Intercultural Dialogue

Between Memory Work and Reconciliation

In my intercultural dialogue projects I have focused on memory work and the critical praxis of reconciliation. Memory work assumes that individuals and communities are shaped by the forces of history and how we remember the past. A critical praxis of reconciliation assumes that individuals and communal bodies need to invest effort and commitment that go beyond a shallow rhetoric of healing and forgiveness.

The concept of memory work further assumes that we all have memories but that the meaning of these memories is in need of exploration. One could say (analogically, not methodologically) that "memory" is to "memory work" what "dreams" are to "dream interpretation." We all have memories, but we need to work through them creatively and critically in order to understand their meaning, especially since memories can also be manipulated and fetishized.

The concept of a critical praxis of reconciliation goes beyond a narrow understanding of (political) conflict resolution and beyond a vague (religious/psychological) vision of healing the world. Reconciliation is an open-ended process that needs the commitment of individuals or communities to work together in order to improve strained or broken relationships. Reconciliation engages the participating parties on all levels: personal, intellectual, political, social, cultural, and religious.

My work in the past has focused on the reconciliation between Jews and Germans in a post-Shoah world. The continuing effects of the Holocaust are not only felt by survivors and their children (the second generation) but have left a heavy legacy also on the third generation. The genocidal antisemitism of Nazi Germany has also left its traces in the postwar German culture. Relations between Jews and Germans, which after 1945 have been tentative and cautious, are in need of (moral) repair. Since the mid-1980s, self-initiated groups have begun to address these issues by organizing meetings and encounters between the descendants of victims and of perpetrators (second generation) as well as younger Jews and Germans (third generation).

But the issues that emerge in encounters between Jews and Germans in a post-Holocaust world can—beyond their specific context—be observed in, and applied to, other situations in which individuals and communities struggle with an antagonistic (and often traumatic) past and present. My work now includes contemporary social issues, from racial reconciliation seminars in the United States to working with an Israeli-Palestinian-German trilateral peace building group.

Project 1

Racial Reconciliation Seminars
Co-facilitation: Sybol Anderson and Björn Krondorfer
Often unrecognized, kept silent, and swept under a thin veneer of toleration, racial divisions continue to define the American social landscape. The Racial Reconciliation Seminar explores students’ lived experience of race through mediated dialogue, exercises, and quiet reflection that illuminate the impact of racialization upon themselves, others and their relationships to each other.
Project 2

Friendship Across Borders (FAB)
Consultation and Facilitation

FAB is a trilateral peace-building organization that initiates dialogue between Israeli, Palestinian, and German professionals (therapists, teachers, lawyers, religious leaders, social workers); it also arranges dialogical encounters between students from all three countries. Meetings have taken place in Germany, Israel, West Banks, and Greece.

Project 3

Art in a Post-Shoah World

In 2003, artist Karen Baldner and Björn Krondorfer started to collaborate on an artistic project addressing the legacy of the Shoah on their lives as Jews and Germans who are residing in the United States. Book art, hand-made paper, and mixed media installations guide their aesthetic choices. Among the many shows, we had a solo exhibit in the fall of 2008 at Mathers Museum, Bloomington, IN, accompanied by a symposium that included art historian Lisa Saltzman, Susan Gubar (Literature), Alvin Rosenfeld (Jewish Studies), Edward Linenthal (History/Religion), and David Thelen (History).

Project 4

Stephen Weinstein Holocaust Symposium

Krondorfer is one of the participating members of the international Stephen Weinstein Holocaust Symposium. Part of Fairleigh Dickinson University, the 4-day symposia take place every other year since 1996 in Wroxton, England. In an intentional dialogical setting, the symposium is international, interfaith, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational in nature. Participants share the processes and fruits of their engagement with the Shoah.
Project 5

Program Director: Björn Krondorfer

The International Summer program on the Holocaust was a unique educational opportunity for students from American and European colleges and universities to learn about the past in an intercultural setting. Students from different religious and national backgrounds studied, lived, and traveled together for one month in the United States, Germany and Poland. The mission of the ISPH was to create understanding of the contemporary significance of the history and legacy of the Holocaust through a four-week long dialogue between Jewish and non-Jewish students.


Project 6

Research Colloquium:
Explorations at the Intersection of Religious Pluralism and Jewish-Christian Dialogue (Union Theological Seminary, NYC, 2011)
Convener and facilitated: Björn Krondorfer, Katharina von Kellenbach, Karla Suomala

The 2011 summer Research Colloquium brought into conversation two discourses that currently run on parallel tracks. On the one hand, there is the discourse on religious pluralism and comparative theologies, which theorizes and reflects on the changing landscape of religious belongings in a globalized and pluralist world, such as multiple religious identities, religious hybridity and migration patterns, or conflicts between various world religions. On the other hand there is the Jewish-Christian relations discourse which has evolved with renewed urgency after the devastating impact of the Shoah and the founding of the state of Israel. The Colloquium opened a space conducive to research, reflection and scholarly inquiry. During a one-month residency, a group of international scholars explored the richness of resources that has accumulated in the research and literature on Jewish-Christian relations (a discourse that may have suffered at times from a parochial narrowing of perspective) and the visionary potential for religious plurality (which at times can suffer from lack of deep engagement within a spiritual tradition).

Project 7

Interreligious Dialogue: Christian German Clergy and U.S. American Rabbis

In January of 2002, Krondorfer facilitated an interreligious/intercultural dialogue meeting for clergy and theologians from Germany and for American Rabbis from the Chicago area. The group met in Weimar, Germany. The meeting, organized by Bridge of Understanding, included a guided visit of Buchenwald concentration camp, where Jewish and Christian religious leaders commemorated together the victims of Nazism through a shared liturgy.
Project 8

Annual Holocaust and Genocide Series at St. Mary's College of Maryland

Between 1993 and 2012, I organized annual series of events to study and commemorate the Holocaust and other genocides. Renowned scholars, Jewish survivors, eyewitnesses, artists were invited as speakers; the series also included commemorative evenings of music, poetry, dramatic performances, documentary films and movies.

Project 9

The Jewish-German Dance Theatre

Co-founders: Lisa Green and Björn Krondorfer

The Jewish-German Dance Theatre (1985-1989), a group of Jewish American and non-Jewish German artists, created performances exploring their relationships in light of the Holocaust.

The company blended techniques and styles of modern dance and experimental drama to produce an original performance that addressed the difficulties of facing the Holocaust as Jews and Germans. Their production was performed in the United States and Germany. Videotapes, audiotapes, rehearsal notes, reviews and performance scripts are collected in the archives of New York's Lincoln Center, Library of the Performing Arts. Television appearances include Sunday Morning with Charles Kurault (CBS), Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR3), Suedwestfunk (SWF3), and Hessischer Rundfunk (HR3).