



A YEAR OF EXTREMES IN AN IDEAL  
LANDSCAPE  
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I was already in Berlin when I learned about the Wissenschaftskolleg and when the invitation reached me to become a Fellow among the group of 2022/2023. I came to Germany in March of 2022 as a refugee from the war in Ukraine. Dnipro, the city of my education and my academic initiation, is located in the East of our country and seemed dangerously close to the Russian aggression in the early stages of the invasion. To this day, frequent missile and drone attacks target Dnipro. I left with an older family member, whose serious illness was also a reason for seeking better security outside of Ukraine.

Having arrived in Berlin, my academic colleagues from various countries of the world immediately helped me to make new connections. The city and its institutions were incredibly welcoming to people from Ukraine (even if occasional hiccups with the notorious *Verwaltung* of Berlin had to be dealt with). I had not even really set up camp when I was already elected for a grant from the Deutsches Historisches Museum to prepare for publication my Ukrainian dissertation on the topic of Holocaust discourses in Ukraine. And the Wissenschaftskolleg followed right after, offering me a fellowship beginning in January 2023. I felt honored, inspired, and also slightly overwhelmed, since after finishing my PhD I did not always have the capacity to invest much effort into a strictly academic career, finding my niche in public history, museum work, and editing. Life in Ukraine has always been demanding for academicians, even before the full-scale war, making them find ways to adjust their professional skills to the picky and unsustainable job market of humanities specialists.

So this is a sample of the best of mankind in all its diversity, I thought, when during the Welcome Week in September I encountered the group of new Fellows. Thus, this was one of the most promising exits from the bubble that each person inevitably creates around oneself when attaching oneself to something for a long time. However, in addition to the most incredible expansion of the range of topics and issues that have ever come into my field of vision, I often sensed genuine interest in my perspective on our nation, which I could elaborate on on a level you can only expect from people who are used to thinking in nuances and reflected terminology.

The move to Villa Walther in the middle of winter coincided with the return of a member of my family from the Charité, and thus we were able to say goodbye together to a 2022 full of not only anxiety and worries, but also new ideas about our ability to cope with challenges. In a few months, I could relive the impressions of my first visit to Wiko in the spring of 2022: this idea of an ideal landscape, half nature, half city, half recluse, but well connected by the M19 that often took me to the city to attend a concert at the magnificent Philharmonie, just take a stroll through the Tiergarten to toss up fresh insights to my brain when my writing seemed stuck, or have a bite at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, which became one of my favorite places.

Wiko also became for me a place of the revival of lately forgotten skills and interests, such as a performing historical songs. When I one day managed to get a ukulele again (the best musical companion when you don't have much space), I enjoyed the opportunity for a little improvisation with a few Yiddish songs I remembered from a Judaica Youth Camp

in Lviv in 2013 at my first party among Fellows, hosted by Judith and Goggy. That was also a super-helpful experience in terms of slowly coming back to normality with its usual practices and possibilities.

In the meantime, my writing progressed step by step thanks to this atmosphere of casual, unconstrained stability and friendly calm. In early April, I submitted my book for prepress. Done! But I don't know for better or for worse; we are not limited to individual achievements and successes alone. Otherwise, life would be too predictable. My relative's condition started to worsen; and in the end, I had to cut my stay short to leave for Ukraine for family obligations.

Nevertheless, several spring walks in Grunewald gave me space to breathe and to think about this intense period I was going through – from speaking at the Center for the History of Emotions at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development on resentment in the Ukrainian public sphere in January to meeting its director Ute Frevert at a Wiko event again a few weeks later and discussing the situation in Ukraine with many Co-Fellows, whom I admire as intellectuals and came to like greatly as people; and from clumsy attempts to sort out German grammar and the most functional vocabulary to a genuine excitement over certain German linguistic concepts during the German course I attended at Wiko in the fall of 2022 (*Hassliebe, doch, Fernweh, also, gern*; a big thank you to Eva and our teacher Giancarlo!). The most precious memory is probably that array of information, opinions, and impressions I absorbed in common conversations generously shared by Fellows and their openness and willingness to speak about everything, whatever you ask.

It has been a year of extremes for me, and I wish the wider German public were more aware of the enormous privileges this country enjoys. The Wissenschaftskolleg to me is an indication of a level of civilization I yearn for my nation to have, retain, and become a part of. I am deeply grateful for everything I learned here, and I invite everybody to look at Ukraine. Because I think that the future of our civilization is at stake there. And in the green forests of Grunewald as well.

In July 2023, I finally held a pre-print item of my dissertation in hand. I finished this chapter of my work and my career, and now I feel free to seek new pathways and interests. It may be a precarious freedom, but my year in Germany has taught me to relish every second of it.