



CONNECTING MY MULTIPLE LIVES DANAI PAPAGEORGIU

Danai Papageorgiou was born in 1992 in Athens, Greece. She is a biologist with a Bachelor's and a Master's degree from the University of Patras, Greece, where she worked on avian diversity in urban areas and on the stopover ecology of migratory songbirds. She did her doctorate (2016–2021) affiliated with both the Max Planck Institute of Animal Behavior and the University of Konstanz in Germany, and she explored collective decision-making and social structure within a society of vulturine guineafowl, earning a prestigious Otto Hahn Medal from the Max Planck Society. After completing her doctorate, she embarked on her first postdoctoral position (2021–2022) at the Department of Evolutionary Biology and Environmental Studies at the University of Zurich. Then she was a Fellow of the College for Life Sciences in the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (September 2022–March 2023), investigating the responses of subordinate group members to the actions of individuals in positions of power. Currently, she is a Marie Curie Research Fellow in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Bristol and in the Department of Evolutionary Anthropology at the University of Zurich. Her upcoming endeavours include an exciting fieldwork expedition in Shark Bay, Australia, where she aims to study bottlenose dolphins. – Address: Changes regularly. E-mail: danai.papageorgiou@proton.me.

I am writing this piece from my current postdoctoral base, reflecting on my beautiful time at Wiko. It has been three months since I “graduated” from Grunewald, and I have been experiencing the nostalgia that previous Yearbooks have reported. My time there was a journey of self-rediscovery, as I had somewhat lost myself due to the harsh realities of academia. Being an early-career researcher constantly on the move between cities, countries,

and continents, a woman, and the first doctorate holder in my family, adding also my class background into the equation, I have so far met some significant challenges in my path. When I began my PhD almost seven years ago, I was full of motivation to explore animal societies, travel the world, and acquire new skills, ranging from coding and scientific writing to changing flat tires in the mud. I was eager to go anywhere in the world that could provide answers to my research questions, spending months in savannahs, forests, and remote islands. However, the accumulation of hardships along this journey made me reconsider whether I wanted to continue or not.

Wiko provided me with a safe space to explore this question without the pressure to produce immediate results. It allowed me to rediscover the version of myself that couldn't wait to learn more about how animals live their lives. In this sense, Wiko played a crucial role in preventing a drop from the "leaky pipeline",¹ which is invaluable for both the drop herself and maybe also for the scientific community.

Wiko embodies a rare culture of academic freedom. While in academia, I often felt like the protagonist of *La double vie de Véronique*, leading separate lives that were disconnected from each other. Each life setup allowed me to express different perspectives. However, at Wiko, I felt safe enough to start connecting hidden dots that explained how my personal trajectory had influenced my research journey and how my research had opened new windows in my life.

The daily interactions with scholars from various disciplines and areas of expertise reminded me, in practice, that topics considered taboo in my field were regular subjects of discussion in other fields. For instance, I have unfortunately witnessed (post-)colonialism in the field of (behavioural) ecology, particularly in the way field sites are managed, where segregation based on class background and, sometimes, race is normalized. Discussing such topics has often felt unwelcome or been regarded as irritating. Not accepting these norms used to make me feel isolated, and I struggled to express my critique constructively among peers. I even felt uncomfortable with my own research, and signs from close peers indicated that I had to suppress such thoughts to avoid being perceived as a heretic by the broader community.

1 Farah Jelaani Shaik and Bernard Fusulier, eds., "Experiences of Early Career Researchers/Academics: A Qualitative Research on the Leaky Pipeline and Interrelated Phenomena in Six European Countries," *GARCIA Working Papers*, no. 11 (2016).

Unexpectedly, during my time at Wiko, I connected with individuals who not only shared my views and concerns regarding decolonizing ecology, but who also had a more radical and well-educated perspective on the matter. They possessed a rich repertoire of arguments and a solid historical background, developed through their own scholarly journeys. As they opened up and spoke about these issues, I found myself re-evaluating my own experiences and perspectives and their connection to historical realities. During my time in Berlin, a paper describing the harsh colonial situation at the field station in Kenya, where I spent over 15 months for my PhD, was published² and set me thinking deeply. My Co-Fellows showed interest in discussing this piece, leading us to organize journal clubs on related topics across different disciplines. Thus, what was perceived as taboo in the field station and in the field of (behavioural) ecology at large became a lively, informative, open, and constructive discussion at Wiko. This made me feel less like a heretic and brought me into contact with scholars from the humanities, from the social sciences, and those holding critical perspectives in the natural sciences. I want to express my gratitude to my Co-Fellows for their open sharing and the fruitful interactions we had.

In addition to these experiences, I found time to initiate and make significant progress in a new project and to make progress on pending tasks, resulting in two manuscripts currently under review and one close to submission for publication in a scientific journal. I also shared my work with numerous labs and institutes I visited during these six months – I had the opportunity to give talks at the University of Potsdam, the University of Münster, the Max Planck Institute for Human Development, the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, the Leibniz Institute for Zoo and Wildlife Research, the Freie Universität Berlin, and the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. At Wiko, I also had the privilege of giving a Thursday Colloquium and participating as a panel speaker in a Three Cultures Forum on inequality. These experiences together expanded my network within, around, and beyond Berlin. One of my primary goals during this fellowship was to explore the potential of applying for a junior research group leader position in Berlin or its close proximity. I thus wanted to get a sense of the atmosphere and dynamics in the various institutions that might be interested in hosting me. Excitingly, I have accomplished

2 Mark Griffiths, Fridah Mueni, Kate Baker, and Surshti Patel, “Decolonising spaces of knowledge production: Mpala research centre in Laikipia County, Kenya,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, published electronically February 13, 2023, doi:10.1177/25148486231156728.

this goal, and I am looking forward to preparing an application to hopefully return soon to Berlin for a longer period.

Even though I was initially afraid of its winter, possibly because I was born and raised in the south, Berlin remains a dream place for me to live and work. I highly value the openness and the diversity of interests that the city allows its residents to develop. During my time at Wiko, I had the chance to live my multiple parallel lives that I have always loved but had kept somewhat hidden from one another. I could enjoy techno parties, pursue research, engage in interdisciplinary interactions, explore international plant-based cuisine, meet like- and unlike-minded individuals from around the world, attend punk and other concerts, enjoy art exhibitions, experience the Berlinale, practice aerial acrobatics, support local social movements addressing gentrification, visit the best pet hospital in the area, and even have my cat's benign tumour treated, which allowed her to enjoy Villa Walther on three legs. The list of experiences is endless. I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend Wiko, for the support of its staff, especially the librarians who facilitated my literature searches and Jana for her endless interest and care, for Dunia and her team for always having something vegan for me to eat, and for my Co-Fellows who welcomed me into their diverse worlds of knowledge. This experience is one I will never forget, and I hope to return soon. Καλή συνέχεια σε όλα μας και εις το επανιδείν!