



THE WIKO CHAPTER: LESSONS LEARNED  
THE HARD WAY  
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I started my fellowship two weeks after the start date because of university administrative responsibilities. This was a major setback for my self-set targets for the fellowship year. I had intended to draft a six-chapter manuscript on “African Pentecostalism,” so I commenced work on that. After two draft chapters, however, I had to start drafting a keynote lecture on “Decolonising of African Secularities” to be delivered at a Point Sud workshop in December at STIAS (Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, South Africa). This took a disproportionate amount of time, partly because of a personal stance on “decolonisation” theory and its implicit activism, and partly because the field of decolonisation has grown to become a forest of competing and contradictory ideas. The idea of decolonisation requires decolonising.

By January 2025, it was clear that I would not meet my deadline. This time, competing demands on my time and presence at workshops and seminars at a few universities were

the culprits. The environment at Wiko, however, helped me develop certain concepts that I had relegated to the background of my research. Especially the workshop on “Sociology and Critique,” held in March, helped me articulate ideas I have been wrestling with for several years. For some time, I had abandoned sociological theory owing to its male, Western-dominated figures and ancestors. I had the opportunity to put in writing my critique of some of these theories and their principal proponents.

The main research project that brought me to Wiko was on infrasacred formations, the entanglement of sacred infrastructure and technological installations across many African cities, especially emerging “Miracle Cities.” The environment at Wiko slowly but steadily nudged me in a different direction to explore something innovative and still unfolding: the changing regulatory landscapes for religious organisations across a swath of African countries south of the Sahara Desert. Cultivating this new research idea and project was by far the singular achievement of my fellowship year. My Colloquium was based on this theme. Writing up a nearly 35-page draft paper on it took its toll on my time and energy. In this, the Wiko library performed much of the heavy lifting, scouring for legal frameworks from a range of African countries as these were being released by governments and state agencies. My Colloquium presentation and the theme of “The Regulatory State and Africa’s Vibrant Religious Marketplace” have become an ongoing multi-year project. The academic resources accumulated during the fellowship will go a long way in sustaining the exercise for the foreseeable future.

I had very inspiring encounters with fellow Fellows whose research provided a challenging, even inspiring, perspective for me to consider. The sociology of Chinese religions, European medieval Christian history and practices, moral philosophical entanglement, and the sociology of modern mass production were themes that excited my imagination, creativity, and scholarly curiosity. By interacting with many scholars from various disciplines involved in some special interest products, I am developing new, still-gestating research ideas.

A sizeable portion of my fellowship year was devoted to attending conferences and workshops and giving presentations during these events. My involvement “compelled” me to draft some papers that would soon be revised for publication. In addition to the Point Sud workshop at STIAS mentioned earlier, I gave a presentation at the University of Bayreuth and at the European Conference on African Studies in Prague, where I co-convened a double panel on “African Lifeworlds: Secularities, Immanence and Governance.” In the last week of my stay in Berlin, I conducted a two-part workshop at the

Theology Faculty of the Humboldt-Universität (Graduate Centre for Theology and Recent Research on the History of Christianity); the first part was titled “Miracle Cities—Infrasacred Formations: The Moral Economies of Sacred Space in Africa,” while the second part was titled “Rites vs Rights: Emerging Governance Dynamics and the Management of Religious Excess and Waste in Africa.” Both parts of the workshop were intimately connected with, and emerged from, my research at Wiko.

Despite not meeting my original target, these varied activities assure me that I had a productive, enriching, challenging, and exciting fellowship year at Wiko.