

Both victims of ideological violence and perpetrators –and their descendants– can become traumatised.

Speaker

Eva Weil

Psychoanalyst in Paris, Researcher
at Sorbonne University and CNRS



European
Peace
Conference





Treating victims and perpetrators of ideological violence with psychoanalysis

Eva Weil on seeking intergenerational justice through reflection

*We are excited to announce **Eva Weil** as a speaker on collective violence at the European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics in Amsterdam, 2025.*

Eva Weil

Eva Weil is a psychoanalyst. She is a both researcher at Sorbonne University and at Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS). She is a member of the Paris Psychoanalytical Society. She is also a director of seminars on collective trauma at Société Psychanalytique de Paris and Sorbonne University. Oscar, the founder of the Peace Conference, came across Eva Weil's work via his therapist network from the 9th European Psychoanalytic Conference for University Students (EPCUS) that was themed "Why war".

What do you mean with "ideological violence"?

"I refer to ideological violence by a state or organisation aimed at destroying a group of people. The targeted individuals did not personally deserve this violence – they were targeted simply for belonging to a particular group. Perpetrators seek not only to erase the group (whether defined by family, religion, or profession) but also to conceal that the violence ever occurred."

"The Nazis told Jews in death camps: 'Nobody will know your history – we will destroy all evidence.' While the perpetrators of the Tutsi genocide in Rwanda may not have used these exact words, their actions followed the same logic. The aftermath of World War II revealed millions of testimonies proving these attempts at erasure. This adds a devastating dimension to one's life narrative, affecting not just individuals but entire families and genealogies."

What symptoms do you see in descendants of victims?

"In my practice, I observe descendants carrying a particular form of depression and derealisation – a sense the world around them is not fully real. They often experience guilt about their parents' suffering and what I call a 'knowing/not-knowing' paradox: they're aware of the trauma but can't fully grasp what happened. Many describe a persistent gloom over their family that prevents lightness or happiness."

"Some become strongly psychologically bound to their parents, unable to express normal anger. It's as if their parents silently communicate: 'After what we endured, we can't handle your rebellion.' These children often feel obligated to compensate for all that was lost – murdered relatives, severed connections, and missing memories."

Ideological violence seeks to not only erase a particular group, but also to conceal that the violence ever occurred.

How do children inherit parental trauma?

"Most traumatised parents do not wish to burden their children, so they remain silent. Yet the trauma transmits itself unconsciously. Children sense something fundamental about their parents is uncanny. They wonder: 'Were my parents always this depressed? This mistrustful? How can someone parent confidently when they were once treated as subhuman?'"

"For Jewish descendants especially – though not exclusively – there's often an unconscious drive to repair what was destroyed. This can manifest in writing family histories, as if ensuring these stories survive becomes a sacred duty."

Can perpetrators' descendants also be traumatised?

"Absolutely. I published a case about a German patient who came to France for studies but felt persistent unease about his family history. During treatment, he visited Poland where his grandfather had operated a factory near Auschwitz. He discovered his grandfather had exploited camp inmates as disposable labor, knowing they would be killed regardless."

"This revelation devastated the young man. He returned to therapy grappling with existential guilt: 'Do I bear any responsibility as being this man's grandson?' The trauma manifested physically and emotionally. Ultimately, he became a historian – a redemptive choice I found profoundly moving."

*How can someone
parent confidently
when they were once
treated as subhuman?*

What about current conflicts like Russia-Ukraine?

"My colleagues in war zones report similar patterns of avoidance or denial. Patients often do not discuss the ongoing violence, as if mentally escaping the unbearable present. Therapists in Lebanon and Israel face comparable challenges. We must acknowledge our shared helplessness in active conflict zones – true trauma work often begins only after violence ends."



Publications

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*Eva Weil
Speaker
EPC 2025*

Want to learn more? Join us in person or online.

European Peace Conference on Perpetrator-Victim Dynamics

"We are not at war, but not at peace either," said the new NATO Chief, Mark Rutte. "If you want peace, prepare for war." Is Europe at a crossroad towards more polarisation, identity politics, and war? Reflections on our human nature may help us find a sensible way forward.

At this year's peace conference, the first of its kind, an international group of scholars, experts and practitioners, will seek ways to explore how perpetrator-victim dynamics run through our lives, families, business and politics.

With guest lectures, workshops, personal and group reflections, we seek to embody the latest expertise from the research on war and peace.

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