



**LEADERS  
EMERGING FROM  
COLLECTIVE TRAUMA**

**Journeys of  
Transgenerational Healing**

Edited by

**Lara A. Tcholakian  
Erik van de Loo**



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The cover painting, created in 1993 (no. 9640), is by Dominican priest and painter **Kim En Joong** (Korea, b. 1940), and was personally chosen by him for this book. Having endured the collective trauma of the Japanese occupation and the Korean War, his art results from a response to suffering and a search for transcendence. As he states: “*My art aims to be an inner liberation, a passage from dark towards light.*”

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We wish to express our deepest love and compassion to all those who have suffered, and who continue to carry the weight of past and present collective traumas. May your courage remind us that even in the shadow of collective trauma, the echoes of suffering can also become the seeds of wisdom and hope for humanity.

This book bears the signature of all our ancestors who have experienced horrible collective traumas.

*Lara and Erik*

# About the editors and contributing authors

## Editors

**Lara A. Tcholakian**, PhD, is a Canadian-Armenian executive and founding partner of Elevate, a social enterprise that advances leadership, systemic transformation, and peace-positive business. She is also a professor at Matena's School of Leadership and Professional Development (Armenia). She teaches, publishes, and conducts research on topics that intersect with leadership, collective traumas, systems psychodynamic approaches to leadership, and mindfulness. For more than twenty-five years, she held leadership positions in international non-governmental organisations and the corporate sector, primarily in the areas of socio-economic project development, capacity building, gender rights, organisational development, and HR, and has lived and worked in Canada, France, Peru, Sri Lanka, and Armenia. A published scholar and international speaker, she holds a doctorate in organisational behaviour from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam's School of Business and Economics, a master's degree in socio-economic development from Université Paris 1—Panthéon-Sorbonne, an executive master's degree in consulting and coaching for change from INSEAD, and a bachelor's degree from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.

**Erik van de Loo**, PhD in social sciences, Leiden University, is a psychoanalyst and affiliate professor of organisational behaviour at INSEAD (Europe Campus, Fontainebleau), where he has been the co-director of the executive master's in change programme since 2001. Previously, he had professorships at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, TIAS-Tilburg University (the Netherlands), and UniRazak University (Malaysia). He is a fellow of Phyleon, a leadership and governance firm in Amsterdam. He is a member of the International Psychoanalytical Association, the Dutch Psychoanalytic Society, and the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations. The focus of his research is on unconscious dynamics in leaders and boards.

### Contributing authors

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**Aydin Ilhan** is a seasoned Brazilian entrepreneur with more than two decades of expertise in business strategy, internationalisation, and finance, working in culturally diverse and complex environments. An economist by training, Aydin specialises in applying strategic insights to businesses worldwide, spearheading more than 100 projects

across various countries. Notable among these are Brazil, Mexico, the US, Singapore, China, Myanmar, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand. Armed with degrees in economics, market intelligence, and a master's in change, Aydin is not only a practitioner but also a trainer in these fields. His passion for turning ideas into global success stories prompted a move to Singapore in 2012, where he focused on developing businesses between Asia and South America. In 2021, Aydin relocated to Europe with his family, expanding his reach and impact. He continues developing businesses and advancing his consulting practice there, acting as a bridge between the Americas, Europe, and Asia, blending a global perspective with invaluable local insights.

**Natasha Kewene-Hite** was born in Wellington, New Zealand, and raised in Eugene, Oregon, in the US. Natasha has spent the past sixteen years with her husband, Paul, raising their family across Ireland, France, Singapore, and New Zealand. She has a passion for language, and studied French and Spanish in school. She has a BSc in family sciences from Brigham Young University in Utah (US) and a master's in change from INSEAD. Now back in the US, she recently completed an MSc in mental health counselling from the University of Massachusetts, Boston and is working as a psychotherapist in the Boston area. She is passionate about people, mental health, and personal and relational well-being.

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**Alvin Lloyd Peter** is the founder of The Wisdom of Nature, an advisory business focused on executive leadership, change, and

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**Japjit Sobti's** professional journey is a testament to resilience, adaptability, and a deep-rooted commitment to personal growth and societal impact. Raised in a liberal Sikh household in Delhi, India, Japjit faced early challenges, including the loss of his father at the age of one. After completing his education at a boarding school in Dalhousie, Himachal Pradesh, India, Japjit embarked on a diverse career path from the merchant navy to corporate leadership. Japjit's journey led him to explore new horizons and opportunities, ultimately leading to a successful career in corporate leadership and as a company president. Currently residing in the Maldives, Japjit has embarked on a new endeavour to pioneer hydroponic farming for food security, driven by a relentless quest for relevance and significance in addressing pressing global challenges. Beyond his professional pursuits, Japjit is a devoted "fur parent" and a supportive spouse, prioritising family bonds and fostering an environment of tolerance and encouragement.

**Suraimy (Sue) Stephens** is a Curaçao-born, Netherlands-raised global citizen based in Singapore, with more than seventeen years of industry expertise in diverse leadership roles across Europe and Asia. Currently,

Sue serves as the head of Meta's Mid-Market Australia & New Zealand business growth team, helping small and medium-sized businesses scale through digital innovation to amplify their impact on growing their business. Her contributions to ethnic minority talent and accomplishments in her career led to her recognition as one of the *Financial Times*' Top 30 Ethnic Minority Leaders in 2017 and the Next 50 MT/Sprout Leadership list in the Netherlands in 2024. Rooted in her humble beginnings, Sue's unwavering commitment to workplace inclusion and equal opportunity led her to research how slavery shaped leadership values for female Afro-Caribbean leaders from Curaçao. Sue holds a bachelor's degree from Inholland University Rotterdam and an executive master's degree from INSEAD. She lives in Singapore with her husband and their four-year-old daughter. Outside her professional life, Sue enjoys being in nature, dancing salsa, strength training, practising mindfulness, and writing.

**Dianne Yun** is a seasoned HR professional with more than two decades of experience working in diverse global environments. Her expertise lies in strategic leadership in managing human capital, leadership development, coaching, and change management. As a trusted advisor to senior leaders, Dianne applies systems psychodynamics theories and integrates trauma-informed leadership perspectives into organisational practices to foster personal and professional growth for leaders in today's rapidly evolving global landscape and ultimately drive organisational growth. Dianne has dedicated her research to exploring the transformative power of art in healing and identity formation. Her insights into the inner dialogues of global leaders, particularly those of Korean descent, stem from her extensive research and first-hand experiences working closely with leaders from various cultural backgrounds. Dianne's unique perspective as both a practitioner and a researcher allows her to shed light on the complexities of navigating identity globally and the impact of historical trauma on leadership effectiveness. Through her writing, she inspires leaders to embrace their heritage, reclaim their voices, and harness the power of healing for themselves and their organisations.

# Introduction

**E**very leader carries invisible stories: some inherited, some lived. These stories reside in our decisions, patterns, and instincts, often without our awareness. They are shaped by the histories of our families, the traumas of our communities, and the wounds of our societies. Yet, it is from these very stories that we emerge, sometimes fractured, sometimes resilient, but always marked. They are not only the burdens we bear but also the raw material for shaping our meaning, identity, and purpose as leaders. Leadership is therefore more than strategy or vision. It involves the courage to confront these hidden histories, face their truths, and let them transform us into more whole, compassionate, and human-centred leaders.

## The genesis of this book

The seed for this book was planted when two strands of inquiry came together: Lara's extensive research on the impact of collective traumas on leaders and executives, and Erik's comprehensive work on leadership and unconscious dynamics. From the outset, our conversations revealed how deeply personal histories, collective memories, and societal wounds continue to shape leadership today, often in ways leaders themselves may not recognise. This realisation compelled us

to gather voices from diverse contexts, to explore not only the burden of collective trauma but also the potential for healing, resilience, and renewal in leadership practice.

As an executive leader and a third-generation descendant of the Armenian Genocide, Lara's personal curiosity about her own experiences—and those of leaders in general—sparked a deeper inquiry into how global traumas influence not only our identities but also our behaviours and roles as professionals.

Rather than examining the pathological aspects of collective trauma, such as PTSD—topics well-covered by qualified scholars and clinicians—her research focused on successful leaders and executives who had thrived or led prosperous lives despite sharing a common experience: they were all survivors or descendants of collective trauma. This book does not ask how trauma breaks leaders, but how facing inherited wounds can transform them into more compassionate, visionary, and service-oriented leaders. By shifting the focus from pathology to possibility, we explore how engaging with our deepest histories can cultivate leadership grounded in empathy, expressed through service, committed to uplifting others, and fostering renewal in organisations and communities alike.

This area of interest arose from her desire to gain a deeper understanding of leadership and leader development. While numerous experts have explored leadership styles that promote more effective or efficient organisations—such as authentic, servant, transformational, charismatic, adaptive, and ethical leadership—Lara has always been concerned with how our most profound memories, upbringing, conditioning, and histories shape the leaders we become and the behaviours we exhibit. Through her academic and executive careers, she discovered that the first key to addressing and healing our wounds lies in cultivating consciousness of our conditioning and our inherited traumas, notably, turning our gaze inward with awareness. From this inner work emerges not only our own healing but also an elevated leadership journey, one that unfolds with greater authenticity, emotional intelligence, meaning, and compassion for others.

At the time, Erik was pursuing his work on leadership, systems, psychodynamics, and unconscious processes in both clinical and academic settings. As a psychoanalyst, he had worked for many years

with first, second, and third generation victims of collective trauma. As a professor at a global business school, he identified how collective trauma plays a significant role in family history worldwide.

When our paths converged, the idea of co-editing this book was ignited. From that moment on, our combined expertise and shared passion for the subject matter shaped the final work you hold in your hands today. Together, we merged our perspectives and insights to create something greater than the sum of its parts. We both felt the need to supplement the “leadership equation” and incorporate the fragmented world in which we were born. There is much more to leadership than merely learning how to be a good one; effective leadership requires understanding the world in which we grew up, as well as the world in which our parents and grandparents grew up. Good leaders understand and empathise with the historical elements of their life imprints and their emotional or behavioural make-up. To achieve this, leaders or executives need to become more reflective and reflexive about their roles as leaders. Through a personal process of remembering, acknowledging, working through, and repair work, we attempt to demonstrate how leaders and executives can undertake a journey of embodiment and wholeness that can better support their personal and professional lives.

Each chapter is authored by a leader or executive who shares their personal experiences of collective trauma. We were fortunate that every contributing author naturally aligned with our vision, united in solidarity with our aim. Their diverse backgrounds—spanning various countries, ethnicities, and cultures—ensured the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Each of them had engaged with historical consciousness within their respective educational programmes, which sparked their own journeys of self-exploration and discovery. As scholars with extensive research and experience, we were able to provide a comprehensive context for the topic, inspiring something profoundly meaningful within each of them.

In their own words, the authors describe how they have discovered the birthplace of their conditioning and how they were able to reconnect with significant aspects of their collective traumas (i.e. war, conflicts, genocide, large-scale calamities such as blasts or natural disasters), some of which are contemporary collective traumas while others are historical. The authors of this book outline the journeys they have undertaken to

reflect on their connection with these traumas, how they conduct repair work, and for some, identify the mechanisms involved in their transformation, healing, and self-awareness. By unearthing these unremembered, unsaid, or unthought collective trauma experiences, and by engaging in a process of historical consciousness, each author illustrates how they transform their inherited collective traumas for the greater good, integrate their understanding or knowledge, and strive to lead more meaningful professional and personal lives.

The authors of this book devoted considerable time and energy to sharing their stories, each offering a unique approach to healing. These narratives created space to honour the sadness, injustice, and pain associated with past ancestral traumas while also embracing a profound sense of hope. Through this, we learned that true and lasting integration with our stories begins by identifying the wounds we bear or inherit, confronting them, acknowledging their existence, and ultimately learning to heal. While we may never fully mend our wounds or achieve complete healing in our lifetime, we *can* embark on a meaningful journey of self-exploration and self-work.

Exploring our personal histories was no easy task. It required courage, encouragement, and a genuine commitment to self-reflection and self-awareness. For this reason, this book does not adhere to typical leadership and management frameworks. Instead, it offers insight into the essential processes of reflection, reflexivity, and awareness, particularly in the context of addressing collective traumas. It examines how leaders can connect with their past to create meaning, fostering deeper conversations, more productive dialogues, and a stronger, more embodied sense of healing and repair, both for themselves and in their relationships with others. This process is complex and messy, as it requires navigating the intricate interactions within ourselves and with others. It is about understanding our identities, not only in relation to those around us but also in connection to our collective history. It involves reflecting on both our own lived experiences and those of our ancestors.

This book was created as both a sense-making process and a symbol of the healing and repair work that we, as leaders and professionals, can undertake. It was also inspired by the urgent need for a more compassionate global community founded on solidarity, empathy, and collaboration. Our hope is to play a small yet meaningful role in encouraging

leaders, whether national, organisational, or institutional, to become valuable agents of change and compassion.

### Why now?

At the time of writing this book, our world continues to face precarious times. The world order, as we once knew it, no longer appears relevant, as we find ourselves in a new era of war and hostile realities. In moments like these, leadership becomes more than a skill; it becomes a moral responsibility to navigate pain with courage and to transform it into a source of healing others.

The world is currently facing an immense wave of collective traumas that reverberate across the globe, deeply impacting countless lives. In the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, we continue to witness the enduring effects of these traumas—escalating aggression, heightened anxiety, and the unravelling of people’s lives and livelihoods. Armed conflicts, civil unrest, and political instability further perpetuate a cycle of loss, displacement, and profound suffering, leaving communities in urgent need of healing and peace. The climate crisis, too, casts a long shadow, ravaging communities and threatening their very survival, destabilising their access to food, security, and well-being. The persistence of social injustice and inequality continues to marginalise the most vulnerable, eroding the very fabric of human dignity and unity. Forced displacement, whether from conflict, persecution, or disaster, tears families apart and exposes individuals to unimaginable violence and exploitation. In the face of these compounded hardships, the mental health crisis has soared, with trauma-induced stress, anxiety, and depression affecting more lives than ever before.

Furthermore, in today’s hyperconnected world, we no longer observe collective traumas from afar. They unfold in real time, flashing across our screens. Social media make sure that every war, injustice, and disaster becomes part of our daily lives, blurring the line between victim and witness. What happens to others inevitably affects us. In this constant exposure, we not only see the traumas of others; we start to carry them, internalising their burden in ways that influence our feelings, decisions, and identities. We cannot afford to be indifferent because these traumas are not abstract; they shape how we feel, relate, and lead. That’s why it’s

more important than ever to understand how collective traumas affect us all, whether we experience them at first hand or absorb them as part of our shared human story.

Collective traumas are passed down through generations, and true healing cannot occur in society until we fully acknowledge the deep-seated traumas that shape our lives. Unresolved traumas are carried forward, often unconsciously, from one generation to the next. If we avoid confronting our past experiences and wounds, we risk perpetuating them indefinitely, leaving us emotionally hardened and unable to grow into our most authentic selves.

Becoming aware of our generational stories and traumas is the first step towards understanding them. To heal and become whole, we must explore the roots of these wounds and the histories that have shaped us. Even uncovering the narratives passed down through our families—through stories, songs, art, and memorials—can help us start to understand ourselves and embark on a path towards consciousness. It is vital to make sense of our inherited collective traumas, even if we haven't personally experienced the events that caused them. This journey of understanding can be facilitated through historical consciousness, enabling us to heal and break the cycle of pain.

Historical consciousness is a process of sense-making that allows us to reflect and engage in reflexive work to understand the events and individuals connected to our past. It bridges the meaning we derive from history with the expectations we establish for the future. For many, this process is unfamiliar, and the opportunity to explore it may seem elusive. However, if we are to become more effective leaders and executives and assist others in reaching their fullest potential, we must first turn inwards and start from within. We must uncover the origins of our social defences, distorted thoughts, and biases to gain clarity on how our past shapes our present actions.

### **“Leader, heal thyself”: The process of remembering, “working through”, and reparation**

This is not a call for perfection, but for honesty. Leaders cannot guide others towards wholeness if they ignore or deny the fractures within themselves. Many of today's leaders come from cultures and societies

that have been profoundly impacted by historical collective trauma. Yet, little attention has been paid to how these inherited wounds shape leadership styles, values, and behaviours. This book seeks to bridge that gap, drawing on research into the transgenerational transmission of collective trauma to raise awareness of how past atrocities influence leadership. It also provides insights into how leaders can initiate the process of repair and healing. Through the personal stories shared by the authors of this book, we witness the journey of acknowledging the traumas we inherit, confronting these narratives and memories, and ultimately integrating them into a new, empowered narrative.

We all carry the weight of collective traumas, embodying our peoples' shared history. However, the healing process begins with the individual. When we start to verbalise or narrate our experiences of trauma, whether personal or passed down through generations, we give voice to emotions and experiences that may have never been expressed or acknowledged before.

*For us, healing is a journey of remembering, working through, and reparation.*

First, *remembering* collective traumas occurs through stories, commemorations, and symbols, which allow us to reconnect with those who have suffered before us. We carry the psychological legacies of these traumas, and unless we process them, we cannot truly move forward or heal. Narrating our stories acts as a powerful means to work through these wounds, enabling us to connect the historical significance of our past with our roles as professionals and leaders.

Memorials, ceremonies, statues, narratives, and songs play crucial roles in helping individuals remember; they can also serve as powerful tools for resolution and reparation. Without the ability to remember, we cannot truly symbolise or make meaning of our past. For instance, the song *Arirang* is the anthem of the Korean people, embodying their historical and cultural memory. In Chapter 3, author Dianne Yun uses this song to reflect on her own understanding of her heritage and the collective trauma it represents. For her, *Arirang* becomes a way to remember and work through what may have been overlooked, unacknowledged, or suppressed. This is a common thread in many cultures that endure collective trauma; they often live in the shadows of their past, carrying wounds that remain unspoken but deeply felt.

*Second, healing is a process of working through the emotions and pain tied to collective trauma.* We carry the psychological legacies of these traumas—real, historical events that continue to shape us. To heal from the traumas passed down to us, we must confront and process the emotions and stories associated with them. We need to sing the song or tell the story that helps us connect with and express the traumatic experiences our ancestors may have endured. These practices are essential for initiating healing, allowing us to feel whole; without them, we remain fractured. By remembering, we become re-memblers, reintegrating not only as individuals but also as part of a larger community. In essence, through healing, we become “whole”.

To work through trauma, we must first become aware of it and have the courage to explore its depths. In Chapter 9, Alvin Lloyd Peter uncovers a part of his ancestry he has always sensed but never fully understood—his mixed-race heritage. He feels it internally but lacks the knowledge and facts to truly comprehend it. Similarly, in Chapter 8, Natasha Kewene-Hite reveals her discovery of how land-owning policies in New Zealand devastated Māori communities and how these colonial practices left a lasting impact on her ancestors. To repair and heal, we must start by learning, acknowledging, and understanding the historical truths that, while perhaps felt deeply within, have not yet been fully uncovered.

*Third, healing is fostered through reparation.* True healing requires reparation, which begins once an atrocity is openly acknowledged. In Chapter 7, Suraimy (Sue) Stephens shares the profound emotional impact she felt upon hearing the speech by Prime Minister Mark Rutte of the Netherlands, in which he publicly apologised for the country’s historical involvement in the enslavement of people. This acknowledgement served as a form of reparation, and the author received it as a heartfelt and sincere step towards reconciliation and healing. Reparation is not only significant for the victims but also for the perpetrating group, whose descendants may carry the heavy burden of guilt and shame from the actions of their ancestors. The weight of this inherited guilt can be overwhelming, and the act of reparation provides an essential step in the healing process, helping to break the cycle of trauma and restore a sense of integrity for both sides.

Despite the deep scars that collective traumas leave on survivors and their descendants, there can also be profound instrumental and constructive outcomes from healing and inner work. This book initiates an important conversation about the global impact of both current and past collective traumas, particularly on organisational leaders. It explores how these traumas shape their behaviours, decision-making patterns, and core values. More specifically, the book and its chapters delve into the inner work undertaken by organisational leaders and executives, highlighting the opportunities for meaning making as they reflect on their histories, cultures, languages, and their relationship with inherited traumas.

Through their awareness and insight, the authors engage in an ongoing process of working through, leading to a greater sense of integration with their identities. Consequently, they cultivate a deeper and more nuanced relationship with their background, heritage, and social identity, allowing them to connect more meaningfully with other social groups, family members, and their own country. This heightened self-awareness enables them to forge stronger connections with core leadership values, such as resilience and empathy, which in turn enhances their ability to relate to and engage with diverse groups of people.

Healing requires a profound awareness and insight into both family dynamics and the political and institutional realities of one's country (or another's), to foster a more comprehensive understanding. The executive authors in this book embark on a transformative journey that blends remembering and discovery with the process of working through and repairing past wounds. This journey significantly impacts their exploration of personal and social identities, sparking important questions that challenge and reshape their sense of self and their role in the world.

### **Features and objectives of this book**

Our book, a collection of stories from executive leaders, does not claim to encompass every trauma, situation, or emotional reality. Instead, the chapters provide executives and leaders a platform to share their experiences in a space where they are truly heard and acknowledged. We simply advocate for the creation of spaces that

foster healing, which involve processes of remembering, working through, and reparation. By putting these experiences into words, we embody collective traumas, enabling us to articulate and derive meaning from our historical facts and memories. This process not only assists executives in supporting one another but also cultivates a deeper sense of emotional intelligence, fostering stronger connections and empathy among leaders.

The narratives in each chapter of this book are deeply connected to the author's personal journey. It is essential to recognise that these stories are deeply individual reflections, shaped by each author's distinctive experiences. They represent a process of self-reflection and a questioning of our assumptions, patterns, behaviours, and actions as we confront our history and collective traumas. Consequently, these narratives should not be generalised or seen as representative of everyone's journey. Through historical consciousness, each executive leader illustrates how they transform their inherited collective traumas for the greater good, integrating their newfound awareness and knowledge while striving to lead more meaningful professional and personal lives.

As mentioned earlier, writing our stories was a challenging and deeply personal process. Many of us experienced resistance, influenced by family or social systems that often discouraged us from sharing our reflections or most vulnerable experiences. This is why this project took time to come to fruition—we needed space to work through the resistance and the forces that kept us from fully acknowledging our stories. The narratives we shared were heavy and, at times, painful. The internal tug-of-war between “I want to understand more” and “I don't want to know” made the process both raw and transformative.

For some of us, particularly as the traumas are still so present today, the writing process felt “too hot to handle”. It revealed that we continue to live in survival mode. In the chapters penned by Lara Tcholakian and Zeinab El Kabbout, the authors speak to the ongoing impact of collective traumas experienced by Armenians and Lebanese people in the Middle East, where the atrocities persist. These calamities are still unfolding and remain very real, yet we recognise that the healing and repair process will take time, regardless of how long it may take to fully confront and integrate these wounds.

From these narratives emerge several objectives we hope this book will achieve:

- To reveal the transformative impact that collective traumas can have on leaders and executives, influencing their performance and behaviour in both their work and personal lives. The transformation through turmoil reveals the incredible potential and deep resilience of individuals and organisations. Traumatic experiences can empower leaders to become forces for positive change, demonstrating how they consciously integrate the effects of inherited traumas into their leadership.
- To sensitise a diverse group of readers to the fact that specific wounds continue to shape how individuals assume their roles, make life choices, and embody their values and behaviours. Although the specific atrocities affecting different communities vary, the common thread is that collective trauma creates lasting wounds that need to be healed.
- To provide an opportunity for executives and leaders to reflect, remember, work through, and repair the self as part of the healing and transformation process. This is particularly relevant for those who lead nations, organisations, or teams. The wounds we inherit are deeply embedded within us, shaping our lives in various ways—through the stories we tell, the emotions we feel, the unspoken pains we carry, and the customs and artefacts we share. We offer ways to help the reader (whether a general member of the public, a practitioner, or a teacher) connect with these wounds and explore different approaches to healing and repair. Ultimately, our aim is to foster greater self-awareness, self-development, learning, and integration for leaders and executives.
- To inspire other scholars and researchers to explore this phenomenon and its far-reaching implications further.

This book begins with a comprehensive overview of collective trauma and its relevance to leadership, offering valuable insights for anyone interested in exploring this subject and deepening their understanding. It then expands to reveal each author's personal reflections and journeys, highlighting the transformative mechanisms that shape

their professional and personal lives, while exploring themes of self-awareness, self-development, and integration.

By delving into our inherited collective traumas, we, as leaders and executives, gain a deeper understanding of our motivations and personalities, and how these factors influence our leadership abilities. This process allows us to view ourselves and our situations from new perspectives, enabling us to question the “why” and “how” of our behaviour as leaders. It helps us uncover the origins of our character traits and cognitive biases, ultimately enhancing our ability to understand others. Our sense of empathy and emotional intelligence as leaders can only truly develop when we become aware of the many facets of life that shape us cognitively and emotionally.

Each chapter in this book illustrates how exploring our collective traumas can deepen our understanding of what we contribute to our leadership roles, as well as our strengths and areas for development. This understanding can benefit our organisations by cultivating a culture that promotes growth, compassion, and humanity. Examining collective trauma is not merely a personal journey but also an exploration of a universal aspect of life that we all experience.

Finally, it is important to recognise that no trauma is more or less significant than another. No victim’s suffering is greater or lesser than anyone else’s. While numerous collective traumas have brought about shared grief in various forms, many of us collectively grieve the loss of connection, authenticity, and safety. Each of us experiences grief differently, and it is not for us to compare one person’s pain with another’s. We are not in a “suffering Olympics”. We believe everyone has the right, and the courage, to express their emotions, memories, and experiences without judgement.

### **Summary of chapters**

Chapter 1 offers a concise overview of the key themes explored in this book: collective trauma, the transgenerational transmission of trauma, historical consciousness, and leader development. Instead of presenting an exhaustive review of the existing literature or research (an endeavour more suited to an academic literature review), the editors offer a broad understanding of how they perceive and interpret these complex topics.

Each of these themes carries significant depth, and the editors seek to present a clear introduction to their relevance in the context of leadership and personal transformation.

The book is divided into three sections or types of collective traumas:

1. War and genocide
2. Slavery and colonialism, and
3. Authoritarianism and violent repression.

### ***War and genocide***

In Chapter 2, Zeinab El Kabbout shares her deeply personal experiences with trauma, including the loss of her mother, the 2020 Beirut port explosion, and the collective traumas endured by Lebanon, such as the civil war. The chapter closely examines her family history, exploring her grandfather's experiences during the Armenian Genocide and the Lebanese Civil War. It highlights the tendency within Lebanese society, as well as in her own family, to avoid confronting past traumas, resulting in unresolved pain and unprocessed emotions. This silence perpetuates a cycle of avoidance and denial, obstructing healing and growth. Nonetheless, the author emphasises the resilience inherent in Lebanese culture—an ability to adapt, survive, and rebuild in the face of profound adversity. The chapter reflects on how the author's upbringing amid such trauma has shaped her behaviour and her ongoing journey of self-discovery and awareness. It underscores the importance of confronting and processing inherited trauma while recognising the persistent struggle to maintain resilience and cope with the continuing effects of collective traumas.

Chapter 3 centres on the reflections of Dianne Yun, who delves into the unspoken history of suffering and identity deprivation experienced by Korean descendants of historical trauma. The chapter examines the impact of transgenerational trauma transmission and the silence that often pervades families coping with this legacy. It underscores the role of art as a potent tool for healing collective trauma and reclaiming identity. By engaging with artistic expressions, such as the Korean folk song *Arirang*, the author illustrates how these cultural practices facilitate mourning, sense-making, and emotional healing for descendants of historical trauma. Dianne Yun

explores the transformative impact of art on the inner dialogue of global Korean leaders, highlighting how it shifts their experience from one of invisibility and silent suffering to empowerment and healing. This personal transformation extends into her leadership journey, enhancing both self-awareness and effectiveness. In her healing process, the author emphasises the significance of reclaiming narratives, embracing the full scope of history, and connecting with collective identity as crucial steps towards empowerment and effective leadership. The chapter ultimately celebrates the liberating experience of fully embracing one's identity and using that transformation to contribute to the healing of others.

Chapter 4 delves into the story of Lara Tcholakian, who explores the profound ways in which the Armenian Genocide is woven into the values inherited by leaders of Armenian descent. In her research with descendants of genocide survivors, she reflects on her own conditioning as an executive and questions the origins of her values, patterns, triggers, and behaviours. Together with her research participants, they recall and bring to life the memories of stories and narratives shared, either directly or indirectly, by grandparents, ancestors, or other family members who lived through the genocide. These stories, rich with details of survival, suffering, and loss, offer a first-hand account of these traumatic events. Through the process of remembering and expressing childhood memories connected to the Armenian Genocide, both the author and her research participants, intersubjectively or interrelationally, gain a deeper understanding of their inherited values and beliefs. The “unremembered” and “unthought-known” memories suggest that even descendants of collective trauma may carry emotions and feelings related to these experiences that are not consciously remembered or fully articulated. By recognising and reflecting on these unspoken stories, participants engage in a process of self-exploration, uncovering the hidden layers of their family's history and forging a deeper connection with their own identity.

In Chapter 5, we explore the narrative of Japjit Sobti, co-authored by Lara Tcholakian. This chapter explores the complex relationship between personal identity, cultural heritage, and religious beliefs through the lens of the Sikh community's historical experiences. It examines how historical narratives shape individual perceptions of self and

community, influencing everything from religious practices to cultural traditions. The chapter highlights the crucial role of collective memory and social consciousness in confronting contemporary challenges and conflicts. It urges leaders to be mindful of the historical traumas embedded within communities and advocates for a leadership style that is inclusive, empathetic, and attuned to these shared histories, promoting positive social change. The authors reflect on how Japjit's experiences with collective trauma have deepened his sense of awareness, agency, empathy, and understanding—particularly towards those from diverse ethnic or religious backgrounds. The chapter emphasises the significance of recognising the shared humanity and varied experiences of individuals, regardless of their cultural or religious affiliations.

In Chapter 6, Erik van de Loo explores the collective trauma surrounding the 1938 forced sale of the Ottakringer Brewery in Vienna by the Jewish Kuffner family. The focus is on Christiane Wenckheim, granddaughter of one of the two brothers who later purchased the brewery, and her decades-long journey of confronting and processing a painful, partially forgotten past. As a leader at Ottakringer, Christiane began this exploration by first engaging with herself, gradually involving a wide range of stakeholders in the process—her family, brewery employees, descendants of the Kuffner family, and representatives from Jewish organisations. Through her empathetic, courageous, and resilient leadership, she guided the company through its emotional and historical challenges, navigating the complexities of trauma and reconciliation. The chapter culminates in the inauguration of memorial plaques, bringing all these stakeholders together in the brewery's inner courtyard. This powerful act underscores the crucial role of remembering and working through trauma in fostering learning, healing, and collective growth.

### *Slavery and colonialism*

Chapter 7 follows the journey of Suraimy (Sue) Stephens as she grapples with her heritage of slavery, beginning with a stark examination of the brutality of the transatlantic slave trade. Reflecting on her ancestry as a descendant of enslaved people from Curaçao, she recounts her transition from a predominantly Black and brown neighbourhood to a predominantly white society in the Netherlands. Navigating complex concepts

such as “covering” and imposter syndrome, she explores the tension between fitting in and remaining true to her authentic self in corporate spaces. Her narrative also includes personal experiences of somatic healing, addressing trauma and deeply ingrained patterns. The chapter concludes with reflections on acknowledgement, reparations, and the importance of growth, highlighting the need to reduce collective trauma to protect future generations. By encouraging readers to embrace their own journeys of self-discovery and authenticity, the author prompts deeper reflection on how heritage shapes identity and behaviour.

Chapter 8 explores Natasha Kewene-Hite’s journey of self-discovery and identity through the lens of her Māori heritage, set against the backdrop of colonial history. It begins with a transformative experience in Kawhia, New Zealand, where Natasha unravels the complex threads of her diverse ancestry and confronts the challenges of cultural assimilation and displacement. She reflects on the internalised racism she faced while growing up in the United States, while also addressing systemic marginalisation and the lasting impacts of colonial policies on Māori communities and the inherited trauma passed down through generations. By the end of this journey, the author emerges with a deepened sense of clarity and purpose, fully embracing her Indigenous identity and reclaiming her voice as she moves towards self-realisation and healing.

Chapter 9 traces the journey of Alvin Peter, a senior executive who rose from the tumultuous landscape of apartheid-era South Africa to a leadership role in the financial services industry. Born to parents of mixed heritage, his upbringing was shaped by the challenges of racial discrimination and segregation. Growing up in an Indian-only community, the author experienced a stark contrast between his impoverished township and the affluent white suburbs. Apartheid policies, such as being barred from participating in mixed-race sporting events, hindered his academic and athletic pursuits. However, a pivotal discovery about his mixed-race ancestry expanded his worldview, enabling him to embrace diversity and shape his leadership style around empathy, understanding, and compassion. Despite the enduring scars of collective trauma, Alvin chooses to confront and accept them as integral parts of his identity, using these experiences as a catalyst for positive change in both his professional and personal life.

### *Authoritarianism and violent repression*

Chapter 10 explores Aydin Ilhan's extensive work in facilitating the overseas expansion of companies, particularly in Myanmar and Brazil. As an executive financial consultant, Aydin reflects on how authoritarian regimes shape leadership styles and personal development through his interactions with organisational leaders in these regions. In Myanmar, the legacy of dictatorship prompts leaders to adopt pragmatic strategies, prioritising resilience in an environment characterised by compromised security and limited freedoms. In contrast, Brazilian leaders demonstrate remarkable adaptability, forged by the challenges of military rule, including economic instability and political repression. The author's personal experiences during Brazil's turbulent period also reveal the profound impact of political turmoil on family dynamics. Throughout the chapter, the author emphasises the importance of self-discovery and awareness in overcoming past traumas, tracing his journey from adversity to entrepreneurial success. Insights drawn from his time in Myanmar and Brazil offer valuable perspectives on leadership values, identity, and the enduring influence of political history on personal and professional growth.

Chapter 11 follows Andrés Neira's reflective journey as he explores his Colombian identity within the context of collective trauma. Initially hesitant and feeling inadequate compared to those who directly suffered, Andrés draws on both academic research and personal experiences to investigate Colombia's history of conflict and resilience. He encounters solidarity, strength, and deeply rooted emotions, grappling with the concept of the "Wandering Colombian", caught between pride and sorrow. Although not directly affected by the violence, familial connections to the trauma begin to emerge. Through his exploration, he challenges stereotypes and advocates for peace and reconciliation, aiming to highlight Colombia's rich cultural heritage. With the "Legacy Project", he amplifies the voices of victims, bearing witness to the resilience of communities such as Surikí and La Comuna 13. Ultimately, the author reflects on the transformative impact of his journey, discovering strength and hope in the face of ongoing challenges and remaining optimistic about Colombia's potential for lasting peace.

## Conclusion

Our conclusion, entitled “Moving forward”, highlights the powerful insights derived from personal narratives that examine collective trauma across diverse regions, including Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. The book presents collective trauma as a universal human experience that impacts individuals and communities across generations. The editors emphasise the significance of acknowledging and reflecting on these traumas to foster resilience, healing, and leadership development. It encourages leaders to embrace historical consciousness and self-awareness, recognising how inherited traumas shape their leadership styles. The book posits that leaders who confront these challenges can enhance their emotional intelligence, cultivate inclusive environments, and promote compassion and creativity within their organisations, thereby unlocking the potential for healing and growth.

The book also provides practical steps for addressing trauma, including acknowledgement, creating safe spaces for dialogue, education, and incorporating self-care practices. The editors urge policymakers, educators, researchers, and leaders to engage in meaningful discussions about collective trauma to support societal healing and develop compassionate policies and leadership practices. By exploring these collective trauma stories, the book advocates for transforming pain into purpose, fostering empathy, and ensuring that the lessons of the past guide us towards a more compassionate future.

This book is, above all, an invitation to leaders who are willing to look within, to remember where they come from, and to lead with the courage, compassion, and humanity our world so urgently needs.