



ABOUT ME Passerelles Project

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INTRO duction

"A generation
that ignores history
has no past
– and no future."

Robert A. Heinlein (1907–1988)

We all carry the traces of the past within us. When traumatic events are hidden and remain unspoken, they become a burden, a "phantom in a crypt" (Abraham and Torok). This is what very often occurs with transgenerational transmission: the trauma is conveyed from one generation to the other mostly through silence. This is often the case with descendants of victims and of perpetrators of the Shoah, as well as with descendants of both sides of other conflicts and genocides. The trauma then becomes embodied. When words are not spoken, the senses express themselves, and this can be very painful.

Expression, sharing, and dialogue are the bases of the work we are trying to achieve.



ME Passerelles

ME Passerelles is a non-profit organisation founded in 2021 in Geneva, Switzerland; its goal is to promote and further the dialogue between descendants of violent conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. The association is a continuation of the work initiated by the psychotherapists Hilde Gött and the late Yaacov Naor, that focused on examining the traces of the Holocaust in present life by bringing together the offspring of Nazi perpetrators and Holocaust survivors.

Today, as the last survivors of the Shoah are dying, we continue this work with their descendants on a very personal and family-historical level. We try to overcome the challenges that still confront those who are alive today – such as the individual and collective burdens of the past – and help them answer the question of how they can handle the responsibility they bear.

All **ME Passerelles** events are designed to delve into current life situations; the goal is not to hide behind evasive strategies but to promote truthful encounters (Buber, Moreno) between the parties involved.

The organisation was initiated by representatives of descendants of both perpetrators and victims. The name ME Passerelles has been chosen to emphasize that we work on gateways, on bridges between ME and you, between the personal transgenerational heritage and the collective trauma. We also want to create a “passerelle”, i.e. a walkway, a path between both sides in a conflict, between perpetrators and victims. The letters **ME** also refer to the **M**emories of the differences we all carry within us and to the **E**ncounters that are at the core of the processes of dialogue PASSERELLES facilitates.

TRANSMISSION of trauma

A violent event or historical conflict can be transmitted collectively or individually to future generations, in conscious and unconscious ways. Intergenerational transmission of trauma occurs mainly when the event is kept silent and cannot be processed. Transmission can occur through early childhood, attachment, modeling, interactions, socialization, education, and more.

In our work in **ME Passerelles**, we explore the projections of this violent history that affect our lives. We express the unspoken and break the silence associated with the trauma. We create a space where emotions like grief, loss, rage, and shame can be expressed and traumatic experiences can be processed. We believe that by processing the trauma of the first generations, we can overcome some of these related issues and bring relief and hope to the next generations.

CREATING a dialogue

Dialogue stands at the center of our work: we facilitate encounters between descendants of victims and descendants of perpetrators, and between individuals and groups from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The violent events of the past have left these groups isolated from one another. After establishing trust between the participants, we delve further into the traumatic events and bring to consciousness the traces of the past. We allow subjective truths to be represented on stage, with all the emotions they entail. We break down the simplified mental images that differentiate between “ourselves” and “the others” by creating bridges between the past and the present as well as between the two sides of the conflict. We therefore become witnesses in each other's stories, giving legitimacy to the feelings, thoughts, and narratives of both sides. By building reciprocal recognition, we enable the participants to acknowledge their roles.



CHOOSING legacies

“Memory is like water:
it is vital and it seeks its own ways
into new spaces and to other people.
It is always concrete: it has faces before its eyes,
and places, smells and sounds.
Noach Flug (1925–2011)

An essential part of the work on intergenerational transmission lies in the conscious choice about the legacies we seek to pass on to future generations. Through becoming conscious of what they have received from the past, participants can initiate changes in their lives and take responsibility to build a better future for the next generations.

It is important to emphasize that our work's goal is not achieving forgiveness or reconciliation, but rather contributing to a healing process. Above all, it offers a path to bringing violent cycles to a halt and to supporting democracy.

FROM DIVIDED MEMORY to shared memory

Monique Eckmann, Prof. em., University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland, Geneva

The role played by collective memory in situations of conflict is crucial, and so is the role of memory in the transformation of intergroup conflicts, especially in "intractable" conflicts that last for long periods of time (over a generation), and are characterized by a strong polarization between **us** and **them**.

In these conflicts, the memory of atrocities endured in the past is transmitted from generation to generation as proof of the ongoing victimisation of the group. Also, this is supposed to demonstrate the moral superiority of one group over "the others". Avishai Margalit, in "The Ethics of Memory" (2006), underlines the ethical duty of remembering the name of one's own deceased. These groups represent **communities of memory**, such as nations, clans, ethnic or religious groups, that deal with the same memory of painful and difficult events that have affected their members: The memory is crucial in order to accept and overcome their grief and trauma, strengthening, and even creating bonds of solidarity and ensuring the continuity of the group.

Yet memories of the same historical event are not homogeneous; different groups have various memories rooted in different, even contradictory perspectives. The victories of one side are the defeats of the Other; independence, celebrated by one group, is a tragedy for the Other. Therefore, recognition of the Other's history and memory is an integral part of a non-violent approach aiming at conflict transformation. Margalit makes a distinction between common and shared memories. Common memory is the sum of individual memories of the same event.

Shared memory encompasses **different perspectives of the same event – divided memories** – which, in order to be mutually accepted, have to be told, heard and shared.

Thus, shared memory requires communication, dialogue and working through different communities of memory about their respective remembrance and trauma. Even if they do not reach an agreement, they can at least register and acknowledge their different stances and narratives. Acknowledgment of the Other's memory perspective is the basis for any dialogue between conflicting groups.

The approach ME passerelles offers is a precious contribution to a dialogue aimed at overcoming divided memories. It does acknowledge that memories are different, and that a space for sharing these divided memories is needed in order to transform them into truly shared memories.

WHAT do we do?

We visit concentration camps, extermination camps, museums, and other places of memory with diverse target groups. We deal with theoretical and empirical considerations and conduct research. We organize meetings and workshops at conferences as well as on-demand. We offer training courses and educational activities.

We intend to publish about our work.



OUR methods

One of the main protection strategies for handling trauma entails avoiding confrontation or re-traumatization. We work with the associated emotions and create different ways of exploring and expressing deep feelings, memories, and narratives in order to promote creativity and vitality. We use various creative therapeutic tools such as expressive arts, psychodrama, bodywork, music, rituals, and more.

Unspeakable trauma is stored in the body. Without words, the pain stays within the concerned person. By working with movement, body awareness and body encounters, we provide alternative modalities of expression, leading participants to communicate their feelings and helping them build a sense of trust and acceptance.

Psychodrama is based on role-playing and action methods. Role-exchange strengthens the ability to see oneself through the eyes of the other and to step into the other's shoes. Art-therapy allows the body to express things in an artistic way. The creative gesture bypasses the conscious mind, leads beyond verbal expression, and provides surprises and awareness.

The diversity of languages also reflects the mutual respect we wish to reflect. We work in various languages so that each person can express him- or herself freely and comfortably. This means we will organize translation if needed.

14 IN MEMORIAM

Yaacov Naor (1948–2018)

Shlomit, his wife

Yuval and Ella, his children

Yaacov was born in a displaced person camp (DP-Camp) in Föhrenwald, Germany, to Holocaust survivor parents, and grew up in Israel, in a home where the trauma of the Holocaust and its horrors were the experiences that most strongly shaped his personal and professional destiny.

Yaacov devoted his entire life to seeing the other as a human being, caring for the diversity of the human soul, and thus working to stop the resurgence of the cruel traumas human beings bring upon each other, wherever they may be on the planet. Seeing and understanding the other was a candle that lit his way. Yaacov listened to others, understood them, and tried to alleviate their distress through psychodrama and treatments calling upon the expression of emotions.

The core of Yaacov's work and activities, in Israel and around the world, was dialogue. Yaacov believed that without dialogue there is no ground for liberating mankind from conflict and no way to end intergenerational traumas created by human evil.

We, Yaacov's family, are excited and grateful for Yaacov's continued path and hope that his legacy will continue to contribute to dialogue, in the present and in the future.

HISTORY

of the idea/organisation

After the foundation of the states of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany, both countries had difficulties in finding modalities to interact with each other. During the 1960s, some civil society groups looked for ways to meet and to seek reconciliation. Later on, this quest developed as a structured psychological approach – see e.g. Dan Bar-On's "Legacy of Silence: Encounters with Children of the Third Reich" – followed all over the world by discussion groups, such as Bar-On's "To Reflect and Trust". In Israel, this work was viewed as very controversial. Yaacov Naor, who had studied Psychodrama in America with J. L. Moreno, completed the methodology by adding body work – the rationale being that when dealing with trauma, the body must be involved because trauma settles in the body.

Since 1995, Yaacov Naor and Hilde Gött continued to develop and lead the series of workshops called "Traces of the Holocaust". They deployed their approach in different settings such as conferences, educational journeys to Auschwitz and Israel, and long-term groups.



SOME EXAMPLES in different settings



In Krakow and Oswiecim

We met for a whole week. We received a guided tour in the Jewish quarter, Kazimierz, to better understand the community's life before WWII. Afterwards, we spent three days visiting the memorial and the two camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau. The participants created a personal ritual that they performed in and with the group. Many of them look back on this event as a turning point in their lives.



In the Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp Memorial

We held a one-day workshop that involved a guided visit of the camp, followed by a collection of resonances through artwork and personal stages. With a group of adolescents, we also



stayed at the original site of a camp, but focused more specifically on creating bridges to their current lives.



In the Death March Memorial in Below Forest

We worked between the trees, relating to the topography of the landscape.

During the pandemic, we also created ways of working through video platforms, because we saw the importance of addressing the effects of being alone, overwhelmed, and without control over one's life.



What I have found on this journey is FREEDOM.
I feel freedom from the norms, from the fixed roles,
from the armour that crushes me.
I am allowed to play, to scream and cry and hit and laugh,
to talk to the dead and seek comfort and warmth from the living.
(A quote from a participant)

HORIZONS of the project

“There is no end to history – certainly not a happy one”, said Claude Lanzmann, whose nine-hour documentary “Shoah” gives voice to people who lived during this time—as perpetrators, as victims, as accomplices, and as bystanders. The traces are still found today in practically every European family and far beyond. Even in today's generations, the descendants of perpetrators and victims find themselves side by side in families. They are influenced (often completely unconsciously) by the indelible despair and rage relating to the suffering of the past. They struggle to find a position regarding the question of “guilt” or “responsibility” whether their families are outspoken about the past or not. Moreover, they must somehow relate to current social debates about the colonial era and the way it impacts lives today.

ME Passerelles works with the descendants of victim groups (not limited to Jewish people) while simultaneously addressing the plight of the descendants of the perpetrators, in order to do everything possible to prevent a repetition of this harm. Our stance enables us to take other collective traumas, mass conflicts, wars, historical guilt, and complex webs of responsibility into account. Especially in Eastern Europe much still needs to be reappraised, as the post-war process of coming to terms with the past was shaped by a communist ideology, which itself was the cause of much suffering. For instance, the war in Ukraine re-actualizes all the above mentioned traumas and the need for expression, sharing and healing is renewed.

We see the difficulty of individuals and society to contain and process these tragic events and live in peace with their consequences. The **ME Passerelles** projects emphasize dialogue as a means to prevent racist and nationalist ideas from taking hold and growing.

CONFRONTING AND UNCOVERING violent pasts

Dr Gabriele Rosenthal, University Göttingen

For several decades now, encounters between descendants of perpetrators and survivors of collective violence, especially in the context of crimes against humanity committed under National Socialism, have been taking place in various settings.

Characteristic of the work of Hilde Gött, Yaacov Naor and their colleagues is that their primary goal is not to bring about forgiveness or reconciliation, but rather, as they put it themselves, to open up opportunities for dialogue that can help to heal some of the wounds.

While it is important that people should be enabled to exchange stories of past suffering from their own particular point of view, they also need to be confronted with the fact that others have very different collective and familial backgrounds and very different experiences. Only in the light of concrete past experiences, which reveal what are indeed irreconcilable differences, can any attempt be made to deal with the past and its complex consequences.

In my opinion, this applies both on the social processing of collective violence, for instance in collective and public discourses or dialogues between (formerly) hostile collectives, and on the personal dialogue. And only by confronting and uncovering the violent past will it be possible to come to terms with it. There are plenty of historical examples, such as that of the wars in former Yugoslavia, which show that even after several generations the discursive concealment or denial of conflicts can re-emerge.

SURGES

in nationalism

Over the past few decades, the extreme right has enormously increased its influence in nearly every country in Europe and worldwide. This phenomenon is related to these countries' economic and social situations, that have been particularly difficult and unstable for a long time. The rich are constantly getting richer while the poor get poorer, and the middle class increasingly struggles with economic difficulties. The extreme right clearly benefits from this toxic "cocktail".

Four issues characterize the rise of the extreme right:

1. Nationalism, which calls for banning immigration and for dismantling supranational institutions.
2. Reactionary politics, rejecting any social change, and even promoting a return to an idealized past – that clearly never existed.
3. Populism, as a stance against "elites": The question of what groups are included in the definition of elites depends on the parties' specific ambitions in different countries.
4. Devaluation, exclusion and scapegoating of certain groups. Usually, foreigners and – yet again– Jews are described as responsible, sometimes even blamed for the Covid19 pandemic.

We see the extreme right gaining seats in the parliaments of many countries, including France, Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The extreme right is governing Hungary and Poland, and forms of dictatorship have developed in Russia, Belarus, North and South America, Africa and Asia. For all these reasons, descendants of perpetrators, accomplices, bystanders, victims, and survivors must work together to preserve these memories and promote prevention of harmful racist and nationalist activities.



Hilde Gött

Was born in Romania as the granddaughter of SS members whose wives were deported to Siberia, is our trainer director, with a MSc in Psychodrama Psychotherapy.

Hilde Gött is a certified trainer and supervisor (DGSv) of Psychodrama for the Psychodrama Association for Europe (PAfE), and has been teaching for more than 20 years in Germany and Europe.

She is a children and adolescent therapist, focusing on trauma, domestic violence, and suicidal cases.



Elinor Zalmona-Bollag

Was born in Israel as the granddaughter of immigrants from Poland. Most of her grandmother's family were killed by the Nazis in the forest near Konin, Poland, together with the majority of the town's Jewish community.

Elinor Zalmona-Bollag graduated from the Anthropology and Theater Studies Departments at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. She is certified as an expressive arts therapist specializing in psychodrama.

She works with adults and children in a private clinic.

TEAM AND BOARD members

We cannot do this work alone.
It is a project of humanity,
and for that reason, it must
be conducted with others.
We dream of a chain reaction
for peace.



Dania Appel

Was born in Switzerland, the daughter of a survivor of the Shoah. Together with his little sister, her father managed to escape from Berlin to England with the last Kindertransport. All the other members of the family who remained in Germany were killed in Auschwitz. Dania Appel graduated in educational sciences and C.A.G.S. in intermodal arts therapy, and is a certified trainer in transgenerational therapy. She works with alcohol-addicted people, as a teacher and therapist in intermodal arts therapy training, in her private practice, and as a group facilitator in social and hospital contexts.



Manfred Jannicke

Was born 1965 in West Berlin into a family consisting of NSDAP / Wehrmacht members on one side, and socialist/ communist party members on the other.

Manfred Jannicke is a nurse, social pedagogue, certified leader of psychodrama (PAfE/ DFP) and supervisor. He serves as head of a diaconal organisation for protection and welfare of children, adolescents and their families.



Daniel Fradkoff (President)

Was born in 1947 in Geneva. He holds a Masters' degree in law and is engaged in many Jewish organisations (as member of the board of the Jewish Community of Geneva, among others). Daniel Fradkoff was one of the founders and board member of LICRA (Ligue Internationale Contre le Racisme et l'Antisémitisme) in Switzerland for 32 years.





me
PASSE
RELLES
MEMORY EXPERIENCE

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