

# The Heritage of National Socialism: The Culture of Remembrance in Berlin

(Account of a Centre for Nonviolent Action study tour)

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## Introduction

At the end of March 2012, six of us from the CNA team had the opportunity to go for a study tour to Berlin and devote a whole week to monuments in Berlin, that is those relating to the culture of remembrance. We had been waiting for this opportunity for a long time, and once we got it, we put the last ounce of effort into it. We returned full of impressions which have still not settled in us, and I think that we are not yet fully aware of all the things we've learned.

In this paper I will try to give a review of most of the places we visited, so that we don't forget (if indeed we ever could), but also to help sort out the main impressions.

Places we visited:

- The Topography of Terror
- The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe
- Monuments to homosexuals, the Roma and political opponents
- Stolpersteine (stumbling blocks) on several places
- An interesting art project in Schöneberg
- The Jewish Museum
- German Resistance Memorial Centre
- Exhibition "Silent Heroes"
- Exhibition "Anne Frank. Here & now"
- The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church
- The Missing House
- The Sachsenhausen concentration camp
- The German-Russian museum
- Gedenkstätte Hohenschonhausen (the Stasi Prison)

We also met with Dr. Christe-Zeyse, Dean of the police school in Oranienburg, and with the citizens association Berliner Geschichtswerkstatt<sup>1</sup> which works on marking the specific sites at which something terrible was committed. Both of these meetings meant a lot to us, and we were impressed by the enthusiasm and the sense of justice of the people we met.

<sup>1</sup> [www.berliner-geschichtswerkstatt.de](http://www.berliner-geschichtswerkstatt.de).



The Topography of Terror

I will not include the Stasi prison in this piece, even though that historically important place is impressive and intimidating. As it is not within the main focus of this study tour, since it does not fall under the direct heritage of Nazism, it would require a separate paper.

I am using this opportunity to thank Dr. Martina Fischer, who has supported us from the very beginning of our idea and spent a couple of Berlin evenings with us, listening with interest to our impressions of the places we had visited, then to dear Miriam Schroer, who was of great assistance to us in preparing the journey (with excellent ideas about what we should be sure not to miss), to little Lisa Milena, who on several occasions rushed with us from one end of Berlin to the other, and of course to the BMZ for their financial support, because who knows when and how we could possibly manage to do something like this without them. And many thanks to Alan Pleydell who helped a lot with English version of this piece.

## The Topography of Terror<sup>2</sup>

The Topography of Terror is a place in the heart of Berlin which today serves as a centre for documenting Nazi crimes. Between 1933 and 1945, the most important institutions of Nazi terror such as the headquarters of the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, were in this place. Thanks to a citizens' initiative from the 80s of the last century, an open-air exhibition was set up in 1987, which in 2010 grew into a museum and a centre that undertakes research, documentation and education about the Nazi past.

The permanent exhibition contains fundamental information on the Gestapo and SS headquarters, and their crimes throughout Europe. It ranges from the rise of the Nazis to power, through the way in which they had taken control of all positions of power and a detailed overview of the institutions that fulfilled the function of terror, through to the concrete crimes that were committed and the social groups that were persecuted, and then the role of the SS and the Gestapo in the occupied countries, and finally the end of the war and the post-war period and the fate of individual-criminals. Numerous photographs show the euphoria that prevailed in Germany around its adored leader, a thing to which the guides will specifically draw your attention, explaining that it is not only Hitler and his closest circle who were responsible for the terror that followed. The exhibition also documents in detail the days of the Nazi rise to absolute power, during which they wiped out any political opponents who could even remotely confronted them,

<sup>2</sup> [www.topographie.de/en](http://www.topographie.de/en).





starting from the Communists, all the way to the Social Democrats. Once they had exterminated these kinds of adversaries, they had to find a new enemy, so they focused on the Jews, who were one of the easier targets taking into account the already existing anti-Semitism in Europe. Apart from the Jews being an easy target, it was never clear to me why the Nazis focused on them in particular, and I am particularly confused after a piece of information told to us by the guide: Jews comprised less than 1% of the population in Germany. So, a small, almost invisible minority that cannot at all rationally be seen as a threat. Why Jews then? - even though the Nazis didn't target only Jews but also other minority and marginalized groups which did not fare any better in these strivings to maintain "racial hygiene": those with epilepsy, the mentally ill, people with special needs (apart from "hygienic", the reason was also to decrease the costs of health insurance), then those who were estimated to be "asocial elements", often including homosexuals, Sinti and Roma, and others who could dirty the purity of Aryan being.

Crimes committed in the occupied countries are only superficially represented, so out of all former Yugoslav countries only Serbia is mentioned, and none of the major mass murders are mentioned: for instance there is no information about Kragujevac or Kraljevo – though I understand that they are planning to expand the exhibition. Also, there is almost no mention of the active collaboration of domestic groups in those countries and their atrocities. On asking the guide why that was so, we received the reply that it was important first of all to focus on German atrocities, but that numerous studies are being done on the role of the collaborators as well, so that more information can be expected on this subject in the next version of the permanent exhibition.

In fact, most of the exhibited information falls within the scope of common knowledge, at least for our region, because if we learned anything in history classes during our studies, then that is the Second World War. And not only from history. If a lot of movies were made about anything, it is about the Nazis and their crimes. However, one kind of information that is not so widely known is also exhibited, which, for understandable reasons, does not fit so neatly the mainstream story about that period. It is about the fate of certain Nazis after the war. A certain number were sentenced to death, but it is more interesting by far what happened with those who did not end up in court. It is estimated that 80.000-100.000 people lived under a false name in Germany after the war. Many were saved by that, so they made it to very old age spared of the judgment of the public and without answering for their crimes. (If nothing else, at least now their names and surnames are recorded in one place, so it is known and remembered what they took part in and what they committed). It is also interesting to discover that the passion for prosecuting the Nazis and for de-Nazification had weakened in American and British circles as early as the summer of 1947. It was necessary to downplay divisions in the light of the now de-



veloping Cold War, so no time could be wasted on bringing the Nazis to justice. Moreover, many of them would have been of great use. This is how some, with significant experience (which it was a shame to waste, right?) were recruited into the ranks of western, but also eastern, intelligence services, even into the newly formed West German one. As far as I could see, almost all the individuals displayed in this section fell into the category of those who had joined the West German (and in a lesser number East German) services. I generally did not manage to see those



The Topography of Terror

who found a livelihood with the CIA, MI5 and with similar employers. I do not know whether this is because of German reticence in dealing only with their own back yard.

I know of numerous criticisms that some Germans have with regard to dealing with the past in Germany, which goes as far as some claiming that the Germans “remember so as to forget”. However, I am impressed that in the heart of the capital of any state there exists a sizeable centre which is focused on keeping alive the memory of an organized crime of inconceivable proportion behind which that state itself stood. I am also impressed that the blame is not being transferred to a handful of individuals, but that numerous state institutions that played the villainous game are neatly documented. And together with that goes the fact that no one heavily pressurised that state to establish this centre, apart from its citizens, perhaps. I am interested whether such a thing exists anywhere else in the world, or if my experience of wrestling with the Balkans puts me in a handicapped position and is the reason behind my being so impressed with this endeavour and also with the fact that the guided tour for the group with a duration of two hours is free, which is a political message indeed.



The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe





The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe

### Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe<sup>3</sup>

The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe is an unavoidable sight when you visit Berlin. Situated near the Parliament and the Brandenburg Gate, it is hard not to notice given the space that it occupies and it definitely creates an extraordinary impression. I do not know to what extent those not familiar with it (if any such people exist) can recognize what it is about considering its abstractness, but I can hardly imagine that they don't immediately ask themselves what it is and what it is for. They are dark grey concrete blocks of different height, a total of 2711 of them, which you can walk between. What you will feel depends on how much you know or what you feel towards the Holocaust, but it is surely difficult to stay indifferent.

During the day a sea of visitors, tourists and various excursions passes through there. You can also see children who are running between these concrete blocks after school, hiding and giggling. Or a grandfather and grandson to whom one of these blocks serves as a stand for chess. There are people who consider this inappropriate. To me, that would be like expecting that the life of today's Germans stops and they freeze on account of what their grandfathers did. It needs care and attention both to live a normal life as well as to remember and learn lessons from the past.

The Information Centre located beneath the monument, underground, is just as important: it consists of four rooms. In the dark *Room of Proportion* there are signs with the names of European countries and the numbers of Jews from each of them who were killed: a total of about 6 million people. On the floor there are quotes from the diaries or letters of the victims, rare written testimonies. The *Room of Families*, in which the fates of 15 Jewish families from different parts of Europe are represented, prevents the Holocaust from just being perceived as a dreadful fact from distant history, but puts before us an intimate, human dimension of that suffering. Then follows the *Room of Names*, another dark room displaying the names and short biographies of murdered Jews.<sup>4</sup> And last in the row comes the *Room of Locations* where historical footage and photographs of concentration camps, places of mass executions and killings, death marches and deportation routes are shown.

The construction of this monument began in 2002, and was completed in 2005. It is important not to forget the fact that discussions about this memorial were being held since the end of the 80s, two public tenders were organized and many public debates based on numerous differing views, from the choice of location, through the purpose of the monument, to its looks and function. The German press has at times been filled with controversies about the monument.

<sup>3</sup> [www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en](http://www.stiftung-denkmal.de/en)

<sup>4</sup> The list with names is, of course, not the final one, and research is still being done. There is also an internet version of this room at [www.raumdernamen.com](http://www.raumdernamen.com).





The Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe

It seems that some had had enough of the discussion, so they were suggesting that an empty space was left in the centre of Berlin, a piece of land on which only one sign would stand with the inscription: "German memorial to the Holocaust. We debated for twelve years and we could not find a solution."<sup>5</sup>

It is interesting that you can arrange a guided tour for visitors in many languages with the centre, apart from the more common European ones, but also in Polish, Dutch, Hebrew and even in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, though our tour in Bosnian didn't really turn out to be the best choice (it turned out that the language was a considerable obstacle for quality guiding).

A nice gesture that I hadn't noticed during my previous visits to this monument is that one of the streets in the locality is named after Hannah Arendt.



## Memorials to homosexuals, the Roma and Sinti and political opponents

The Memorial to Homosexuals persecuted during Nazi rule is located in the big park (Tiergarten) between the Parliament building and the Monument to the Murdered Jews of Europe. The Nazis considered homosexuality a crime and people were criminally prosecuted and detained in camps. Tens of thousands of homosexuals were killed. The monument is in the shape of a big concrete cube with a carved window through which a shot of a same-sex couple kissing can be seen. It was officially opened in 2008, and even today it gets repeatedly damaged, probably by those who have a problem with the sexual orientation of the victims to whom it is dedicated, not to say homophobes.

<sup>5</sup> U Karen E. Till. *The New Berlin. Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p. 170.



Not far from it there stands the still unfinished Monument to the Murdered Sinti and Roma, half a million of whom suffered during the Nazi regime. The German government decided on the construction of the monument 20 years ago, but it began only in 2007. There were various reasons for this delay and the most often quoted was the lack of agreement about the inscription and the choice of terms for Roma and the Sinti. However, many claim that it is also about the lack of political will. The monument is a solution of the Israeli artist Dani Karavan, a small round lake with a black triangle in the middle, the symbol with which the Roma and Sinti, or gypsies as the Nazis called them, had been marked in the camps, and in its centre is a white rose.

Across the road, in front of the Parliament building, there is a monument in honour of the 96 members of the Parliament who were killed as political opponents of the National Socialists. It consists of 96 pieces of marble, on each of which there is engraved the name, the year of birth, the party that he/she belonged to, the name of the concentration camp in which they were and the year of their death.



Monument to homosexuals



Monument to the Roma and Sinti



Monument to political opponents





Stumbling stones

## Widespread places of remembrance

*Stolperstein*<sup>6</sup> or the “stumbling stone” is a project of the artist Gunter Demnig who lives and works in Cologne. The metal plates measuring 10x10cm are his original conception. He insets them amongst the cobblestones in front of the buildings in which the victims of Nazism lived, in their memory: the Jews, the Roma and the Sinti, homosexuals, dissidents, Jehovah’s witnesses and victims of euthanasia, those who were deported and killed. Gunter Demnig says that a man is forgotten when his or her name gets forgotten. *Stolpersteine* in front of the buildings bring the people who used to live there back to memory. Almost every stone begins with “... lived here”: one named stone each for each person.

On each stone are inscribed the name and surname of the victim, their year of birth, the date of their arrest and deportation (if known), the place of deportation and the place where the person was killed.<sup>7</sup> For example, in Berlin, in front of the building in Oranienburgerstrasse 10, five stones stand for five members of the Kozower family who were deported to the Theresienstadt camp in January 1943, and afterwards transferred to Auschwitz where they were killed. The father, mother and three children of eleven, nine and one. (See the photograph.)

When you see these plates, it is hard not to wonder about the fates of these people.

Demnig conceived this project in 1993, and he laid down the first *Stolperstein* in Berlin, in Kreuzberg, without permission. In 2000 he was granted permission to place 600 more plates in Cologne, and then 2000 in Berlin.<sup>8</sup> This became his life project which is being realized in cities all over Germany, but also in the cities of other countries: Austria, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Hungary, Belgium, Norway and Ukraine, Poland and Italy. Over 32000 stones have been laid down in more than 700 places.<sup>9</sup>

## Engaged art in Schöneberg

Prior to the Second World War, Schöneberg, the south part of Berlin, was home to 16 000

<sup>6</sup> [www.stolpersteine.com](http://www.stolpersteine.com)

<sup>7</sup> The stone is also laid down for victims whose fate is unknown, or they committed suicide or were forced to emigrate.

<sup>8</sup> Ingrid Scheffer, “Do Tread on Me!” Translated by Eric Rosencrantz. Goethe Institute - Kanada, official website. October 2007 (Updated August 2008). Available at <http://www.goethe.de/INS/ca/lp/kue/bku/en78940.htm> (accessed April 9, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Data from the official website [www.stolpersteine.com](http://www.stolpersteine.com) (accessed April 9, 2012).



Jews, mainly in the Bavarian quarter.<sup>10</sup> These were mostly wealthier families of higher education: doctors, lawyers, architects, business people, etc., who were very much integrated within German society. Today, this quarter seems unattractive, it is far from the main flow of city life, tourists rarely venture in there and there is almost no trace of the formerly rich Jewish life. Almost twenty years ago, in the Bavarian quarter, a very provocative and significant memorial dedicated to the victims there was set up, which not only reminds us of that part of history, but also graphically shows how one group of people was dehumanized step by step, and how its almost total destruction came about.

As the winning solution to the public call in 1992 for a memorial on Bavarian Square, the artists Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock produced a design for an impressive installation. It consists of panels which remind one of advertisements hanging from street lighting. They have a stylized drawing on one side and on the other an example of a Nazi law or a regulation with the year in which it was passed. For example: "All local authorities in Berlin must immediately suspend Jewish teachers in public schools (1st of April 1933)" or "Jewish authors are forbidden any literary activities in Germany (March 1935).

Apart from the memorial resembling modern advertisements, additional weight is added to this installation by the choice of location for the signs – their content is often related to today's infrastructure. Next to the children's playground there is a board saying "It is not permitted for Aryan and non-Aryan children to play together (1938)"; in front of a bakery stands a board: "Jews are allowed to buy groceries in Berlin only between 16h and 17h (1st of July 1940)", and next to the greenery on Bavarian Square there is an inscription: "On Bavarian Square, Jews can only sit on the benches marked with yellow paint (1939)".

The authors are clearly pointing to the fact that the Holocaust did not occur overnight, but that it was worked towards over years, until a group of people were dehumanized to such an extent that it became legitimate to "erase" them: they don't leave much space for excuses to the effect that the majority of people didn't know what was going on.

## The Jewish Museum<sup>11</sup>

I will surely go again to the Jewish Museum in Berlin. It seems to me an unavoidable point both as a place of remembrance and as a monument to a culture. And it is also impossible to visit it in detail in a single morning.

The "newer" part of the museum, the work of the architect Daniel Libeskind, made a par-

<sup>10</sup> Data from the catalogue: Renata Stih & Frieder Schnock, "Places of Remembrance - Isolation and deprivation of rights, expulsion, deportation and murder of Berlin Jews in the years 1933 to 1945." 4th edition Berlin 2009.

<sup>11</sup> [www.jmberlin.de](http://www.jmberlin.de)





The Jewish Museum

tical impression on me, regardless of how some may consider it kitsch. It is a construction that does not have a clear entry point of its own. It has long corridors but also stairs underground or above it, where it is easy to lose orientation both in space and time. “The Voids” as Libeskind calls them according to him “really aren’t museum space”. You can’t tell in advance where these corridors are leading you. And then you come across a door and behind it an even darker space, the *Tower of Remembrance*, a narrow, very high and cold space, whose only source of light is a fissure somewhere up high but through which you can’t see the sky or anything else from the outside world. One of the corridors will lead you outside to the *Garden of Exile*. Even though I was delighted with a bit of daylight and fresh air, I soon felt slightly nauseated due to the curvature of the terrain and stone blocks lined up in the garden. On top of the stone blocks, out of reach, there are bushes and branches. Libeskind says that this garden should completely disorient the visitor and that it represents the wreckage of history.

The old building is a typical museum space, but with a pretty modern setting. The history of Jews in Germany is exhibited in it and really all sorts of things can be learned, especially about the development of anti-Semitism. There are frightening facts on one hand, and on the other a frightening amount of victimisation and cult of victim. I thought that I would get soothed by a bit of reflection on today’s reality in Israel/Palestine, but I haven’t managed to find such a thing.



The Jewish Museum, Tower of Remembrance



The Jewish Museum, Garden of Exile





The Jewish Museum, Garden of Exile

I found it interesting to discover that the first Jewish museum in Berlin was opened in 1933, a week before Germany got its notorious Chancellor and, even in that atmosphere of stirring up of anti-Semitism it had managed to sustain itself up to 1938. It was also interesting for me to read that in 1933, some Jews were against the opening of a separate Jewish museum considering that it would contribute to their segregation.<sup>12</sup>



The Jewish Museum

## The German Resistance Memorial Centre<sup>13</sup>

As a peace activist, I was particularly curious to see the German Resistance Memorial Centre. I did not have clear expectations, but what I came across confused me a bit. First, the memorial centre is tucked away and it is unlikely to occur that you would bump into it without particularly looking for it.<sup>14</sup> We knew the address, but when we entered the courtyard there, we did not see anywhere the appropriate sign which would have directed us to one of the several entrances. It seems that they are not counting on casual visitors, let alone foreigners. About a month before we had tried to arrange for a tour in English, however, we received the reply that they could not

<sup>12</sup> James E. Young. "Daniel's Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin: The Uncanny Arts of Memorial Architecture" in *Jewish Social Studies*, Winter 2000, Vol. 6 Issue 2, pp. 1-23.

<sup>13</sup> [www.gdw-berlin.de/index-e.php](http://www.gdw-berlin.de/index-e.php)

<sup>14</sup> Albeit, von Stauffenberg's office used to be in this building, so it is historically significant. On the other hand, there is a sea of historically important spots all over Berlin.



accommodate us as we were less than ten in the group. There wasn't even any attempt to still offer us a guided tour for a price, just the information that we can rent an audio guide in English. In the event, it turned out that the audio guide in English covers only 50-60% of the exhibition. This was to my great regret, as resistance to any organized state terror is a very important thing.

Also, at least regarding that audio guide, the greatest part of the exhibition is dedicated to conspiracies against Hitler, the assassination attempt on him, and the like, that is to people who were still in certain positions of power, as in the case of von Stauffenberg, Hitler's attempted assassin, who is today something like a national hero and who had actively participated in the Second World War and was building his career, so that only in 1943, after recovering from a wound, he thought of the need for someone to get in the way of Hitler. Even if he did think of it earlier, as some claim, he had nevertheless taken part in that war for a number of years, in Poland, Russia, France, North Africa, being promoted to the rank of colonel. He is also, probably, a very interesting character for historians, but for me quite "ordinary people", such as the group "White Rose", and to whom far less space has been dedicated and about whom, I would say, far less is known, are far more interesting.

Hans and Sophie Scholl and Christoph Probst were students who founded the group "White Rose", under the influence of discussions with their parents, and especially with their professor Kurt Huber. They printed and distributed through the post or by other means flyers against Nazism and Hitler, and called people to their moral responsibility and opposition to the regime.



German Resistance Memorial Centre



Visitors of the Centre





After the caretaker of the University in Munich discovered them in an attempt to distribute flyers around the hall of the University and reported them to the Gestapo, they were arrested and after a trial were killed the same day. Several books were written about this group, and in 2005 a film "Sophie Scholl, The Last Days" was made.

## The Silent Heroes

What I was missing in the German Resistance Memorial Centre I partly got by visiting the exhibition "Silent Heroes"<sup>15</sup> which is dedicated to brave individuals who helped Jews during the war and to their memory.

For example, information can be found here on the "European Union", a Berlin anti-fascist group whose goals were to overthrow fascism in Europe, to return basic civil liberties and create a socialist order in a united Europe. This group was helping the Jews, providing them with false documents or food. The group was destroyed several months after it's formation in 1943.

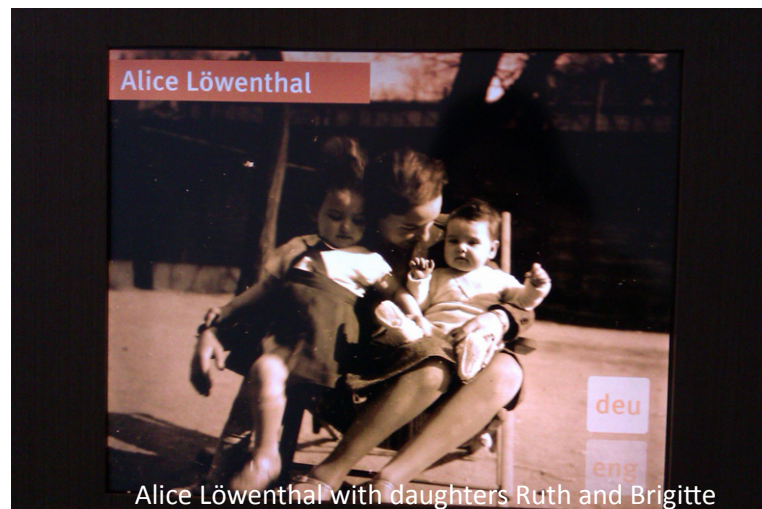
Besides a number of individual fates presented at this exhibition, I was specially shaken by the story of Alice Löwenthal and her daughters. In her marriage to Herbert Süssmann, Berlin-born Alice Löwenthal, a Jewess, gave birth to two girls, Ruth (1937) and Brigitte (1939). With the beginning of the Second World War, the difficult situation for Jews in Germany got even worse. It is possible that that affected the marriage of the Süssmanns. Whatever the case, a short time after Brigitte was born, Alice had left Herbert and moved away with the two daughters to Christinenstrasse.

According to the law of that time, Alice had an obligation of compulsory labour, and the girls spent that time in a Jewish children's home. In 1942 Alice married Adolf Löwenthal, who had become a caring father to her girls. But, Adolf was deported to Auschwitz in 1943. The next morning, before dawn, Alice left their home with the two girls and with a few of their things, and as of then their life in the "underground" began, in constant hiding, often changing shelters. They had to leave the first shelter very soon because the four year old Brigitte had mentioned in front of other people that dad was taken by the Gestapo. They spent some time at Louise Nickel's, in the Berlin suburbs but they had to leave there as well as it became too risky. Not being able to find a shelter for the girls in Berlin, Alice decided to take a risk and travel to Weimar to an old acquaintance. Each journey was very risky, as they did not possess the necessary personal documents. They arrived in Weimar, but they did not manage to find accommodation with the acquaintance: no one opened the door to them. Then they were helped by a complete stranger. Seeing a mother with children without a roof over their heads, he offered them to spend the night in his apartment. A couple of days later, he found them accommodation with his cousin Elly Moller, whose husband was at the front. Alice had to return to Berlin so as to manage to feed the girls by

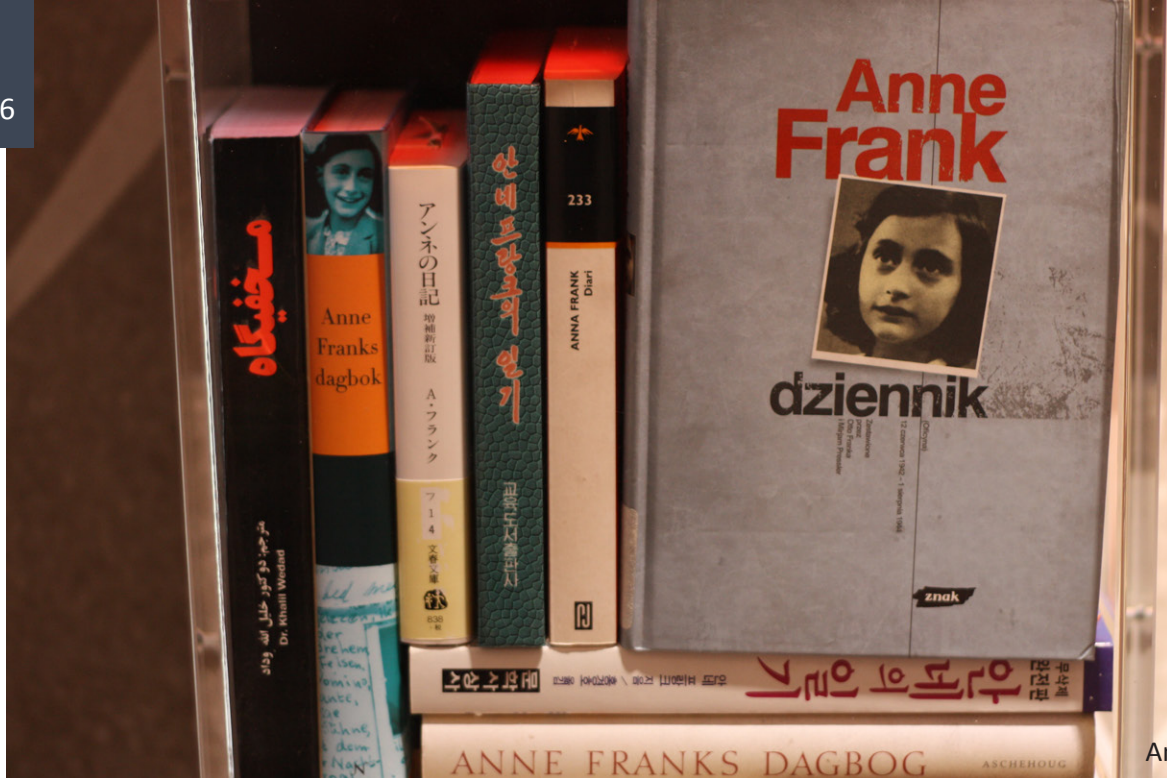
<sup>15</sup> [www.gedenkstaette-stille-helden.de/english.html](http://www.gedenkstaette-stille-helden.de/english.html)



Exhibition "Silent heroes"



Alice Löwenthal with daughters Ruth and Brigitte



Anne's diary

securing food coupons. She had complete trust that Elly Moller would take care of the children.

Until the end of the war, Alice was hiding in different places. She was once again at Luise Nickel's, who was hiding several more people. At the beginning of 1945, when the wave of German refugees from the east started coming to Berlin, Alice managed to obtain documents with a help of an acquaintance, pretending that she had fled as well. Only after the end of the war did she find out about the fate of her girls. Ruth and Brigitte Süssmann had been deported to Auschwitz on the 10th of August 1944, where they were murdered. Ruth still hadn't turned seven, and Brigitte five.

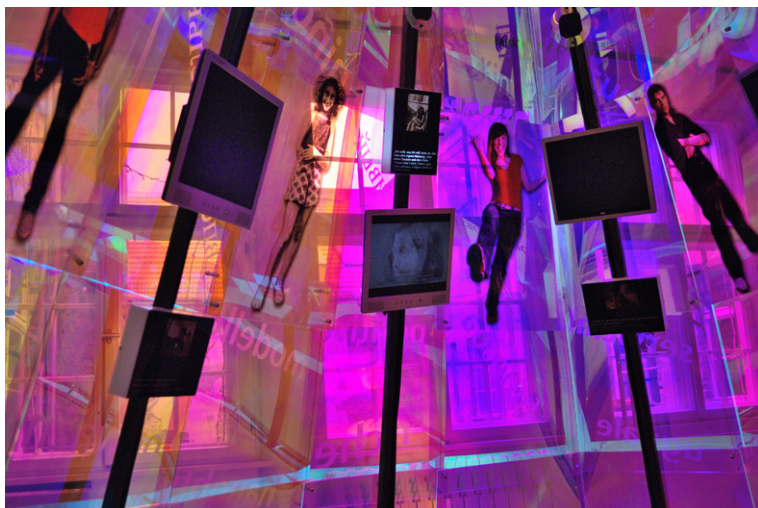
In 1947 Alice married Willy Nickel, the son of her saviour Luisa. The following year a daughter was born to them, Eva Ruth Brigitte Nickel. Alice died in 1987 in Berlin.

In Berlin, in front of the building in which Ruth and Brigitte had lived, Christinenstrasse 35, *Stolpersteine* were laid, tagged with their names.

## Anne Frank. here & now<sup>16</sup>

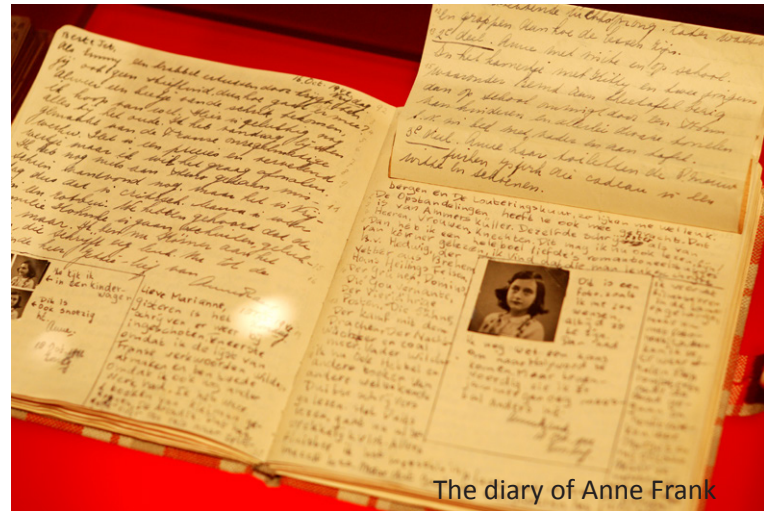
The exhibition in the Anne Frank Centre in Berlin combines the past and present in an interesting way and is primarily aimed at teenagers, but I believe that it could also be interesting for

<sup>16</sup> [www.annefrank.de/exhibition-in-berlin/anne-frank-here-now](http://www.annefrank.de/exhibition-in-berlin/anne-frank-here-now)



Exhibition "Anne Frank. here &amp; now"





adults. One part is dedicated to Anne Frank and the period of Nazism. In the second part, which is modern and colourful, young people from Berlin deal with questions which are part of the key to Anna's diary: about values and identity, but also about discrimination, equality and the war. It is a valuable attempt to learn something applicable out of history, that is, that to relate the horrifying experience of the Holocaust with today's xenophobia, racism and discrimination on various grounds, and human rights in general.

This exhibition, even though small, was very important for me. The part about Anne Frank herself was moving for me, because apart from dealing with a fate of a child, I well remember the strong impression her Diary had left on me in early adolescence. Even though up to then I had already learned a bit about WWII, only with her Diary did I begin to understand the dimensions of its terror.

## Environs of the concentration camp

The Sachsenhausen concentration camp<sup>17</sup> is as creepy as a camp can possibly be. The effort of marking that big space and converting it to the function of remembering of the machinery of evil which it served deserves praise.

In Oranienburg, we had the special honour to be the guests of Dr. Christe-Zeyse, the Dean of the police school located close to the very core of the camp and which partly uses the premises that belonged to it, that is, where the headquarters and SS troops were accommodated. At the

<sup>17</sup> [www.stiftung-bg.de/gums/en/index.htm](http://www.stiftung-bg.de/gums/en/index.htm)



Sachsenhausen





Sachsenhausen

very entry of the University complex there is a big board with information about what the purpose of that space was during the time of the camp's existence. From the conversation with Dr. Christe-Zeyse, we were able to find out how the history of the place is a part of the school curriculum, which is how the future policemen/women learn about the Sachsenhausen camp, but also about the role of the police in the age of National Socialism. We were completely impressed by a policeman who spoke to us about tolerance, nonviolence and citizen responsibility, and we wondered whether we will live to see such people in such positions in our own regions.



Dr Christe-Zeyse



Sachsenhausen





Sachsenhausen



Sachsenhausen

## The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church

The conserved remnants of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church are located in the consumer centre of former West Berlin. It was built at the end of the 19th century and largely destroyed in the Allied air attack in 1943 when its tower collapsed. Under public pressure it was decided not to renovate the church but that it should remain instead as a monument and a warning.

When, after the intensive Nazi bombing of the English city of Coventry, the city cathedral was destroyed in November 1940, the Archdeacon asked for the words "Father, forgive" to be carved in the ruins. The Coventry Cross of Nails is famous as one of the symbols of peace and truce worldwide. Those who have been given this cross, as is the case with the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, were invited to devote themselves to work and pray for peace, justice and reconciliation. This is how the Community of the Cross of Nails came about. The Coventry Litany for Reconciliation, composed in 1959, is said as a prayer in many places in the world. It can be heard every Friday in the ruins of the old Coventry cathedral, and also at the same time in the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church. (The text of the prayer can be found in the Appendix at the end of the text).

The Memorial Church has another symbol of reconciliation: the Stalingrad Madonna, a graphic by Kurt Reuber, a doctor and a theologian. He drew her as a German soldier in a trench before Stalingrad, on Christmas Eve of the icy winter of 1942, while the German army surrounded him. On it is Mary who holds little Jesus in her arms, close to her face. Words "Light, Life, Love" are written on the right side, and on the left "Christmas of 1942 in the cauldron", and at the bottom "Fortress Stalingrad". Reuber died in 1944 in a camp as a Soviet war prisoner. Copies of the



Stalingrad Madonna were given to the church in Volgograd (Stalingrad) and the Cathedral in Coventry as a symbol of reconciliation.

## The Missing House

“The Missing House” is an installation of the French artist Christian Boltanski, set up in the place where there used to be a part of a building in Berlin which was torn down in the Allied bombing of Berlin in 1945, 15-16 Grosshamburger Street. You would be unlikely to notice this monument if you didn’t have a special gift of perception or unless you knew in advance that it is located there.

Boltanski researched the history of the demolished building with a group of students. They got the information that the residents of the building in the pre-war period were mostly Jews who, by the time of the bombing, had been most likely already deported, murdered or had the luck of escaping in time. Boltanski got the idea to mark this place by setting up boards, roughly in the places where they lived, which carry the names of the residents, their occupation, year of birth and death.

## The German-Russian museum<sup>18</sup>

The German-Russian Museum Berlin-Karlshorst is a bilateral institution which is financed by the German and Russian governments. It is located in the building in which the German forces signed the capitulation on the 8th of May 1945. Its opening marked the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe.

This museum very much reminds of our (Balkan) museums about the Second World War, although it is much bigger and more richly endowed. There is a tank in the yard on which stands a caption in Russian: “For the fatherland!” Inside, there is a great number of lively exhibits: uniforms, various weapons and ammunition, bombs (for example with the inscription “For Berlin” in Cyrillic), strategic maps, army badges, medals, etc. In addition, there are mosaics, water col-

<sup>18</sup> [www.museum-karlshorst.de](http://www.museum-karlshorst.de)





ours, installations and their works with (socialist) realist partisan aesthetics which are now very rare (except in well-endowed museums) – and an impressive collection of propaganda posters from different sides. The part where the lives of Russian and German soldiers during the war are compared through a series of photographs is particularly interesting. On the Eastern front, there were about 10 million German and Austrian soldiers, and more than 26 million Soviet soldiers (of whom over a million were women). In the everyday life of a soldier the battles were not that frequent, so it consisted more of marches and exhaustion, waiting and surviving in harsh weather conditions, often without an adequate roof over one's head or food, living in fear of all that war brings.

Then, there is a part dedicated to war prisoners and slave labourers and their living conditions. From the beginning until before the end of the war, there were almost four million prisoners in Germany, of whom a million were war prisoners, and the rest were civilians brought in for forced labour. Tens of thousands of them died of hunger, exhaustion from work and disease. The irony is that after the war the Soviet authorities declared a great number of prisoners who survived, especially prisoners of war, to be traitors, so some of them once again ended up in camps, but this time Soviet ones. A little over three million of German soldiers became Soviet prisoners of war, and several hundred thousand of them did not survive their captivity. They perished mostly due to terrible living conditions: of hunger, cold and disease, what many others had also suffered right across the Soviet Union. Many had spent years in Gulags. Some of the survivors were able to return home only about ten years after the end of the war.

As we found out from the guide, the main exhibition was altered several times starting from



the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it awaits another new change soon. It would be interesting to compare these exhibitions, because I believe they demonstrate well how these two narratives are gradually getting closer to one another.

I thought for example how wonderful it would be to see a Croatian-Serbian museum, and I wondered when the time will come for these two official narratives to come close enough to coinciding.



## Appendix

### The Coventry Litany of Reconciliation<sup>1</sup>

All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

(Romans 3:23)

The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class,  
Father Forgive.

The covetous desires of people and nations to possess what is not their own,  
Father Forgive.

The greed which exploits the work of human hands and lays waste the earth,  
Father Forgive.

Our envy of the welfare and happiness of others,  
Father Forgive.

Our indifference to the plight of the imprisoned, the homeless, the refugee,  
Father Forgive.

The lust which dishonours the bodies of men, women and children,  
Father Forgive.

The pride which leads us to trust in ourselves and not in God,  
Father Forgive.

Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.  
(Ephesians 4:32)

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from the internet presentation of Coventry Cathedral: <http://www.coventrycathedral.org.uk>.