



CRITICAL INTERDISCIPLINARITY
AND CATHARTIC HILARITY
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Sitting in my apartment in Manhattan, with sirens screaming down below my window, it is difficult to conjure up the Grunewald in all its glory. The swans on the little lake outside our tree house apartment window in the Villa Walther are hard to picture, much less the sounds of Kamran Ali and Syema Muzzafar downstairs cooking the delicious meals they so often shared with us, or of Elias Khoury one flight up calling out to little Ivan and Olga to tell him he loves them so. It all seems so unreal. Sometimes I think I must have dreamed the Wissenschaftskolleg.

I came to Wiko to finish a book. The combination of quiet space and time, and the camaraderie of my fellow Fellows and their partners, and the truly brilliant Wiko staff enabled me to finally put it to rest. The book is an ethnography of a small cancer ward in Botswana. The narrative follows patients, their relatives, and ward staff as a cancer

epidemic rapidly emerges in Botswana, part of the surge in cancers across the global south. The stories of the ward dramatize the human stakes and the intellectual and institutional challenges of this cancer epidemic. They show how care proceeds amid uncertainty in contexts of relative scarcity. They also offer fresh perspective on cancer medicine and illness experiences more broadly. In other words, the book is about pain, laughter, care, death, and future-making, but it is based on very intimate material, some of which presented a particular writing challenge. I was quite fortunate to give my colloquium very early in the fall. As a result, staff and Fellows continued to offer me ideas and questions throughout the rest of the year, such that my book was continuously fed by the generosity of my colleagues.

I also came to Wiko to spend a year in deep discussion with my thinking partner, Steve Feierman. Steve and I were both given offices on the first floor of Villa Jaffé, and so the year turned into one long conversation between us – about writing, about Africa, about health and medicine, but also about life, about pain, laughter, family, aging, and future-making. That conversation alone would have made my year in Berlin more than worthwhile. As would the joy my daughter, Hazel, found in adopting Sandy and Steve as her surrogate grandparents of sorts while in Berlin. Steve and I were part of a group of scholars working on issues of health in Africa: Nancy Hunt, Iruka Okeke, Herbert Muyinda, David Kyaddondo, and Robby Aronowitz. Together we held a meeting with a group of clinicians, scientists, and social scientists working on contemporary dilemmas of clinical practice in Africa, some of which is detailed in a paper you'll find later in this yearbook.

But the magic of the Wiko, I came to learn, far exceeded any particular academic project. As someone who works in two disciplines (history and anthropology) and is often involved in intellectual exchange with clinicians, policy makers, nurses, epidemiologists, and ethicists, I thought I understood the challenges and rewards of interdisciplinary conversations. But Wiko is completely unique for the unexpected and deep nature of critical interdisciplinarity that is fostered by shared meals, seminars, and outings over many weeks and months. Conversations with Iruka Okeke, Mike Boots, and Dieter Ebert, all biologists, revealed extraordinary forms of methodological and analytic creativity that raised questions about time and narrative, which I take back to my engagement with history. Over the course of the year, Claire Messud described and demonstrated a highly intuitive form of what I would call ethnographic practice that clarified aspects of anthropology I had only dimly grasped before. Similarly, the seminar, complete with the intro-

ductions and Hannah Ginsborg's wonderful questions, rapidly became the highlight of my week. Not only did I knit five pairs of socks, two sweaters, a scarf, and various and sundry other items during the seminars, I began to see entirely new ways to think and write.

But as much as Wiko is the place that gave me time and space to write, to think, to read, to listen, to knit, and as much as it was a place of real intellectual satisfaction, what stands out most in my memory of this year is the unrelenting hilarity. It was cathartic. From our German classes to the dining room to the Olivia Judson's Pilates class to Vera Schulze-Seeger's office to the M19 bus and the hallways of the Villa Jaffé, not a day seemed to pass without a moment (or more often many such moments) of deep and often prolonged laughter. Somehow our motley assortment of Fellows, partners, children, staff, and even one extremely large aquatically inclined dog was able to sustain this hilarity for an entire year. This, above all else, is how I gratefully remember my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg.