



IN SEARCH OF JUSTICE: ENCOUNTERING  
BERLIN IN HISTORY AND IN PERSON  
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I arrived in Berlin Brandenburg Airport on an autumn afternoon on September 15, 2022. The concrete industrial office blocks and apartment buildings along the 40-minute drive from the airport finally gave way to huge mansions hidden by trees in what looked like the leafy suburbs of Berlin, and the driver announced, “We have arrived at Wallotstraße in Grunewald.” The gold, brown, orange autumn leaves lined the cobbled paths outside the main villa, which I did not recognize since it was my first time ever in Berlin and Germany. I was warmly welcomed by Vera Pfeffer, our lovely organizer, who showed me around the main building, White Villa, and my accommodation with a great view of the lake. I was tired but curious to explore the Berlin I had read about immediately on my places-to-visit list – especially the famous Berlin Wall. My anxiety about my nonexistent

German language skills did not dampen my curiosity for exploration. I knew only a few words in German: *guten Morgen, gute Nacht, wie geht's, auf Wiedersehen, danke schön, and Kindergarten*. I reassured myself with the Kiswahili words *roho juu*, meaning I was determined to learn and enjoy Berlin despite language limitations. I also signed up for the weekly beginning German classes with Wiko language teachers Eva and Reinhard.

I had taken three months at the Wissenschaftskolleg out of my university teaching in Nairobi to think and write on transitional justice and the politics of justice in Kenya. I thought both Germany and Berlin with their rich histories of justice and injustice would provide rich lessons to learn from when I was asked to make a choice between Germany and the United States. My short-term fellowship was sponsored by Wiko and the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS) Iso Lomso Fellowship Programme in South Africa. I first heard of Wiko in 2021 from several people including the STIAS Programme Manager Dr. Christoff Pauw, former Wiko Fellow 2010/2011 Prof. Bahru Zewde from Ethiopia, and the Kenyan Iso Lomso Fellow 2021/2022 Dr. Nkatha Kabira, who shared their great experiences at Wiko. I looked forward to spending time in Berlin with such a rich history that was tied to my African story and in an intellectual academic community at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Despite never having visited Germany before Wiko, it was always a part of my imaginary, due to the Jewish Holocaust and the popular “Football Made in Germany” television show on Kenyan TV in the '90s. Long before English football leagues became popular, there was German football, and I remember hearing some of the teams' names like Bayern Munich and Dortmund on our Sunday TV.

Two significant events that happened in Berlin and their legacy in Africa were important signposts for my academic life. First was the “Scramble for Africa”; Berlin was introduced to us in school as the city where, between October 1884 and March 1885, the Berlin Conference was held that regulated the scramble. Otto von Bismarck and his huge white moustache were ever-present in our history books as the host of that famous conference that, as we later learned in university, divided Africa into colonies containing disparate groups of people who lived respectively as one state, leading to crises of the nation state and identity in Africa that endure to date. The second reason Berlin was important to me as a scholar of politics, peace, and security was the iconic Berlin Wall. The fall of the Berlin Wall signified the end of the Cold War and had lasting effects on African states. In Africa, the end of the Cold War challenged dictatorships, ended proxy wars, ushered in multiparty elections, and inspired conflicts and civil wars as the world ushered in a multipolar world after decades of bipolarity and the politics of the East versus West.

I was determined to see the two landmarks, the Berlin Wall and the location where the Berlin Conference was held. After getting oriented in the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, I spent most of my first weekend exploring Berlin. I saw remnants of the Berlin Wall, the museums and exhibitions on Unter den Linden, including the Humboldt Forum with Joyce, the Humboldt-Universität, and the Holocaust Memorial, and took a beautiful day trip to the Baltic Sea organized by Gunnar and Grit. A few times I erroneously took a wrong turn and stumbled onto a treasure; for example, one day, instead of taking the train towards Alexanderplatz from the Grunewald station, I boarded the train in the opposite direction, to Potsdam – to find Sanssouci Palace, which was such a marvel, as well as the University of Potsdam. This became a pastime over my weekends – randomly stumbling onto historic places while getting lost in the city. Beyond exploring Berlin's many memorial sites, a local Grunewald guide tour informed us about the history of Grunewald, where we learned about Gleis 17 and the stumbling stones, which I had previously stepped on without noticing them. These plaques in brass provided the names of those who lived in the houses before the Holocaust. It reminded us about the weight of injustice, the need for justice, and the place of memory.

As we settled down in the Kolleg, we were introduced to amazing people working at Wiko and the 2022/2023 Fellows. The Fellows' projects were fascinating – from art history, religion, identity and diversity, the gender of plants, and art history, to the poetics of death and evolutionary biology in bees, dolphins, and guinea fowl, among the many fascinating book projects, music compositions, and novels that would occupy the Fellows for a year in the comforts of Grunewald. Intellectually, during my stay at Wiko, I explored two themes: the legacies of the International Criminal Court (ICC) intervention and the politics of memory in Kenya after international intervention. The first project benefited from reading other case studies at Wiko on the legacies of Nuremberg and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The second project, on the politics of memory, was born from my being immersed in Berlin, a city of memories of injustice and justice. The library staff at Wiko was very useful in ensuring I got articles and books on time that assisted me in understanding the politics of transitional justice and the politics of memory in Germany as I reflected on Kenya. I explored in a journal article how memory is often contested and how sometimes state-driven public narratives of memory differ from everyday private memories. I was also invited to the inaugural meeting of the research network for black scholars, activists, and professors in Germany, who were involved in developing an interdisciplinary curriculum for Black Studies in

Berlin. The two-day conference in October 2022 was organized by a collective of black academics and activists including Prof. Maisha Auma from Magdeburg-Stendal University of Applied Sciences to raise the visibility of Black Studies in the experience of German black scholars and activists. The research network was inspired by the invisibility of academics who are black and people of color and of studies on their fields in Germany, given the long history of such people and of their presence in Germany. I presented work on African feminisms there.

My time at Wiko was rewarding thanks to the Wiko team for providing the resources for us to take time out of “life.” In addition to the resources provided, I appreciate the thoughtfulness, love, and care invested by the Wiko staff led by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger in making our stay memorable and fulfilling. The team that was responsible for organizing our everyday lives was especially patient – *Asante Sana* (thank you very much in Kiswahili) Vera, Andrea, Nina, Maike, Vanessa, and Johanna. I loved my time at Wiko because of all the care and support I got from the staff, and I look forward to another session.

To the other Fellows 2022/2023, *Asanteni* for the comradeship, the great conversations we had on Tuesday and Thursday Colloquiums, and the great lunches and Thursday dinners created by Dunia and her team (shout out to the last table to call it a night on Thursdays – I miss our many “inspired” debates). I am so full of gratitude to everyone and to Berlin. I appreciated Berlin as a city that is self-reflective about its past and accountable for its future – which is so apt for my justice research. I could not have chosen a better city. In a sense, though I had encountered Berlin and Germany earlier in history lessons and through football made in Germany, my personal encounter in the search for justice was much better.