



WIKO RUMINATIONS
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I spent the last few days before boarding a BA flight to Berlin sifting through my library, collecting and packing books. The morning of September 12, I arrived at Villa Walther saddled with four large boxes full of books that Sonja Grund and her outstanding team of librarians would soon prove dispensable. My friend and former Wiko Fellow, Ibrahima

Thioub, had spoken to me with amazement about the wonders that the library worked for him, but I was still skeptical that they could deliver the obscure materials, especially decades-old issues of periodicals, immigrants' autobiographies in a variety of languages, and Masters and Ph.D. theses in French that our excellent librarians at the University of Pennsylvania had had such a hard time trying to find for me. But Thioub was right. The Wiko librarians can work miracles.

I started this report referring to the library because I came to the Wiko hoping to write a book on the religious lives of Senegalese Muslim migrants in selected cities in Europe and the United States, which I have been researching for some time. The last few years, I have amassed a large body of primary sources conducting interviews and visiting archival repositories across Europe. But as a 19th- to 20th-century historian working on a contemporary topic, I quickly realized how anthropological, sociological and other social scientific works published in academic journals, especially in French, were critical to my project. Access to this material has been a stumbling block to taking my project off the ground.

Ten months at the Wiko has made a big difference for my work. As I am getting ready to return home, I realize that I will fall short of my dream of leaving Berlin with a complete book manuscript in my computer hard drive. But dreams, as the saying goes, rarely come true. I am nearly halfway through my manuscript, but most importantly, I now have all the pieces of the puzzle in place and a road map to get where I want to be, hopefully in a year or two. I will be forever grateful to the Wiko for inviting me and for providing the excellent working conditions that allowed this accomplishment.

But my life at the Wiko was not solely about my research project or about the stimulating Tuesday colloquia or the engaging discussions with my fellow Fellows over weekday lunches and Thursday dinners; perhaps some of the most satisfying moments during my stay in Berlin were my encounters beyond the confines of our Grunewald nest. I enjoyed my involvement with the "Werkstatt der Kulturen", where I delivered a lecture and a four-session mini-course on religion and politics in the history of Africa that exposed me to a wholly different audience of Berliners and shone light on fascinating facets of the cultural tapestry of Berlin. I interacted with graduate students, colleagues from German universities, journalists, independent researchers, and cultural activists, mostly of Afro-German and African descent. Kreuzberg, where the Werkstatt is located, is a crucible of multiculturalism where German culture mingles with myriad other cultures transplanted by immigrants from the Middle East and Africa and expressed in the food,

sartorial choices, groceries, music, and art that populate this lively Berlin neighborhood. I relish my bi-weekly ride on the U7 to the area around Hermannplatz and Kottbusser Tor where I did my grocery shopping and had my hair cut by a skilful and entrepreneurial Ghanaian barber. I had stints in Neukölln, where I frequented the Berlin chapter of the Muridiyya, the community I study. Although Berlin is not part of my field research, I benefitted greatly from conversations with some of the pioneers of Murid immigration in Europe who lead this community.

My stay at the Wiko has also been an opportunity to engage with the wider Africanist scholarly community in Berlin and in a few European countries and to write a few articles. I delivered five lectures at the Humboldt University, the Free University, the University of Basel, and the University of Leiden. An article on the role of the Muridiyya Sufi order in Senegalese presidential politics has been accepted for publication by the *Journal of West African History*. People come to the Wiko with secret projects, but in my case it was the secret project that grabbed me with the complicity of my dear friend and Fellow Michele Loporcaro, a passionate and brilliant linguist specializing in the study of Italian dialects. Since our first encounter, Michele has worked relentlessly to convince me to write, together with him, an article on Wolof (my mother tongue) noun-classes. In an earlier career, I had received extensive training in linguistics and have remained fascinated by the study of languages. It did not take long before I fell to Michele's charm. A few months later, our article on Wolof noun-classes is on its way for submission to a leading linguist journal.

I leave the Wiko with fond memories of places, events, and people. Some of the friendships I built here will probably endure. I look forward to continuing personal and intellectual relationships with Mahua Sarkar, with whom I have shared interest in the study of Muslim international migrants; with Michele we already have the project of together writing an article on the Wolof lyrics of Senegalese rappers; with Jocelyn Benoist we have exchanged our contacts to make sure to remain connected beyond our Wiko experience.