



IT BEGAN WITH A BOAT TRIP SUSAN MARKS

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I believe it is now a tradition that the Wiko year begins with a boat trip. On a partly rainy September day, Philip and I boarded a boat with a large group of strangers, and by the end of the trip those strangers had already started to become friends. Laughing together on the deck as we all ducked to avoid the lowest bridges, we bonded over the glorious prospect of the year that lay ahead.

My project for the year was to finish a book on the concept of dignity. It was an appropriate topic, perhaps, to be undertaking in a country that has a constitution, the very first article of which declares the inviolability of human dignity: *Die Würde des Menschen ist unantastbar*. While my study was more socio-theoretical than jurisprudential, I was inspired by the eminence of German constitutional scholars – among them two Permanent Fellows of Wiko, Dieter Grimm and Christoph Möllers – in this sphere.

Inspiration is important, but so too are the practical tasks associated with academic work. My project had led me into a range of unfamiliar literatures, so finding books and articles was an ongoing challenge. For me, one of Wiko's greatest gifts was its amazing library services. It was not just that no book or article was too esoteric for Wiko's librarians to track down. It was also that the books or articles one requested almost invariably appeared the very next day, so that one's thinking and writing could move forward without the delays that usually hold back research.

Of course, research is only part of the Wiko experience. Another hugely significant and memorable element was the colloquium series. My study of the natural sciences ended when I was fifteen, so it was eye-opening to say the least to hear papers at the cutting edge of biology, genetics, genomics, ecology, microbiology and clinical psychology, among other disciplines. Scarcely less impressive than the papers was the preternatural ability of Barbara, Daniel, Iris and the Permanent Fellows to formulate interesting and insightful questions, no matter how remote a paper was from their own respective fields of work.

More immediately accessible to me, but no less fascinating, were papers from Fellows and Permanent Fellows in fields such as anthropology, philosophy, history, critical theory, political science, international law, art history and the history and philosophy of science, and on topics ranging from Kenyan funerary practice to ethnic discrimination and inequality in Germany. The opportunity to attend presentations by Wiko's writers-in-residence, Maria Stepanova, NoViolet Bulawayo and Kateryna Mishchenko, and its composer-in-residence, Lucia Ronchetti, was a particular privilege.

And what a joy to be able to go on to lunch after these colloquia (thank you Dunia!) and continue the conversation! I loved that there was never small talk. Everyone was too excited by the issues and ideas that had been put before us. But everyone was also too sobered by the violence and injustice in which many of our colleagues and those close to them were caught up – Elçin from Turkey, Anna, Kateryna B and Kateryna M from Ukraine, Maria from Russia, Henadz from Belarus, NoViolet from Zimbabwe ... That they faced the horrors of war and the unfreedom of authoritarian rule was powerfully reality-checking.

My final memory of Wiko is of our farewell party, with dinner on the terrace surrounded by Wiko's magnificent garden. It was an incredibly beautiful scene, bathed in the golden light of a July evening. A moment of calm in a troubled world. A last demandless day before normal life resumed. Thank you Wiko for a wonderful, unforgettable and fantastically restorative year. Thank you for the colloquia, thank you for the

conversations, thank you for the friendships, thank you for the books and articles, thank you for the readings, concerts and receptions, thank you for the lunches and dinners, thank you for the breathing space in which to read and think and write. Thank you!