Amalurra: A Platform for Individual Empowerment and Social Service

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In this paper, I intend to share the information that I have distilled over the past 20 years, in which I have been working with groups of people in the field of personal development and the awakening of consciousness. As a result of this work, I have inspired the foundation of three intentional communities in Bizkaia (see Figure 1), Granada, and Barcelona, north, south, and east of Spain, respectively. All of them constitute a life project named Amalurra, which in Basque means Mother Earth. Today, there are some 100 of us, including adults and children.

Keywords: intentional community, collective memories, awakening of the sacred feminine, cultural complexes, consciousness, interactive field

Amalurra’s Definition

I consider Amalurra to be an intentional community because it fits within the parameters that define this type of initiatives. Intentional communities are made up of a group of people who have chosen to live together with a common purpose and cooperate to create a lifestyle that reflects their shared values. This kind of communities are based on creating unity out of human diversity, educating people to lead a cooperative life and training them “in the art of relationship: learning to live as an inter related part of a whole system, balancing the needs of others with one’s own” (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985, p. 2).

Figure 1. Leading a councilor circle.
According to these authors, community is an ongoing process of unfoldment of the wholeness of a person on all levels—physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Community is the context for actualizing potentials within the individual and between the individual and others, for connecting with others and experiencing oneness. It is a sense of brother/sisterhood where we recognize ourselves in the “other”. According to them, at times, this experience of unity reveals a taste of the Divine. It can also create a sense of unity consciously “As we get to know each other, revealing more of our deeper selves, trading vulnerabilities, developing trust, keeping our hearts open as we work out conflicts and differences” (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985, p. 10).

In the evolution of this project, the bonds that emerged among us ensured the sustainability of our group, focused on restoring life and on unifying our dissociated aspects, both individually and in our social projection. In my view, the community represented a container or alchemical laboratory that evidenced all the contents that needed to be seen and integrated in favor of a transpersonal development. This process was always contemplated in relationship to the other and the environment, in a horizontal relationship, and to our own self, in a vertical relationship. The basic idea was that, “It’s much easier when there’s a group of people with a similar vision, working for the same goals—the transformation of consciousness on this planet, which starts with each individual” (McLaughlin & Davidson, 1985, p. 21). Therefore, Amalurra represents a contemporary attempt to develop the skills required to live in community and embark on an inner journey.

I also consider Amalurra to be an integral community because its main goal has been to integrate the density of matter with the subtlety of the spirit or, in other words, Heaven with Earth. From the beginning, we committed ourselves to living in contact with our human and our divine parts without excluding either of them. Our attempt has been to live with our opposites at the same time: selfishness and generosity, goodness and evil, individuality and collectivity, or light and shadow. We have tried not to exclude one in favor of the other. The result has implied to be constantly walking on the razor’s edge, focusing on the development of all aspects of our humanity without separating us from the common goal. The experiences of success and failure derived from this work have marked a process of growth and expansion. In this sense, I totally agree with McLaughlin and Davidson (1985), who said “Community probably provides the most profound and intense experience of personal growth that is available anywhere, if a person opens to it” (p. 30).

**The Origins of Amalurra**

This adventure began with the impulse of awakening to the sacred feminine aspect. In the 1990s, I called my first circles of women (see Figure 2) with a desire to liberate our true identity, in resonance with a yearning of our Basque people, projected on political and social platforms. Back then, we projected that desire on a process of inner search.

Group consciousness is contained within the framework of the feminine. That is why, in the beginning, we focused on recovering the bond with this part of ourselves in order to become connected to a global framework that welcomes every being alike. We sought our link with the Mother archetype, with the Goddess, represented by Mother Earth. To me, this unitary conception is the origin of the bond of fraternity that exists between human beings.

The first steps of Amalurra were directed at awakening to the feminine consciousness, which is a transformative energy capable of containing and connecting matter with the soul through the fire of love. The goal was to come closer to the balance between the masculine and the feminine. The feminine principle of creativity embodies a force that impels every ascending movement, from the depth to the top and then back into the Earth. The feminine is the aspect that connects Earth and Heaven, symbolizing the opposites. It also makes every daily act sacred by endowing it with will, sense, and feeling.
Awakening to feminine consciousness means awakening to what is natural in all of us: Our creative essence that completes and brings us together. Awakening to the feminine implies awakening to our sentient capacity that connects us with the vulnerability arising through feeling. The capacity to feel is equivalent to the capacity to experience both pain and pleasure. We often tend to protect ourselves from any situation that takes us near to pain or any space within us that is contracted by feelings like shame, anger, or insecurity, among others. However, according to my experience, there is no pleasure without pain and no love without first having experienced a broken heart.

I myself have confirmed that we become united to the other to the extent that we consciously open up to feeling our vulnerability, which unites what is contracted or separated within us; that is, the opposite that reflects our separation from the other. In fact, feeling the pain heals the wound, fosters the integration of what is separated, and provides us with a new consciousness in which we include the other. This is how we engage in soul-making, or community-making, resonating with the field of unitary consciousness in which we are all part of a larger body. In this adventure, the other gives us the possibility of becoming aware of our separated or dissociated contents. As we integrate them, the inner community takes shape, and the external community establishes itself as a reflection of our inner state, as Palmer (1998) so accurately expressed,

Community cannot take root in a divided life. Long before community assumes external shape and form, it must be present as seed in the undivided self: Only as we are in communion with ourselves can we find community with others. Community is an outward and visible sign of an inward and invisible grace, the flowing of personal identity and integrity into the world of relationships (Palmer, 1998, p. 92).

Entering vulnerable spaces unblocks us, allowing the light to penetrate and take root, promoting an expansion of consciousness that leads to a cultural transformation. In Amalurra, we have experienced that a conscious approach to the community creates an intensity that makes it possible to become aware of dissociated
or rejected aspects in order to delve into them and retrieve the feeling they contain. For me, this integrating capacity of feeling is what I call the sacred feminine aspect, with which I committed myself 20 years ago, when I began to travel this way back home. From an indigenous point of view, this process entails retrieving the sacred bond with our Mother Earth. Therefore, Amalurra is the result of coming closer to the dark, to the passive, to the dense, to the feminine, and to vulnerability, qualities that represent the archetype of the Earth and that both men and women have often denied in ourselves.

After a while, I expanded this work to men, including them as the archetypes of the father, husband, brother, and all the aspects represented by the masculine. I understood that, only if we embraced the feminine and the masculine within each of us the fight between the opposites, in which we were immersed, would reach an end. Then, it would be possible to include them as complements, in order to give birth to a new consciousness in the service of life. The masculine would no longer fear the feminine in it and the feminine would no longer fear its own femininity and its attributes, such as unity and the collectivity.

Gradually, we consolidated as a group and, later, people with similar interests joined us. As we shared this experience and communicated with greater transparency, we strengthened our inner bonds with each other. As a natural result, it aroused in us a yearning that dwells within every human being: living in community. In the beginning, we engaged in this initiative with all our baggage, mainly emotional, in order to prepare the ground for the new consciousness on the base of all our contents, by transforming them and doing without the inertia that limited us. In this way, we attempted to burn the old bias and reconnect with the essence of the tradition of the earth; that is, the sense of community or of belonging, with the intention of recovering the wisdom of our ancestors. Thus, we attempted to fertilize the ground to welcome a consciousness oriented to collective values and to being in the service of life.

Our Relation to Mother Earth

When we arrived at the place where we materialized the first intentional community Amalurra in the Basque country, the land was in a complete state of abandonment. The brambles covered it all, the waters were stagnant, and extensive pine and eucalyptus forests had replaced the native trees of the valley. The buildings of the previous seminary of the German congregation of the Sacred Family were in ruins.

Our personal process of introspection was aimed at engaging in a dialogue with the land. Therefore, it began to speak to us and thus we established a relationship with it. The way in which this portion of land had been divested of its indigenous trees evidenced our lack of love for the Earth. In our wish to approach our Mother, we felt the need to heal that separation and become linked to her again.

We began to prepare the plot of land, and be aware that nature was a mirror that reflected our inner process. We made the water flow, removed the brambles, and enriched the clayey soil, making it more permeable. We were determined to recover the native vegetation, planting thousands of oak trees in an attempt to rescue the ancestral wisdom that the land had kept inside it after the ancestral and centennial trees disappeared. Our aim was to include the legacy of our ancestors and retrieve our relationship with them. The connection with the ancestral knowledge was immediate thanks to this intention and our actions. While we were doing this work, the land enveloped us in an intense feeling of love, as if our bonds with the Earth and the other quenched the need that we all have of being loved.

The water of the Earth, which is like the blood in our veins, is related to the flow of our emotions. The stagnant waters of the property reflected our contained emotions and, as we let them flow, we could also channel the water. Although it filters underground, water obeys only one direction: going to the ocean. If it flows freely, water can reach its destination and re-experience itself in that need of encounter, just like us, who
become one when we unite to something larger.

The stones and rocks, which are the manifestation of the physical part of the Earth, are not inert. They are alive and, in Amalurra, they also reflected our inner stones and how, sometimes, carrying them limited us. We took a major turn in our life by listening to the psyche expressing itself through the land. It was like looking again at our kin, as if we had recovered our connection and were listening to our ancestors.

Preparing the land and replacing what was missing was a conscious act. When we planted the trees, pulled the brambles out, ploughed the land so that it could breathe, and channeled the water, we compensated for the abandonment of that piece of land in a conscious act of restoring what already was beautiful. In this way, we became one with it. This symbiosis expressed itself in the love that everyone can breathe in Amalurra today. This love does not come from our hearts, not even from the Earth. It is the product of this union in which all of us became one. That was a process of pure creation that emerged out of the love that flows from Mother Earth.

The community started taking shape at the same time that we participated in the natural process of life: work, family, and friends. Some of us got married; others engaged in a relationship; and many had children who have grown up in an atmosphere of fraternity, linked to a larger body than their own family: a sort of family of families. Individual apartments that preserve family privacy coexist with common outdoor spaces and a hotel resort. This has been the scenario to project personal, family, and social cohesion, expressed in values such as solidarity, unity, a sense of belonging, and, above all, in the warm welcome to every person that comes to Amalurra.

Amalurra is the result of going beyond what separated us from our transpersonal experience of feeling united. Intuitively, we approached the Earth in a descent toward our roots through our complexes, which we projected on the community. In turn, it acted as a vessel to contain our projections and achieve the necessary transformation in order to fertilize the ground that would take in the seed of the community, which we so carefully conceived. And if only for short periods of time, our community experience has allowed us to feel complete, one with the other, erasing the painful memory of being separated.

The Encounter With the Past

Living in community is something intrinsic to human beings. Authors like the poet and mystic Sufi Rumi emphasized our need of a community of specific souls that travel so as not to get lost in the desert (Wikman, 2004, p. xxiv). To me, living in community provides the experience of a feeling of belonging to something larger than oneself. At the same time, it also entails a process of detachment. Along these years, I have confirmed that living in community contributes, among other things, to healing our wounds and traumas, to strengthening our gifts, to finding our place in society, understood as a bigger framework for interaction, and to exercising a more effective responsibility in life. But, above all, living in community offers us the opportunity of accepting the other as a mirror that reflects the parts that we have rejected in ourselves and of becoming aware of our true identity. In fact, we know ourselves through echo that the voices of those who surround us produce in us.

Edinger (1984) mentioned that for Jung,

Man’s task is to become conscious of the contents that press upward from the unconscious. Neither should he persist in his unconsciousness not remain identical with the unconscious elements of his being, thus evading his destiny, which is to create more and more consciousness. Just as the unconscious affects our, so the increase in our consciousness affects the unconscious. (p. 16)

Although I was not yet familiar with the work of this great psychologist, Jung’s words reflect one of the objectives with which I started the intentional community Amalurra: making conscious the unconscious so that
we could embrace our dark side or “shadow”, which Jung (1983) defined as the negative side of the personality, the sum of all the qualities that we reject and want to hide and which we tend to project on the other (p. 87).

In this sense, I see the community as a perfect platform to promote the encounter with one’s self through the other. According to my own experience, the relationship with the other becomes a projection of oneself on the other person. The interaction that arises in this contact gives the opportunity of becoming aware of our excluded aspects and work toward acceptance. As a result, we are more complete and empowered of who we really are. Taking back our projections allows to see the real other, “As soon as the projection is really withdrawn a sort of peace establishes itself—one becomes quiet and can look at the thing from an objective angle” (Von Franz, 1981, p. 222).

According to Avens (1984), James Hillman, a well-known depth psychologist who recently died, said that any change that takes place in the human psyche resonates with a change in the psyche of the world, understanding psyche as the totality of the psychological processes, both conscious and unconscious (p. 46). Therefore, bearing in mind that individual achievements affect the collective field to which we are related through the historical and cultural unconscious of the people to which we belong, Amalurra has also aimed at being a social contribution for our respective peoples, Basque, Andalusian, and Catalonian, from the individual and collective experience of its members. My attempt has focused on fostering collective healing through our individual healing process.

In this process, it was essential to open up to the vulnerability that emerged as we deepened in our relationships and faced the situations that arose in our community life. I paid especial attention to those circumstances that we tended to exclude out of their connection to past experiences that had not been integrated for their painful or traumatic content. Some time later, I realized that these situations resonated with historical events consigned to oblivion.

The inner work carried out in this community over the last 20 years has not only been a movement of personal individuation, that is, the development of the individual personality. It has also represented a group movement that has allowed us to penetrate into our own inner world. As a result, we have awoken to the collective memories of a past time that were pulsating toward our consciousness through our current circumstances.

This awakening has been possible thanks to a conscious grieving process focused on integrating the feelings that got buried in the past, creating separation, and thus, guilt and numbness. The present has been a suitable platform because including the events that it brings helps to heal the past and to experience ourselves as more complete individuals.

When, as a group, we decided to descend to our personal unconscious with a collective projection, we were taken by the interactive field, a powerful energy field created when a group of people come together with the same intention, achieving a degree of consistency and synchronization. This field has a higher level of order, wisdom, and creativity. The interactive field possesses a superior intelligence, always present, that guides and envelops us. In opinion of Schwartz-Salant (1985), this space has its own dynamics, which is separate from and independent of the individuals and is situated between the field of the collective unconscious and the realm of subjectivity while including them both. Schwartz-Salant (1985) added, “The discovery of these dynamics is only possible by experiencing them through the individual and combined subjectivities of both people” (p. 2).

This process gave us the opportunity to heal the wounds in the collective unconscious, hidden under apparent cultural complexes that resonate with individual complexes, which Stein (2006) defined as “a festering emotional wound, often mostly unconscious, that has a life of its own. It harbors resentments, hurts, and angry and hurtful intentions, and it bubbles to the surface in spontaneous and often surprising ways” (p.
Cultural complexes, in turn, are based on repetitive historical group experiences, rooted in the cultural unconscious of a group. At the appropriate moment, these latent complexes can be activated in the cultural unconscious and consolidated in the collective psyche of the group and the individual (Singer, 2004, p. 6).

In that regard, I decided to move toward a conscious and responsible encounter with the past, in order to awaken our individual memories, linked to cultural traumatic ones that were affecting our daily lives through the repetition of patterns associated to denied or excluded aspects. My intention was to deepen in a group process aimed at penetrating in our historical memory and our cultural losses. The foundation for this attempt was the fact that the contents of the each individual’s current memories are a vehicle that can take us back to the origin of a cultural historical trauma. Generally, this kind of trauma is directly related to a wound that is deeply rooted in the collective memory and is used to build a social group’s identity.

In the case of Amalurra, I have noticed that the collective identity of the three communities is linked to the historical background of their respective peoples. The unconscious reason that encouraged the formation of each community was the need to awaken their cultural memories, excluded and engrained in their traumatic past in order to retrieve their true cultural identity. Therefore, another relevant objective of Amalurra has been the retrieval of traumatic memories in favor of personal and collective healing. The medium for this was the activation of a mechanism that entails awakening to the sacred feminine aspect with the intention of reintegrating the damaged parts of the soul.

At the beginning of our experience in the community of the Basque country, we totally committed with creating consciousness. To do this, it was essential to take responsibility for the effects of our actions. At different moments in our journey, we have been defamed and accused of being a cult. The identification of some members of the community with these accusations brought a state of personal doubt. This caused a general weakening and the disconnection from the spirit of the project or the inner image that we all shared and that had inspired us to experience our community aspiration.

The ones who most resonated with the external accusations left the community and started a defamation campaign against me and Amalurra. Their voices evidenced deeply dissociated contents belonging to all the members of the community. I interpreted this fact as a confirmation of our relationship to the collective unconscious out of our personal emotions in resonance with something that I would later discover. From then on, I encouraged an introspective process whose goal was to become aware of our resistance to assume the content of the defamation campaign due to those parts that were dissociated and that, to this day, remain so.

The defamation campaign has contributed to becoming aware of all our excluded and separated parts and to opening a container to own the negative aspects that belonged to each one of us as part of our personality rather than as aspects of our shadow. On the other hand, I understood that the inner work carried out had borne its fruit. One of the intentions contained in the foundation and development of Amalurra had been fulfilled: revealing the aspects that needed to be healed in favor of integration. Everything in conflict within the individual and collective psyche had emerged to the surface for us to notice and assume.

As I have already mentioned, the defamation campaign showed our connection to the collective unconscious out of our group resonance with a collective trauma of the Basque people. This fact was corroborated by the research that I have conducted as part of my doctoral program. In 1610, more than 300 women were arrested, tortured, and killed by the inquisition accused of witchcraft. These women of knowledge were connected to the wisdom of the earth and worked in the service of the community. According to one of the findings of my research, some resonated with the accusing voices and doubted their own legacy. Others used their knowledge to their own benefit, which out of a deep feeling of unconscious guilt, promoted a weakening process, in the face of a much stronger Inquisition.
I facilitated a process with the purpose of bringing to consciousness the unconscious memories, thus contributing to freeing both the body and the soul. To do this, it was necessary to delve into the cultural complex of the Basque country, which arises from having denied the pain caused by traumatic events and our difficulty to mourn our cultural loss. This loss led us to assume a subtle stance of victimhood from which we defend with a superiority complex that hides our indignity for having allowed others to steal part of our ancestors’ legacy. For example, during the fierce witch-hunt, a sector of the population and the clergy were involved in it.

The community acted as an alchemical vessel, propitiating the constellation of fragments of the past history of our people. The information contained in them found a resonance in the lives of some women of Amalurra as archetypes of a memory excluded because of its painful content. At the level of our community, I corroborated our group’s resonance with the past events and the trial of the “witches” of Zugarramurdi. Somehow, that explained the intense defamation that the community and myself were constellating at the time.

The research also showed that, as a community, we were connected to another traumatic event: the bombing of Gernika, my hometown, and symbol of the Basque soul. On Monday, April 26, 1937, a busy market day, the city became the experimental site of the second aerial bombardment during the Spanish civil war directed specifically against Basque civilians. The result was a large number of victims and the physical destruction of the center of the city. Much has been written about this fact, and there are authors that confirm my own interpretation of the event. Gernika was not selected as the target of the attack for military reasons, but because of its deep symbolic significance as a sacred and iconic place in Basque culture (Raento & Watson, 2000, p. 715).

The bombing represented a traumatic injury and a severe blow, not only materially, but also to the history, archetype, and essence of the Basque people, whose archetype contains the values of dignity and sovereignty. The Basque country possesses a deep connection to Mother Earth and the elements. It also has a profound sense of the sacred. After the attack, its archetype weakened and the qualities that characterized it, such as honesty, connection, and authenticity became inactive. Researcher Kai Erikson (2008) expressed that collective trauma is a heavy blow to the tissues of social life, creating a “gradual realization that the community no longer exists as an effective source of support and that an important part of the self has disappeared” (as cited in Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 107). In the case of the Basque country, we felt defeated and deprived of our identity. Although we refused to accept this fact, we were treated as if belonging to an inferior category. The Basque country was denied the right to speak our own language and to express many of our traditions.

For the Basque people, it was very difficult to assume this defeat, which aroused a large shadow that fostered a defensive response, especially from a broad sector of society. In our case, this response further activated the cultural shadow because the recourse to violence, in the face of our inability to express the pain caused by the defeat, hampered the possibility of accessing our sorrow. In fact, after 75 years, we still find it very painful to integrate these traumatic events.

Going back to Amalurra, five years after the traumatic split and the media campaign against the community project, focused especially on me, I understand this campaign as the re-traumatization of a historic past period in the present setting of our community. Our need to become aware of the difficulty to mourn the memory of that loss with which we resonate within the collective field became evident. Engaging in that process would enable us to honor the fate of our ancestors, abandoning an attitude of struggle that reflects our lack of acceptance toward such a destiny. This experience connected us with the necessary vulnerability to transform toughness into firmness and emerge from the ashes, having recovered some memories that completed us (see Figure 3). This process also facilitated following our course much freer from the burden of the past.
Conclusion

The process that the I have facilitated in the community is the result of a deep inner work known as anamnesis, “A psychoanalytic term that refers to a process of reflecting on and emotionally working through one’s relationship to past events with another” (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 88). However, this course of action is not finished yet for all the members of the community because, at present, there are still emergent aspects that are completing the understanding and analysis of the events. Taking responsibility for them would avoid being drawn by the collective unconscious and would bring awareness in favor of personal individuation and the maturity of the group.

Engaging in a practice of inner work in the community with the intention and the conscious commitment of recuperating the contents that we had rejected has allowed us to recover both individual and collective memories that, while unconscious, were making us repeat the past in our daily lives. In turn, retrieving those memories has contributed to our empowerment because with them we have also rescued parts of ourselves as well as our lost identity.

None of this would have been possible without the interaction with the other and without a work focused on taking responsibility for our share in this process, that is, our own shadow. At the social level, I suspect that the work carried out within the framework of this intentional community, as in many other social platforms, has subtly contributed to the change that is taking place in the Basque people. It has been interesting to compare the synchrony with the turn experienced by this society, in which I have observed less polarized attitudes and a more conscious intention of taking responsibility. I think that our experience supports the increasingly widespread thesis that the transformation of a group field also affects its culture. Taking into account all of the above, I can say that the work carried out in this community at such a deep level has become an opportunity for transformation, healing, and empowerment.

I would like to finish with the words of Watkins and Shulman (2008), which so accurately illustrate Amalurra’s intention,

Here is a program for an ongoing revolution, where the central goal is not a fixed and future utopia known
in advance, for which we have to sacrifice in the present, but rather a continuing practice of dialogue and restoration with the goal of building more humane communities (p. 25).

References