



WHAT A DIFFERENCE A FELLOWSHIP
CAN MAKE!
JOSÉ CASANOVA

José Casanova is Professor and Chair of the Department of Sociology at the New School for Social Research in New York City, where he has taught since 1987. Born in Zaragoza, Spain in 1951, he studied Philosophy at the Metropolitan Seminary in Zaragoza, Theology at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and Sociology at the New School for Social Research, where he obtained his Ph.D. degree in 1982, with a dissertation on “The Opus Dei and the Modernization of Spain”. He has held visiting appointments at various universities and centers in the United States and Europe and is a Distinguished Visiting Professor at Central European University in Budapest. He has published widely in the areas of sociological theory, religion and politics, transnational migration, and globalization. His most important work, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994) has appeared in Japanese, Spanish, Italian, Polish, and Arabic editions and is forthcoming in Indonesian. Besides the project “Rethinking Secularization: a Global Comparative Perspective”, he has been working also on a major SSRC-organized project on “Transnational Migration, Transnational Religion and Diversity”. – Address: Department of Sociology, GF, New School for Social Research, 65 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10003, USA.

I left Berlin with the euphoric sensation that my biographical calendar would from now on be neatly divided “before Wissenschaftskolleg” and “after Wissenschaftskolleg”. Certainly, my residence at the Wissenschaftskolleg had constituted one of the most intellectually productive and personally fulfilling years of my life. The felicitous combination of the privileged academic paradise of the Kolleg and the exciting yet relaxed life of cosmopolitan Berlin proved indeed unbeatable. I decided, nevertheless, to postpone the writing of my

report in order to gain some distance and to avoid over-ecstatic expressions. But the hard landing in New York, where I immediately had to assume the duties of chair of the Sociology Department at the New School for Social Research, only added the feeling of deep nostalgia.

To be sure, not everything turned out to be perfect. I must confess that I did not complete the manuscript, as I had anticipated. But, remarkably, I have no feeling of guilt, nor do I regret having missed the golden opportunity of a year-long sabbatical to finish the book. The frequent and intriguing remarks by members of the Wissenschaftskolleg staff to relax, not to lose oneself in the reclusive life of scholarly solitude, but to immerse oneself instead in convivial interdisciplinary fellowship, had no doubt served to assuage my conscience from the start. While I did not drop my original project altogether, it changed sufficiently in focus to qualify as the result of a successful fellowship. The title, “Rethinking Secularization”, remained unchanged, but as the year progressed, the project gained in historical depth and expanded significantly its comparative global perspective. Originally, I had planned to revisit my old revision of the theory of secularization in order to place under more critical scrutiny that aspect of the theory, the thesis of modern secular differentiation, that I had left untouched in my previous revisions.

A systematic comparison of what I characterized as Catholic and Muslim *aggiornamenti*, or adaptations to secular modernity, was to serve as the core of my study. But as I probed into the comparison, I realized the need to dig deeper into the genealogy of “the secular” as a medieval Christian theological category, a unique historical crystallization of the dualism between immanence and transcendence that is to be found in all axial civilizations, albeit in significantly diverse forms. I was led in this new direction not only by the fruitful ongoing discussions with the Fellows of the focus group “Religion and Contingency”, but also by a more profound engagement with the “multiple modernities” paradigm and especially by conversations with Shmuel Eisenstadt.

While I am excited by this intellectual detour, it contributed no doubt to some slowdown in the writing of the manuscript. I managed to finish three chapters and to write substantive drafts of two additional ones, but the two remaining chapters still will require substantial additional research. I was also able to complete four additional essays for publication, two of which have appeared in German translation. Regaining my ability to converse in German, after a 30-year interlude, I count as one of the most rewarding accomplishments of my Berlin fellowship. Besides the welcoming encouragement of the German Fellows and staff, crucial for me in helping to overcome any remaining reticence or anxiety was the

opportunity to lecture in German on numerous occasions in Berlin and throughout much of Germany. It all began with the invitation to deliver a *Festvortrag* at the University of Erfurt, followed by the invitation to deliver an *Abendkolloquium* at the Wissenschaftskolleg.

I must confess as well that I surely exceeded the allotment of ten percent of our residency spent away from the Wissenschaftskolleg. But paradoxically my productivity was enhanced by my excessive commitment to lectures and conferences. Lacking the self-confidence and the self-discipline to write methodically and uninterruptedly, I could easily have spent my year taking advantage of the unparalleled library services at the Wissenschaftskolleg, happily reading yet another important source, before daring to commit my unsure thoughts to writing. Fortunately, the need to deliver new strategically placed lectures at the University of Virginia in January, at the Université de Montréal in February, and at the Europäische Akademie Otzenhausen in April functioned as the external discipline I needed to write first drafts of three chapters of the book.

My scholarly productivity, my engagement in the collegial life of the Wissenschaftskolleg, and my immersion in the cultural life of Berlin oscillated with the seasons and with the presence of my wife, Ika. October and its glorious autumn weather was a time of adjustment to a new life without external obligations, of progressive enchantment with the four Villas of the Kolleg and with Grunewald, and of discovery of the unlimited cultural treasures of Berlin. November through March, by contrast, were months of hibernation and monastic solitude. The daily, dark and cold, early morning walks down Koenigsallee and Wallotstraße to my office in Villa Jaffé and the return walks late at night to Villa Walther constituted some of the most vivid and memorable experiences of the year. At times, entire weeks would pass without going into the city and without using any money, which attests to our pampered existence as Fellows. Accustomed to the patterns of extreme weather change and the occasional snow blizzard of New York, the Berlin winter appeared by comparison as constant, severe, predictable, and methodical as the stereotypical Prussian character.

I had never experienced, however, such an abrupt transition from winter to spring, nor such an exhilarating spring fever. The unexpected marvelous singing of birds one dark winter morning was the only anticipation of the sudden defrosting of the Grunewald lakes and the blossoming of trees a few weeks later. The pace of my social life at the Kolleg, of my lecturing and traveling, and of my rediscovery of the cosmopolitan life of Berlin quickened progressively towards the summer. Three consecutive workshops in early June – on

“The Religious Lives of Immigrant Minorities”, on “The Secular, Secularizations, Secularisms”, and on “Cultures of Democracy” – constituted intellectual highlights of the year. My participation in the intellectual life of Berlin also enlivened towards the end, as I held lectures at various institutes of Humboldt University, at the Wissenschaftszentrum für Sozialforschung, at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, at the Studienkolleg, and at the Katholische Akademie.

Berlin urban life exploded in jovial celebration during the month-long football world cup. It was a genuine pleasure seeing the Germans positively and unabashedly celebrating their national identity, while serving as gracious hosts to all peoples of the world. But the climax of all the festivities was our end-of-year celebration at the Wissenschaftskolleg on Bastille Day. I had prepared Thanksgiving dinner and tapas parties for large numbers of people before. But preparing dinner for 120 people, with the help of Fellow amateur chefs Catherine David, Robert Aronowitz, and Thomas Laqueur, and dozens of Fellows and spouses helping in the kitchen, was a first and a most enjoyable experience. The Spanish tortillas were a hit and I cooked them again for lunch another day, so that Frau Klöhn and Frau Speder could learn how to cook them for the enjoyment of future Fellows. For me, it was the most appropriate way of expressing my gratitude for the constant attention and gifts I had received throughout the year from all the Wissenschaftskolleg staff. While accepting that we are barred from returning again to paradise for a full year as Fellows, it is gratifying to know that as former Fellows we will be welcomed back as visitors. The parting gift for me was to learn that I had been appointed to the Academic Advisory Board of the Wissenschaftskolleg and that I will therefore be returning several times in the next three years.