



JULY AT VILLA WALTHER
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July is an unforgettable month at the Villa Walther. It is the month with the longest hours of sunlight. The sunlight is a gift in a city in which the darkness falls in the early afternoon much of the year. In July, the Fellows and their partners began meeting in the evening to enjoy the garden of the Villa Walther, instead of gathering indoors in our apartments. But unlike our dinner parties and social gatherings during the rest of the year, in July, we started to say goodbye.

Fellows love to complain. In the beginning, many of us complained that we would have to meet daily for lunch at 13:00. It is at that time of day, many of us argued, that we find ourselves at our most productive.

I remember our lunchtime discussions and our Thursday dinners very vividly. Our year was filled with stunning events that raised many issues. For example, during the Cold War, each state or nation had to choose its allies: either they were with the capitalists or with the communists. There was nothing “in between”. We knew then what was left and what was right. Are we sure today about the distinction between war and peace, or left and right, or the norm and the exception? Was there a place during the Cold War for groups like ISIS? Could the US attack Iraq during the Cold War? Is there a link between the US attack on Iraq and the rise of ISIS? Could the Syrian war occur during the Cold War for such a long time without serious international intervention? What about the Brexit, what did it signal? Is it an anti-globalization/anti-capitalist decision or a racist, anti-refugee choice? Does the rise of Donald Trump raise the same questions as those raised by Brexit; does it challenge our old political thinking?

Beside evaluating the previous century, we also enriched each other in different subjects. Do you know that women in Tanzania are polygamous, that they may choose and marry more than one man? Some of our expert colleagues in this field argued that polygamy in general is good for women, as the research indicates that it saves many women from a life of poverty. Maybe this is exactly the point, that we cannot let scientific research decide our life choices. Polygamy puts women in a second-class citizenship status. Each table that discussed such issues opened a new subject daily. In July, as we were happily barbecuing together in the garden, with our American colleagues professionally cooking over the grill, we also realized – mournfully – that we were toward the end of our time at Wiko, and then I told my friends: “Give me back our lunches with Dunia.”

When I first arrived, I wondered what I would do during our Tuesday seminars, as almost half of the Fellows were scientists. Some of the scientists also asked what they would do during the presentations of the humanities scholars. But after a short time, we discovered that the mixture of the sciences and the humanities was itself part of the challenge. Our first semester was almost all about animals, with the coloration group among the most dominant. We learned that the color of an animal’s skin is a matter of its life and survival. Among the big puzzles were: Why does a zebra have stripes? Does a fish have consciousness? Does a fish feel pain? Still, we, the civil rights lawyers, advocate daily before courts that discrimination based on color, race, gender, ethnicity, and other categories

is illegitimate. We think that the color of skin should not be a matter of judgment and evaluation. Like the science regarding polygamy, here the science of coloration may clash with the study of the humanities. Any way, one talk was missing in our seminars: Can we articulate a philosophy about the rights of animals? Such a talk would be a challenge to both disciplines: science and the humanities.

An unanswered phenomenon at Wiko was that most Fellows got nervous and excited about their Tuesday seminars. And so we even created a new social habit: the post-talk dinner. Following a friend's talk, we would invite him or her for dinner to say: now you can relax; you made it; you were great and let us have a toast for you. Each of us had delivered hundreds or thousands of talks during his or her career, including as keynote speakers. Why did this talk at Wiko become like the talk of a lifetime, with long preparation and conceptualization? My career as a lawyer is about the art of speech, and here in Berlin, I delivered during the year several talks at the Forum Transregionale Studien (EUME), the University of Potsdam, Humboldt University, the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) think-tank, and the Barenboim-Said Akademie. Each presentation was about a different subject of law and society; however, none of them required such diligent preparation as my talk at Wiko. In addition, we had the great support of the best librarian team. If I ordered a book, not only would I get it within 24–48 hours, but the librarian team also often asked if they should also invite the book's author. Indeed, this service, together with the super-efficient services of the other staff and the great location, allowed me to easily accomplish deep writings toward my project during this year, which, I estimate, equals the work of three years outside of Wiko. Still, I have no answer to what makes the Tuesday talk different.

In July, the lights of Villa Walther gradually turn off with each departure of the Fellows and their families. Rina and I stayed in our apartment until the last day of July. We had the opportunity to say goodbye to all of the families. When we left, the Villa became dark during the sunniest month. It was a sad moment. However, we immediately also thought about the future. We could not imagine that at our age, we would make new, close friends – but we did. We decided with some of the Fellows and their families to meet again very soon, and we gathered in New York City in September and continued our conversations. We agreed in NYC that we had an amazing experience at Wiko, and it was just a new beginning for us.