



ACADEMIC PARADISE  
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At one of the dinners, a visitor (non-Wissenschaftskolleg member) asked me a question: “How would you characterize this place, *read institution* (Wiko), in view of what your

work is?” Without much thinking, I told her that it is an academic paradise. I felt that this was the best way to describe Wiko and I think that is what it is. It is a place where it is very difficult to complain of anything or blame anyone but oneself in case of any failures. It is not easy to write academic work in Africa and probably in other low-income settings in the world. The main challenge is to balance academic work with consultancies. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, and government departments heavily depend on the (African) academicians to do research (consultancies) for them, since there are hardly any credible institutions to offer such services. Although consultations are part of research, they limit academic value since the research questions (objectives) are formulated by the hiring agencies, reducing the work of the academician to mere data collection and a usually biased/skewed analysis aimed at serving the interests of the consulting agency. This is compounded by the problem of very low pay from universities and research institutions, which makes it difficult for the African researchers to concentrate on academic work, because much time must be spent on consultancies for survival; and lack of academic resources in the form of books, information and sharing experiences, save for the Internet, which is also still inaccessible in some places.

What Wiko does is to provide the opposite of this academic impoverishment; basically, excellent library services, opportunity to share ideas, a comfortable stipend and ample time that allows Fellows to concentrate on academic work. Apart from giving a lecture at the Tuesday colloquium, there are no serious assignments that are required of a Fellow, which provides ample time to concentrate on one's project(s). For instance, the only additional assignment I was asked to perform was to assess a nominated candidate for a fellowship at the Wiko. The community at Wiko is cool, friendly and passionate. At least twice, I saw mails from the reception announcing lost and found property; at one time someone had dropped a 20 Euro bill and it was announced, another time it was a wrist-watch found somewhere in the Weiße Villa. In my view, these incidents say a lot about what Wiko as an institution and its communities are. Below I highlight a few activities that in my view make Wiko an Academic Paradise.

### The Colloquia

Wiko was the place I first met such a diversified academic population with immense enthusiasm both to learn and to teach others. To be presented with at least one lecture every Tuesday was wonderful and an important resource for me. The academically hetero-

generous group of engaged, deeply committed, provocative and curious Fellows meant that any comments about one's work were constructive and often supportive. I particularly admired the way hard scientists (biologists) endeavoured to simplify their lectures to keep us (people from arts and social sciences) on board. The lectures in fields different from my own discipline not only made me appreciate other academic fields and professions, they also made me think about my own work from new and often unexpected perspectives. This enriched my insights and understanding of the ideas I am working on in various ways.

### Medical Practice in Africa Focus Group

My invitation to Wiko was in connection with the Focus Group on *Professional Dilemmas of Medical Practice in Africa*. As a person from a different academic setting (in a developing country), my expectation was that we were going to be working on this one project all the time with each of us being assigned responsibilities to accomplish. I soon realized that the arrangement was such that there was ample time to work on other projects along with the focus group work. This provided the chance for me to pursue my own academic interests, which, though exhausting, were an exciting experience with great personal benefit. We had regular meetings to discuss topical issues and we read and commented on each other's work, we received various guest speakers and we had the wonderful international conference that brought medical practitioners in Africa and the social scientists together. I enjoyed and benefited from the academic exchanges and interaction with the rest of the group members. Particularly Steve Feierman was an inspiration in all this and I look forward to the publication from these group efforts.

### Lunches and Dinners

These were very much enjoyable meals and important for people like me for whom cooking was not a pleasurable activity. I enjoyed virtually all the meals, thanks to Christine Klöhn, Katarzyna Speder and the entire kitchen team that was so efficient and friendly, too. Meals were a very effective means of bringing Fellows together on a regular basis. I sat and shared a table more than once with every Fellow and with members of the staff who regularly had meals with the Fellows. Discussions at the tables covered a range of topics often historical in nature and strongly related to artworks – museums, architec-

tural designs and sites, opera, religion, detailed description of (old) places, foods ... The conversations were often enjoyable and informative because, like most conversations in daily life, they had a mixture of past and contemporary experiences and were very relaxing moments.

### German Language Lessons

This was one of the most exciting experiences for me. I liked the way the facilitator, Eva von Kügelgen, handled the adult learners. I learnt the *few* German words I now know with a lot of ease and interest. It became more interesting whenever I tried to practice what I had learnt – thanks to Ursula Wachholz, with whom I always had to communicate in no other language but German every Monday and Friday morning when she came to provide the cleaning services. It was always more challenging to communicate with the bus drivers, cashiers in supermarkets, bank staff or bar attendants ... who often responded by talking *too fast* for me whenever I said a few words, because their impression was that I knew enough of the language, and then they just got lost in the process; but it was a very exciting experience. I had to leave the German class in April when I started visiting Halle to deliver lectures at the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, because I no longer had enough time. But I am proud of the few sentences I can produce in German and, given another opportunity, I will take it on from there.

### Humbling Situations

David Kyaddondo (my other colleague from Uganda) and I initially reached Wiko on a Friday, and on Saturday we decided to look for a supermarket to buy some food and other necessities. This was a weekend and Wiko staff members were not in office. We decided to explore the place and look for the market. At the bus stop there was a young boy (about 10 years old) who was also waiting for the bus. The boy heard us wondering what supermarket to go to and in which direction. The boy approached us and told us the name of the nearest supermarket to go to – *Kaiser's* – as he boarded the same bus with us. As we were approaching the supermarket, the young boy came down from the upper deck of the bus to tell us that we had reached the supermarket. “There is the supermarket, please get off here” – moreover in English. We felt so humbled by how such a young boy could be that caring.

I have a bad leg (disability) that affects my physical mobility. Although I mentioned this in my communication to Wiko in preparation to my invitation, this was necessarily no guarantee of the recognition and necessary attention I received. My understanding is that I was given an apartment at Wiko compound in consideration of my physical condition. The apartment more or less on ground floor has a limited number of steps. As I was settling in to start work, I received a call from the IT section asking me whether I needed a printer in my office. The concern was that it would be difficult for me to go downstairs where the pool printer was. One time the Rector offered Dieter Ebert and me transport in his official car to Toshio Hosokawa's concert, and he let me occupy his (co-driver's) seat. Although he did not say it, my guess is that he wanted me to occupy the more spacious front seat in consideration of my condition. Whenever we walked in a group, people slowed down to match my limited speed or gave way for me to pass before them ... with noticeable care not to offend or embarrass me. These were seemingly simple things that made my life at Wiko realistic. Sometimes I felt this was probably *too much* care for me, but at the same time, it was important to appreciate people's sensitivity towards "special" conditions.

### My Work at Wiko

I am not very sure about this. At the beginning of spring, when discussing the weather changes, one member of the Wiko staff asked me whether my stay at Wiko was productive so far. My answer was a straight No, because at that time (around March), I did not have something I could physically put a finger on as a product of being at Wiko, although I had a feeling that I was benefitting in different ways. Of course quite a lot was being accomplished, but I had not considered any of the outcomes to be products. The question was important because it made me reflect on how to make myself productive. Below I highlight some of the outputs I would consider to be accomplishments at Wiko:

*Research grant:* One of the things I had set out to do at Wiko and in line with the *Medical Practice in Africa* Focus Group was to publish a journal/book chapter on *Medicines, Uncertainty and Healthcare in Uganda*. When I started writing, and in view of the literature I accessed and reviewed at Wiko, I realized I did not have enough information to continue. With support from Professor Richard Rottenburg, and in collaboration with the Max Planck Institute and the Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, my colleagues and I revised and submitted a grant application titled: *The supply side of Antiretro-*

*viral Therapy (ART) – Users, drugs, and technologies in organizing the supply of mass HIV treatment programmes in Uganda.* The grant, approved by the German Research Foundation for funding up to the end of 2013, will enable me to collect more information I need for this work. The project aims to provide answers to pressing questions related to the instabilities and uncertainties regarding ARV availability in Uganda, an issue that presents serious challenges to ART users for whom treatment is a matter of life and death. In particular, we are interested in how the current efforts to standardise the distribution of these global pharmaceuticals shape users and institutional contexts of HIV/AIDS.

*Book chapter:* Late last year I managed to revise a book chapter titled *Displacement, Mobility and Poverty in Northern Uganda*; and this has been published this year (2011): Arne H. Eide and Benedicte Ingstad, eds. *Disability and Poverty: A Global Challenge*. Bristol: Policy Press.

*Book chapter:* The Center for Disability Studies Department of History, University at Buffalo renewed their request for me to write a book chapter for their upcoming book on Disability. I wrote the chapter titled *Negotiating Disability: Mobilization and Organization Among Landmine Survivors in Northern Uganda* and it was sent in for review in June 2011.

*Book project:* Along with the book chapters, I have been working on my book project *Limbs and Lives: Disability, Violent Conflict and Embodied Sociality in Northern Uganda*. I managed to get a contract with the Fountain publishers (Ugandan Branch) and I am now in the final stages of writing the introduction and concluding chapters, before submitting the book for first review by the end of August.

*Guest professorship:* Lastly, I received the opportunity to be appointed Visiting Lecturer – *Gastprofessor* – for the *Medizin in Afrika* course at the Institute of Anthropology and Philosophy, Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg. This was quite challenging, but an exciting and important experience for me. Being a Masters level class, this small group of six international students exposed me to many lessons in academic, organizational and to some extent political perspectives. These were important experiences and important lessons to be shared in my home university.

In a nutshell, Wiko was an academic paradise for me. Being a Fellow was a privilege and an excellent empowering and enabling experience.