



WHY DO WE STUDY WAR, NOT PEACE? TONI GOSSMANN

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I arrived on Good Friday and I am leaving on a Friday for good. Or maybe not; there is an alumni club, I was told. My stay at Wiko was very short, almost the blink of an eye. I think some of the ideas need to sink in first. It was a pleasant short breeze.

I am from around here, but I had never been to that part of Berlin. *Grunewald*. Supposedly the name means green forest. I think the naming is well chosen in anticipation of climate change. Green forests will become rare. In COVID times, it had some amazing tranquility. Disrupted by the noises of all these Porsches, Ferraris, and Lamborghinis.

I did not hear the electric BMW, though. I should get one of those – it looked futuristic. It perhaps is good for keeping the green forests.

My first academic encounter at Wiko was with Daniel. He told me that sometimes there needs to be tension or a heated discussion. This is what sticks in your mind and what you will remember. In one of the Tuesday Colloquia, someone asked, “Why do we study war, not peace?” Here you go. It sticks in your mind. I was told that Daniel helps you with writing the books. Massive help. I am not writing a book. Unfortunately.

Back to Berlin. Unlike many other German cities, Berlin has some sort of working Uber service. Even in *Grunewald*. I frequently used Uber when getting along abroad. Not so much in recent times, though. Uber has been stigmatized as being an evil capitalist construct. What I learned at Wiko is that of all the bad employers, it is one of the better ones. How does this relate to my employer? What I understood is that, working for Uber, you have flexible working hours. Like in academia. But to be really successful you need to work very hard. Like in academia. It is more beneficial to work extreme hours. Like in academia: you are most productive when the Department is empty. Uber’s work load is dictated by an algorithm. I am wondering whether they should do that in academia as well.

So when I drove with the Uber to the vaccination center, I encountered the diversity of the public space. Only this time I was more aware of it than usual – thanks to another Tuesday Colloquium. What messages do I want to see and what messages do I not want to see in the public space? It is almost like a newspaper that randomly appears in front of your eyes. What I see is mostly advertisement. Not so much about opinion, although some ads have opinion. Where is all the art? We need more of that... certainly. I conclude that we are in the era of the homogenized boredom of public space. More tension is needed. It sticks in your mind.

In the last days of my stay at Wiko, Berlin opened up again. It started to feel like being able to breathe. The opinionated public space did not matter so much anymore. Museums and zoos, restaurants and cafes – sometimes life can be simple. Just being around people. What surprises me is that during the last year my thoughts centered on when life was good – and now within a couple of weeks, I feel like all the limitations never existed. There is peace, and it came quickly. The bad times will be remembered in the history books. But now – for me – it is background noise you deal with with dignity – like the next tax declaration.

So when Berlin opened, Wiko became a place of exchange as well. We had lunches and dinners, and there was a chance to see people in reality without masks. Some people look very different on screen. I unfortunately did not have time to talk to everyone. There were inspiring ideas and comments on the Tuesday Colloquia, and I wish there would have been more time to interact with people in reality. But there was some hint of what “real” Wiko might have been like. We started to have discussions in the garden, with philosophers, sociologists, and historians. It was great – but I really lost my hope for interdisciplinarity. As a matter of fact, it felt like when Berlin was the divided city: somehow coexisting in separation.

We resided at the *Villa* Walther. It is an amazing place. It looks a bit like a castle and has a great open balcony on the back side. It was used as a financial school during the Third Reich, and after the war a new part was attached to it on one side. The architecture works and does not work at the same time. Most Fellows resided there. So does the Kosovarian embassy. In the evening, Marcelo played his melancholic guitar songs on the back terrace. Then it all started to make sense – we study war because peace is something we have to find for ourselves. Thanks Marcelo and thanks Wiko!