



ON WORK AND FELLOWSHIP AYŞE BUĞRA

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I had never lived in Berlin for any extended period of time before my stay at Wiko, which, nevertheless, was a return for me in several senses. First, I was returning to an old area of research, which I had left many years ago, to write a book on politics and business based on an empirical study conducted on the impact of the recent capitalist globalization on the transformation of the Turkish private sector. At Wiko, I also found myself revisiting the methodology-related questions that had been important for me at the earlier stages of my

academic career, questions about how the natural sciences and humanities exercise a mutual influence on each other and how this is related to the social scientists' perceptions of society and politics. Perhaps more significantly, being at Wiko was something like a return to my graduate student days, when academic life was full of "wonder and surprise" at the never-ending possibilities of encountering new subjects, ideas and ways of looking at and interpreting them. As such, it was also a return to a time when new friendships could be formed and developed around debates not necessarily within the confines of one's own academic discipline.

I am aware that interdisciplinary dialogue is not something that can be easily created and interdisciplinary work environments do not always yield productive results in academic work. To be honest, our Tuesday colloquia, especially the question and answer period that followed the presentation, made me somewhat uneasy at the beginning of the year. How were we going to give meaning to these talks on topics that were so different from ours and, on top of it, ask questions that made sense? I was worried that the presentations would be followed by long silences embarrassing both to the speaker and to the audience. These concerns rapidly disappeared, not least because one of the first presentations was Philip Kitcher's "Ethics as a Human Project", which had deep political relevance. This, however, was followed by other colloquia in which disciplinary boundaries did not seem to affect the way Fellows related to and engaged with the problems at hand. Question and answer periods went rapidly and often ended with the chair announcing that "there are now seven more questions and less than two minutes left, so we'd better continue the discussion over lunch". And the discussion continued over lunch and after.

There was something in the atmosphere (and I still do not know the secret) that made us try really hard to explain to other Fellows what we were doing, as well as why and how we were doing it. This went together with a widespread intellectual curiosity about the questions asked and pursued by others. My own topic was not of much interest to other Fellows in my cohort, but there were common methodological concerns. Discussions around these concerns and different ways of dealing with them helped me think more systematically about my own methodological problems. They also helped me answer the questions that emerged as I was trying to decide how to use my empirical material to say things that might be of relevance to an audience beyond the specialists in political economy or business history.

I personally found the environment more conducive to thinking than to easy and smooth writing, which I appreciated because it made me realize how we can at times go

on producing without seriously questioning what our work means in the general context of ideas and beliefs through which people from different disciplines interpret their social and natural environment at a particular historical moment. Trying to write while engaging with such questions might have somehow slowed down the progress I made in my own manuscript, but I believe that the overall impact on quality was clearly positive and, in this regard, I remember one English phrase that I was able to catch when listening to the Berliner Abend lecture that Wolf Lepenies gave in German, something to the effect that “the choice is between writing a good book and not writing a bad book”.

I left Wiko with the first drafts of all but one of the chapters of what I hope will not be a bad book. I also revised two journal articles submitted earlier for publication and completed an edited volume on *Trajectories of Female Employment in the Mediterranean* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2012). But I came back home also with other books, books by Fellows who became friends. It was indeed a great pleasure to read Claudio Lomnitz and Philip Kitcher while enjoying their wonderful friendship. It was lovely to discover Hoda Barakat’s work, her novels as well as a play of hers read, or rather performed, with such real talent by Hollis Taylor and Susannah Heschel. All this was really precious, but for me the most precious of all was watching, day by day, the mural Elena Climent was painting as it developed from idea to work of art. I think that we all owe thanks to Wiko for creating a great environment of fellowship that included partners like my next-door neighbor and dear friend Elena and Valentina Carbone who, with her warm personality, endless energy and enthusiasm for art, made life in Berlin all the more pleasant for me as I am sure for many others.

There was one question that emerged as we were enjoying the full freedom to think and to write while we were being served excellent food and the very friendly staff members were making sure that we felt comfortable in every way: Is Wiko an ivory tower, an unreal place (“paradise on earth”, as some Fellows referred to it) that we were to leave behind to go back to the reality of our teaching duties, committee meetings and other bureaucratic chores? I tend to think that what was successfully created at Wiko was less an ivory tower existence than life in a community of people working freely and with pleasure while sharing interests and concerns beyond the strictly academic ones. The atmosphere was surely different from the one that prevails at many universities, where finding time for reflection sometimes becomes a real challenge. But it was also an atmosphere that made me think about the nature of intellectual work and academic community – and that led me to ask whether the constraints of our “real” work environments are

truly given or whether it is only practical necessity that shapes the increasingly bureaucratic environment of our universities. I hope that I will continue thinking about these questions in my “life after Wiko” and that 2011–2012 will not remain only as a pleasant parenthesis.