

Murat Çizakça

Work and Music in Berlin



Born in 1946 in Bursa, Turkey. Started university education in Vienna at the Hochschule für Welt-handel and at the Konservatorium der Stadt Wien (singing). B.A. (economics) Leicester University, England; M.A. and Ph.D. (economics/economic history) University of Pennsylvania, U.S.A. Various visiting professorships ranging from a week to a year at the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, Kuala Lumpur; University of Western Australia, Perth, Istituto di Storia Economica, University of Bari; Consortium of Mediterranean Universities, Ph.D. Program in Mediterranean Economic History held at the University of Valencia, Harvard Law School and others. Major publication: *A Comparative Evolution of Business Partnerships; The Islamic World and Europe, with Specific Reference to the Ottoman Archives* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996). Author of several other books and articles on Ottoman industrial history, the history of inflation, comparative business history, comparative history of Islamic foundations, Islamic banking/economics and modern Islam. – Address: Economics Dept., Bogaziçi University, Bebek 80815, Istanbul, Turkey. E-mail: mcizakca@hotmail.com.

I came to the Wissenschaftskolleg during the second part of a two-year sabbatical leave. Coming from sweltering Kuala Lumpur, where I had spent the first part, Berlin seemed so cool and absolutely European. The foretaste of things to come was revealed to me on my very first night in Berlin when Aziz Al-Azmeh invited me to his place for a meal. He would ask questions and challenge me relentlessly, which I could reply to only with the utmost care and reflection. The whole thing was like music; *staccato*, *allegro* attacks followed by sober thoughts and responses of *adagio*, *legato*...

Everyone in the Kolleg, starting from the kitchen staff all the way up the hierarchy, were all professionals, efficient, polite and helpful. This helped our very rapid adjustment to our new environment. Within a week,

which included finding an international school for my daughter, we had settled and I was ready to work. But which work?

Most of the Fellows who come to the Kolleg have a definite project to complete. My problem was that I had not one, but two! I had completed in Kuala Lumpur a manuscript on the comparative history of Islamic foundations. Although the time span covered was enormous, from the seventh century to the present, the comparison was limited to the Islamic world. So, here in Berlin, I could expand the comparison to include Europe as well. This was one alternative: to write a true opus magnum on the comparative history of charitable foundations.

The other alternative was far more comprehensive. It was to combine everything that I had done until now. As the short CV above indicates, my strength was obviously in the area of institutions and I could approach this field as a historian and then work my way through as an economist. In short, I could satisfy the historian in me by covering a time span of 1400 years of institutional history, and the economist, by always keeping in mind the question of contemporary relevance. Yes, I was beginning to like this idea more and it was becoming clear that I should write an institutional framework for a hypothetical democratic and Islamic government.

When things had progressed this far, I decided to ask outside opinion and followed Jürgen Kocka on a Tuesday post-colloquium lunch and simply sat at his table. Being an economic historian himself, I should have known how he would react, but maybe, I needed someone to react the way I wanted!!! The result is, I shifted to the second alternative and I have been busy at it ever since that faithful Tuesday.

Events soon proved how right Jürgen had been in suggesting that I shift to the second alternative. The Refah, the largest party and the only Islamic one in Turkey, was banned by the secularists, seriously undermining the Turkish democracy. This boosted my determination: I knew I was on to something important. The rough outline of the book became clear quickly. I would start with a series of assumptions: 1. An Islamic party wins the elections and comes to power. 2. An elite settlement takes place and the secularists allow this party to function. 3. The Islamists agree to fulfil two conditions as part of this settlement; they declare their commitment to democracy, that is their willingness to leave government if and when they fail in the future elections, and to respect women's rights. My task and challenge was to draw the institutional framework for such a government. In doing this, I had to ensure that this framework would not contradict the basic teachings of Islam, would be a natural outcome of the evolution of Islamic institutions and at the same time would enable such a government to address the modern needs of contemporary Turkey or, for that matter, any other Islamic country. The last condition

also meant that this framework would also be able to co-exist with the West.

The book would have three parts: in the first part, I would explain the compatibility of Islam and democracy and argue why the Islamists should be willing to commit themselves to leave the government in the event that they fail in future elections. This would also provide a counterargument to the secularist warning; “when Islamists come to power they will hijack democracy”. The second part would concentrate on capital accumulation and the third part on capital redistribution.

After the outline emerged, a long period of intense reading – pure, uninterrupted, blissful – followed. The library was simply superb. I cannot sufficiently describe my gratitude to its staff. About 98% of whatever I ordered was provided within a day or two. Since I ordered in large numbers, I was never without books. Source led to source and soon I felt I was lost in an ocean of knowledge. When confused and depressed, there was Eric Jones always urging me to “float” and Şerif Mardin and Ekkehart Schlicht putting my thoughts into disciplined order. I also cherish those long breakfasts with Weyma Lübbe, who must be the best listener in the world. For a comparative approach, Tapan Raychaudhuri and Mushirul Hasan would provide the Indian, Tonio Hölscher and Cornelia Isler-Kerényi the ancient and Jürgen Kocka and Peter Miller the early modern European perspectives. For totally unexpected bursts of information, nobody could rival Chris Hann and Altan Gokalp, the anthropologists. But it was with Jürgen Kocka and Eric Jones that I got involved in the deepest dialogue. Jürgen would make devastating comments, which I could reply to only after much thinking. Soon I found myself replying to him in writing. He responded in kind and we ended up having several rounds in this manner. Due to Eric’s early return to Australia, we simply had no choice but to correspond. But thanks to e-mail, distance proved no problem whatsoever.

An urgent conference invitation to Kuala Lumpur by the Research Division of the Islamic Development Bank, followed by another one by the Harvard Law School and by Munich University, interrupted my readings but led me to write two articles. The Kuala Lumpur conference, by an incredible coincidence, came at the same time as Wolf Lepenies’s trip to the Far East. So, I was able to meet him at the Shangri La in KL and take him to my old institute, where we had a joint meeting with Professor Naquib al-Attas.

These trips not only interrupted my readings, but also made me miss the *Ring der Nibelungen*, which my wife Kitty had to enjoy on her own. Besides the superb operas and concerts which we frequently visited with the much appreciated help of Barbara Sanders, together we developed a

passion for the museums of Berlin and made a point of visiting one or two every weekend. As far as we are concerned, this was the basic difference between Kuala Lumpur and Berlin; in the former we used long weekends to travel in South East Asia and in the latter we simply stayed put in the city. Berlin offers so much that one does not feel the need to travel at all.

One Sunday afternoon, coming out of the Deutsche Dom after having visited an exhibition, *Fragen an die deutsche Geschichte*, we noticed the preparations for a concert in the Gendarmenmarkt. Exhausted from a six-hour museum visit, we gratefully sat on the benches to listen to the concert, about which we knew nothing. It turned out to be the pop version of Händel's *Messiah*. When I heard "...and who may abide the day of His coming?" from the huge loud speakers I could not believe my ears, for this was an aria I had sung some years back in Istanbul. I could not resist the temptation and burst into the music myself. Eventually warned by Kitty, I asked an old Berliner sitting next to me if I was disturbing her. She replied smiling, "*Es gehört dazu!*". Thus encouraged, I ended up singing the whole thing (what a pleasure!) and decided that I will miss Berlin!!!

My singing career (!) in Berlin reached its zenith at the farewell party. As requested by Weyma Lübbe, the visiting Rumanian composer Dan Dediú had composed three songs for an alto and a bass. Weyma had planned to sing these songs, "*Hörreste, Sehreste*", for the farewell party. We prepared seriously for about two months and at the end performed a *Welturaufführung* for our colleagues and the staff. It was great fun and as a reward for my efforts I was asked to dance by Karl Corino's daughter who, in my opinion, should be the next Miss Germany! Nothing demonstrates the atmosphere at the Kolleg better than the fact that, five minutes after this dance, I found myself involved in a serious conversation with Reinhart Meyer-Kalkus on the impact of religion on German politics, the origins of the CDU and whether these have any relevance for what I hope to do in the Islamic world: normalising, democratising Islam.

Today, July 16th 1998, I have more than a hundred pages of a detailed book plan and my hands are itching to write. Time to go back home. The next elections in Turkey will take place either in November or in April. I hope, of course, for the latter: it would give me about six months to complete my book...