

## **Healing the Wounds of History: Drama Therapy in Collective Trauma and Intercultural Conflict Resolution<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

In 1995, fifty years after the end of World War II, I made a pilgrimage to Auschwitz concentration camp where both of my parents had been imprisoned for more than two years. I saw Block 10, where sterilization experiments had been performed on Jewish women, including my mother, by the infamous Dr. Klauber. I saw the location where my father had worked processing the confiscated clothes, shoes and other belongings of people sent to labor camps or to their death by the Nazis. I visited the gas chambers. In the adjacent Birkenau concentration camp, I wandered around the area they call “the burning fields.” At a point near the end of the War, there were so many transports bringing in Jews to be exterminated that the gas chambers were operating 24 hours a day. The crematoria couldn’t dispose of the corpses fast enough. The Nazis ordered the camp inmates to create huge mountains of bodies and set them on fire. The bodies burned for weeks. The ashes were put in the nearby ponds and spread around the surrounding terrain. What struck me, wandering around the former burning fields in the summer of 1995, was the fact that they were alive with the most beautiful wildflowers I had ever seen. I was moved by the way that nature was able to transform such horror into beauty. This transformative principle that I observed so profoundly in nature guides my work as a drama therapist.

In my journey to reconcile my own past as the son of Jewish WWII resistance fighters and survivors of Auschwitz concentration camp, I have sought to understand how nations and cultures integrate a heritage of perpetration, victimization and collective trauma. I have endeavored to comprehend how collective trauma is passed from generation to generation. I have

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also committed myself as a psychotherapist to developing an arts oriented approach to working with intercultural conflict resolution in which collective trauma plays a primary role.

Considering the number of seemingly intractable intercultural conflicts that plague the world, it is critical that we find innovative ways to address the impact that this trauma has on the personal and collective psyche. The techniques of drama therapy, with all of their transformative potential, are powerful tools in moving towards ending the cycle of re-traumatization and perpetration.

*Healing the Wounds of History (originally called Acts of Reconciliation)* began as a drama therapy process in which I used theatre techniques to work with a group of participants from two cultures with a common legacy of conflict and historical trauma. I first used this process in 1989 with sons and daughters of Jewish Holocaust survivors and Nazis. I subsequently used it with many other cultures in conflict, most recently with Israelis and Palestinians, Armenians and Turks on the legacy of genocide, and Japanese, Chinese and Koreans on the impact of Japanese perpetration during WWII.

This work has evolved into several related applications: a workshop that focuses on a single trauma and its impact on a group of people or nation, a more general workshop open to persons of diverse cultures who wish to explore their legacy of historical trauma, therapeutic sessions with an individual, couple or family for whom historical trauma is a defining event, a process lasting several days bringing together participants from two cultures with a shared legacy of conflict and trauma and lastly, a *Playback Theatre* performance that follows such an intensive workshop in which workshop participants and audience volunteers share personal stories related to the historical trauma in question. This chapter will focus on the latter two applications.

## **Theory and Principles**

Healing the Wounds of History (hereafter HWH) is based on several premises:

1. Collective trauma is a psychological state shared by any group of people and can affect even an entire society. Examples in the United States include the events of 9/11,

Hurricane Katrina and the Vietnam War. The impact of collective trauma is carried in our psyches in the form of images, stories, sense memories, spoken and unspoken messages transmitted by parents, teachers and the media. Ultimately, this process evolves into a collective narrative. This narrative is absorbed unconsciously through a process akin to osmosis and has an impact on the cultural and national identity of the individual and the group.

2. The transgenerational transmission of trauma is a real phenomenon observable in the United States in cultures such as African-Americans and Native Americans where the continuing destructive impact of slavery and genocide is visible centuries after the original atrocities took place. Historical trauma is also transmitted inter-generationally from parent to child where a father's alcoholism or depression, for example, may be directly due to the unresolved PTSD of his experience in the Vietnam War, but the historical and collective aspect of the trauma is never fully addressed. The inheritor of such a legacy receives the parent's trauma as a burden of unexpressed grief, often out of their conscious awareness.
3. Historical trauma can also have negative effects on cultural and national identity and self-esteem. Human beings are tribal in nature and have a need to feel good about the tribe to which they belong. When this pride of association is disrupted through a history of war trauma, humiliation, defeat, or subjugation it negatively affects the collective self-regard in the form of internalized oppression. This can influence the way individuals view or value their own culture. (Klein, 1980, Grier and Cobbs, 1968)
4. Healing the Wounds of History takes the view that there is a potential perpetrator in all of us and that under certain circumstances every human being has the capacity for dehumanization and cruelty.
5. There can be no permanent political solutions to intercultural conflict until we understand and take into consideration the needs, emotions and unconscious drives of the human being.

By working with the specific participants who are representatives of their cultures I seek to make a therapeutic intervention in the collective or societal trauma. In this way my work is related philosophically to Psychodrama's founder Jacob Moreno's idea that, "A truly therapeutic procedure cannot have less an objective than the whole of mankind." (Moreno 1953). HWH, which takes a psychological approach to conflict, provides a map to help polarized groups traverse the emotional terrain to reconciliation. In this sense the approach is a form of social activism.

### **Therapeutic Goals**

This work has five important therapeutic goals:

The first involves *recognizing and deconstructing cultural or national identity*. I support workshop participants in reflecting on their cultural identity or identities with the goal of working through obstacles to their self-esteem. Within each person's constructed identity lie cracks that hold the fragments of their collective story. Feelings, associations, formative sense and affective memories emerge from its deconstruction. Often it is the member of the family who has been designated consciously or unconsciously as the carrier of the family legacy who shows up in the workshop. In other cases, the collective trauma has gone underground. Due to the assimilation or the silence of a traumatized parent, the family legacy is hidden from the participant's awareness. In the end, my goal is to help participants uncover the collective story of perpetration or victimization they may be carrying and help them integrate their legacies in a more generative way.

The second goal involves *intercultural conflict resolution and teaching intercultural communication*. Often there is a taboo against speaking to 'the other'. People from polarized cultures so stereotype, dehumanize or demonize each other that the simple act of talking can be an important step towards healing. There can also exist a lack of authentic understanding of the other culture or empathy for their emotional or political stances. Through the self-revealing, story-telling and playful aspects of the Healing the Wounds of History process the tension

between the opposing groups is momentarily eased. Enemies are humanized. This creates enough emotional generosity and psychic space to allow participants to begin to make cultural adaptations with the help of mediation. For the facilitator, all of the principles and elements of conflict resolution come in to play at this stage, including effective listening, an empathetic and non-defensive stance and an understanding of the art of apology.

The third goal is to help participants move deeply into and experience their personal and *collective grief and mourning*. As I guide participants through the HWH of history process there is a well of grief I know I will eventually tap into. Even if not displayed or acknowledged at the beginning of a workshop, I am always aware of its presence. The collective grief of the participants' parents, grandparents, ancestors and culture as a whole is implied by the very act of our coming together. This grief may be related to victimization or to perpetration, or both. Each traumatized group has a need to experience this inherited pain as unique. The added dimension of groups in conflict, sometimes perpetrators and victims grieving together, can have a profound cathartic effect. Participants, as representatives of their cultures, are given the opportunity to give shape and expression to this collective grief, the principle being that, until that pain is grieved fully, the legacy will continue to be passed on to the next generation.

The fourth goal is to *create a culture of empathy*. At its core, HWH is about teaching empathy. Workshop participants develop the capacity for feeling compassion for the pain of the other group and transcend the impulse to view one's own suffering as superior. This helps to create double binds that participants must resolve. How can I hate this person and have empathy for him or her at the same time?

The fifth goal is to *create meaning out of suffering*. A healthy human being needs to create purpose and meaning out of his or her life (Frankel, 1984.) Suffering is a great teacher. When there is a legacy of trauma, shame, guilt and humiliation, the task is to transform it into meaning. This is a spiritual task. How can one create meaning out of the meaningless events such as the Holocaust? The way to master suffering is to create acts of service and acts of creation.

## Methods and Techniques

### Drama Therapy in Intercultural Conflict Resolution

In working with polarized groups over the last 18 years I have identified six phases that can develop in a multi-day workshop. These phases do not necessarily emerge in a progressive way but depend on the given circumstances of the group process including a feeling of safety, cultural influences and the amount of emotional and aesthetic distance from the collective trauma.

#### Phases of the Process

The first phase in bringing cultures in conflict together is *breaking the taboo against speaking to each other*. Often there is an invisible barrier preventing contact. Speaking to the "enemy" is often perceived as a betrayal. But when two polarized groups break the taboo and engage in honest dialogue, they can begin to work through the layers of unresolved feelings they carry about each other. I work first with the emotional pioneers who pave the way for others to follow.

The second phase involves *humanizing each other through telling our stories*. When members of cultures in conflict listen deeply to each other's stories and hear each other's pain, they begin to care about one another. Their feelings of empathy and friendship become more powerful than the historical imperative to hate one another

When there is enough trust, I move into the third phase of *exploring and owning the potential perpetrator in all of us*. In order to reconcile, people need to acknowledge that under extreme circumstances, we all have the capacity for cruelty. Accepting this truth is the great equalizer. It levels the playing field.

The fourth phase is *moving deeply into grief*. Grieving together and giving each other permission to grieve is essential. People carry their parents', grandparents' and ancestors' pain, and until that pain is grieved fully, the legacy continues to be passed on to the next generation.

The fifth phase moves towards *creating integration, performances and rituals of remembrance*. When groups in conflict create commemorative rituals and performances, privately and publicly, to acknowledge the complex, difficult history they share, they provide a way for people to channel their feelings in an aesthetic form. Public presentations serve to extend the healing effects of the reconciliation into society by touching the lives and consciousness of others who did not participate in the workshops.

The final phase of this process extends the learning achieved in the workshop out into the world, *making commitments to acts of creation or acts of service*. Creation can mean sharing stories, creating poetry, art, theatre and somehow transforming the pain of their past into an aesthetic form. Another mode is to channel the participants' energy into service: working with political refugees, helping survivors of rape, or doing other work that helps to end injustice.

### **Breaking The Taboo Against Speaking To Each Other**

The taboo against speaking to one another often comes into play prior to the beginning of the HWH encounter. Taking the step of meeting together is frequently seen as an act of defiance against the status quo. This stance requires courage on the part of participants. I describe these people who are willing to be the first to come to an encounter with the "other" as *emotional pioneers paving the way for others to follow*. The image of the Healing the Wounds of History facilitator as resistance fighter is apt here, for he or she is symbolically leading an insurgency movement against an entrenched and oppressive fear that is preventing reconciliation or peaceful co-existence.

When members of groups in conflict come together it can, in fact, involve real danger. In the early 1990's while working with a group of Palestinian and Israeli students at UC Berkeley, it was important to hold our meetings clandestinely. The Palestinians feared, if it were discovered by militant forces in the West Bank or Gaza that they were meeting with Israelis, that their families back home would be ostracized or killed. Similarly, in 2007 I recruited Turkish people to participate in a workshop and Playback Performance with Armenians on the legacy of the Armenian genocide. Turks feared that their government would arrest them for anti-Turkish

activities when they returned to Turkey. The very act of meeting with Armenians around the issue of genocide might put them in violation of Article 301/1 of the Turkish Penal Code that outlaws public denigration of the Turkish Republic or "Turkishness." Facilitators must recognize the courage and danger sometimes involved in bringing together polarized groups and proceed ethically to protect participants from harm.

My strategy as a drama therapist entering into a potentially explosive environment is to first develop the spontaneity and imagination of the group as a warm-up to the dramatic processes that will soon follow. The techniques I use correspond roughly to Renee Emunah's (Emunah, 1994) Phase I (dramatic play) and Phase II (scene work) of her five-phase model. The play has many functions in the context of intercultural conflict. It allows participants to connect as human beings and brings out their child ego state. They find commonalities in the state of play and communicate in non-threatening ways. This starts to develop the bonds I will build upon later in the process.

Beginning to play can sometimes feel awkward for the facilitator to initiate in this context, as we are working with serious themes such as genocide and war trauma. However, generating playfulness in groups in conflict is an obligatory first step in establishing a beachhead in territory occupied by fear and mistrust. For many, permission to play is the perfect antidote to the burden of the imagery of collective trauma they have inherited. The parentified children within them are liberated by the process of reclaiming their lost innocence.

The techniques in this phase are familiar to most drama therapists and facilitators of theatre improvisation. A few are worth describing as their function changes in the context of working with collective trauma and intercultural conflict. I might begin a group with the simple name game in which participants say their names and articulate a movement at the same time that expresses how they are feeling in the moment. This might be followed by more sound-making exercises such as "sound ball" in which imaginary balls are thrown around a circle accompanied by creative sounds or "Sound and Movement Transformations", originally described by Viola Spolin (Spolin, 1968), which allows sound and motion to transform into a new sound and motion which passes from one person to the next until everyone has had a turn.

These structured exercises prepare the participants for more challenging improvisations to come. They are also diagnostic of the group, for as facilitator I am assessing which of my arsenal of techniques participants will be able to tolerate and when. Improvisational space work, pantomime and sense memory are also important skills to develop early in the process. The act of taking an internal image and embodying it in the space is an important building block in the development of a drama therapy process. Adult non-actors are often rusty at engaging in the activity of play that once flowed easily for them as children. Developing their ability to create imaginary external environments playfully also indirectly prepares them for Psychodrama (Blatner, 1988) or developmental transformations (Johnson, 1991) in developing the idea of a *surplus reality* or *play space*.

Dramatic play evolves into *scenework* through exercises such as *Cross from Here to There* in which people cross the room one at a time and then two at a time using sound, movement, words and breaking into spontaneous scenes. *The Role Circle* divides participants into dyads and archetypal issues of power and powerlessness are introduced: Policeman and speeder, parent and adolescent, headmaster and delinquent student, captain and private explore roles of authority and submission. These give way to more psychodramatic scenes in which inanimate objects or abstractions can talk to each other as such as: Person on a diet and piece of chocolate cake, cocaine and cocaine addict, writer with writer's block and blank page. Slowly I begin to introduce scenes that reflect the theme or issue we are gathered to address which are more *sociodramatic* in nature. For example, an Israeli soldier and Palestinian encounter at a checkpoint, a Japanese tourist meeting an elderly Korean woman who remembers the Japanese atrocities in her country during World War II, or two adolescent daughters of Holocaust survivors speaking to each other in the middle of the night because their survivor mother has had yet another nightmare about her experience in a concentration camp.

Many intercultural conflicts involve a spoken demand or unspoken longing for apology. Line repetitions (Emunah, 1994), in which participants in dyads repeat lines and explore the emotions behind them such as "You hurt me/I'm sorry" take on special meaning in relationship to Japanese and Chinese, Palestinians and Israelis, Turks and Armenians and Germans and Jews.

In this context, a simple playful activity can propel the group into the heart of their conflict. Even in this warm-up phase a seemingly benign exercise like passing imaginary objects can trigger a powerful emotional reaction based on the tension in the room. In a Palestinian and Israeli workshop in 2004 in Berkeley, California, passing an imaginary lit match and ladybug around the circle gave way to passing a mimed symbolic concretization of “hope”. There had been another bus bombing in Jerusalem the day of the workshop and the group immediately tapped into the pain and grief about the event that was right under the surface. This exercise provoked a Palestinian and Israeli woman to physically struggle with each other, in a playful way, over the tiny and elusive thread of hope that kept escaping both of them. The playful laughter of the group response to this spectacle evolved into the anguished sobs of the Israeli woman who expressed her feelings of hopelessness about the Middle East conflict. The Palestinian woman comforted her in her pain and despair. This moving scene occurred in the first thirty minutes of the workshop and set the course of the work together

### **Humanizing Each Other Through Telling Our Stories**

By the time the participants have entered the room the intercultural conflict between them has evolved into mutual stereotyping and profoundly different historical narratives. But instead of arguing over whose version of history is correct, we focus on sharing personal stories. While it might be acceptable to refute someone’s version of history, it is almost impossible to claim that someone’s feelings and personal stories are untrue. It is for this reason that I move quickly towards sharing affective memories and life stories. My goal is to build mutual empathy and strengthen the bonds between participants. These bonds will be put to the test later when sensitive issues arise.

In setting up the workshops, I often ask participants to bring personal objects related to their collective story. I use these objects to launch the journey into the depth of emotions we are gathered to explore. These objects could include a photograph of an ancestor, a book related to the subject, a piece of jewelry from a grandparent -- something that evokes personal and collective memory. In the absence of objects, I ask participants to pantomime them using their

imaginations to bring something personal from their past into the room. The pantomimed sense memory of the object can be equally powerful and evocative. I ask each participant to briefly share the significance and meaning of their object with the group. When they have finished sharing, participants place the objects on an altar that has been created in advance of the workshop by me, or my assistants. Each participant then takes a stone from the basket of stones that have been provided and encapsulates the story they are carrying, saying, for example, “I carry the story of my father’s exile.” Participants hold on to their stones throughout the workshop and only return them to the basket at the very end of our encounter. The stones function as a container for all that will happen during our time together. Carrying these stones throughout the workshop sets up a central idea of HWH, that we all carry the stories of our ancestors whether we are aware of them or not.

Certain events such as the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide and The Middle Passage, (the horrific transportation of Africans across the Atlantic) have resulted in forced mass migrations, immigrations and fleeing refugees. In these instances, I might begin a workshop by creating a map of the world on the floor with masking tape. I ask participants to silently move around the map in response to specific directions. For example, move to a place on the map:

Where you were born.

Where your mother was born.

Where your father was born.

Where your mother’s father was born

Where your mother’s mother was born

Where your father’s father was born.

Where your father’s mother was born.

Where an unknown ancestor was born.

Etc.

In a large group it is powerful to watch participants move silently around the room. Each change of location on the map implies a personal story of transition, trauma or displacement that workshop participant might be carrying. Some participants know their family history. Others do

not know it but only have a vague notion of what occurred. Either way the exercise evokes memory and feelings about history and identity. I might choose to enter into a sociometric discussion in action to explore the feelings aroused by this exercise or channel the emotional tension built up into another exercise leading to personal story.

One exercise that I often use to mark the transition from warm-up to personal storytelling is “My name is \_\_\_ I am a \_\_\_”. It is a core exercise in the HWH process and begins the deconstruction of the cultural identity of the participant. Each participant stands alone in front of the group and I ask the person to speak his or her full name, either in English or in the person’s language of origin. This is followed by a statement of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual preference, depending on the theme of the workshop. For example, a Jewish participant standing in front of a group of children of Holocaust survivors and The Third Reich may state “My name is Sonja Goldstein and I am a Jew.” Or, “My name is Jurgen Doering and I am a German.” A moment of silence follows each statement. Then the participant is asked by the facilitator to reflect upon and share the feelings or images that come up for them as they make this public statement.

Feelings evoked by these statements are complex and multilayered. ‘I am a Jew’ may have a different resonance for a participant than ‘I am Jewish’ or I am a Jewish American.’ A German participant saying his name in German “Ich bin ein Deutsche,” has a different feeling than the same statement in English. This is a purposefully provocative exercise that helps participants access the memories that shape their cultural identity.

If, as facilitator, I choose to deepen the exploration of cultural identity I often use an adaptation of psychodramatic sculpting to flesh out positive and negative cultural messages. I call this exercise *diagram of roles and messages*. It is sometimes first sketched out on paper before being moved into action. This form is essentially a sculpture of the internalized spoken and unspoken messages that a workshop participant received from parents, ancestors, society, educational institutions, authority figures, governments or God, which affect that person’s beliefs, identity, and self-esteem.

To illustrate this technique I will describe what happened in a workshop I conducted in October of 2007 with a group of Armenians and Turks during a politically explosive time.

Turkey had recalled its ambassador from Washington after a US congressional committee voted to recognize the mass killing of Armenians during World War I as genocide. Turkey continued to deny claims it was genocide, while Armenia welcomed the vote. In response, Turkey threatened to withdraw its support for the Iraq War. In this political climate, Armenians and Turks gathered to face each other in dialogue.

I asked the members of the two groups to create human *sculptures* and diagrams of the messages they received from their families, governments, religious institutions about being Armenian or Turkish. Following are two images that emerged from this process:

An Armenian man shapes a physical representation of the burdens on him as an Armenian, by placing participants in various physical poses and giving them lines to say verbally. In the sculpture, the Armenian man reaches out to Turks with an extended hand but the millions of dead, mangled bodies of the genocide, visually represented by participants from both groups, cry out for revenge. The Turks in the image look towards a clock hoping that time will fade the historical memory of the massacres of Armenians so they won't have to face the culpability of their ancestors. Enraged members of the Armenian community block his reaching out gesture and prevent him from speaking to Turks imploring him to hold on to and remember the trauma of the genocide.

A young Turkish woman, who happens to be pregnant with her first child, volunteers to create a map of messages she received from her family and Turkish culture. In the sculpture, her father lectures her, warning her not to deviate from the patriotic image of her people. Her mother pleads with her to not get involved with the Armenian/Turkish dialogue as it is dangerous. The Turkish government delivers a nationalistic message reminding the woman of the greatness of modern Turkey and its founder Ataturk. The Turkish educational system teaches history

but does not mention the suffering of the Armenian people. In the sculpture, the Turkish woman is shocked to learn about the Armenian genocide. The woman's Turkish friends express their hatred of Armenians with a nationalistic fervor that stuns and disappoints her. The sculpture culminates in a brief psychodramatic enactment where the woman speaks of her fears and hopes for Turkey to her unborn child. She expresses her commitment to teach her child the truth about history no matter how painful it may be.

This kind of sculpting serves to deconstruct cultural and national identity and make participants aware of the unconscious collective forces that shape their behaviors, opinions and feelings. I use this exercise as a stimulus to move into more intensive emotional work. Often an emotional leader emerges from the participants who can carry the issue or theme of the workshop to another level. When the emotional intensity reveals itself, I shape it in various ways: as a psychodrama, as a playback theatre piece, as a sociodrama, an improvisation or as a creative ritual.

Towards the goal of intensifying and deepening the group process I ask participants to share formative or transformative stories related to their historical trauma or cultural identity. Participants are drawn to HWH workshops because they want to have their 'story'—their pain, burden and the grief of their legacy—witnessed. Asking participants to share formative or transformative personal stories helps them focus on stories that shaped who they are or that can never be erased from their memories. Following are brief examples of formative stories from previous HWH processes.

A Palestinian man shares how in 1967 as a ten-year old boy during the Six Day War he sees Israeli soldiers come into his mosque without removing their shoes. He describes the disrespect and humiliation of that experience. He recounts his profound sadness at leaving Jerusalem, driving towards Jordan and knowing he may never see his homeland again. His story is enacted through Playback Theatre.

An Israeli man in the same workshop, while in the military, is charged with guarding the northern Border of Israel and his unit kills a Palestinian man who was trying to infiltrate the border. The story evolves into a Psychodrama in which the Israeli enacts the dialogue he had alone with the dead Palestinian man. His words express his profound desire to understand why this Palestinian man would risk his life in such a way. It was in this moment that this man decided to get involved with the Israeli Peace movement.

A German woman recounts the story of sitting on her father's lap at age 11 in Germany watching the Eichmann trial. The father had been a member of the Nazi party but watches the proceedings in silence. In her child's mind she becomes Eichmann. It is she who is on trial. A psychodrama ensues where we explore her burden of guilt as a child of the Third Reich.

A Jewish man remembers when he was ten in Frankfurt, the Gestapo came in during dinner and took his father and uncle away to Dachau at gun-point. He decided in that moment that the grown-up world was out of control, could not protect him and was not to be trusted. He decided never to grow up. His spirit is still 10. This scene is "played back" through Playback Theatre and then evolves into a psychodramatic enactment where the man, as an adult, comes in to rescue his 10 year-old self.

A Japanese man as a four-year-old boy, witnessed and survived the atomic bomb blast in Hiroshima. In recounting this memory from his 4 year-old perspective he says, "It was the day that the sun fell out of the sky." The man's story is witnessed and honored through a ritualized Playback Theatre enactment.

A Chilean exile and social activist describes her escape from her beloved Chile as a young woman during the military coup in 1973, expresses her longing for reconnection, her lost youth and the grief of her exile. A moving psychodramatic

dialogue with a workshop participant playing the role of the country of Chile ensues.

A black woman shares the story of her experience in elementary school where her white teacher who, in a class art project drawing of a human hand, insisted that the girl color her hand Caucasian flesh color instead of brown. In a reparative Psychodrama the woman speaks to her teacher and the little girl she once was, reclaiming her right to be seen and valued for who she was.

In entering into these formative and transformative stories with a group of people who have little exposure to action methods, as well as differing cultural values around self-revealing, it is important to prepare them for the more complex dramatic structures that will follow. An adaptation of the Playback Theatre form becomes a useful tool in creating competence and trusting intuition among workshop participants. I ‘conduct’ a story related to their collective trauma in front of the group and then ask members of the group to step inside the story. Stepping inside someone’s personal story necessitates people taking on roles in the Teller’s narrative. Since the workshop participants generally have little acting experience, I, as facilitator, deconstruct the story intoactable elements for them. I am careful to help people succeed in this exercise. Stepping inside others’ stories requires two types of risk-taking. First, it is scary for novices to be thrust into a psychodramatic acting exercise that requires an aesthetic sense. But even more threatening is the challenge and responsibility of stepping authentically into the story of an “enemy”.

To mitigate the potential humiliation of the actor, the teller of the story needs to be coached to restrain his or her natural impulses to critique the enactment. This restraint is necessary in view of the larger good: building trust, intuition, and empathy. Facilitators also need to concern themselves with the safety and emotional needs of the Teller. Stories that are told at this early stage often take on archetypal significance for the group. There is a kind of self-sacrifice taking place by the storytellers, in which personal needs are set aside in the interests of the group.

A recent example of the usefulness of this technique in developing a HWH process occurred at a conference in Tel Aviv, Israel in 2006. My Palestinian-American colleague Amal Kouttab and I co-led a workshop with a group of Israelis and Palestinians on the use of drama therapy in intercultural conflict resolution. The Palestinian participants were mostly mental health workers from Gaza who had received permission from the Israeli government to cross the border to attend the conference. After guiding the group through a brief warm-up we invited participants to share a formative or transformative memory connected to their identities as Palestinians and Israelis. Two personal stories emerged from this request.

A Palestinian mental health professional shared an incident that happened to him on the way to the conference. He had been waiting in line for hours to cross the border from Gaza into Israel. While waiting he witnessed a disturbing scene. A mother holding a distressed 3-year old boy was attempting to pass through a metal detector to be screened for weapons as required of Palestinians by Israel at checkpoints and border crossings. An Israeli soldier was communicating with the woman through a loudspeaker from a bullet-proof booth commanding her to go through the metal detector separately from her child. The child, hysterically crying with fear of the proceedings, clung to his mother in desperation, refusing to cooperate. In tears, the mother pleaded with soldier, saying that she would go so far as to take the child's clothes off to prove that her 3-year old son had no weapons. The soldier, insisting on his authority, refused to make any exception for the mother and the child. Witnessing this humiliation, a wave of seething rage came over this man. He could not express this rage at the border crossing, but was willing to quietly share it with the Israelis present. For him, the humiliation of this young boy was symbolic of the humiliation of all of the Palestinian people. It was a kind of scene that he witnessed every day. It also recalled his father's trauma, who as a young boy in the Israeli War of Independence ("The Catastrophe" for Palestinians) fled with his family from his home in what is now Israel.

Deciding which roles we wanted the participants to play, Amal and I invited workshop participants to bring different aspects of the Palestinian man's story to life through soliloquy, character monologues and fluid sculptures. Israelis were able to embody the roles of the Palestinian boy and his mother with deep empathy. Palestinians were willing to step inside the role of the Israeli soldier revealing his possible feelings and motivations. The complexity of the

mental health professional's rage at witnessing the boy's humiliation was explored through fluid sculptures. For a brief moment the Palestinian man felt seen. A culture of empathy prevailed in the group. The Palestinian historical narrative revealed itself through this man's story. The archetypal nature of the story as the common experience of Palestinians made this story ripe to work with and develop in the group.

In response to the Palestinian man's enactment, an older Israeli woman insisted on telling her story. Her "act hunger" prevailed in the group process. She was a Holocaust survivor and described her experience of standing on the selection platform in Auschwitz seeing her grandmother holding her infant sister as they were led to the gas chambers. The story took place in her imagination. The woman visualized what her grandmother might have done to comfort her infant granddaughter as the Zyklone B gas began to fill the death chamber. In a lullaby voice the woman imagined hearing her grandmother saying, "It's all right sweet little one. We're going home now." The Israeli woman explained that her sister's rights as a child were also violated like the boy at the border crossing. She ended her story by passionately expressing the need for Jews to have a state to protect themselves.

This story contained the classic Israeli historical narrative and was very provocative for the Palestinians in the room to hear. Palestinians feel that they are constantly being asked to set aside their suffering and their rights to a homeland because of the Holocaust. I could feel the tension in the room around this issue. I chose to meta-communicate with the group about what was happening in the room. I named the triggering elements of the story and asked the group if they were willing to set aside their reactions for a moment and empathize with the Israeli woman's story since this had been our agreement. I promised that we could enter into a discussion after we had honored the story. The group agreed. And, through improvised monologues, fluid sculptures and enactments, the Israeli woman's narrative was fleshed out. In an act of emotional generosity, Palestinians were able to empathize with the Holocaust survivor, including her profound longing for security for herself and her people.

As the workshop was relatively brief, we were not able to move beyond the phase of humanizing each other through telling our stories. Although our intervention did not produce major

breakthroughs in the impasse between Palestinians and Israelis, it did open up an emotional space where Palestinian rage, hurt and humiliation and Israeli fear, grief and longing could be expressed and witnessed in a contained and respectful way. The heated discussion that followed the enactments created a quality of direct and honest dialogue that had been missing from the conference up to that point and had an important impact on other parts of the proceedings.

These examples serve to illustrate how personal stories can reveal historical narratives. These narratives, when presented side by side, can be explored effectively using dramatic structures including adaptations of Playback Theatre and Psychodrama. Emotional and archetypal themes can emerge from these stories and be developed in the course of a workshop. Their primary result is to create the emotional double bind that short circuits hatred and dehumanization and fills the vacuum with mutual empathy.

### **Exploring and Owning The Potential Perpetrator in All of Us**

In 1975, I began leading drama therapy groups at Chino Men's Prison, in a Los Angeles psychiatric hospital and at California Institute for Women at Frontera. I was interested in understanding the potential perpetrator in all of us. The legacy of the Holocaust had left me with the drive to grasp how human beings can dehumanize others enough to torture, rape, or gas them. On a personal level, if in some way I could humanize the sadistic Nazis of my childhood nightmares, they would be less frightening to me. As a therapist, understanding the human impulse towards cruelty would help me in working with intercultural conflict. Although prison inmates are not "Nazis," their crimes involve a violation of human rights. I wanted to deconstruct and understand the dehumanization process that occurs in a cruel act. A prison was an apt laboratory for this kind of emotional and existential research.

In 1986, I was asked by a public defender to work as a drama therapist with a 21-year-old man who had murdered two adults and an 18-month-old child by stabbing them with a knife. Over the course of a year I worked intimately with this man, and in so doing, immersed myself in the mind of a perpetrator. In a dramatic affective memory re-enactment, I accompanied him into the moment he took the knife and stuck it into the bodies of his victims. After he was found guilty, I

testified on his behalf at the sentencing phase of his death penalty trial. When the members of the jury were interviewed after having decided that the defendant should get life in prison, they said that it was my testimony that humanized this “monster” enough to save his life. In my capacity as a therapist who deeply empathized with his client, a murderer, I also needed to face the part of me that could commit the same crime.

After working with this man for more than a year, I felt compelled to continue my work understanding the concept of the “perpetrator.” I also felt driven to understand the evil behind the Holocaust and knew that the closest I could get to working with former Nazis was to work with their children who knew them intimately. It was this experience that led me to bring together the sons and daughters of Jewish Holocaust survivors and The Third Reich in the United States, Germany and France. With these two groups and later with Japanese, Chinese and Koreans on their legacy of WWII, and other polarized groups, I explored the archetypal human impulse to commit evil acts.

Guiding groups in intercultural conflict towards exploring the potential perpetrator in each of us is a delicate task. It is a journey into the “underworld” to grapple with aspects of human behavior that few people want to face. Both perpetration and victimization bring up feelings of tremendous personal shame and judgment for workshop participants. The primary reason that I explore this theme in the context of intercultural conflict is that it humanizes the perpetrator. It is easy to write off criminals and Nazis as “monsters” and believe that the “monster” does not inhabit us but resides in “the other”. However, if we hold as true that all human beings are capable of being oppressors, given certain conditions, then it allows us to view perpetration as a human act not just a heinous one. It removes the burden of the perpetrator role from belonging to only one group assembled in the room. Recognizing the perpetrator within each of us allows participants to examine the forces and drives that create perpetration and cause us to engage in violence, commit racist acts or be part of a murderous mob. It permits participants to do this without shame or judgment.

However, because of the triggering elements inherent in this kind of emotional investigation, I only venture down the path of exploring the perpetrator when there is enough time, trust and a

collective agreement about the value of taking the journey. I must also assess whether the group is ready to tolerate such a potentially divisive endeavor and consider their emotional state and their capacity for aesthetic distance, which this work requires.

I often begin the exploration into this phase by bringing out historical photographs that evoke the collective trauma being explored. I choose participants and ask them to place themselves into physical postures based on the elements in the photograph, including body language, facial expression and emotion. I switch the cultural groupings, for example, I choose a Jew to play a Nazi and a German to play a Jew. Then I ask participants to enact the photograph, bringing the human sculpture to life.

Other theatre conventions I use to explore the photograph include improvising monologues based on characters in the photographs. These photo enactments immediately immerse the participants in the world of the historical trauma. Using their intuition and taking cues from the sensory details of the photograph, the enactments become very real and often frightening. The participants can be triggered by playing the victim and oppressor roles. Germans, for example, enter into the exercise, scared that it will prove their worst irrational fear----that they carry the evil of Nazism in their bloodlines. Jews sometimes point their finger accusing their counterparts as being personally responsible for the Holocaust needing a target for their collective rage at their victimization.

In an exercise I call Master/Slave I break up the group into pairs, each pair with representatives of the different groups. I ask each dyad to assume the roles of master and slave, taking turns at playing both parts. The master must order the slave around in a degrading fashion exploring the power of their role.

Sometimes after this exercise we move into expressive arts processes to channel the feelings being stimulated. The art inspired by this undertaking can take the form of visual art, poetry or mask making that moves into enactment. This helps in processing the experience while simultaneously allowing participants to de-role.

With more time, trust and group cohesion I move into the sharing of personal stories of times participants have been a “perpetrator” in their lives. Sense memories and affective memories of moments when group participants have dehumanized, devalued or abused someone are explored fluidly through Playback Theatre, Sociodramatic, and Psychodramatic processes. These activities further universalize the role of perpetrator.

Stepping into the perpetrator role, in the end, becomes a great equalizer. It allows participants to develop a compassionate stance towards the “victims” and “perpetrators” of a historical trauma. From this position they can deeply empathize with and humanize both roles as they accept that both are within them.

Exploring the role of perpetrator in these direct and provocative ways can be emotionally draining. At these times I move towards the aesthetic distance that playful approaches to thematic exploration allow. Although humorous and sometimes quite irreverent, given our serious theme, these more distanced explorations of historical trauma are no less useful and profound than exploring them directly.

One of the distanced sociodramatic exercises I sometimes use is an improvised performance by each national or ethnic group, entitled ‘The History of my People (in five minutes)’. Each ethnic group is given only a few minutes to prepare an enactment of their people’s history from ancient times to the present. The only guideline is that the enactment must be brief. This is a purposefully impossible task. Members of each ethnic group must decide how to include the important elements of their history and how to incorporate the perpetrator or victim aspects in the performance. In the pressured, chaotic and playful preparation for the presentation, the participants tap into their society’s cultural training to retrieve the internalized messages and collective narrative of their people. The light-hearted enactments often give way to profound revelations about how each group holds their history within their personal and collective identities.

Another variation on this theme is facilitating the technique of transformations where the perpetrator role is explored, played with and deconstructed. Also, groups may enact stereotypes of their own cultures, sharing the impact of the internal and external projections.

The emotions and images stimulated by these powerful exercises become a point of departure for discussion and group process integrating the reflections and insights discovered during these explorations. I believe there can be no political solutions to intercultural conflict unless we come to understand and tame the darker emotional and psychological drives of the human being. This is a guiding principle in my Healing the Wounds of History approach to working with groups in conflict.

### **Moving Deeply into Grief**

In the grieving process, waves of strong emotion, often triggered irregularly and unpredictably, wash up on the shores of consciousness and are worked through in various ways. In individualistic cultures, the emotional attachment to the deceased is experienced as a personal loss. In collectivist cultures, the emotional attachment also includes the family, community and society. Mourning processes guide the group towards a repair of the social fabric that has been torn by the loss of the individual.

In the context of my work, I deal with grief caused by a traumatic event, especially a collective trauma, such as disaster, war, genocide or displacement. In such events, large groups of people are impacted and the traumatic event becomes part of the collective narrative and identity.

During a time of trauma, such as war, those who survive are focused on staying alive; they cannot take the time to fully grieve their losses. Once the trauma is over, the focus becomes building a new life and so the trauma gets moved into the background, because its impact is so overwhelming and painful. The result can be that entire cultures reconstruct their societies on the unresolved rubble of the trauma.

In the intercultural conflicts that I have dealt with, I have seen members of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and even 4th generations struggle under the weight of the unexpressed emotional burdens of their ancestors. For example, the 6 Million Jews who perished in the Holocaust represent both the loss of entire families, towns and generations, but 6 million individual lives, as well. Each lost life was someone who was known and loved: a sister, aunt, grandfather, teacher, neighbor, or first love. The societal trauma is so huge that one cannot grieve all of these lives and losses at once. But drama therapy and expressive arts approaches are able to contain deep wells of emotion through symbolic processes, aesthetic distance and their capacity to work through grief. The HWH model can guide participants on the journey through an archaeological dig of buried memories and emotions. This can happen in small group encounters and large group gatherings and may even lead to national commemorations.

There is no single map to uncover the underlying grief inherent in a historical trauma. Specific exercises to achieve this cannot be listed here. Of paramount importance are the facilitator's intuitive skills. This phase requires the facilitator to tune in and make decisions about therapeutic interventions and track the group's process while at the same time seeking out the emotional leaders whose stories will carry the group into the catharsis of grief that it needs. Psychodrama, more often than not, is the structure I choose to help give shape to the complex stories of grief and mourning.

However, unlike in a classical Psychodrama, I am not just looking for the most warmed-up person to do a piece of therapeutic work, but tracking and choosing the protagonist who will express the larger collective story that needs to be told to move the group forward in developing the theme of the workshop. One must strike a balance between the personal and collective story in order to achieve a meaningful release.

In a workshop I conducted with descendants of Holocaust Survivors and the Third Reich, a moving example of such a personal/collective story emerged. A German American woman who grew up in the US had an American GI father and a German mother. The mother's parents had been members of the Nazi party and she herself had grown up as part of the Hitler Youth. As a young woman during the war, she experienced multiple traumas: the Allied bombing destroyed

her home and killed her grandmother, her brother came back from a Russian POW camp a shattered shell of himself, and she was raped by the conquering Russian soldiers. After the war, she met and fell in love with an occupying US soldier. At the age of 20, she moved to the US with her American husband and gave birth to a daughter. The mother suffered from PTSD, dark depressive episodes and a tremendous guilt and feeling of responsibility for the Holocaust. When her daughter was an adolescent, she committed suicide.

As the protagonist of the Psychodrama, the German American woman expressed both rage at her mother's self-destructive act and grief at her loss and the pain that she had inherited. This story was enacted with the help and tender support of both the German and Jewish workshop participants. There was enough compassion created in the room that the Jewish participants set aside their vengeful feelings towards the Germans and were able to empathize with the woman's pain without judgment. Even though this was the story of a particular woman, echoes of similar losses were shared by the other German women in the room, many of who were from the same generation as her mother. When the protagonist was reduced to sobs, instinctively all the German women in the room surrounded her and began to sing her a German lullaby (the same one her mother used to sing.) The work of this protagonist tapped into the German participants' need to grieve and reclaim a positive relationship with their identities as Germans. Even though the Germans had been the cause of WWII and their people had been responsible for the deaths of millions of Jews, it did not negate their emotional right to grieve their own losses.

In a HWH process, several workshop participants can experience this kind of meaningful release of grief as we cycle through the various phases of the work. Like the natural ebb and flow of the ocean, when a large wave of grief appears, the facilitator needs to step back and allow it to engulf the group. As the wave recedes, there is a cleansing and integrative effect. As participants share their personal responses the group is able to sculpt meaning out of these stories of suffering.

### **Creating Integration, Performances, and Rituals of Remembrance.**

At the end of a HWH workshop there is a need for closure, integration and assimilation of the feelings and insights that were explored during the group encounter. This segment of a HWH group process is conceptually similar to Renee Emunah's (Emunah, 1994) dramatic ritual phase of a drama therapy progression. The participants review what they have experienced, acknowledge what they have learned and decide what they will take with them back out into the world. This is accomplished through creative means and often contains ritual elements.

One example of a ritual of integration that I devised took place at the end of a three-day workshop I conducted in Berlin in the early 1990's with descendants of Jewish Holocaust survivors and The Third Reich. The workshop was held on the beautiful grounds of an ancient castle that had been the quarters of important Nazi officials during WWII.

Our time together had been rich in the deep exploration of our mutual pain as inheritors of the legacy of the Holocaust. Dividing the participants into small groups, I asked the teams to imagine that it was 500 years from now and the events of WWII and the Holocaust had become an official day of commemoration observed by both Jewish and German cultures. I instructed them to either create a ritual that they would present to the gathered assembly, or to direct the larger group to be part of a procession they devised.

There were certain elements that I required them to include in their presentations. Each group was to go out into the nature that surrounded the castle grounds and find elements (leaves, branches, stones, flowers, etc.) that they could incorporate into their enactment. Each workshop participant also had a "sacred space" on the grounds of the castle where they could use expressive arts processes of visual art, journal writing and poetry to reflect on their experience and incorporate their results in the final presentation. Finally, I asked each group to include a brief enactment of the story of the Holocaust from the "future projection" perspective of 500 years in the future.

Filled with the images and emotions of our three days of work together, the German and Jewish participants fully invested themselves into preparation for the final ritual. The result was that,

through the aesthetic distance of creating and performing the ritual, the group was able to integrate their complex workshop experiences in a satisfying and meaningful manner.

Another way to culminate a HWH process is to close with a public performance or commemoration. This allows what happened in the workshop to be shared and experienced by a larger group of people who would never sign up for a drama therapy process themselves, but who would be willing to come to a performance. I am an actor, theatre director, leader of a Playback Theatre company as well as a drama therapist. Creating the public performances that came out of HWH processes with groups in conflict was a natural outgrowth of my experience. In my first experiments, I conducted three-day workshops with Germans and Jews and then spent weeks directing the participants in creating self-revelatory performance pieces. (A monologue/dance with a potato, representing the essence of German-ness, a Jewish poet reciting an ode to her German side. A German and Jewish couple enacting scenes from their relationship and a German opera singer singing a Yiddish lullaby). Using the Playback Theatre form as a frame, these self-rev pieces were interwoven into public Holocaust commemorations. My Playback Theatre company enacted the personal stories of workshop participants in a public forum and we interspersed the self-rev pieces throughout the presentation.

As this process is time consuming and it is not always possible to work with workshop participants in depth to develop theatre pieces, a simplified structure evolved over time. My company, The Living Arts Playback Theatre Ensemble, which I have directed for 20 years, has become seasoned in performing personal stories of trauma and historical complexity related to HWH events. A public Playback Theatre performance is organized and promoted in advance. The workshop participants are not pressured to share their stories although most elect to be available to do so. After the completion of a HWH process with groups in conflict I invite two participants to share a personal story related to their historical legacy or their experience in the workshop. This serves as a warm-up for the audience, develops the theme of the evening, and functions as a bridge between the closed private workshop and the open public assembly. I then open the Playback process to the public, inviting audience volunteers to come on stage and share a personal story triggered by the intercultural conflict being witnessed on stage. Often, the Tellers are themselves members of the cultures in conflict who, for one reason or another, did not

participate in the preceding workshop. In addition, I facilitate the audience in Playback Theatre short forms such as Fluid Sculptures, Pairs, Narrative V, as well as engage them with Sociodramatic and Theatre of the Oppressed techniques. This further deepens the audience exploration of the social, existential and political dilemmas provoked by the performance. It can be argued that this approach to performance effectively functions as a large group drama therapy process in which society is the client.

An innovative use of this large group drama therapy approach to intercultural conflict resolution was initiated by drama therapist Stephen Snow, Ph.D., director of the Concordia University Drama Therapy Program in Montreal. In October 2003, I was invited by Professor Snow to intervene in the aftermath of a conflict between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian students at Concordia University as part of a Peace and Conflict resolution program. A pro-Palestinian faction had won the student government elections in 2001. This had set off a chain reaction that culminated in a violent protest in September 2002 against Benjamin Netanyahu, the former Israeli prime minister, who, as a result of the violence, had to cancel his planned speech on campus. This was a traumatic and polarizing event that captured the attention of the entire country.

In 2003, Stephen Snow organized a week-long workshop for Palestinians and Israelis in Montreal, which I facilitated, and assembled a Playback Theatre ensemble made up of Montreal actors to perform in a culminating event. The public performance was well attended and the Playback actors were able to give emotional shape to the complexity of the Palestinian and Israeli crisis and engendered compassion for both sides of the conflict, including the felt but unexpressed Palestinian rage. What struck me most was the enormous amount of attention from print and broadcast media that this event received (the CBC, the London Times, French television coverage). As a social activist, I was inspired by the tremendous potential a drama therapy intervention could have on society as ripples of influence turned to waves. News stories and sound bites extended well beyond the Palestinian and Israeli workshop and theatre performance. The possibility of changing perceptions, creating empathy and instilling hope, where none existed previously, seemed momentarily possible. (A video of this performance is available through Concordia University Drama Therapy program-[cite film reference]).

In recent years I have gone on to produce more performances: *Mapping the Emotional Terrain of Peace*, 2004 (with Palestinians and Israelis), *Hiroshima Stories*, 2005 and *Facing the Mountain: Armenians & Turks in Dialogue*, 2007. I have found that creating workshops, events, rituals and commemorations around a focal point such as an anniversary date (November 9, 1938, Kristalnacht, April 24, 1915, Armenian Genocide or August 6, 1945, Hiroshima Day) can mobilize latent emotional energy. These are times when the memory of the trauma rises to the surface.

In 2005, for the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, I organized a day-long workshop with Japanese participants and an evening commemoration open to the public. The performance/commemoration featured an Okinawan music ensemble, a troupe of Taiko drummers, a playback theater performance and an art installation. Audience members participated in an interactive public forum and finally placed a thousand origami cranes on a "peace tree". At the heart of the evening, were the testimonies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bomb survivors, whose stories were honored by the Playback theater enactments. With Japanese and American cultures as my ultimate clients, I chose to organize the event to help release the unexpressed grief and outrage about this traumatic event and motivate the audience to take social action.

In response to the misperception that Martin Luther King's Birthday, is a holiday only for African-Americans, Drama Therapist David Read Johnson Ph.D., experimented with the creation of rituals of commemoration for all Americans. He designed a Haggadah-like progression, which was modeled on the Passover Seder. With this ritual, Johnson implies that this is a day that all Americans should reflect on the impact of slavery (Johnson?).

Not only is there is a role for drama therapy in guiding meaningful commemorations for significant dates but for creating new dates that need to be acknowledged by society. In the early 1990's I became involved in the public discourse in Germany on the need for Germany to have a Holocaust Commemoration day. There was ambivalence about creating such an annual day of observance as German leaders had difficulty imagining what shape the commemoration rituals

would take. At a conference in Berlin, with the help of a group of Germans and Jews who had just completed a workshop with me, we performed a ritual before the politicians and the leaders of the German Jewish community. They eventually established January 27, the day Auschwitz concentration camp was liberated, to be observed annually.

My impulse towards taking a deeply personal process such as working with collective trauma and intercultural conflict and turning it outward came out of my social activism. Although working with group participants can be very meaningful the impact it has on society is limited. By bringing the essence of what happened in the workshop to the public, I am able to share our experiences with a wider audience. In this way, a whole community can witness these stories, be touched and have their attitudes transformed. Creating a documentary film or having print and broadcast media cover the event further extends its impact.

### **Case Example:**

In May 2007, I was invited by Professor Haruhiko Murakawa, Ph.D. and Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan to conduct a series of workshops and performances addressing the Japanese legacy of WWII. Working with my Expressive Arts Therapist colleague and collaborator, Aya Kasai, who also functioned as my interpreter, I facilitated two workshops in Kyoto, one in Hiroshima and another in Tokyo. I also worked with two separate Japanese Playback Theatre companies and conducted performances in Kyoto on the aftermath of Japanese militarism in other Asian countries during WWII. In Hiroshima, I facilitated a workshop and conducted a Playback Theatre performance on the emotional impact of the atomic bomb on the survivors, their descendants and the identity of the city of Hiroshima itself. I will give some background to help the reader understand the historical context in which I intervened and then describe a workshop followed by the description of a performance in Kyoto. (For the sake of confidentiality, some of the details in the workshop have been changed.)

WWII in the Pacific ended with the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the formal surrender of Japan on September 2, 1945. Japan had occupied and committed atrocities in other Asian countries and subjugated the populations to forced labor, medical

experiments and sexual servitude. Because of the post-War emergence of the threat of the Soviet Union, and later Red China, the United States needed Japan as an ally in the fight against communism during the Cold War. The United States was reluctant to humiliate the Japanese government by making them accountable for the crimes against humanity they had committed. Therefore, unlike the Germans, who had the Nuremberg Trials forced upon them by the Allied countries, Japan never had to confront its behavior during the War in a direct way.

The Japanese post-war “economic miracle,” the historical phenomenon of Japan's record period of financial growth, propelled it onto the world stage as an economic superpower. The country focused on the future. School history books avoided lingering on the Japanese militarism of the 1920's through 1940's. With the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan struggled with its role as victim as well as perpetrator. Some Japanese government administrations took steps towards apologizing for past actions, while others awkwardly moved towards retractions of the apology. These behaviors reflected the national ambivalence about accepting responsibility for War crimes. It was too humiliating and brought shame upon the collective. The cultural values around “saving face” prevented Japanese society from direct reflections of its legacy.

Set against this historical backdrop, my invitation by Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, to address these issues, itself was a controversial act. Ritsumeikan University is home to one of a handful of Japanese Peace Museums where Japanese militarism and the events of WWII are presented in an unflinching way. In the museum are artifacts, documents, photographs, installations that educate students on the details of WWII, including the Japanese invasion of other countries, the use of “comfort women” by Japanese soldiers, forced slave labor and use of prisoners of war for medical experiments. The ultimate goal of the museums is to educate and help people understand the nature of all wars and conflicts.

My workshop, which was to bring Japanese students and students from other Asian countries together to address the unexplored history between them, took place within the museum itself. Although Ritsumeikan University has a large population of foreign Asian students, and the two-day workshop and subsequent Playback performance were widely publicized, in the end, the only participants who registered for the workshop were Japanese. Accepting that this was the

reality of Japanese / Asian relations on campus, it was collectively decided that it would be important to hold the workshop anyway, so that the Japanese students could confront their legacy.

Fifteen participants attended. They were asked to bring objects or photographs that had some meaning for them, which were related to their personal legacy of WWII. After a brief discussion, we launched into a drama therapy warm up which included improvisational techniques.

We then moved into the opening ritual of our work, where participants presented the objects that they had brought to the workshop, shared a little of their meaning, and placed them on a makeshift altar. One woman placed a photo of her uncle who had died during the war, as a Japanese soldier and tearfully stated, "I carry the ghost of his death." Another placed a photo of herself and her grandmother with whom she had been very close, and said, "I carry the story of the little child that took on my grandmother's pain of the war." Another placed an abstract art object that he had created, and shared, "I carry my emptiness as a Japanese person in relationship to this war." Eventually, all 15 participants had a turn sharing their objects.

The group then needed to address their disappointment that the other Asian students did not feel safe enough to attend the workshop. I placed a series of empty chairs in the room facing the participants and asked them what nationalities they would like to address in a sociodramatic dialogue. The nationalities the group chose to embody as victims of Japanese oppression were Filipinos, Chinese, Koreans, Americans and Okinawans. The participants took turns sitting in these chairs and expressing the imagined feelings of the absent voices. It was clear that they understood and empathized with the mistrust that the Asian students felt towards them. Having worked through their disappointment and unresolved feelings, the participants were better able to commit to looking at their own legacies without the benefit of having the victims of their country's atrocities present.

Holding the workshop in a Peace Museum enriched the experience. There were films, artifacts, tactile and sensual stimuli that could open the collective memory files of the participants. I

divided them into four groups and asked them to wander around the museum for an hour and a half. Each group was to agree on a single image that they would later bring back and present to the entire group. The four groups all chose photographs that they found compelling. Each group created a human sculpture of their photograph and then brought it to life in an enactment.

One group picked a photo of “comfort women” being rescued and protected by Allied forces in Burma, empathizing with the women’s plight as sexual slaves. Another group selected a picture of Kamakazi Pilots eating their last meal before they went on a suicide mission. Through inner monologues the actors revealed that one of the Kamakazi pilots proudly embraced his fate that he was going to die for the Emperor. Another pilot expressed his ambivalence and fear of dying. The third group portrayed a humiliating scene in China, where Japanese soldiers walking on the sidewalk forced Chinese citizens to bow down to them in the gutter. The last group brought to life a scene from the occupation of Korea where a Japanese school teacher forcibly coerced young Korean students to speak Japanese.

This last scene seemed to carry the most charge for the group. A sociodrama emerged out of this enactment where the entire group took turns doubling and role reversing with the students and the teacher. One workshop participant played the character of the teacher with such commitment that the chilling, authoritarian timbre of his voice triggered many of the workshop participants – some needing to put their fingers in their ears to protect themselves from its frightening quality. It became clear that this controlling voice belonged to a Japanese archetypal figure present in various forms in Japanese culture. This voice came to represent the “perpetrator,” a theme that kept resurfacing during our time together.

The next day, after checking in with the group, a pivotal story emerged. One of the participants shared his experience going home on the bus the previous evening. A developmentally disabled man had gotten on and started disturbing a woman on the bus. The woman reported this incident to the bus driver. It was clear that the man did not have his full capacities. The driver yelled at the man in a very demeaning way, humiliating him and telling him to get off the bus in the same authoritarian voice that had been expressed in the workshop. The participant struggled with the decision of whether to speak up in defense of this mentally challenged man. The fact that no one

had stood up to authority in the scenes the group had depicted haunted him. The Japanese value of obedience was very strong. He finally found the courage to speak out against the oppression he felt he was witnessing as the other passengers looked on.

The participant and the bus driver entered into an argument and the participant threatened to report the driver's behavior to his superiors. Hearing that, the bus driver immediately took a more conciliatory tone. The participant experienced a certain redemption in the fact that he had spoken up in the face of oppression. This felt like a direct response to what had happened in the workshop earlier that day.

The story on the bus was then fleshed out by the workshop participants through Playback Theatre techniques and a sociodramatic exploration. The group made the connection between the bus driver and the teacher in Korea and realized that both of them had the authoritarian voice of the archetypal "perpetrator. I guided the participants towards attempting to understand the societal forces that had given rise to Japanese authoritarianism in the 1930's and the reasons why the echoes of this voice still exist in Japanese society today.

Gradually I became aware that I was standing in a cultural minefield: Here I was in a university in Kyoto, Japan, the only Caucasian in the room. Yet my role as teacher and therapist accorded me great respect in the Japanese culture. I realized I needed to move delicately and respectfully through the process of uncovering a potentially shameful side of the Japanese character. I felt that it was important that we humanize and deeply empathize with all of the "perpetrator" roles we were exploring. I believed that this would help counter the collective inclination to turn the group's gaze away from such shameful images. I introduced the idea of the "wounded child" within the perpetrator. Although a Western psychological construct, the "wounded child" concept took hold. The group then took turns dialoguing with the "perpetrator" as well as stepping inside the role. In the integration phase following the enactment, participants shared their insights about the ways that society's messages about obedience and respect for authority had impacted them in their family, school and work.

This process evolved into a more in-depth examination of Japanese identity and the way it is constructed. Using the “My name is ... I am a ...” technique described earlier in the chapter, I had the participants sort out the feelings that came up for them as they publicly stated their national identities in various ways. Two Japanese participants exposed their hidden Korean and Okinawan bloodlines in the process of doing this exercise. Korea and Okinawa have both been dominated by Japan in the past. Even in a seemingly homogenous country such as Japan, these revelations demonstrated that there exists a complex web of cultural identity under the surface.

Participants further explored their Japanese identity, first on paper by diagramming and then through the technique of sculpting the significant internalized spoken and unspoken messages from parents, ancestors, society, authority figures, etc. A Japanese man who had lived in the United States for many years volunteered to do this exercise in front of the group. The roles he chose to portray in his diagram of societal messages were: his father, his mother, school, America and Japanese society. Each one gave him messages that were enacted by members of the group. The strongest charge came from the role of Japanese society insightfully acted by another participant and a moving psychodramatic dialogue ensued between them. The Psychodrama unearthed the conflict that existed within this man between the traditional Japanese values of loyalty to the group, politeness, harmony, and indirect communication and the Western values of directness and open emotional expression. In the post-Psychodrama sharing the theme of the collision between Eastern and Western values in Japanese culture resonated with the majority of the participants. The point came up that this internal cultural conflict might have had its roots in the history of Japanese modernization, the end of World War II and the injection of Western values caused by the post-War occupation of Japan by the United States.

In a continuing exploration of Japanese history and identity I asked the group to prepare a 5 minute enactment of their people’s history from ancient times to the present. I only gave them 15 minutes to prepare. The group welcomed the comic relief of a playful examination of a serious topic. The light-hearted improvisational presentation fast forwarded through the creation of the Japanese Islands, the movement of tectonic plates, the period of the Japanese as hunters and gatherers, the influence of Chinese culture, the succession of Shogunates, the opening of Japan by Commodore Matthew Perry, the Sino-Japanese War followed by the Russo-Japanese War, the

elevation of the Emperor to god-like status, the military build-up to World War II, culminating with the atomic bomb and the end of the War followed by the American occupation. Using chairs and other objects in the room the participants started to symbolically build skyscrapers on the shaky foundation of the rubble and destruction of their country. The group, as if with blinders on, cried out “Stay focused on the future!” Exhausted, they stopped to view and take stock of the society that they had created. In a synchronistic moment, through the open window of our workshop space the tall skyscrapers of the city glistened in the sun. Slowly, the group began to dismantle the sculpture of chairs representing the society they had created. Underneath the foundation of these buildings was the unexpressed grief of the Japanese people symbolized by a black scarf.

The workshop closed with an improvised “story theatre” allegory that was collaboratively created and enacted by the group. In the story, a character that the group named Akira went on a journey in search of the meaning of WWII. Akira was troubled by his legacy and could not make peace with it. He drowned his sorrows in sake and found himself wandering around a peace museum after hours trying to find answers to his quest in the darkened exhibits. Suddenly a group of angry people from Asian countries that had been oppressed by Japan appeared and started to chase him. They were accusing him of not admitting to war crimes. In the midst of the chaos, the Asian people caught Akira and they abruptly all started to drink sake together. Once they joined him in drinking, they all became friendly. The scene transformed from one of anger into camaraderie. Akira’s conclusion was that the search for the meaning of WWII is very simple: we must find our common humanity. In the playfulness of the improvised story, the group had projected all its fear, sorrow and hope.

In the final ritual, we ended as we had begun. The participants returned the stones they had been holding as symbols of their personal and collective WWII stories. Each participant put their stone on the altar, stating, “I place this stone in honor of...” Each participant ended the sentence with a heartfelt sharing of the person they were honoring and what they were taking with them from their experience.

A Playback theater performance was held two days after the workshop at a lecture hall on the Ritsumeikan University campus. Playback Theater AZ ensemble from Tokyo, directed by Kayo Munakata, came to Kyoto to perform the stories and support the HWH event. I conducted the performance interviewing the Tellers with the help of an interpreter.

That night the lecture hall was filled to capacity with students. The actors began by sharing their own stories related to the legacy of WWII, the advertised theme of the performance. This functioned as a warm up for the audience. As I came on stage to introduce myself, facing a sea of Asian faces I again became profoundly aware of being an outsider asking the audience to share their inner secrets. I knew that I would need to gain their trust.

I began as I often begin an evening of Playback, by referring to the theme of the evening and the opening stories shared by the actors. Then I asked the audience for feelings and images related to the theme and explained that the actors would respond with fluid sculptures.

The first respondent said in an angry voice, "Why do you come to Japan? Why are speaking English; why aren't you speaking Japanese? You come to Japan, you should learn Japanese."

I responded. "These sound like angry questions. Can we play back your anger?" He agreed and the Playback ensemble played back his outrage. I asked him if we had captured the essence of his anger. He said, "Only 50% of it." I thanked him for his honesty and moved on to the next person.

I responded to the next raised hand. An older gentleman with white hair stood up and began to rant at the top of his lungs, "How dare you come and speak to us about Japan?" I recognized that voice – it was the harsh controlling voice of the bus driver, the voice of the teacher, the voice of the "perpetrator" from our workshop. It turned out that this man belonged to the right wing nationalist movement and had come to sabotage the event. I decided to stay with him and to take an empathetic stance towards his rage. "Look at what the United States did to Japan in Hiroshima and Nagasaki", he continued. "Look at China – they've killed thousands of their own people. You must face the facts; you must tell the truth!" He went on in this manner for 2 minutes.

When he finally paused, I said, “I want to explain that I have not come here as a colonialist power trying to tell Japan what to do. I have come with humility and with empathy. I feel your anger and your passion, sir. Will you permit us to play it back?” He nodded silently.

The ensemble played back the man’s anger and passion. He was calmed by the aesthetic response of the actors and, with a strange smile on his face, sat down. We were then able to proceed. I then invited someone to be the first Teller of the evening.

My request was met with tense silence. I asked again. Finally, someone from the workshop raised his hand and I invited him up onstage. It was the man who had intervened with the bus driver and he told that story again, but this time in public. In sharing the story again he seemed more empowered and his message to the audience was that we all have a strong voice inside that can be used to fight oppression and promote peace.

The next story was told by a Japanese woman who had visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum with an American and a Korean friend. They all wandered around the museum, looking at the aftereffects of the atomic bomb. Then the Korean and Japanese friends found themselves outside, waiting for their American friend. He did not emerge from the museum until several hours later. They asked him why he had spent so long in the museum. He replied, “As an American whose country dropped the bomb, I have a heavy conscience. I wanted to carve the images into my brain and heart so as never to forget.” The Japanese teller questioned herself: “Do I feel the same guilt and responsibility for what Japan did in Korea and China and other countries?” She had to admit that she did not.

Following these two moving stories I thought that it would be important to allow the audience to process what had been stirred up. So I asked people in audience to turn to a neighbor to discuss the themes from the first 2 stories. I then invited people to share their feelings and played them back with Playback Theater short forms.

The man who originally challenged me about what I was doing in Japan speaking English said that the first 2 stories had cleared the air and he now felt that we were all standing on common ground. Another man said he was impressed with the integrity displayed by the first two tellers.

I asked for another Teller to come up and share a story. Once again, the man who had ranted at me before stood up and started ranting again, this time about the Korean War. Trying to feel compassion for what was driving this man, I sensed a deep hurt within him. I said, “I feel your anger and your hurt and your sense of feeling wronged.” And asked the ensemble to play these feelings back. They did a Narrative V monologue driven by a powerful drumbeat created by the Playback musician. Finally, the man seemed to feel seen and understood. He smiled and sat down and we didn’t hear from him again the rest of the evening.

A young man came up next and related his memory of being a 4<sup>th</sup> grader and having a school assignment to go home and ask his family members about WWII and then write a report. First, he asked his grandparents. His grandfather had been too short to be a soldier in the Japanese Imperial Army and felt enormously ashamed that he had not gone to war. His grandmother was conflicted: glad that her husband was alive but also ashamed that he had not been in the army. These sentiments puzzled the boy. Next, he asked his uncle, who had been a soldier in China during the War. The boy knew that his uncle had killed a lot of people and asked him about it. Hearing his question, his uncle hit him hard across the face and said, “Don’t you ever ask me about that again!” Shocked at his uncle’s reaction, the boy was thrown into a sea of confusion. He felt the profound differences between the experience of his generation and the generations that had lived through the War. He felt the “shame of the gutter” and couldn’t make sense of his complex legacy. In a Hamlet-like soliloquy, the Playback actor who had been chosen to portray the young man, movingly captured the essence of the boy’s confusion and the man’s struggle with his conscience and the Japanese soul.

I invited a final Teller to come up on stage and share a personal story. A woman stood up in the audience and started to speak with great passion from her chair as if she could no longer contain herself. She identified herself as a Korean student studying Peace Education at Ritsumeikan University. She thanked the actors and the people who had produced this public forum on the

legacy of the War. She thanked the Tellers who had so courageously shared their stories. The Korean woman's family had suffered greatly at the hands of the Japanese during World War II and she felt that it was important to speak about the truth in such bold and honest ways. It gave her hope. She saw the potential of this kind of theatre to heal.

A descendant of Japanese victimization had finally felt safe enough to speak up. The audience acknowledged her with warm applause for her courage in expressing herself. The Playback Theatre ensemble honored her by playing back the essence of her experience through a final fluid sculpture.

As the audience filed out of the lecture hall I was approached by several Chinese and Korean students, some trembling with emotion, sharing their appreciation for the event. A Chinese student whose grandmother had been a "comfort woman" during the War confided in me. Whispering through her tears she said, "I wanted so much to tell my story. But, I couldn't. I was too afraid."

Profoundly moved by this encounter I saw that I might have made a small crack in the in the silence around this War.

### **Conclusion: Making Commitments to Acts of Creation and Acts of Service**

The last phase of the HWH approach actually takes place out in the world, after the workshop is over. Many people participate in HWH workshops hoping that somehow the burden of their historical legacy can be magically lifted from their shoulders. Often inheritors of a historical trauma feel locked in an unfortunate cycle of rage, shame and guilt with no release from their suffering. They attempt to cope by ignoring or avoiding the issues arising from the trauma and its aftermath. Then a film image, news story or an encounter with the "enemy" reawakens their awareness that there is ultimately no escape from the ghosts of the trauma. Most people live their lives unconscious of the role that history plays in the present. In American society, for example, the impact of Slavery can be felt every day if one chooses to see it and feel it. HWH is founded on the premise that historical trauma needs to be worked through in a personal way in order to be

truly understood and re-integrated into a life-affirming sense of self. This process provides a bridge between personal and collective experience. First, we need to face history and uncover our unconscious emotional reactions and beliefs. We can then give ourselves the opportunity to transform the trauma through acts of creation or acts of service.

The principle behind encouraging HWH participants to use the traumatic images, memories and messages they have inherited to create art or take social action is that this is the most powerful way to ultimately master the trauma. Through the acceptance that the trauma will never disappear and that one has a permanent relationship to it, the inheritor can be liberated from a tortured denial or rejection of its existence. Embracing the legacy allows the constrained and unexpressed emotional energy to begin to untangle.

Acts of creation can involve all of the expressive arts (visual art, poetry, music, dance, and theatre) to transform the pain of the past into an aesthetic form. In this way, the person's experience of the trauma can be witnessed and their soul soothed. The empowerment of taking social action can counter the overwhelming helplessness that inheritors of a trauma feel in the face of an unbearable legacy. The HWH approach models the synthesis of art and social action, when workshop attendees become involved in new HWH initiatives or move back out into the world having been transformed by their experience. A German and a Jewish poet collaborated and toured reading their poetry, an Armenian created a on-going Turkish-Armenian dialogue group, in Montreal, a Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation group was formed, a German dancer performed dance rituals in Berlin on Holocaust commemoration day, a Japanese man was inspired to create reconciliation groups with Chinese and Koreans, a Jewish Holocaust survivor created a theatre piece about her story.

As a drama therapist, I do not judge the form that the transformation of the inherited pain takes. I assist in helping the participants find their own paths. I trust in the profound healing and transformative principles I found in nature when I made my pilgrimage to Auschwitz in 1995---- the horror of the ashes of the cremated bodies scattered around the burning fields could be transformed into transcendently beautiful wildflowers.

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