



TIME FOR THINKING
JEANNE KORMINA

Jeanne Kormina is Professor of Anthropology and Religious Studies at the National Research University Higher School of Economics in St. Petersburg. She graduated from the Urals State University (Ekaterinburg) and did her Ph.D. at the European University in St. Petersburg. In her ethnographic research on post-secular transformations in Russia, she focuses on topics of historical imagination, the construction of the religious and secular self, and the desecularization of the public sphere. Her recent publications include a book *Pilgrims: Ethnography of Orthodox Nomadism* (in Russian, 2019), a co-edited volume *Invention of Religion: Desecularisation in Post-Soviet Context* (in Russian, 2015), and the articles “Social Nature of Prayer in a Church of the Unchurched: Russian Orthodox Christianity From Its Edges” (with Sonja Luehrmann, *JAAR* 86, no. 2, 2018) and “A New ‘Great Schism’? Theopolitics of Communion and Canonical Territory in the Orthodox Church” (with Vlad Naumescu, *Anthropology Today* 36, no. 1, 2020). Currently, she is leading two collaborative research projects, “Infrastructures of Pilgrimages” and “Marking Space Religiously”, and working on her new book on memory activists in Russia who are involved in debates about the authenticity of the remains of the Russian “Royal Martyrs” – Emperor Nikolas II and his family. – Address: Department of Sociology, Higher School of Economics, 16 Soyuzna Pechatnikov, 190008 St. Petersburg, Russia.
E-mail: kormina@eu.spb.ru; jkormina@hse.ru.

My and my family’s preparations for a year in Berlin started a couple of years in advance, when I received an invitation from Wiko to apply for a fellowship. I knew already that it was a great place to do academic work, as I had participated in a workshop organized at

Wiko earlier and some of my colleagues were lucky enough to be Fellows there. The reality was even greater than our expectations. The staff members at Wiko helped us a lot in organizing our routine, from choosing a school for our son to providing office space and library services not only for myself, but also for my husband (who is an academic, too). Their efforts made our time there effective and unforgettable.

I used my time at Wissenschaftskolleg mostly for reading and thinking, for revising my ideas and writing my book. The wonderful library services at Wiko played a crucial part in making this thinking time possible. Like everybody, I presented my research at the Tuesday Colloquium, a cornerstone of Wiko academic community life, and received useful comments and constructive criticism, which helps me to continue and improve my work. Usually, all of us present our work to either a narrow circle of close colleagues from our own discipline or sometimes to a broader public outside academia. At Tuesday Colloquia, Wiko Fellows are invited to explain their ideas to academics from other disciplines, from biology and medicine to ancient history and law, and have to do this in an intellectually engaging way that is not too simple and not too complicated. I really enjoyed the intensity of discussion at the colloquium and the friendly atmosphere we always had.

Workshop with ZOiS

Wiko is a wonderful place for organizing workshops and conferences. In March 2020, in collaboration with colleagues from the Zentrum für Osteuropa- und internationale Studien (ZOiS), we organized a workshop “Religious Activism between Politics and Everyday Life: Mobilizing and Mediating the Religious in Eastern Europe and in the Caucasus”, in which colleagues from both institutions and from other places in Germany and outside the country participated. Not everybody who planned to participate managed to come, as the workshop was scheduled right before the lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. As it happened, this workshop was the last offline academic event at Wiko in 2019–2020. The workshop, however, went very well, and now we are preparing a special journal issue based on the papers presented there.

Seminar on post-Soviet memories

After the lockdown, all academic activities went online, and this transition was made so smoothly and smartly that the bonds created within the Wiko academic community at the

beginning of the year became even stronger. One of these online events was a discussion about the memory of the Soviet times in the post-Socialist countries on April 22, the 150th birthday of Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the USSR. What became clear for us four participants and Wiko Fellows from Bulgaria, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Hungary – a writer, a historian and political activist, an anthropologist, and a specialist in the history of ideas – when we were preparing this discussion was that the post-Soviet space is not a relevant category for us anymore and that the memory of the socialist era is in no way a common ground for our contemporary geopolitical imagination, whether as citizens and or as analysts. It was fun, though. And a wonderful photo of the four of us made in a kind of Velázquez style helped to make this event memorable for us.

Cultural events

During our stay at Wiko, we had many unforgettable cultural events, from an art exhibition at Wiko to a cinephile club and from excursions into the city with the best guides imaginable to tours of art museums organized by Fellows themselves. We enjoyed Berlin's endless opportunities, with its wonderful theaters and concerts, not to mention pubs and restaurants. A very special event was the baptism of the baby Alexander born to a family of our Fellows in spring 2020. A priest and Wiko Fellow performed it on the Wiko lawn, as it was a time of quarantine and no indoor events were possible.

Extra time at Wiko

The global lockdown caused by the pandemic changed everybody's plans and restricted our movement. Because the borders of our country were closed at the time when we were supposed to leave Germany, we had to stay in Berlin longer, and Wiko helped us a lot, both in preparing our travel back home and in prolonging our stay in Berlin. We are very thankful to Wiko for this generous help. During this extra time, I managed to finish for an edited volume a chapter about the apparition of the Mother of God during the second Chechen war in the Caucasus, which I would never have written if I were not stuck in Berlin so happily. I hope my book on memory activists in Yekaterinburg will also be finished and published, thanks to my fellowship at Wiko that filled me with new ideas, knowledge, friends, and energy.