



A REAL YEAR OF WORK/LIFE BALANCE  
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I arrived in Berlin in late August exhausted, after a year spent working double time to create space and time to think and write at Wiko. It did not help that my entry coincided with a poor weather spell. I experienced a thirty-degree drop in temperature (from 90° F (32° C) in New York City, where I live, to 60° F (16° C) in Berlin), the rain was constant, and the skies were cloudy, casting a gloom over the neighborhood and city. Even the trees near the Bundestag had been fooled into thinking it was already fall – the leaves were already turning gold. My first to-do list item was to purchase a rain jacket, a sweater, and two thick pairs of socks. I was also puzzled by the heaviness I felt in the neighborhood and in the city. Learning Grunewald's history and seeing the Gleis 17 monument at the

local train station, the stumbling stones in front of Villa Jaffé where I stayed, and monuments throughout the city helped me make sense of the weight I felt. Things eventually perked up. The sun fought its way out, and on a lovely Thursday in September, the first truly sunny and warm day, I took advantage of an open-air Hop-On, Hop-Off bus plus Spree boat ride tour to finally get an overview of the city that would be home for ten months. As I settled in, I established a rhythm of very early weekday morning starts to enable me to have a good writing stint and get ahead of the siesta-inducing inertia that inevitably followed the filling three-course Wiko lunches. I spent my afternoons in Zoom meetings and answering emails, and came to treasure my late afternoon/early evening walks through the beautiful Grunewald streets when I could think or unwind or just be. (I must admit that part of the initial motivation for daily walks – as opposed to afternoon naps – was a desire to slow down my growing dependence on what I came to call “kind trousers” that could easily accommodate my expanding waistline – see lunches above).

I also decided that during my sabbatical year, I would try to consistently take full weekends off, for perhaps the first time in my academic career. So over the weekend, I started to venture out and take in the Berlin cultural scene, both high- and low-brow, including attending performances of symphony orchestra, opera (for which I developed a real appreciation), and jazz (Wynton Marsalis came to town for his birthday); visiting art and photography museums; and going to see comedy and movies (the CineMaxx at Potsdamer Platz showed English-language movies). But the main event of most of my weekends was traveling, which made it easy to leave the laptop behind. One of the many gifts of my time at Wiko was the gradual and obvious realization that I was not only in Berlin, but also in Germany – and not only in Germany, but also in Europe. I had been dreaming of exploring Europe for over twenty years. Despite flying through European airports on my way to and from home in Kenya and Tanzania since I first left to take up a high school scholarship abroad, I was not able, for many years, to leave the airport. Now, here was my chance. Traveling through Europe from a base in Europe is so much easier and cheaper than doing so from afar. Fall, winter, and early spring travel also meant fewer tourists, shorter lines for famous sites, and my feeling safer, given that the COVID-19 pandemic was (and is) still ongoing. There are many travel memories I will treasure – riding on the Glacier Express train in Switzerland with its stunning vistas of snow-capped mountains, a midnight walk through Venice and viewing Anselm Kiefer’s stunning mixed media art displayed in the Palazzo Ducale, listening to live fado music in a small Alfama neighborhood café in Lisbon, watching flamenco dancing in Madrid, savoring French food in

Paris and seeing the Eiffel Tower up close, indulging my childhood self as I toured fairy tale-like castles in Prague and Füssen, understanding why, as the saying goes, one loses one's heart in beautiful Heidelberg, wandering through the lovely streets and over the canals in rainy Amsterdam, and more, much more... It was a dream worth waiting for, and a real education in history, in sociology, in culture, and in pure enjoyment of life.

I was amazed at how well my attempt to reset my work and non-work life balance went. My wonderfully full and fun work-free weekends were matched by a surprisingly productive work year. I focused primarily on two projects. For the first project, I had been running a large research study since 2013 called "HIV after 40 in Rural South Africa: Aging in the Context of an HIV Epidemic" (<https://hivafter40.princeton.edu>). It was funded in part by the U.S. National Institute on Aging and was slated to come to an end in March 2022, with a final progress report due in July 2022. South Africa has the world's worst HIV epidemic – almost 8 million people are living with HIV, comprising about 20 % of the reproductive-age population. The project's aim was to study the causes and consequences of the HIV epidemic among middle-aged and older South Africans. Prior literature focused mainly on young adults, yet HIV rates remained high up until the '70s. We were also interested in examining, more broadly, the complexities of aging in post-apartheid South Africa through the lens of the HIV epidemic, along with other chronic disease epidemics such as hypertension and diabetes. (Overall, 72 % of our study population aged 40 and over have at least one major chronic disease). The COVID-19 pandemic had stalled or entirely stopped many parts of the project, and this past year was when many of my team members were finally starting to get fully back up to speed. I spent much of the year pushing my group to move our remaining papers through the pipeline – finishing drafts, submitting articles to journals, revising papers in response to reviewer feedback, and getting papers published. As a result, I had to devote significant time and attention – far more than I had hoped – to writing and editing team papers, many of which I was not leading, but was nonetheless responsible for as Principal Investigator. We made substantial progress, with many papers getting accepted and/or published as of the time of writing this report (the publication list is at the end). I had hoped to bring my group to Wiko, but the shifting travel restrictions various team members faced (we were scattered across four continents) along with shifting restrictions and safety levels in Berlin made it impossible in the end.

For my second project, I had planned to finally finish what began in the summer of 2011 as a "small summer study," which gradually became a historical project stretching

from 1790 to 2020. The book, which was the subject of my Tuesday Colloquium, aims to examine how racial health inequality in the U.S. is produced and maintained, using the case of Washington, D.C., the country's capital city. It has had worst-in-the-nation HIV/AIDS rates, infant mortality rates, heroin overdose rates, and homicide rates, among other epidemics. I was glad that I decided to give my presentation "Death by Design: Producing Racial Health Inequality in the Shadow of the Capitol" in early November. I had two months to fully immerse myself in the project, yet had plenty of time left to work on the colloquium feedback and continue conversations with my Wiko interlocutors for the rest of the year. The Fellows' feedback at the colloquium was phenomenal and generous. It was exactly the right audience at the right time for the project – the lawyers, especially, pushed me to think about intentionality, culpability, and causality, given my controversial proposed book title "Death by Design"; the humanists pushed me to think about the craft of storytelling, the power of biography, and the soundtrack running through my book project; the social scientists pushed me to think harder and deeper about my theoretical and empirical contributions to the various fields I was engaging. I also learned a lot from the natural scientists, in thinking more holistically about human beings in the context of the larger ecosystem they inhabit, both above and beyond (the environment, the globe) as well as within the body (on the level of cells and genes) as I thought about the intergenerational transmission of disease vulnerability. The book will bear a Wiko Fellow imprint, for sure. I arrived at Wiko with a very messy book draft at the beginning of the fellowship year. I left with most of the book revised and solid enough to circulate (I had a virtual book manuscript workshop with a few colleagues to get feedback just before I left Wiko), and just one substantive chapter and conclusion left to draft. The book manuscript is currently under review. I still have significant work left to do, but an end to this seemingly never-ending project is now clearly in sight. I could not have accomplished this without the time afforded by being at Wiko.

As I reflect on my year, I am grateful for many things – the invitation to come, the welcoming and friendly Wiko staff, the remarkably efficient and persistent librarians, the privilege of our wonderful housekeeper at Villa Jaffé, the German lessons, the lunches (and especially the Wednesday buffet), the enriching and informative colloquia, the many rich conversations with Fellows in different disciplines, and most of all, the friendship, communality, generosity, and kindness extended to me by many Fellows and the permanent Wiko administration, Fellows, and staff, which made all the difference. Thank you Wiko!

Articles published or forthcoming (student co-authors italicized)

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