



NERVOUS CONDITIONS IN GRUNEWALD:  
REFLECTIONS ON A YEAR AT WIKO  
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Rarely does an academic experience that stretches over a ten-month fellowship encapsulate rich intellectual stimulation, remarkable hospitality, unparalleled library services, and a rare opportunity to meet highly accomplished individuals from different disciplines. The fellowship at Wiko was that unique experience. The fellowship offered an excellent and conducive environment for research and intellectual exchange and enrichment. I have come out of it with a wealth of knowledge, profound reflections on academia and politics, a better understanding of certain German historical and political complexities, a powerful network of friends and fellow scholars, and the intellectual drive to produce new academic work based on the research of the past year.

I started my fellowship during very challenging times back home, as well as elsewhere around the world. We are living and witnessing alarming structural shifts, collapses, and ruptures in our world. The steady rise of right-wing populism in Europe and elsewhere in the world, Israel's war on Gaza, Russia's attack on Ukraine, the increasing US-China tensions in the Pacific Ocean, particularly around Taiwan, and other sites of local and global contestations have been contributing to exposing fundamental problems in the world order that was established after World War II. These fundamental problems, together with the nascent shift from American unipolarity to fluid and "unbalanced multipolarity," have given rise to demands calling for rethinking, reforming, or decolonizing the world order and generated new levels of violence, anxiety, precarity, insecurity, racism, capitalist greed, climate crisis, and the decline of welfare policies and democratic values.

Pursuing my academic research on egalitarian binationalism in Palestine/Israel during these precarious global conditions and the horrendous violent realities back home of an ongoing genocide in Gaza, extreme violence in the West Bank, and racial discrimination and oppression inside Israel was a daily struggle. More specifically, it was hard to gather the emotional and intellectual strength to talk, read, and write about alternative horizons and a new moral and political grammar for Palestinians and Israelis. These nervous, wretched, and tormenting conditions invite us to serious reflections on the value of academic research and public intellectual engagements. More precisely, I often found myself challenged by the gap between the distant and abstract world of academia and the lived realities. Also, I wondered about the ability of academia and intellectuals to rise to the occasion and use their knowledge and research to make impactful interventions, interrogate hegemonic discourses and power structures, and potentially contribute to stopping genocide, war, and violence in Israel/Palestine and elsewhere in the world.

Being in Germany during this period posed an additional challenge. While Wiko provided a protected oasis of free and honest intellectual exchanges, dominant and powerful circles in the German mainstream political, academic, and cultural spheres were engaging in the policing, silencing, and criminalization of debates around Palestine and the Palestinian struggle and quest for freedom, equality, and justice. While the Israeli genocide with the complicity of several Western countries brought the Palestinian issue back to the forefront of German internal politics and gave impetus to the global solidarity movement with Palestine, the public and academic debate on Palestine remained largely policed and hostile to the Palestinians. These realities in Germany, though depressing, encouraged me during the second half of my fellowship to engage with the German academic audience

through talks that I delivered in several academic institutions in the country such as the Technische Universität Berlin; Bielefeld University; the University of Konstanz; Marburg University; and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Through these talks, I witnessed initial signs of change in the German academic and public scene. I learned about enclaves of opposition and critiques in Germany and was exposed to German academic, cultural, and political sensitivities and controversies on memory culture, the Holocaust, German identity and democracy, and how Palestine questions these sensitivities and controversies.

Due to these complications, challenges, and engagements, I couldn't write as much as I had planned, but thanks to Wiko's remarkable library services I managed to get hold of and read almost every reference I was hoping to read for my research on egalitarian binationalism. The outstanding help of the librarians and their ability to obtain books, articles, and other references in various languages were a serious contribution to the progress of my research.

The weekly Colloquium at Wiko as well as the daily joint meals created a sense of social and intellectual community through which one could discuss at length topical issues and closely learn about academic, cultural, and political themes from people with different disciplinary backgrounds and various geographies. The special arrangement that allows Fellows to invite academic guests who work on related topics allowed us to meet and learn from several visiting scholars through internal seminars and networking activities.

The presence of German scholars among the Fellows at Wiko was of great value. Though the fellowship is primarily geared to enable Fellows to focus on their research, there was the added and unexpected benefit of gaining insights into German culture, history, and politics. I would highly recommend increasing the optional activities related to German culture, society, and politics as part of Wiko's fellowship, including two or three organized day trips to cities of cultural, political, and historical significance. I also benefited greatly from the German language course that Wiko offered. Besides learning the language with kind and highly trained teachers, the course served as a great opportunity for closely knowing some of the Fellows, developing friendships, and organizing joint academic and social activities.

Being elected to serve as one of the two speakers of my cohort gave me the opportunity to better know my Co-Fellows and familiarize myself with some of their work. It also provided me with the opportunity to grasp the outstanding efforts the different sections of the management of Wiko invest in these fellowships to render our stay productive, meaningful, and comfortable.