



DER HIMMEL ÜBER WIKO OR  
WINGS OF REVIVAL  
BAŞAK TUĞ

---

Başak Tuğ received her Ph.D. in Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies from New York University in 2009. Since then, she has taught in the History Department at Istanbul Bilgi University. She published *Politics of Honor in Ottoman Anatolia: Sexual Violence and Socio-Legal Surveillance in the Eighteenth Century* (Brill) in 2017. Her book investigates the sexual and moral order established through the legal surveillance of sexual violence in mid-eighteenth-century Anatolia. Her new book project explores how the legal codification of “honor” in the nineteenth-century Tanzimat criminal codes was reflected in the configuration of the Ottoman Empire’s new gendered subjects and family. She has been a member of the editorial board of the *Journal of Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* (JOTSA), Indiana University Press, since November 2018. She was previously a fellow of *Research Center of Anatolian Civilizations* (RCAC) at Koç University in 2006/2007 and of *Europe in the Middle East, Middle East in Europe* (EUME) at the Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin in 2013/2014. She has been awarded a Gerda Henkel research grant for 2019/2020. – Address: Department of History, Istanbul Bilgi University, Emniyettepe, Kazım Karabekir Cd. No: 13 D: 2, 34060 Eyüp/İstanbul, Turkey.  
E-mail: basak.tug@bilgi.edu.tr.

The Wissenschaftskolleg has been a revival for me. The same Wiko to which I had applied a year ago with totally different plans, yet came with almost no hopes and expectations in the following year. I came here with a tremendous hole opened in my life as a result of an unprecedented huge loss that my small family experienced almost a year before coming to Berlin. I had some anxieties about heavy socialization requirements such

as having lunches together with the other Wiko Fellows four times a week, family dinners every Thursday night, and weekly colloquiums that we had to attend and present. Even though such “academic” socializing was familiar to me from other academic contexts, I was not sure about how I would get through “this time” when nothing seemed familiar after the big catastrophe in my life.

However, to my surprise, my state of exception turned into a state of acceptance in a short period of time. The intensive German courses that we took in August with great teachers and a small group of new Fellows were a good introduction to an excellent Wiko year and great friendships. Our “deep” conversations with David Armitage on history in “false beginner” German turned into a collegial relationship during the year. Hassan Salem and I shared our insights on German culture and first impressions about Wiko both in our German classes and in the kitchen of the Weiße Villa as villa-mates. The “cultural” friendship that I established with Gisèle Sapiro during the cultural events and tours in August has transformed into intellectual solidarity and comradeship during the fellowship year.

In the first official introduction of the new Wiko Fellows, I was struck by what I heard from Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, the new Rector, and Daniel Schönplflug, the scientific coordinator. They told us that the Wiko might be considered a “heaven”, even if it is granted to us for a short period as happened to Adam and Eve, as well. This was not the interesting part though. All Fellows already knew that ten-months distance from the academic routine of teaching and administrative duties would be more than enough to feel in heaven, especially in such a heaven-like place surrounded by lakes, trees, and birds. Yet, nobody, I assume, was expecting to hear advice to spend our time not necessarily “efficiently”, but in a creative and free manner. At the end of the day, we have all been brainwashed with the efficiency discourse in academia, even though suffering from it. This was the first time I heard such advice, at least from someone not a Slow-Academia advocate, but from the heads of an academically successful, well-established research institution. This introduction granted me great liberation at a point in my life where I was not expecting anything from the Wiko year but “getting and feeling better” in the aftermath of my great loss. This introduction to the Wiko has been an implicit acknowledgement of my grief as well as a catalyzer of a revival; a revival out of the acknowledgement that the tremendous hole in my life might not be filled, but could be integrated into my life, including my academic thinking and production.

The weekly colloquiums also opened new intellectual avenues for me. The talks given by the experts in their fields, ranging from barely familiar disciplines such as biology and ecological sciences to more familiar ones like literature and sociology, have infiltrated my contemplations with new engaging questions and insights. Interestingly enough, the less familiar the discipline was, the more contemplations I had, as I have realized what Barbara's advice on taking the liberty of free thinking meant.

"Then I reflected that all things happen to oneself, and happen precisely, precisely now. Century follows century, yet events occur only in the present; countless men in the air, on the land and sea, yet everything that truly happens, happens to me ..."\* While working on the intriguing legal struggles of unknown historical subjects, I have been involved in two important legal cases, one totally personal and one totally political, which brought the past into my "present". Or as Borges has already pointed out, do all things always happen to oneself, precisely now? This "now" that took place at Wiko allowed me to focus on the questions of "honor" and "dignity" in the past and the present. I have benefited a lot from the deep wisdom of scholars coming from different disciplines and life experiences. Thanks to the support of my cohort and the Wiko staff, rebuilding the present and the future and integrating the past into this have been much more exciting and exploratory. I should of course acknowledge the wisdom I got from the clouds and angels that I often encountered in my office at the top of Weiße Villa.

As a result of all these stimulations and excitement, I organized an international working group workshop on Ottoman/Turkish legal history and was involved in the organization of a translation workshop with Irene Schneider, Amr Hamzawy, Gisèle Sapiro, and Bhri Gupta Singh. I was also lucky enough to be part of an international workshop on treaties that David Armitage organized. I received invaluable feedback and working motivation from these collaborations and presentations. While enjoying the pleasure of reading the works of previous and current Wiko Fellows thanks to the rich Fellow collection in the library, I had the opportunity to collect the sources for my research by using the excellent Wiko library services and to focus on my project. I also wrote two articles on different subjects from my project, which I would not normally have done if I did not enjoy the liberty to do what I want to do. In short, I remembered what I loved about my work and its connection to life. What would be a more precious present than this for an intellectual?

---

\* Jorge Luis Borges. "The Garden of Forking Paths." In *Collected Fictions*, 120 (London, et al.: Penguin, 1999).

Of course, I did not obtain this motivation only through work. We were indulged with great lunches and dinners prepared by the team under the leadership of Dunia Najjar. Not only the food, but the babysitting service of Wiko provided on Thursday dinners made us – both parents and children – very happy. At the dance parties that we organized monthly after the Thursday dinners, we discovered that the most serious Wiko Fellows could be the best dancers. We enjoyed listening to the musical and literary pieces and seeing the great exhibitions of those “talented” Wiko Fellows, thanks to Wiko’s inclusion of writers, musicians, and visual artists in the fellowship program. We visited exhibitions, watched movies and theater pieces, and enjoyed our drinks in German thanks to the cultural enthusiasm of Eva, our German teacher. And finally, we shared what we know and enjoyed, other than the intellectual activity, at the *Abschiedsfest* that we organized all together: food, songs, dance, poetry, literature, and photographs, without getting overwhelmed by the grief of the “end” but with the appreciation that all ends are new beginnings. Thank you, Wiko, for showing me that endings may bring forth vivid beginnings.