



MAY YOU LIVE IN INTERESTING TIMES
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When my taxi pulled into Villa Walther, with its old-world grandeur, I felt as if I had entered a time warp, an imaginary spatial dimension that allows time travel. These feelings were intensified as I took the architectural tour of the mansions in Grunewald during the first week. Among the most memorable was an abandoned mansion covered by tangled vines and surrounded by unruly grasses with a clock above the entrance, frozen just past

10 a.m., evoking the Dickens character Miss Havisham, who shuts herself off from the world. The specters of real persons were visible in the bronze plates on the sidewalks with the names of once-wealthy Jewish inhabitants who did not survive the Holocaust. I imagined myself back in 1941, walking silently toward the train station with the thousands who did or did not know their fate, now memorialized in the metal plates along the tracks, noting the exact dates and numbers sent to the death camps. At the end of our tour, one plaque marked the spot where in 1922 right-wing radicals assassinated Walther Rathenau, a Jew and socialist who served as Foreign Minister in the Weimar republic.

Disturbed by these images and the parallels between the 1930s and the current wave of nationalist populist parties, I wrote a poem that night that ended with the line: “I cringe as I watch the beast slouching across Europe”. These lines resonated as we Wiko Fellows watched the German elections on the big screen at Villa Jaffé. The implications were topics of conversations at our lunches. These and other geopolitical events that permeated the walls of the Wissenschaftskolleg 2017/18 personified the Chinese curse “May you live in interesting times”.

Contrasts

In contrast to the ethnic suburban enclaves of Stockholm, my home, Berlin offers diverse and vibrant multicultural neighborhoods, with open markets and a fusion of music and styles, venues that defy both political and artistic boundaries. The first concert I heard involved an Iranian-Israeli group, held in a church, creating a dynamic mix of Farsi and Hebrew lyrics and musical traditions. Considered to be “spray art” rather than defamation of public property, which is the case in many cities, graffiti is found on walls throughout Berlin.

Political demonstrations are near-daily occurrences interrupting the traffic patterns. One protest against the lack of appropriate bicycle paths left me stranded on Bus 19 for 20 minutes as I watched hundreds of cyclists commandeer the streets. Together with several other Wiko Fellows at the May 1 rally, I observed a collage of rock bands, manifestos calling for radical change and revolution, and endless selling of booze on the street corners, a dramatic contrast to the staid and orderly first of May demonstrations in Sweden. In the only march I participated in myself, on International Women’s Day, invited by Zeynep Kivilcim, our Wiko colleague from Turkey, we joined the diverse and energetic migrant contingent, with its polyglot posters and speeches, carrying our sign “Women, Unite!” (Yaşasin Kadın Dayan Vişması).

Located in the Grunewald suburb, just 10 minutes by bus from the heart of Berlin, Wiko seemed worlds apart, the embodiment of tranquility and cleanliness. Its elegant villas with their pruned gardens were mirrored in the serene lake that I passed every day as I walked to my office. Often, I was lost in thought then, hardly noticing my colleagues outpacing me. Yet, even this sheltered space could be interrupted by protests. On May 1 the Grunewald Train Station was the site of a fairly large demonstration against the housing shortage and rising costs of living in Berlin – with helicopters whirring above and more police than demonstrators.

I wondered how, and if, the growing geopolitical tensions in the wider world would be reflected in the Wiko world. As one of the three Fellows who are sociologists, I wondered how my research project – with its focus on the growing gap in capabilities for well-being and quality of life across regions and countries and within them and its recognition of inequalities in capabilities with respect to gender class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual preference, and their intersections – would be received. Would it engender broader debates in these interesting and perilous times?

Lost in Translation: Challenges

My first glimpse of Villa Walther raised expectations that the Wiko would be formal, mired in age-old traditions – like I felt the first time I was invited to high table at Oxford University. Instead, Wiko appeared to be a vibrant intellectual environment, evoking an alternative universe where scholars from a range of countries and contexts left behind our daily routines and demands. We came here to compose, write, imagine, and innovate. To facilitate this, we were treated as privileged guests, with kind and generous staff catering to our every need: librarians supplied us magically with books and articles that we needed, no matter how hard to get; IT experts visited our offices and apartments to fix the computers on which we have become so dependent; and three-course lunches were served every day and dinners every Thursday, offering vegetarian, vegan, and lactose- and gluten-free alternatives. Our only obligation was to engage and interact with those on their journey.

Even at our very first meeting I sensed the possibilities and challenges of such a community. As each Fellow introduced his or her project and partners, the range of contexts and frameworks appeared remarkable and daunting. Could we translate our scholarly pursuits into some common language where all would feel seen and included in the

dialogue? I was thinking not only of our different mother tongues, but also whether we could communicate our concepts, theories, and methodologies to others unfamiliar with them. Or would our seminars be variants of “lost in translation”?

Almost immediately, I also recognized the potential of this multi-disciplinary group to enrich each other’s lives – both professionally, forcing us to think outside the box of our disciplines, and personally, to expand our horizons. Finally, in these “interesting times” in which democratic institutions are under siege and polarization and divisiveness in political cultures increase menacingly, could we create an open and nurturing environment, with not only tolerance, but mutual respect for diverse positions and positionings? This is a best scenario, which the leadership clearly set as a goal.

Meeting the Challenges

We almost always present our research to other specialists, speaking in jargon and shorthand at conferences and assuming that our listeners understand and are familiar with the canon and major figures we refer to. Although academia often rewards scholarship that is highly arcane and translatable only with great difficulty, if at all, these rules of the game may not apply in diverse multi-disciplinary milieus, such as Wiko. Lost in translation was the experience for many Fellows after some seminars, especially the natural scientists who voiced their frustration at hearing a two-hour presentation that they could not decipher. Overall, most presenters rose to the challenge to communicate with all of us.

Nevertheless, for me, these natural scientists were the litmus test whether seminars avoided being lost in translation. Keenly aware of their different ways of organizing research, their emphasis on methodologies and evidence-based hypothesis-testing, the biological scientists made heroic efforts to avoid this pitfall. They explained how they had arrived at their research topic, what their contribution to the knowledge base in their field was, and, importantly for us others, the broader implications of their research for understanding the world we live in: translating how bees and bats learn, communicate, behave, and exhibit cognition and presenting the new trends in evolutionary biology that connect the genome of our species to those of the simplest living organisms. It is not surprising that in the discussion part of their seminars, the questions and comments were not as longwinded and rambling as some of those in other seminars.

In flagging this need to address “lost in translation”, I do not want to suggest that Wiko should abandon its general seminar format for more specialized presentations to

smaller groups. Rather, I want to argue that this format provides great rewards in broadening our horizons and creating venues and incentives for multi-disciplinary exchange and inter-disciplinary collaborations that could be developed further for future Wiko scholars.

My own research has been enriched by the scholarship of my Wiko Fellows. Others have awakened my intellectual curiosity and enhanced my appreciation for architecture, literature, and music: a prizewinning author (I stayed up to the wee hours of the night reading his novel about the military coup in Pakistan); a renowned Bach clavichordist who attuned me to the emotional structure in Bach's compositions; an eminent architectural historian who walked us through the micro-histories of urban space (street signs and sewer covers); and a remarkable modernist composer whose current project, an epic opera, "Europa", traces myth through different epochs of history. Through his other compositions (he generously made a copy of one for me), I gained a deeper understanding of how silences in music create dramatic tension.

Building Bridges

Interdisciplinarity has been a cornerstone in my professional career and my research. Gender, a dimension in my research, emerged as a subfield within academics through cross-disciplinary dialogue within institutions and networks. I was an active participant in this development as founder and editor of *Social Politics*, a journal whose interdisciplinary and global reach has created dialogue across disciplines. Sociology as a field has been transformed by cross-disciplinary exchange with many subfields: political, economic, and historical sociology. The innovations in my research over the years have emerged from building bridges across theoretical terrains. Relating to my current project, I turned to economist Amartya Sen's capability approach in my quest for a more dynamic and multi-dimensional framework: one that allowed me to explore multiple inequalities across social categories and to engage with institutional changes that have emerged from global processes, notably migration. Social psychology and cultural anthropology provided new perspectives for modelling mechanisms shaping capabilities to make change: the sense of entitlement to make claims for rights and the perceived scope of alternatives for agency (freedoms) to choose other ways of living.

At our weekly colloquia, scholars presenting their research lodged in specific disciplines and discursive terrains often confronted questions that tested disciplinary borders. Presenters

were asked to consider other dimensions – how gender, race, nationality, colonialism, or different country contexts might nuance the narrative. After these discussions, I hungered for more cross-disciplinary dialogue. I took the initiative, specifically at one-on-one lunches and coffees where I sought to carry on the discussions that emerged from seminars, both theirs and mine. What a rich array of intellectual dishes covered my table: scholarship on critical race theory and colonialism, as well as frameworks for citizenship and human rights; and philosophers who shared their knowledge of existential debates on agency freedoms and futures. Several lively conversations with Permanent Fellow Lorraine Daston provided me with important insights on mechanisms reshaping norms (related to my earlier book on capabilities and work-life balance, which will be helpful for a project that I will be starting next year). Closest to my research, Permanent Fellow Bénédicte Zimmermann, who also shares my interdisciplinary bent, has had the most impact on the theoretical development in my research this year. In addition to our informal, passionate discussions on capabilities, she invited me to participate in her international workshop on work and capabilities. These laid the foundation for a collaborative article in which we seek to present theoretical innovations in capabilities research. Through my Wiko connections, I met with two prominent scholars living in Berlin; anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, whose framework on the capacity to aspire has become a key dimension in my project on migrants: “Imagining Alternative Futures”; and the historian Gisela Bock, a former Fellow, shared with me her insights on German history of the 1930s and the evolution of gender research in German scholarship, its complexities, and its fragmentations. The many conversations with her have evolved into a continuing friendship.

Wiko offers fertile ground for cross-disciplinary exchange. In order to foster more interdisciplinary exchange and collaborations among Wiko Fellows, I have recommended that resources be reserved for workshops and seminars that emerge from discussions and research debates during the Wiko year.

Lost in Translation in Interesting Times

During our year, many social occasions brought us together: yoga classes led by one of the Fellows, several potluck dinners, barbecues, discos, etc. were held and long-lasting friendships were made. 2017/18 at Wiko has nevertheless been characterized by both the Wiko leadership and Permanent Fellows as an exceptional year, illustrating how geopolitical

events, such as #MeToo and contentious discourses on diversity and difference, can reveal the strains and fault lines in a community.

For me, “lost in translation” is an apt overall metaphor for this exceptional year. My earlier research on recognition struggles and current work on citizenship and diversity have shed light on the tensions in social identities and their contextual embeddedness that resonated in our year. As my colleague in the recognition project, Susan Gal, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Chicago, an expert on translation has underscored, translation is a process that involves who is speaking and who is listening and in what contexts. Layers of context frame our lenses for understanding, interpreting the texts we receive, and engaging with colleagues in seminars, sometimes electrifying daily conversations at lunch and dinner tables. Where we locate ourselves (our habitus) embodies concentric circles: the countries and regions we live in; the academic institutions where we teach and advise students; our research and social networks; the stage of our careers; and other socio-demographic characteristics. In our era, when political social identities are becoming more polarized, the notion that context matters comes into play.

The issue of diversity, which has been raised in previous years, became a flashpoint in ours and has spurred the Wiko leadership and Permanent Fellows to develop further their strategies for achieving broad geographic representation and more diversity among the Fellows with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity. There is potential and promise for future Wiko communities to engage with these tensions. Perhaps that is at least part of the legacy of 2017.

Not a World Apart: Political Engagement

While many scholars might yearn for a return to the ivory tower in these turbulent times and while Fellows of bygone years celebrated Wiko’s seclusion in a setting apart from tribulations outside, this image does not resonate in our year. In our year, the Wiko leadership selected three Fellows fleeing persecution in non-democratic regimes in Syria, Turkey, and Poland, an unmistakable indication that the Wiko was very much in and of the world. These Fellows inspired us with their courage to resist authoritarian regimes, and their projects embodied our theoretical discussions on human rights: Zeynep Kılıncım, Professor of Civil Law, whose passport was confiscated after signing a protest letter against the authoritarian Erdogan regime; Paweł Machcewicz, director of the World War II museum in Gdańsk, who is currently facing trial for standing by his interpretation of

history (all of us were invited on a tour to see his exhibition before it was removed to accommodate the Polish government's revisionist history); and Yassin al-Haj Saleh, author and public speaker on the ravages of the Syrian civil war and the enduring effects of torture, incarcerated in a Syrian prison for 16 years. We Fellows become engaged in their struggles, signing petitions against the devastating carnage in cities like Ghouta (letter published in the *New York Review of Books*) and sending a petition to the Polish government in support of our colleague and the rights of free expression. Politically engaged scholarship can emerge from our own research. Seeking to reach a wider public on an injustice that has been perpetuated for nearly 200 years, Kris Manjapra, historian of slavery and colonialism, unearthed archives that revealed that reparations for slaveholders were still being paid by the British government until as late as 2015. He was commissioned to write a long article about this for *The Guardian* (now to become a book) that has activated the growing international movement for reparations to the descendants of slaves.

Though situated in idyllic and insular surroundings, the Wiko is not a world apart. It is fitting that the last seminar involved a panel on World War I and its aftermath, culminating in the spectacular film from a new TV series, "The Clash of Cultures", based on a book by our own Daniel Schönplüg. Both the panel and audience addressed the reverberations of the past in the current day: anti-Semitism, the demonizing of the Other (nowadays migrants), the resurgence of white power, and identity. Currently, gender backlash has been added to this list wherever the populist right has gained power. The recent decree of the authoritarian Hungarian government forbidding the teaching of Gender and LGBT Studies at universities. Despite the outpouring of hundreds of letters of condemnation from international academic associations, journals and institutes, the authoritarian Hungarian government has decided to prohibit teaching of Gender and LGBT studies at Hungarian universities. This is a wake-up call to all scholars and academic institutes like Wiko to vigorously contest these threats to academic freedoms.

Publications and Presentations during Wiko Year

"Migrants, Markets and Domestic Work: Do Institutional Contexts Matter in the Personal Household Service Sector?" *Journal of European Social Policy* 28, 4 (2018): 386–401.

"Revisiting Recognition and Redistribution and Extending the Borders." *Intersections. East European Journal of Society and Politics* 4, 1 (2018): 9–23.

- “Gender, States and Citizenship: Evolution of a Field.” (with Jeff Hearn). In *The New Handbook of Political Sociology*. Cambridge University Press, forthcoming.
- “Migrants and Capabilities for Wellbeing in Two Diverse Institutional Contexts.” The Politics of Fiscal Welfare Markets Conference, Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg, Delmenhorst, November 1/2, 2017.
- “Imagining Alternatives through the Lens of Sen’s Capability and Agency Approach.” Tuesday Colloquium, Wissenschaftskolleg, February 6, 2018.
- “Collective Voice, Access to Training and Desired Capabilities in New Zealand Workplaces.” and “Voice and Employees’ Training Capabilities in French and German Firms.” Discussant. Workshop “Employees’ Vocational Training Capabilities. International Comparisons”, Wissenschaftskolleg February 15/16, 2018, organized by Bénédicte Zimmermann.