



EINE REPUBLIK DER KINDER
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Nothing quite prepares one for a year at the Wissenschaftskolleg. A colleague and friend – and a former Fellow – had gushed that the year had changed her life. And I recalled thinking that this was surely an exceptional outcome, perhaps a passing comment made in the interests of soothing my concern about ferrying my somewhat reluctant-to-leave-Brooklyn spouse and my five-year-old daughter to another country. I arrived at the Wiko (settling in a lovely apartment that overlooked the lake) with no such exaggerated expectation. I merely wanted to get ahead on overdue writing projects and advance my project

tracing the institutional, social, and intellectual relationship between classical political economy and imperial governance. I hoped, along the way, that my spouse would discover a rewarding routine and that my daughter might navigate the challenge of attending the local kindergarten where *Deutsch* was the lingua franca.

I carried to the leafy perch of the Grunewald many overdue projects that I hoped to nudge to completion and a major project to begin thinking about and drafting. While I was able to make headway on most of my overdue writing projects, what stands out about the year was less the final tally of writing than the unexpected adventures in reading and thinking and living anew. On an intellectual terrain, these adventures were fostered by animated conversations with many of my fellow Fellows, especially my office neighbor Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann and my Villa Walther neighbors Jean-Phillipe Narboux, Lisa Herzog, and Mohammed Hanif, who were all cherished interlocutors. The conversations, nurtured through a year-long residency, were enriching, and their imprint still resonates, despite our collective scattering. Nor had I anticipated the great fortune of meeting and learning from the generous and formidably acute observations of Lorraine Daston. The literature that makes up the history of science was new to me. But toward the end of the fall, before the astonishing dark of the Berlin winter set in, I found myself reading and thinking through an unexplored terrain. This was, for me, a new portal into making sense of the relationship between shifting modes of economic thought and forms of governance across the modern British Empire.

The Wissenschaftskolleg is by any measure a rare institution. It is so not least for the genuinely international cast of scholars it brings together. Its rarity also, or perhaps principally, lies in the exorbitant attention it lavishes on the Fellows. This attention extends from the well-designed housing provided to the lively Tuesday Colloquia to the festival of daily lunches and weekly Thursday dinners overseen by the gracious Dunia Najjar and the unflagging patience with which Eva von Kügelgen conducts *Deutsch* classes. Given this material largesse, and the solicitude of its exceptional staff (among others: Vera Pfeffer, Andrea Bergmann), it felt at times like a total institution in the very best sense, all-encompassing in what it took on to do for the Fellows. Daniel Schönflug kindly arranged for me to meet with a number of academics, from Margit Pernau, a wonderful Berlin-based Indian historian, to Philipp Lepenies, who kindly shared a wealth of knowledge about economics and graciously attended my colloquium talk, to Alexander Nützenadel, who directed me to new research in German economic and social history, to Sebastian Conrad, to whose seminar at the Freie Universität I was glad to present my ongoing research.

This institutional “thickness” of the Wiko also inevitably prompted a search for comparable instances or conditions. And the closest example I came up with was a full-service boarding school for scholars, albeit with an interdisciplinary and international group of adult scholars. The routine of daily lunches and Thursday dinners set the pace for what sometimes felt like a singular social experiment: bringing together scholars from across the globe who were for the overwhelming part essentially strangers, to live in intimate proximity for a year. In this year, I spent more time with my fellow Fellows than I have in the past decade with many of my colleagues at my home institution in New York. And this intense if fleeting proximity, where all needs were catered to, felt akin to provisioning adult scholars with the kind of protected space-time associated with childhood.

Perhaps the most unexpected pleasure afforded by the Wiko lay in the diverting and diverse *Republik der Kinder*. The children at the Wiko – Eleanor, Elsa, Changez, Yuri, Nouri, Karim, Valentine, and Francisco – knit us into the easy warm fellowship enjoyed by parents. They were exemplary citizens of their own self-made republic. My daughter, who had mightily struggled for the first few months as she entered kindergarten with no prior *Deutsch*, came to delight in a language that made her feel, as she declared sometime in early spring, as if she were always “Lego spielen”. While my own efforts at improving my spoken German remained paltry, she embraced a new language with aplomb. For her it was a literal conveyance to new worlds, new friends, and the imaginative playgrounds that abound in Berlin. Children who had arrived without a common language had by the glorious spring (that, yes, does follow the inglorious grey skies of Berlin winters) crafted their own vivifying community of German-speaking denizens, morphing the grounds of the Villa Walther into a constant stage for daily games and mysterious chalk drawings and impromptu dance parties. Witnessing this flourishing *Republik der Kinder* was, for me, inspiration and instruction alike. So fierce was my daughter’s attachment to *Deutsch*, a language that she had learned on her own by playing with others, that she has just begun first grade in a bilingual German-English school, housed as it happens, in the oldest synagogue of Brooklyn. So perhaps my friend the Wiko past-Fellow was indeed correct about the life-altering implications of spending a year at the Wiko!