



ZUM EWIGEN FRIEDEN:
EIN WIKOLOGISCHER ENTWURF
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I arrived at the Wissenschaftskolleg with a puzzle and high hopes. My hopes centered on Wiko. The puzzle concerned Kant. Ten months later, I left with some answers, more questions, and all my great expectations surpassed. “The best year of my life,” I told a

friend who asked how it had been. “So far,” he kindly replied. Yet it would take a lot to equal, let alone to outdo, that *Wunderjahr* on Wallotstraße.

Among academic institutions, Wiko is the ideal to which others may aspire but never quite reach. In this regard, it resembles Kant’s idea of perpetual peace – the source of the puzzle I brought in my baggage to Berlin. Kant laid out his vision in 1795 in a short book entitled *Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf* (Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch). He couched his argument as a set of preliminary articles, definitive articles, and even, in a revised edition, a “secret” article of perpetual peace. In short, Kant composed his treatise in the form of a *treaty*. But why? That was one conundrum I wanted to tackle at Wiko, as part of a larger project I began there on the global history of “treaty consciousness” from the early modern period to the present, viewed through the lens of intellectual and cultural history.

To make any headway with that project, I needed, at a minimum, time, books – *lots* of books! – interlocutors, and greatly improved German. Wiko provided all this, and more. I arrived early in August for the intensive German lessons, to both humiliation and illumination. After being thrown out of the first class for being a “false beginner”, the reward was an enlightening conversation with my forgiving teacher about the semantics of *Vertrag*, meaning, revealingly but for anglophones confusingly, both “contract” and “treaty”. Those weeks of deep immersion before the Wiko year began helped me immeasurably to polish my rusty German, to resettle in Berlin (where I’d been a brief visitor at both Wiko and the Freie Universität in recent years), and, above all, to kindle friendships that lasted the whole year and beyond.

One main goal for the year was *not* to write a book: I’ve done that perhaps too often lately. Instead, I badly needed the time and space to read, reflect, and recharge before my next major work. Yet one can never quite shake off earlier work. Soon after I arrived in Berlin, my latest book appeared in German as *Bürgerkrieg: Vom Wesen innerstaatlicher Konflikte* (2018); over the course of the year, I gave interviews and presentations about it, wrote a reply to critics for a special journal issue devoted to it, and in the majestic theater of the Deutsches Historisches Museum presented the Humboldt-Universität’s annual Droysen Lecture on it. Alongside this residual work on war, I finished co-editing a collection on the cultural history of peace in the Age of Enlightenment, as well as articles defending presentism in historical writing and treating John Locke’s bureaucratic and philosophical engagement with treaties. Because 2018/2019 was the first full year I had spent across the Atlantic since moving to the US in 1993, I keenly seized most opportunities to keep up

connections and to create new ones in Europe and the UK with lectures, seminars, and conferences on these and other subjects in Augsburg, Belfast, Berlin, Freiburg, Gotha, Göttingen, Hamburg, Helsinki, Jena, Newcastle, Sussex, Tartu, Verona, Vienna, and Zurich. For two weeks in February, I even played truant to lecture on the history of the Pacific Ocean and its peoples in French Polynesia. The first Europeans to visit those islands thought Tahiti the closest place on earth to paradise: of course, they hadn't been to the Wissenschaftskolleg.

Wiko launched my study of treaty-making and treaty-breaking over the *longue durée* with three main events and a thousand smaller prompts along the way. The first occasion was my Tuesday Colloquium at the mid-point of the year in early December. Daniel Schönplflug urged us to play with the standard lecture format and I took him at his word by offering three short talks, punctuated by rapid-fire questions sessions, memorably introduced and meticulously chaired by Gisèle Sapiro. I spoke about the ubiquity of treaties, their visual representation in Western art from Holbein to 1919, and their contemporary significance in the age of Trump and Brexit. Acute responses from fellow Fellows and their partners that day shaped the next six months of my work at Wiko; I'm sure they will continue to inform my book over the coming years.

That is also true of the second event, a classic Wiko workshop, generously funded by the Otto und Martha Fischbeck-Stiftung, on the question "What is a Treaty?" It was classically Wiko because it was multidisciplinary, gathering scholars of art history, international relations, international law, and legal theory in conversation with historians of many stripes, but also because it was informal, open-ended, and richly fertile in new questions rather than definite answers. Finally, at the close of the year, I was honored to join former Fellow Anne Peters in presenting an Abendkolloquium on the theme of "Treaties in Danger? Contemporary Crises of International Order in Historical Perspective". This was an occasion to bring a wider audience to Wiko. It allowed us to debate whether the postwar international legal order founded on treaties was shifting or shattering, based on developments such as the Trump administration's withdrawal from various international agreements, the then British government's inability to ratify its treaty for exiting the European Union, and the defeated Swiss referendum on the supremacy of domestic law over international law. Each of these events propelled my project but also made it harder, by revealing new complexities and opening up unanticipated lines of inquiry: all, again, classically Wiko.

Yet, what's perhaps most characteristic are the more informal, self-organized, and unplanned exchanges that Wiko excites. Where else could I have found out why it might

matter what kind of table you sit at to negotiate a treaty, as I did from Heidi Tagliavini? (In one of her inimitable installations, Jessica Stockholder later transformed the table at which the 1713 Treaty of Utrecht had allegedly been signed.) Or how treaty regimes that seem benign to Western powers can be so destructive to more vulnerable populations, as Yassin Al-Haj Saleh powerfully reminded me in relation to Syria? Or whether the sanctions imposed in certain treaties mirror similar behaviors among social insects, as Koos Boomsma urged me to consider? Every occasion for interaction – from the August walking tours of Berlin and many stumbling exchanges in German lessons, via brief encounters in the Club Room, to all those lovely long lunches and even longer dinners – seemed to bring new pleasures and novel insights, especially from our large, lively group of biologists. Then there were moments of quiet triumph, such as finally reading (most of) Max Weber's *Politik als Beruf* in the original, thanks entirely to patience and encouragement from Gisèle and Eva von Kügelgen.

All this happened with Wiko's unusual commitment to integrating the arts, and artists, with the human and natural sciences. As a fiction reader, I'll be forever proud to have played a small part in launching Yvonne Owuor's kaleidoscopic novel, *The Dragonfly Sea*. (When Yvonne wins the Nobel Prize, I shall dine out on the story of her thrashing me at pingpong.) And as an opera lover, I'm eternally grateful for the chance to sit in on rehearsals at the Staatsoper of Beat Furrer's unsettling masterpiece, *Violetter Schnee*. For ours was a year of memorable music – Quatuor Diotima and Cantando Admont performing more from Beat; Nurit Stark and Cédric Pescia playing Schumann; Beat and Cordula's touching Schubert at the *Abschiedsfest*. In a different register altogether, there was even Siobhán O'Brien's Spotify list that electrified our dance parties from deepest winter through to dazzling summer.

Those parties were perhaps the signature achievement of the Fellows' Speakership, to which Gisèle and I were unexpectedly elected at the beginning of the year. The great upside of this office was the chance to spend even more time with everyone who makes the Wissenschaftskolleg such an extraordinary environment. We were fortunate to be there during Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger's first year as Rector: Barbara's grace and rigor, inclusiveness and good humor, set the perfect tone right from the start, with the generous support of those most blessed of academicians, the Permanent Fellows. Daniel and Thorsten inhabit their unusual roles with inventiveness and dignity, but how to begin to thank them, along with Andrea, Nina, and Vera, Katharina, Petria, and Sophia, and all those who keep the Rolls Royce vehicle that is Wiko humming so smoothly? And how to

pay tribute to Dunia and her incomparable team? Perhaps Hassan Salem said it best, after leaving Wiko too soon in mid-year. What was the hardest part about being away? “That there’s no Dunia,” he lamented. Hassan, we now all feel your pain.

What, after all, of my Kantian puzzle? With the help of Wiko’s miracle-working librarians (*vielen Dank*, Anja, Kirsten, and Stefan!), I uncovered his learned playfulness. *Zum ewigen Frieden* begins with an old joke. Kant tells us that “toward perpetual peace” were the words a Dutch innkeeper inscribed on his tavern sign with a picture of a graveyard: the only true way to find peace was to *rest* in peace. It turned out the joke wasn’t even Kant’s: it came from his predecessor, Leibniz, who had told it a century before in the preface to a compendium of treaties he compiled in the 1690s. This showed he was familiar with treaty collections, where he would have found the formula “perpetual peace” much used in the texts of treaties and which would have provided templates for his own treaty-like text. That work appeared in late 1795, just a few months after his native Prussia had signed a pivotal peace treaty with revolutionary France.

Kant’s use of the treaty genre was allusive, witty, and timely all at once. And it turned out it was not unique in his oeuvre. As we discovered in a magical reading group on Cassirer and Kant (*grace à* Karin, Juliane, and Gisèle), Kant extended the joke a year later in an essay that ironically promised the “imminent conclusion of a treaty of perpetual peace in philosophy” (*Verkündigung des nahen Abschlusses eines Traktats zum ewigen Frieden in der Philosophie*). I hadn’t quite solved my puzzle – just where had Kant read about the Treaty of Basel? How did he know his readers would get the jokes? – but it had ramified satisfyingly. And it helped me to lay the foundations for a multi-year project I could not have begun without Wiko’s stimulus and support.

Kant argued that institutional innovation, individual independence, and occasionally agonistic sociability would all be needed in the search for perpetual peace. He also knew such a condition was more likely to be pursued than finally achieved. Yet even he could not have imagined the kind of profound calm amid ferment that the Wissenschaftskolleg inspires.

Wiko has a logo – that famous naked (male) angel with his outsized pair of compasses – but not, it seems, a motto. Why not steal one from Kant, as he had pilfered it from Leibniz? *Zum ewigen Frieden*.