



A TIME OF RESPITE, RETHINKING, SOME  
CONCLUSIONS, AND SOME NEW QUESTIONS  
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Ever since Tijana and I embarked on the ERC-supported research project “The fashioning of a Sunni orthodoxy and the entangled histories of confession-building in the Ottoman Empire,” we had had few opportunities to get together in person and have extended conversations about the project without being distracted by other responsibilities. This is why we were especially looking forward to a time when we would be in a third place that would afford us respite from the busy schedules of our home bases. Specifically, we planned to finish editing two large collective volumes, which had been in our hands for

some time, and to co-write what we thought would be a monograph that synthesizes the results of the entire project. We both agreed that Berlin, and in Berlin, Wiko, would be the perfect place to do all this. We were, therefore, delighted when we applied and were granted the Wiko fellowship for the fifth and final year of our project.

I arrived at Wiko in mid-August with my son, who would stay with me only part of the time, as he lived in Düsseldorf with his father. As someone who had spent her sabbatical in Berlin a few years earlier, I should say that it was a true luxury to arrive in Berlin and not worry about finding a place to live, and not even to have to go in person for the *Anmeldung*, which, I knew from experience, could be quite a time-consuming and trying business. It was also luxurious to have at our disposal a whole team of librarians who magically and quickly brought us the books and articles that we needed. (My only regret is that as a result, I rarely ventured out to the Staatsbibliothek, which had been one of my favorite places during my previous stay.)

At the same time, it quickly became clear that Wiko was not just an idyllic place where one could isolate oneself from the rest of the world and simply work unperturbed. As a Wiko Fellow, one was also expected to take part in an intense intellectual community. Daily life at this venerable institution was organized in such a way that Fellows had to regularly interrupt their work to spend time with each other. In addition to the Tuesday Colloquia and occasional events like Fruitful Frictions, or the evening lectures, we had the obligatory lunches four times a week, plus the Thursday dinners. No matter how delicious the food and how engaging the conversation, I must confess that I initially found the performativity required on these occasions to be a bit too much, but luckily most of the Fellows were remarkably collegial and kind, and as I got to know everyone else, I felt more at ease and got more accustomed to the rhythm of Wiko's communal life.

Without doubt, one of the most memorable aspects of the Wiko experience for me was the colloquia. In my adult life as an academic, I had mostly attended conferences and lectures of fellow historians, or more broadly, people in the humanities and the social sciences, and had not really taken part in multi-disciplinary fora comparable to those at Wiko. I was not initially sure how much sense I would make of the presentations by the life scientists, but thanks to the helpful tips given by Daniel Schönplüg and Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger at the beginning of the year and thanks also to the communicative skills and resourcefulness of most Fellows, I actually got something out of every colloquium that I attended, no matter how remote the topic. But what truly made the colloquia memorable for me were the discussions that followed. It was truly exciting to see how Fellows

from different disciplines dissected each other's presentations and asked questions that cut to the core. I frequently learned as much or even more from the discussions than from the presentations themselves.

As stimulating as it was to be exposed to the research of Fellows from so many different disciplines, it was also great to have been at Wiko at the same time as several exceedingly good historians whose research addressed questions relevant to mine. Colloquia and lectures given by other Fellows on the politics of law in different contexts were also extremely interesting to me, because during part of my stay I was writing about the tensions between the supposedly immutable religious law and the mutable local and imperial customs in the early modern Ottoman context. I wonder whether it was pure luck or extremely good planning on the part of the selection committee (most likely, it was both) that during our year there were a significant number of Fellows whose work delved into religion from different disciplinary perspectives. I very much enjoyed the single session that Tijana, Nicole, and Jeanne organized on readings on religion. I wish we had started it earlier, since the COVID-19 pandemic brought it to an abrupt end.

Shortly after my own colloquium in March, the pace of life at Wiko changed significantly, when the whole of Germany (like many other places in the world) went into lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For me, perversely, this was not such a bad thing, since my husband and son came over to stay with me. Besides, when some of the Fellows left, I asked for and got an office all to myself, which helped my productivity. Also, we no longer had communal lunches, even though Dunia made sure that lunches were delivered to us individually, which was incredible. But by then, we had become a close-knit community, so when the communal lunches were resumed (with the requisite precautions) a few months later, we had all missed each other's company and relished the renewed opportunities to get together in person. By then, of course, we all knew we were approaching the end of our fellowship and were already feeling sad on that account.

Despite the ups and downs of my moods and the distractions of a world gone awry, I now realize that my ten months at Wiko were actually more productive than I thought. The first piece I finished was a long article on the Ottoman reception of the political thought of the Hanbali jurist and theologian Ibn Taymiyya. Specifically, I discussed how Ottoman scholars engaged with the Taymiyyan doctrine of shariah-based governance (*siyasa shar'iyya*) in the light of their own legal and administrative practices, which were based on the shariah, sultanic law, and local custom. This article will come out in the project's first edited volume. After this, I revised and finished an article discussing how

seventeenth-century Ottoman jurists reckoned with local custom and historical change in the context of the jurisprudential debates on contested forms of communal prayer. This article has also been accepted for publication in a separate collective volume devoted to the topic of change in the Ottoman world.

My interest in debates on Islamic law notwithstanding, Sufism or Islamic mysticism remained at the center of my focus. Earlier, I had written about how the growing importance of Islamic law and legal norms in learned discourse and administrative practice, together with growing Sunni confessionalism, had placed new constraints on the Sufis living under Ottoman rule in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Yet, I was also mindful of the fact that, despite these challenges, the Sufi brotherhoods had continued to spread deep into Ottoman society, and Sufi masters continued to be influential religious and political actors, not only through the early modern era, but also all the way until the end of the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth century. I wanted to address this seeming contradiction in my work. I had the opportunity to present some of my thoughts on the topic in a paper I presented at the conference “Imperial Mysticism: Piety and Power in Early Modern Empires from a Global Perspective” at Central European University. My paper focused on Sufi political writings of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and showed how Sufi writers were able to revitalize the discourse of mystical rulership with new inflections and use it to secure their place within the Ottoman religio-political order in a time of change. More and more, I realized that leading Sufis of the early modern Ottoman Empire turned the debate on Sufism into a debate on the Ottoman “constitution,” and I began to explore other ways of approaching that constitutional debate. One of those ways would be through a study of royal rituals, and for that, I found the work of Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger (and conversations with her) to be immensely inspirational. In this connection, I would also like to acknowledge the help and encouragement provided by Eva von Kügelgen when reading German-language scholarship. I wish I had taken greater advantage of her expertise.

By December, it had become evident that Tijana’s research and mine were evolving in rather different directions. Much of my research focused on those elements of Ottoman Islam that did not neatly fit the confessionalization model, and I felt increasingly drawn towards writing a more layered history of that tradition than one that would be more global in its reach. In the end, Tijana and I decided that, rather than try to co-write a book that would somehow “put everything together,” we might more profitably write two separate books on our respective foci of research, while remaining in conversation. Of course,

we still continued to collaborate in various ways. In January, for instance, we gave a joint talk on our project as part of a colloquium on early modern European history run by Professors Schunka and Jarzebowski at the Freie Universität. We also continued to work together on the two collective volumes.

By the end of the Wiko fellowship, the first product of our collaborative work, the collection of essays we edited under the title *Historicizing Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, c. 1450–c. 1750*, was finally finished and was in press. The second collective volume, *Entangled Confessionalizations? Dialogic Perspectives on Community and Confession-Building in the Ottoman Empire, 15th–18th Centuries*, was also almost finished. It was for the second volume that I wrote the article titled “Confessional Ambiguity in the Confessional Age: Philo-Alidism, Sufism and Sunni Islam in the Ottoman Empire, 1500–1700.” I presented the gist of this paper at my Wiko colloquium and benefited greatly from the questions and comments from the other Fellows.

Of course, my stay in Berlin as a Wiko Fellow was also about much more than academic work. I know I will dearly miss the long walks that I took, sometimes alone, sometimes with Tijana, and sometimes with Deniz and Eren, along the lakes and through the Grunewald forest. The peace and quiet of the Grunewald area appealed to me so much that I did not venture out to the rest of Berlin as much as I had done during my previous stay. That said, I did see some excellent exhibits and plays, and I am grateful to Efraín and Romy for initiating me into the riches of the Schaubühne. The Pilates classes with Rebecca Rainey were also a gem. Above all, however, I owe to Wiko the privilege and pleasure of having gotten to know so many people who are not only terrific scholars, but also wonderful human beings. For all these reasons and more, I consider myself very fortunate indeed to have been at Wiko when I was. Let me end then by extending my sincerest thanks to all the people who made it possible for me and for us to be Wiko Fellows, who made that experience truly work for us, and who stood by us, also when things got rough.