



ON SENSE, THE SENSES, AND SENSIBILITY  
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Like other Wiko realms cloaked in aura, such as the magical speed with which book requests are granted or the impossible variety of culinary offerings (was ever a menu repeated in the course of our ten months?), when and how the list of the 2012–13 Wiko Fellows was made public remains a mystery to me. It must have occurred several months before we arrived in Berlin, when I was still mired in the obligations and responsibilities

of my regular life in Michigan and dreaming of the moment when I'd fasten my airplane seat belt and feel the relief and release that comes with the start of a journey.

Well before that anticipated moment, I received two curious e-mails. The directors of two institutes in the greater Berlin area invited me to present my work in their respective lecture series during my Wiko year; each considered my research a good fit for their thematic foci on society and emotions, at one institute, and music and emotions, at the other. Perplexed, I expressed gratitude for the invitations but pointed out that I don't engage the topic of emotion in my work and thus was perhaps not an appropriate addition to their programs. In both cases, I met stout resistance: my research on Swahili music and poetry and its deployment in discourses by, about, and against the Tanzanian nation-state, they insisted, was of great interest for its ties to national sentiments and collective emotions. Is it necessarily so? I asked myself. Must poetry and music be forever linked to affect and realms beyond the rational? Can they ever be liberated from Plato's warnings against the power of poetry especially to bewitch, entrance, and cause hearers to lose their senses?

If anything, I had studiously avoided all discussion of affect in my work, my gut response to popular and scholarly stereotypes of African cultural practices as forever subject to emotion and irrationality. Consider the ever-growing literature within African studies on witchcraft, on ecstatic dance and trance, and on healing traditions based on supernatural epistemologies. And link to these the equally prevalent attention to music and poetry as bridges to altered states of being. No, let others pursue those lines of scholarship. I wasn't going to contribute. My work focuses instead on the power of music and poetry to move *minds*, not emotions, souls, and psyches. Music and poetry as modes of reasoning, as methods of political claim-making, as vehicles for social action: *that* is where I position myself as a scholar. There would be no space in my analysis for matters of the heart. I would battle Plato not in terms of his rational approach to politics, but in his exclusion of music and poetry from a rational approach to politics.

So off to Wiko I went, to start a new book project on the uses of populist poetry, both sung and in print, as a vehicle for laying political claims and mobilizing publics in Tanzania, East Africa. Nearly five thousand Swahili poems published in newspapers by ordinary citizens from across the full breadth of Tanzania and spanning five decades of Tanzania's history constitute my raw data. Add to this corpus some 100 rap songs from the 1990s on to enable me to access the poetic politics of Tanzania's youth. Poems from women and men, from Muslims and Christians, from a huge swath of the country's 120+ ethnicities, from youth and elders, from experienced poets and from amateurs. These

would form the focus of my Wiko year, and my first task would be to catalogue them and select a manageable and hopefully representative sample for translation and analysis. After that, I'd separate them into topics relevant to a political history of postsocialist Tanzania (1985–present) including: 1) the privatization of property (especially land), 2) the retraction of the state and public services, 3) new memoryscapes, 4) new labor regimes (including widespread “redundancy”), 5) the privatization of profit (otherwise known as “corruption”), and 6) emerging neoliberal moralities. That's indeed what I managed to do, thanks in part to the assistance I received from famed Kenyan poet and political exile Abdilatif Abdalla, whom Wiko generously allowed me to invite for two weeks of collaborative translation work. What remains now is for me to interweave my selected poems and songs with an analysis of postsocialist Tanzania, exploring how citizens imagine their newly configured state, its future, and its socialist past and how they engage it: my task for 2013–14.

But how to deal with the expectation confronting me at the other institutes and during my *Dienstagskolloquium* discussion that I must not ignore the role of emotions in all this? As the lone sociocultural anthropologist and lone Africanist in my Wiko cohort (a stroke of amazing luck), I'll be forever grateful to my legal theorist, political scientist, historian, literary scholar, and philosopher colleagues who pressed me on this and other points. Our “Democracy” reading group was an especially helpful forum for thinking these matters through. Though I remained resolute in my desire to eschew discussions of collective effervescence or ecstasy, they convinced me that there are rational political purposes to which emotions can be put. Cristina Lafont, thankfully, directed me to a book on *Civil Passions* about how political movements are propelled by emotional responses to injustice and oppression, such as the utterly rational horror one feels in the face of genocide, Third World poverty, or other violations of human rights. Perhaps an obvious point to others, it wasn't obvious to me, given the state of African studies, that rationality and emotion could be productively reconciled. Sense and the senses, I've learned, both constitute sensibility.

So I leave Wiko wiser and not a little emotional. When will I enjoy again such collective intellectual effervescence? This unimaginable freedom to think and debate, read and write, bound only by a daily meal obligation that became a daily reward? When will I feel again the shared thrill of discovery that Marianne the Wiko librarian and I experienced in trying to track down the origins of the quote: *Art is not a mirror held up to society but a hammer with which to shape it* – most commonly attributed to Bertolt Brecht, but also

to Leon Trotsky, Karl Marx, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Boris Arvatov? Was it not beyond the call of duty for Reinhart to direct me to Brecht's *Short Organum for the Theatre* to search for something resembling this quote? Or for librarian Anja to query the Brecht-Archiv here in Berlin about what that son of this soil might or might not have written on art and political action? For fellow Fellow Andrij to search Russian texts on the quote's possible ties to Trotsky, Marx, Mayakovsky, or Arvatov? For Axel to lead me to Nietzsche's idea of philosophy as a hammer? For Hubertus to e-mail one of the editors of the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe inquiring about Marx as potential originator and receive the clue implicating Arvatov? Or for Franco to introduce me to his team at Stanford to help make quantitative as well as qualitative sense of the overabundance of Swahili poems I've collected? To discuss poetry and the perils of translation with Lian, José, Abdilatif, Eva, and Kamal; diaspora with Daniel; colonialism and its aftermaths with Ussama, Tony, Alessandra, and Gabor; pragmatics, language use, and Maa versus Swahili grammar with Bill and Ben; music with Mark, Maria, Mauricio, and maestro Brendel; global economic challenges with Bruce, Shakti, Gillian, and Teri; global political challenges with Cristina, Anne, Dominique, and Atac; Plato with Froma, Jonas, Avi, and Michael; gender inequities with Gillian, Elora, Sonia, and Delphine; collaborative research and methodologies with Angela, Jack, Jim, Joanna, Emily, and Bob; Kafka's *Das Schloss* and the limitations of political literature with Thorsten; Islam past and present with Sadik, Martin, and Garth; the powers of art with Kendall, Marianne, and Elisabeth; or the powers of emotion with Ulrich, our local champion of passion as productive sentiment?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, one of Africa's most celebrated novelists, dissidents, and intellectuals, writes, "Art, with its embodiment of notions of creativity and freedom, needs to assert itself. It needs to be active, engaged, insistent on being what it has always been, the embodiment of dreams for a truly human world ... The goal of human society is the reign of art on earth." Tanzanian poets and rappers, in keeping with the original meaning of *poiesis*, bring into being new ideas and possibilities. They generate social action by identifying the practices of the corrupt, and they produce political engagement by insisting on the rights of all Tanzanians but especially those of the outcast (e.g., albinos and widows), the poor, the exploited, and the vulnerable. If they move hearts as well as minds, enraging in order to engage, so much the better, I belatedly concede.