could use in the future?' (see Figures 42.2 and 42.3 for examples). This question is related to attitudes, behaviours and belief systems participants could change or consider trying out for promoting coexistence micro-practices and gestures, healing their wounds, or actualizing some aspect of their personality. A 20-plus year-old boy created a crown, with different words written in it, these words



Figures 42.2 and 42.3 Creation of an exit object and a completed exit object

meaning new elements that he should consider bringing into his belief system.

Once all objects are created, we come back to a final circle with all entry objects in the middle. Participants, one by one, comment on their exit object and place it close to their feet when finished. The group atmosphere denotes satisfaction for the work done, relief, joy, lightness, serenity, exhaustion, accomplishment. Quite a different atmosphere from the one we had in the beginning of the retreat (uneasiness, doubt, uncertainty, curiosity, not-knowing, etc.). I reinforce initial premises with a final comment on how we can transform the relationship we have with traumatic and disturbing parts of our past, and how through dialogue and (collective) memory we can transcend fixed identities coming from the past (victim, perpetrator and so on) and update ourselves to the new times and roles, and what they demand from us.

A LEARNING SYNTHESIS: LOOKING BACK AT THE PREMISES

Dialogue as a Restorative and Healing Practice

For many years I mostly practised multi-stakeholder dialogue process facilitation on concrete topics (a policy agreement, a

national agenda, a shared manifesto, a strategic analysis, etc.). Now, looking in hindsight, I feel these types of dialogues aim at producing some sort of concrete and objective agreement or shared vision at Consensus Reality level, but usually do not consider explicitly other levels of reality (Dreaming and Essence). Although I know by experience that they may also produce meaningful changes in ways of relating and thinking in many of the participants, they are not intended to be transformative.²⁰

But, for me, the practice of dialogue in Memorialab added a restorative and healing dimension which is acknowledgement of and coming together with the imagined 'other' after long-lasting conflict. And yes, I felt the Memorialab approach and container as much more transformative than my previous dialogue work. It was designed for that purpose, and the structure and environment were meant to contain those sorts of processes.

In terms of action-oriented reflective processes this is important in that it qualifies the value of dialogue – not just as a way to come together (relational aspect) to share different meanings (cognitive aspect) – but also as a transformative practice where feelings are expressed and acknowledged in a safe space (emotional aspect). I learnt that in contexts such as this one, bringing in the emotional aspects of dialogue builds trust among group members. This allows them to move

beyond initial positions and feelings towards those who they felt were against them in the first place. Let's say that Memorialab was designed and facilitated under the major premise that says, 'If the conflict doesn't transform you, you cannot transform the conflict', which I realized after several Memorialab applications.

We Sometimes Need Structure to Flow

Some elements of the methodology we use put lots of emphasis in structure, as in the circle of testimonies, where there is a clear and structured procedure – entry object, testimony, bell, silent pause – which gives participants a sense that everybody is acknowledged and listened to. And because the structure feels safe, people take a step forward and dare to talk and share, to flow with the group conversation. In terms of flow, the facilitator allows any phenomenon to emerge (a new comment, a body sign, the repetition of an argument, somebody crying, etc.) and follows whatever the dialogue process brings to life (as in the example of the emergent subgroup conversation with Maite). This way of integrating and processing new elements as they arise brings a sense of flow to the conversations and safety to participants; as it did with Maite and her need to explain to her daughter what happened to her.

From a process-oriented facilitation perspective, here are some basic methodological tips to keep the group flow going:

- *Divergence–emergence–convergence – but adapting to whatever emerges.* The group process design considers these three steps. Divergence supports deep democracy by bringing in all voices, experiences and memories to the room (initial body-based thematic mapping, circle of testimonies). Emergence comes on strong during circle of testimonies and role analysis, since new experiences, roles and ways of looking may emerge during the group conversation.

Convergence is achieved through the guided meditation and exit object. This process demands certain conditions, time being one of them. The structure offered by Memorialab allocates time for each of these moments, assuring time and space for emergence. This is important in that building trusting relationships for new realities to emerge, takes time. Otherwise we may fall into the temptation of diverging and converging without emerging. Emergence is about opening space and allowing new ideas and future possibilities to come to life as a result of these new relational interactions among diverse experiences and belief systems.

That said, the facilitator may well outline a process based on his or her interpretation of reality and what (s)he wants to achieve (initial outline). From there, reality will 'tell' the facilitator which path to follow (group process). Reason's (as cited by Heron, 1996: 119) words ring true here: 'We cannot claim valid inquiry unless we can be fully present with the persons and things with whom we inquire.' This may require altering the initial programme or changing methods as we move along. The key is for the facilitator to be in tune and present with what's emerging in the group.

- *Iterative and interactive connections.* In different moments of the group process, participants or the facilitator may link one comment heard in previous stages to new emerging insights or experiences (iteration) coming from other participants (interaction). Iteration and interaction, foundational elements of complexity thinking, support an organically created common narrative and shared understanding of what happened (collective memory), to which all participants can relate and make sense of beyond their initial political positioning, social identity or one-sided opinion.

Roles: A Tough Bone to Chew

The session on roles is the one that activates me the most; there is a lot of room for emergence here because the group conversation is

rich and the topic is animated ('what roles did we inhabit during the conflict, and which ones not? why?'). I have to be very alert and awake to detect the roles and their polarities as they continually emerge. Someone may be inhabiting the role 'demanding restoration of damage perpetrated' ('I wish they acknowledged what they did'), while another person may be speaking from the role of 'denial of acknowledgement' when trying to justify a past action ('we did it to defend ourselves'). The trick here is to put these two polarities in dialogue and help them work through their relationship (using role switch, restorative sentences, etc.) until each role integrates the part of the other, as occurred with Koldo and the roles he inhabited in different moments of the conflict.

As we can see, it is difficult for people to integrate roles/voices that were (un)consciously marginalized, unknown or untold: 'At that time I also used to celebrate some ETA attacks', 'I never told my daughter I was tortured years ago'. I have also found that when working on role analysis in the Basque context, participants find it difficult to move from one role to another – to look at life from that other place, even if only to have a sense of it. I understand this resistance to move the body–mind to another role (belief, opinion, mindset, argument, perception about the other, etc.) is a consequence of past conflict. Conflicts stimulate lots of creativity, but they also reinforce rigid and fixed perceptions and mindsets.

Framing and processing these roles and polarities in the group takes lots of energy but can bring much clarity and great material for healing and restoring relationships. So, we use fixed roles (victim, perpetrator, etc.) to initiate the process and provide some sort of structure to begin with, and then we follow the group dialogue, detecting emergent roles in the conversation (beneficiaries of conflict, fear to talk, pain, forgetting, etc.) and making sense of them. Fixed roles look at reality as a norm, emergent roles allow reality to speak beyond norms.

Letting the Body Talk First ... and Overcoming Initial Resistance

I remember a woman saying, 'this is funny, my body goes here but my mind wants to move there', when applying body-based mapping with statements in Table 42.2. I feel this comment sums up much of what's going on when we apply these methods. By using embodied methods – *senti-cuerpo-pensante* (feeling-body-thinking) – (see Ortiz Aragón and Giles Macedo, 2015; see chapter 29 of this Handbook), we move away from our primary or known identity and ways of knowing and believing, allowing ourselves to access complementary knowledge that wouldn't be available through just cognitive or rational methods. Embodied learning is a great approach for making explicit to ourselves and others what's implicit in our body–mind.

In this sort of context, it is not easy to bring the body into the group process for two major reasons. One, people are not used to it and sometimes they resist it. Two, although I know body-based practices and sentient methods are a great tool, my own fears as facilitator (doubt, fear of failure, not-knowing, effectiveness of approach proposed, etc.) may hinder proper application in certain contexts. Many times, participants approach me to comment on the exercise and share their surprise at how rich the information that comes out of it is. This feedback is very useful for me in terms of overcoming my own doubts and allowing myself to go deeper into the method.

Facilitator's Metaskills and Style: Carving the Stone Endlessly

My facilitation style has evolved throughout the years from a training and inductive style in early years, into a more process-oriented and abductive facilitation style nowadays – noticing first what's trying to unfold and then following whatever emerges and making

sense of it. With Memorialab, I knew I had to develop new metaskills and learn new methodological approaches²¹ if I wanted to meet the challenge.

We need to learn skills and techniques, but these cannot be applied without the proper metaskills of deep democracy. In working with groups or organizations in serious trouble, either with themselves or with other groups, the decisive factor for the facilitator is not the skills or methods she uses but the attitudes she has toward the group. These attitudes and beliefs are what I call metaskills. They generate tools for dealing with any situation. (Mindell, 2000: 59)

In Table 42.3 I present a set of metaskills I find very useful to master in this type of process-oriented facilitation, some of which I

learnt in Memorialab, which helped me evolve again in my facilitation style.

All metaskill development implies continuous inner work and personal development. Even more in this type of work. If I as the facilitator am not open to be transformed by the conflict, I won't be able to transform the conflict. There is no other way, there are no shortcuts. From a Buddhist perspective, developing these metaskills is like carving a stone until uncovering the Buddha within. We just have to keep carving until the best version of our facilitation style comes out. There is no hurry in reaching our final destination; what's important here is just to keep carving the stone, keep burning our wood, keep walking the path. It's an endless process. That's all.

Table 42.3 Metaskills for process-oriented facilitation when working with conflictual roles

<i>Metaskill</i>	<i>Brief description</i>
Presence	Being present means being aware of the outer environment and mindful of one's inner condition at the same time. Presence connects us to our inner source, further develops intuition and brings awareness in terms of helping the facilitator see how her own inner ways of thinking and relating affect her work, and vice versa. Any continuous meditative practice strongly develops this fundamental metaskill (sitting or walking meditation, taichi, yoga, nature walks, solo retreats, etc.).
Surfing	Surfing entails not attaching to predetermined ways of thinking and doing and, instead, following the process as it emerges. We may have an initial idea of what needs to occur or be achieved in our inquiry, but if we become aware and not attached to initial fixed ideas and (pre)judgments, 'reality' will show us the way. 'Following the process' may imply changing the initial outline of a workshop or inquiry as things move in a different direction. Surfing also means being aware of the rhythm and pace of the group process and speeding up or slowing down, stick up or let go, when the group process demands it.
Resilience	Resilience means the capacity of a facilitator to overcome stressful moments that (may) put in danger her performance and presence in the group. We as facilitators need to stay centred, recover from attacks and failures as quickly as possible so to keep supporting all sides that need to be heard.
Creativity	Creativity is about having the adaptive capacity to address different challenges in different or unusual ways, to associate ideas in a non-expected way, to have the audacity of using non-formal or non-hegemonic methods of inquiry, etc. These emergent and non-linear processes demand a lot of creativity on behalf of the facilitator.
Compassion	Compassion is the capacity to see and care for the whole beyond our limited and self-interested ego/identity/self. This is eldership. Seeing and embracing reality as it is and being appreciative of all there is – even the ugly, nasty, messy parts of reality (the shadow). It also means having the attitude and behaviour of suspending judgement, embracing and allowing all emotions and feelings to be expressed, avoiding one-sidedness, supporting people who are struggling or being judged by others, bringing awareness to the group, healing and restoring relationships, bridging distances between parties, etc.
Beginner's mind	Humility, self-critique, listening with curiosity, doubt, inquiry, avoiding pre-assumptions, formulating powerful and meaningful questions and so on help in developing this metaskill. We never know enough, we never stop (un)learning. Just stay alert and open to surprise!

Notes

- 1 This note is a personal reflection as lead facilitator of the Memorialab dialogues. The opinions expressed in this document do not necessarily represent the institutional position of the sponsoring organizations. For more information contact: iretolazae@gmail.com. I want to thank Iratxe Momoito (Gernika Peace Museum), Maria Oianguren and Alex Carrascosa (Gernika Gogoratuz Peace Research Center), Rocío Salazar (Bakeola-EDE Foundation) for all their effort and complicity in bringing Memorialab to life.
- 2 Bohm, D. (1980). *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*. London: Routledge, pp. 7–8.
- 3 ETA stands for *Euskadi Ta Askatasuna* (Basque Country and Freedom, in Basque language, *Euskara*). ETA was a Basque independentist terrorist organization active from 1958 to 2011. It came to life during the dictatorship (1958) as a result of violence being perpetrated by the Spanish State against the Basque population.
- 4 See www.eitb.eus/es/videos/detalle/1221504/documental-iniciativa-glencree-etb2-grencllee/
- 5 See www.bakeola.org/bakeazblai/bakeaz_quees.html
- 6 See <https://thejunction-ni.org/towards-understanding-healing/>
- 7 See www.democraticdialoguenetwork.org
- 8 See <https://museo.com.sv/es/>
- 9 www.healing-memories.org
- 10 Mindell, A. (2002). *Dreaming while Awake*. Massachusetts: Hampton Roads Publishing.
- 11 Scharmer, O. and Kaufer, K. (2013). *Leading from the Emerging Future: From Ego-system to Eco-system Economies*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.
- 12 Mindell, A. (2017). *Conflict: Phases, Forums and Solutions*. Portland, OR: Tao Press.
- 13 Mindell, A. (2011). *Dreambody. The Body's Role in Revealing the Self*, rev. edn. Portland, OR: Deep Democracy Exchange; Weiser Cornell, A. (1996). *The Power of Focusing: A Practical Guide to Emotional Self-healing*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications Ltd.; Rome, D. (2014). *Your Body Knows the Answer: Using your Felt Sense to Solve Problems, Effect Change and Liberate Creativity*. Boston: Shambala Publications.
- 14 Malchiodi, C. (2006). *Art Therapy Sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- 15 Thomas, P. and Pruitt, B. (2007). *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*. New York: UNDP/OAS.
- 16 Whittington, J. (2012). *Systemic Coaching and Constellations*. London: Kogan Page.
- 17 Gobierno Vasco (2016). *VI Encuesta sociolingüística. Comunidad Autónoma de Euskadi*. Vitoria-Gasteiz: Gobierno Vasco/Eusko Jaurlaritza

- 18 The historical territory of the Basques comprises three provinces in France (Lapurdi, Nafarroa Beherea, Zuberoa) and four provinces in Spain (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, Araba, Nafarroa). In Spain, these provinces are divided into two political and administrative units: Autonomous Community of Basque Country (Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia, Araba) and Autonomous Community of Nafarroa (Nafarroa). Memorialab takes place in the Autonomous Community of Basque Country.
- 19 In this section I use imaginary names to protect confidentiality (Maite and Koldo). This section of the text has been approved by the person cited in it (*aka* Maite).
- 20 By a transformative process I understand one that considers and connects all three levels of reality (Consensus, Dreaming, Essence).
- 21 In following years, I mainly focused in receiving extensive training in Process Oriented Psychology (Process Work), Social Presencing Theatre, systemic coaching. I also updated my practical knowledge around Theory U, Non-Violent Communication, Focusing, and Restorative Dialogue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beck, C.J. (1989). *Everyday Zen: Love and Work*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Bohm, D. (1996). *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2001). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*. London: Sage.
- Gendlin, E. (1978). *Focusing*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goodbread, J. (2010). *Befriending Conflict: How to Make Conflict Safer, More Productive, and More Fun*. Portland, OR: Harmonic Processes Inc.
- Greenwood, D. and Levin, M. (2007). *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On Collective Memory*, rev. edn. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition*. London: Sage.
- Hübl, T., (2021). *Healing Collective Trauma. A Process for Integrating Our Intergenerational and Cultural Wounds*. Boulder, CO: Sounds True.
- Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. New York: Doubleday.

- Lapsley, M. (2012). *Redeeming the Past: My Journey from Freedom Fighter to Healer*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Lederach, J.P. (2007). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Levine, P. (2015). *Trauma and Memory: Brain and Body in a Search for a Living Past*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books.
- Maezumi, T. (2002). *Appreciate Your Life: The Essence of Zen Practice*, rev. edn. New York: Shambala.
- Martin Beristain, C. Bilbao G., Ibáñez de Opacua J. (2015). *Ondas en el agua. Un análisis de la experiencia Glen Cree*. Barcelona: Liniazer Edicions
- Meadows, D. (2008). *Thinking in Systems*. Chelsea, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing.
- Mindell, A. (2000). *The Leader as Martial Artist: Techniques and Strategies for Revealing Conflict and Creating Community*, 2nd edn. Portland, OH: Lao Tse Press.
- Mindell, A. (2019). *Your Unique Facilitator Style*. Columbus, OH: Gatekeeper Press.
- O'Hara, P.E. (2014). *Most Intimate: A Zen Approach to Life's Challenges*. Boston: Shambala.
- Ortiz Aragón, A. and Giles Macedo, J.C. (2015). Radical epistemology as caffeine for social change. In H. Bradbury (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage. pp. 681–690.
- Reiss, G. (2018). *Healing History: Breaking the Cycle of Individual and Historical Trauma*. Eugene, OR: Changing Worlds Publications.
- Retolaza, I. (2012). *Theory of Change: A Thinking and Action Approach to Navigate in the Complexity of Social Change*. Guatemala: HIVOS/UNDP.
- Retolaza, I. (2019). The creation of dialogical environments. In *Peace in Progress*, n°36. Barcelona: ICIP.
- Retolaza, I., Oianguren M., Momoito I., Salazar R. (2019). *Memorialab. Encuentros ciudadanos para la construcción social de la memoria*. Gernika: Gernika Gogoratuz.
- Retolaza, I. et al. (2021). *Afaloste. Convivencia al pil pil. Laboratorio gastronómico-social*. Bilbao: Foro de Asociaciones de Educación en Derechos Humanos y por la Paz.
- Rosenberg, M. (2005). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language for Life*. Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press.
- Stacey, R. (2001). *Complex Responsive Processes in Organizations: Learning and Knowledge Creation*. London: Routledge.
- Valverde, C. (2014). *Desenterrar las palabras. Transmisión del trauma de la violencia política del siglo XX en el Estado español*. Barcelona: Icaria Editorial.
- Zehr, H. (2015). *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, rev. edn. New York: Good Books.