

COLOURS OF REVOLT

Report on the Excursion 'Peace, Trauma and Religion'

Berlin, Summer 2022

COLOPHON

This report contains findings and reflections of students' part of the 2022 study trip to Berlin as part of their education in the master specialization program Peace, Trauma, and Religion, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Published under the supervision of: Prof. Dr. Fernando Enns.

Editor: Eline van der Kaaden
September 2022(digital edition)

© Amsterdam Centre for
Religion and Peace & Justice
Studies (ACRPJ), 2022

www.religionpeacejustice.com
centre@religionpeacejustice.com

De Boelelaan 1105 HG-2E03
1081HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

protestbloemen groeien
in de kleuren van verzet
hun plantenhanden open
alsof ze daarmee hopen
dat ons eigen vredesgebed
ook zo kleurig zal bloeien

//

flowers of resistance grow
waving the colours of revolt
their plant hands open
as if hoping
that our own peace appeals
will as beautifully show



Poem by Thirza Snoek, student of one-year Master "Peace, Trauma, Religion"

CONTENT

Berlin Excursion 2022-2023	5
Oyoun: A Space for Agency	6
Meetings of Fear and Joy at Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin	7
Reflection for Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand Visit	9
Horrors of History in Plain Sight: The Berlin Wall.....	13
I am a Berliner	15

BERLIN EXCURSION 2022

The Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Peace & Justice Studies intends to broaden the interest and research about topics at the intersection of peace, trauma, and religion. The centre coordinates the master specialization 'Peace, Trauma, Religion' (PTR, one-year Master of Theology & Religious Studies) at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Besides reading interesting papers, participating in lectures and dialogue in the classroom, we believe that these topics need to be experienced. It is important to hear narratives and stories from different people, to see and witness places that are torn by conflict, whilst also be inspired by hopeful activists and changemakers. For this reason, each year the students go on a field trip to a place where conflict is present and peace is being negotiated. After cancellations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, at the end of the academic year the students raised the idea to go on a trip to Berlin together. Thus, in August 2022 the group went on a 4-day trip to Berlin. And so, after three years, the study trip could be part of the curriculum again.

As PTR-students, we are called to always look for possible transformation, courage, and hope. In this trip, we decided to look for those stories of resistance and courage; stories taking place in the second world war, during the period of the separation of Berlin by the Wall, or that are acted upon now. This could stand in contrast to the well known narrative of wide-spread obedience of the Germans to the Nazi regime. As Sofie Scholl, one of the members of the student resistance group 'White Rose', said,

**'stand up for what you believe in,
even if you are standing alone'.**

Sometimes it is our plight and responsibility to search and remember those who stood alone. As the poem on the front of this report says, we hope that the colours of revolt that we witness may inspire our own appeals for peace. In this report you can read about the variety of revolt colours we witnessed, and how it inspired the students in diverse ways. We hope it will also inspire you.

- Eline van der Kaaden, Intern at ACRPJ and student of PTR



GROUP OF EXCURSION PTR 2021-2022 1

OYOUN: A SPACE FOR AGENCY

THIRZA SNOEK



'If God hates the queers, why are we so cute?' says the sign hanging over the entrance of Oyoun. Inside, there is a café and walls lined with artworks and photographs. The collective is located in Schillerkiez, a tiny neighbourhood that is part of the bigger area of Neukölln.

On its website, Oyoun describes itself as a space for decolonial, queer feminist and migrant perspectives. These perspectives are implemented through various art projects, making Oyoun a cultural hub for queer and BIPOC bodies. Within Oyoun, there is a strong focus on community. We got to experience this first hand, when we were invited to the SOUP3 event taking place in the beautiful shaded garden behind the building. We were offered some amazing mezze, which consisted of the most delicious *muhammara*, humus, *mutabbal* and fried Lebanese bread. With events like this, Oyoun wants to involve the entire surrounding community in their projects and activities.

Arjunraj, who explained the ins and outs of Oyoun to us, stated that everything within Oyoun is an experiment. The collective is experimenting with the removal of hierarchical structures, with the connection between art and space, and with radically decolonising spaces and bodies.

During the discussion we had with Arjunraj, one of the main themes was the concept of agency. Oyoun aims to create a place where people who normally aren't allowed to, can claim agency over their bodies and ideas. People who aren't allowed to be someone, can carve out room for themselves, to have agency and to decide for themselves who they want to be.

Do I provide a 'safe space' to others?

Thus, when thinking about resistance and courage, Oyoun exemplifies that for me. The people working to make this collective of people work are trying to resist dominant structures, and to figure out what it means to be radically different. It made me realise how I am part of such structures, and how often I am probably complicit in the enforcement of harmful and exclusionist frameworks. Do I provide a 'safe space' to others? What is the place of my whiteness in relation to people of colour? What do I undertake to change the things that are within my control? Being at Oyoun helped me to start thinking through such questions. And that is a process that will probably take a lifetime.



OYOUN BUILDING 1

MEETINGS OF FEAR AND JOY AT IBN RUSHD-GOETHE MOSQUE IN BERLIN



EZRA MANULLANG

The weekend in Berlin (19/08/2022) was cloudy with drizzling rain. On that Friday, the sun did not shine brightly. Nonetheless, our group enthusiasm remained high as we were going to visit several historical sites in Berlin. The itinerary of our group ‘Peace, Trauma, Religion’ (commonly abbreviated as PTR) from the VU Amsterdam Faculty of Theology, included a visit to the Ibn Rushd-Goethe mosque in Berlin. This mosque has been highlighted by local media outlets as a place of worship that embodies the inclusive and progressive teachings of Islam. It is the first mosque in Germany to fly the rainbow flag in support of the LGBTQI+ community, starting in 2017. Moreover, women are not required to wear the hijab to enter the mosque. Also, unlike most other mosques, men and women are permitted to pray together in the same room.

Furthermore, the congregation of this mosque is based on several political commitments. One of their main commitments is to rely on the Qur’an’s interpretation which directs people toward peace, unity in diversity, and compassion for other people, particularly the marginalized. On top of that, the Muslim community within this mosque pledges to stand against fundamentalists and radical interpretations of Islam. The aforementioned pieces of information are among of what sparked the PTR group’s interest in the mosque. When we arrived at the mosque, we sat in as listeners for a short discussion that continued with the Jumu’ah moment at the mosque, a congregational prayer (*salat*) that Muslims hold every Friday.

‘We believe in a God that provides love and compassion to all creation.’

During the discussion, a woman spoke about how she copes with her fears. The woman expressed that she always lived with fear, especially fear of what other people think about her, her family, and her friends. She talked about her past, she said “I was always busy dealing with these feelings. How can a Muslim live with so many expectations from the community that often give pressure? What is the collective expectation from me and how should I relate to that?” Those questions lingered her mind so many times.

She continued, “in a Muslim family, one would find a lot of fears. Most of the time we believe in God who is a punisher, it is not about a loving relationship, it is about punishment and building fear.” She adds, “it is too bad because I don’t believe that Islam teaches us first and foremost fear.

But than she continued that For her, Islam was a religion that is concerned about the body of love and compassion. “We believe in God that provides love and compassion for all of creation.” These certain qualities, love and compassion, were the central identity markers of Islam, she said. As

every Surah says in the introduction, ‘the name of the Father, all compassion of the living God’.” Love and compassion are the quality of the relationship that Muslims have with Allah, and it is not about fear and punishment. This was not merely her personal narrative.

She then continued that she, along with the community, has received a lot of hatred and threats in the past, because of the existence of this particular mosque. Yet, a man in the audience spoke about happy moments rather than fearful ones. He mentioned that he has been fed up with fear-related topics lately and would like to balance the conversation. He emphasized that he does not want to sound pessimistic because there are many happy moments in this mosque as well. He said, “this is the place where we bring joy to one another, especially for the couples who held their interreligious marriages in this mosque. Then, in this place of worship, same-sex married couples can receive the blessing. Those moments are the proof of happiness that we do not want to lose.” He ended his speech with such a positive energy; “these smiles on the faces of the marginalized, the elation of finally being able to be in a safe space with a supportive community, and these joys, among other things, are the reason of why we still continue what we are doing.”

At the time, these two contributions were part of the discussion. What made it special was that everyone expressed their respective questions and perspectives with honesty and openness. The differences are celebrated as a source of conversation and opportunities to complement one another.

Frankly speaking, this PTR visit to the Ibn Rushd-Goethe Mosque in Berlin marked my first encounter with such a progressive and inclusive Muslim community. As a citizen of Indonesia, the world’s largest Muslim-majority country, I have never seen a Muslim community that constructs a mosque with such inclusive attitudes. Indeed, one can recognize individuals or small groups of

As a Citizen from Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority country..

people who combine their political commitments with their faith. However, welcoming and embracing the LGBTQI+ community as well as interfaith marriage, while basing it on a certain interpretation of the Qur’an, it is a community I have never heard of before. In my view, it is a different way of being Muslim. Given the context of having previously received a multitude

of hatred and threats, it fascinates me when they repeatedly convey vocabularies like love, compassion, happiness, and safe space. Those keywords spread the language of hope and reflect a strong sense of caring attitudes towards the marginalized.

The moment after the event ended, I reflected on our time there and was reminded of this saying (the author of which I have forgotten): “be the reason why someone feels included, welcomed, supported, safe, and valued.”

We left the mosque with food for thought, notions of peace, compassion, and living together in the community. Afterwards, we chatted about it again while enjoying a tasty



IBN RUSHD-GOETHE MOSQUE 1

REFLECTION ON „GENDENKSTÄTTE DEUTSCHER WIDERSTAND“

(„Memorial Site German Resistance“)

GRACE SHOCKMAN



The Memorial

The weekend in Berlin for me was an exercise in reflection about what it means to engage with memorials. I had the privilege to spend my whole summer working at the Chapel of Reconciliation along the Berlin Wall Memorial. This experience primed me to ask questions about sites of remembrance, documentation, and about the narratives of those we find depicted at such sites. There is a meaning in hosting visitors in the physical spaces where acts of violence took place and inviting a type of engagement that asks one to consider what it is to memorialize, “deal with”, and remember history in such locations. The “Memorial Site German Resistance” is one such site which was utilized by the German military and as our guide made us aware was also the center of the attempt to overthrow the National Socialist regime on July 20, 1944.

There is a meaning in hosting visitors in the physical spaces where acts of violence took place

Like many memorial sites which find themselves intertwined with historical data and special exhibitions, there are levels of engagement one can have. For this visit it suited the group to speak with a guide and to also engage most with narratives of the youth resisters as well as the religious resistance movements. It is worth a note that this day meant something different for many of the students in the group and for our own level of discussion, emotional responses, and questions on the narratives depicted. I can of course only speak for myself about what the visit meant for me and so I will share briefly some of the questions which arose for me as well as attempt to paint a picture of the emotional response it warranted for me.

I was mainly curious to engage about with the idea of responsibility in how we engage with history. The primer into our visit to the memorial included a conversation about the reason for the creation of the memorial site. As our guide noted there was a feeling amongst many in the German public that it was perhaps painful, too soon, or confusing to look back at the 12 years of Nazi-dictatorship. It was the generation born in the 1940s who didn’t “remember” the national-socialist era but had parents, teachers, etc. who did remember and experience it. This younger generation started to rebel in the late 1960ies, to demonstrate. The students especially began to question and tell those around them ‘we cannot close our eyes’. Their voices are the ones that created such a memorial.



THE COURTYARD OF THE MEMORIAL BUILDING 1

Responsibility to Remember

I reflected after the visit on the idea of responsibility to ask our communities to “open their eyes” but also sat with the difficulty of what this means when one is working with traumatized audiences or with communities with internalized xenophobia for example. There tends to be a chorus from generations whose direct experience does or did not align with such experiences that says ‘how could you be so blind?’ and ‘how could you let this happen?’ These were questions which our tour guide helped us to engage with through telling a couple of stories.

The first was in relation to the figure of 90% of youth who were participants in either “Hitler youth” or the “Federation of German Youth”. The number has something to do with the success of the organizations considering lack of competition (as other organizations were forbidden), the reality that these groups provided holidays or other experiences which may not have been accessible otherwise to families, and that they created a social pressure wherein kids who did not join faced both alienation and suspicion. Understanding this piece of the narrative invited many questions and for me it brought up emotions around the influences of political ideology in my own upbringing in the USA. This part of the tour invited me to consider again that question of ‘how could you let this happen?’ It is a question that cannot be excused even in situations of high social pressure. However, instead of only pushing this question to individuals, one might also consider what forces, institutions, and powerful people this question might also be directed towards.

responsibility to remember also means a responsibility to consider one's own culpability..

What was important about viewing the exhibition was also reminding myself that being a child doesn't mean you cannot understand how you are being influenced by social regimes. We heard the narratives of many of the youth resisters. We can learn something from asking how Helmuth Hübener at 15 years old had eyes wide open. It is not easy to hear his story because it is a reminder that responsibility to remember also means a responsibility to consider one's own culpability.

My response to seeing these photos was not necessarily shock but it did make me emotional. For the fact that it does provide a visual response to 'how could you let this happen?' More than an 'allowance' it depicts endorsement. With our guide we reflected on the notion that for these images to arise there has to be a history, and in the Christian history there is a primer for anti-semitism written in long before the national socialist era. It begs the questions again of responsibility for ideologies and critical reflection on where social pressures are fostered.

In the end this visit for me was one that I was left thinking about, because memorializing resistance in instances where the resisters are such a minority (in this case 1% of the population) is emotional. Visiting the memorial brought me both a sense of hope that resistance matters as it provokes a sense of responsibility and a wave of emotions about the influence my own political and religious context has on my own acts of resistance. I know this site was a difficult one to visit for several individuals in the group (especially those who come from contexts of conflict and oppression) which also brought me to consider what it might mean to consider how memorials can be challenging sites which should be also navigated with time for reflection or sensitivity to context.

HORRORS OF HISTORY IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE BERLIN WALL

THIRZA SNOEK



In this land
I have made myself sick with silence
In this land
I have wondered, lost
In this land
I hunkered down to see
What will become of me.
In this land
I held myself tight
So as not to scream
-But I did scream, so loud
That this land howled back at me
As hideously
As it builds its houses
In this land
I have been sown
Only my head sticks
Defiant, out of the earth
But one day it too will be mown
Making me, finally
Of this land.

This poem comes from Anna Funder's beautiful book *Stasiland*, in which she tells stories from East-Berlin before the wall came down. The poem was written by Charlie Weber, a dissident who died under mysterious circumstances in a Stasi jail, and whose girlfriend Miriam never stopped looking for him and his body. The whereabouts of his body are uncertain; Miriam suspects the Stasi (abbr. "Staatssicherheit" - National-Security-Forces) of secretly cremating his remains.

It is just one of the many stories that exemplify what the Berlin Wall did to families, individuals and human relationships. After the night of August 12 and 13, 1961, all of a sudden families, friends and colleagues were separated, first by barbed wire, later by increasingly bigger walls. Over the years, 9 children under the age of 16 died due to the border, some drowning in the river Spree from which no one dared to save them, fearing the bullets of the Eastern border guards.

One of the central landmarks at the Berlin Wall Memorial is the Chapel of Reconciliation. Its clay walls are lined with the remains of the original Church of Reconciliation, which stood in that same place until its demolition on 22 January of 1985. Pieces of brick, glass and tile remind visitors of what once was. Tuesday through Friday, every day one victim of the walled border is remembered during a service in the chapel.

Behind this beautiful place of worship, an even more beautiful worship grows. Little plots of land together form a blossoming garden, worked by more than 30 people from all over the world. This garden is located on the original death strip, which was deliberately rendered barren in the years of the wall. It was the place where one would be instantly shot when spotted by the Eastern guards. Now, flowers and trees defiantly grow there, showing off their colours as if in protest to the terrors of history.

*Flowers and trees
defiantly grow there,
showing off their
colours as if in
protest to the terrors
of history.*

Having placed my body at the site where the wall used to be, and being in the garden atop the former death strip was a very profound experience for me. I think there is poetry in casually walking across the old border between East and West, almost as a belated act of resistance. Being in this environment made me think of divisions in today's world, and in my own life. Having this embodied experience is so much different from reading things from textbooks; being

physically at the Wall Memorial, seeing the old buildings, and walking around this historically loaded place made clear to me that real people were involved here. Additionally, it showed me how powerful resistance can be, even if it takes a long time to really see change.



GARDEN OF CHAPEL OF RECONCILIATION 1



SERVICE AT CHAPEL OF RECONCILIATION 1



THE BERLIN WALL 1

I AM A BERLINER

HTETPAING YEMAUNG



As a person, born in 1993, Germany for me has always been a strong and developed nation which enriched with prosperity, peace and beautiful heritages. though I have also learned about World War II, Hitler, and Holocaust in my school history books. Germany is a dream place for a friend of mine to continue her theological studies because of famous German theologians. It is also a dream place for another friend because he wants to work at BMW company or may be, Volkswagen. I guess, my college history teacher might have a different view. He might see Germany as a loser from WWII or as a terrible nation who killed millions of Jews. Yes, no one thinks that German people were the victims, and were traumatized by their own government.

Yes, it was my first time to see the suffering of the German people. It was the first time I see Jehovah's Witnesses are honored as those Christians who did not submit to the injustice of the Nazis. It was the first time I saw Dietrich Bonhoeffer not as a great theologian who died for his faith, but as a person who was killed by his government authorities. And it was also the first time I became aware that the past of the peaceful present was not as peaceful as I believed.

Actually, it is not a long time ago story. It is not old as I thought in my history classes. It is the story of just a couple of previous generations. But the story of their struggle is beautifully honored by today's people. Rains and flowers take away the blood-stained ground. The screams during Berlin nights are not scary anymore.

While many people are learning about the past of Berliners, I am still living in the past of Berliners. I see people beaten, tortured, and killed for they do not obey the injustice. Nights are not safe. Soldiers have power to do everything they want. No one knows when we will wake up from these nightmares.

Now I am in West Berlin. I pray every night for the safety of my family and friends who are still in "the East". I believe in the Berliners' dream. I believe there will be a day when we can honor those who sacrificed their lives. I believe there will be a day when the children forget the brutality of human beings but only remember the noble lives of those who gave theirs for us. Like there's a dawn for the Berliners, there will be for us, too. Like the Berliners woke up from the nightmares, I believe, we will too.

Ja, Ich bin ein Berliner!