

Introduction

The fifteenth international conference of the ESWTR took place in Dresden, Germany, in August 2013. We would like to thank all – organizers, sponsors, assistants, participants – who helped realize this conference and make it a memorable event.

The title of the conference was *New Horizons: Resistance and Visions*. The location for this conference on resistance, vision and women's scholarship on gender and theology was no coincidence. Dresden, the former capital and royal residence of Saxony, known for its baroque and rococo splendor, stands as a symbol of the destruction of WWII, Cold War politics, dissidence protest against the socialist regimes, powerful restorations, and the revivals of protest movements in the past few decades. This beautiful city by the Elbe thus served as an important background to the theological musings that took place during the conference, a witness to resistance, catalyst for visions, and inspiration to new horizons.

The goal of this conference in Dresden, 25 years after the *Wende*, was to inquire about the importance of the political and theological efficacy of the dissidence in eastern Europe which led to the peaceful revolutions around 1989, and which serves as a role model for current resistances and new social movements. Many of the resisting persons, many of the dissident political, religious, and artistic mobilizations imagined an open radical, democratic, and solidary society not only beyond existing fake socialism but also beyond existing limited democracy with its capitalism.

An important part of the conference was thus a panel with women from different eastern European backgrounds who gave intimate insight into the experience, rationale, and theologies in the context of political transitions. Additionally, film screenings and guided tours to historical sites of struggle, like the former East German political prison in Dresden, made the context of resistance and vision palpable.

Thus the conference underlined the inseparability of the personal, the political, and the theological, and the conference call for papers posed its theological questions accordingly:

In our world coined by globalisation and neoliberalism a commodification of the whole life has emerged. In consequence, poverty, (hetero-)sexism, homophobia, racism, fundamentalism and nationalism (including right-wing extremism) are producing

violent exclusions instead of inclusive ideas of community. What answers can theological perspectives of different religions offer to sustainably decrease economic and epistemic violence?

Especially liberationist, intersectional, feminist, and gender-sensitive approaches have proved to be very conscious of these issues and have contributed immensely to their analysis in theology and religious studies. More recently, postcolonial, post-secular and queer theories have furthered the critical debates in cultural and social analysis and enriched previous approaches. Whereas often only one of these theoretical approaches is used to frame the analysis, this conference provided the opportunity to discuss the contributions to theology and the study of religions of all three approaches together.

The articles collected in this volume were all presented at the Dresden conference. They were discussed in companionship and solidarity, and then turned from conference papers into peer-reviewed articles. All of the articles offer their own unique vision and partial answer to the questions of resistance and visions. Consequently, the editorial team has chosen to organize the entire volume around the conference theme instead of dividing it up into the traditional sections.

The volume opens up with *Ulrike Auga's* article which provides a framework for the following papers by introducing postcolonial, post-secular and queer methodologies and their contributions to theological and religious studies reflections on resistance and visions, using as her starting point the dissident movements in former East Germany.

The next papers focus on resistance movements in various forms and queer visions of alternative societies of justice and solidarity. *Anne-Marie Korte's* paper proposes a European feminist and public theology, drawing like Auga on a case study from the context of former Eastern bloc states, namely the Pussy Riot feminist *Punk Prayer* event in 2012, in order to analyze hybrid and ambiguous performances of feminist public theology in Europe which offer the possibility of resistance against antidemocratic and corrupted powers. *Teresa Forcades i Vila* then directs our attention to structures of "fake democracies" which operate under the pretension that the people rule, while in fact they are powerless. Forcades i Vila proposes four principles of Christian theology as indispensable tools in dismantling fake democracies, namely the notion of a creation which is still ongoing and human participation in co-creation, queer notions of unity in diversity, the inseparability of love and freedom, and finally the importance of metanoia, or conversion. *Janet Jakobsen*

then introduces alternative queer economies and visions of justice, with a special emphasis on domestic work. For Jakobsen, such a vision of justice can never be monolithic or uniform, but is instead connected, engaged, and achieved in solidarity through analyses that take the intersecting categories of gender, sexuality, race, nation, class, age, ability, etc. seriously. As for Jakobsen, alternative notions of economies are at the heart of Kwok Pui-lan's and Joerg Rieger's articles. Their papers represent companion pieces, as they were presented together at the Dresden conference. *Kwok* argues that the Occupy movement with its protest against the growing disparity between rich and poor requires us to rethink the relation between God and politics. Drawing on the insights of *minjung* theology (the theology of the multitude), she exposes the limits of a masculinist and heterosexist portrayal of God. *Rieger* also focuses on the Occupy movement and its critique of not just dominant power in politics and economics, but also as it is embodied in religion. As with the other contributions to this volume, his paper moves beyond critique, however, in pointing out alternative experiences of power in Jewish and Christian traditions that enable a new understanding of solidarity. *Julia Enxing's* contribution also focuses on a protest movement and its visions of a different reality, namely guerilla gardening and its parallels with resistance movements within the churches. This form of "green" resistance, working with flowers, plants, seeds, and soil, is a call against the oppression of the environment and persons, using forms of communication and protest that question borders and differences, and cultivate them colorfully.

The next set of papers focuses on issues of postcoloniality and World Christianity from different perspectives. *Musa Dube's* contribution provides an introduction to postcolonial biblical exegesis and a powerful critique of traditional forms of biblical studies with their inherent colonial presumptions. Dube then goes beyond her critique by discussing her current research in which she reads letters from the modern colonial context, seeking to identify strategies of domination, resistance, collaboration, and the emergence of hybridity in the modern colonial contact zone. *Andrea Taschl-Erber's* text also focuses on the Bible and its potential for resistance. Her intertextual reading of the opening of the Gospel of Luke discovers the subversive memory, rooted in traditions in the First Testament, of prophetic social criticism and political resistance by women. Especially the Magnificat becomes a document of resistance against social oppression and the experience of violence perpetrated by the Roman colonial power, a messianic vision of political freedom and socio-economic justice. *Eleonora Hof's* article explores and critiques prevalent

imaginaries of World Christianity. Using gender as a critical category, she challenges tropes of imagining World Christianity, shifting attention from notions of travelling and exploration towards storytelling because it provides room for ambivalence, displacement, rupture, continuity, and the strategies of identity negotiation.

The two papers that conclude our volume present the maybe newest approaches to the issues discussed here going beyond body and developing new ways of thinking – and critiquing – concepts of materiality, vulnerability, and personhood. In her article, *Mayra Rivera* bridges the gap between liberation and postcolonial theology, calling for theologies of the body to examine social-material incarnations, social inequality, pain, and desire. She argues that the challenge now is to think corporeality in a way that refuses objectifying knowledge and idealizations that deny vulnerability, suggesting the concept of flesh as a possibility to further develop the accounts of the relationships that constitute life. In their paper, *Montserrat Escribano-Cárcel* and *Neus Forcano i Aparicio* bring together queer and postcolonial theologies with the insights of neurosciences, thus opening up a new perspective in theological thought. They show how the combined insights of neurosciences and Christian theology on the concept of “subject” help to question the epistemic pillars sustaining our perception of reality, and at the same time, to think of the possibility of making each and every human life better.

The papers collected here show the surplus of the synergy between the postcolonial, post-secular and queer approaches they apply, and we hope that they may inspire further interdisciplinary research and activism in theology and the study of religions. The section ESWTR Members in Action, founded in Dresden, also calls for stronger connections between activism, theory, and theology linked to global debates, to further develop the visionary contributions of theology to a more just society.