

Interview with Diana Carolina Mignano

(Graduate of M.A. African Culture and Society 2010)

I had the opportunity to get to know Diana through the cooperation with the 'BIGA-Regio' project of the European Social Fund. She is the project coordinator in the International Office at Hof University of Applied Sciences. As part of her project, she supports international students and academics in achieving their qualification goals and entering the German labour market. She is also an anthropologist and historian and is currently doing her PhD at the Free University of Berlin.

As an alumna of the University of Bayreuth, could you please tell us a bit more about yourself? Why did you decide to come to Germany/ Bayreuth?

After completing my Bachelor's degree in History in Bogotá, Colombia, I was looking for the destination of my Master's programme. My sister was living in Graz, Austria, at the time and inspired me to look for universities in German-speaking countries. I wrote my undergraduate thesis on the daily life of the enslaved in an ore mine in Antiquia-Colombia in the 18th century, and throughout my studies I was interested in the history of the Afro-Colombians, which has been made invisible in my country, so I decided to pursue a master's degree in culture and society in Africa. There is therefore no doubt that I was led to the University of Bayreuth, which has a strong focus on the study of Africa. After admission, I was very lucky to receive a scholarship from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. So here I am.

How was your time in Bayreuth?

I learnt German at the IIK for 6 months before I started my Master's degree. I spent more than 10 years in Bayreuth, including my master's degree and the following research fellowship at BIGSAS. The study programme was very interdisciplinary. This inspired me to start my field research on sexuality, love, economic-sexual exchange, women, bodies, emotions, gender and gender relations in Madagascar. I also travelled to Paris for research projects and learned the French language.



In short, my time at the University of Bayreuth opened the door to the world for me. And during this time my two children were born.

What was your favourite memory or place at UBT?

Drinking coffee in the cafeteria, the library, and of course the botanical garden- my home climate at the cocoa trees. (Laugh out loud)

What kinds of international career experience have you had to date? What is your current position like? What are your responsibilities?

In 2018, I was faced with the decision of whether I should stay in Germany to deepen my research or whether I should try something completely new outside the campus. Then I got a job offer from the Goethe-Institute in Bogotá, Colombia, and I went back to my home country. I was the head of information and the library. I carried out interesting projects to achieve our goal of using innovative technologies, seizing the opportunities of digitalization and reflecting on its impact on people and society in equal measure. It was the best job I have ever had, my dream job!

If it was your dream job, why did you come back to Germany?

Life keeps going. When you have a family, you no longer just think about yourself, but about the future of the whole family. The city of Bogotá presents a multitude of challenges, particularly in terms of mobility. This made it extremely difficult to balance the needs of my children and my work with the demands of daily life in the city. Ultimately, the decision to return to Germany was made due to the high costs associated with schooling in Bogotá.

Was it easy to move back? How is your career path in Germany?

In 2020, I was very lucky to get a job at the city of Bayreuth. I was a project officer for data-based municipal education management with a focus on education monitoring in the education office. I analysed the needs of Bayreuth's educational institutions and compiled the first education report for the city of Bayreuth. It was the time of the Covid pandemic. Schools and nurseries were all closed and I had to manage to work from home and look after the children at the same time. It wasn't easy and I'm so glad that we made it through.

After finishing my contract with the city of Bayreuth, I found another job in the International Office / Student and Career Service department at Hof University of Applied Sciences. As a project manager, I ran various programmes together with our Welcome and Career Service to improve the study success of international students and support them in entering the German job market. Now I am the project manager for the 'BIGA-Regio' project. My 'customers' are no longer just the students at Hof University of Applied Sciences, but all international professionals in Bavaria who have obtained their university degree in their home countries and would like to enter the German labour market. We offer a university certificate course that includes professional courses, German courses, career coaching and a mentoring programme. I derive great fulfilment from working on this project. It offers me the opportunity to apply the knowledge I have acquired during my studies

and professional career, as well as insights gained from my personal experience as a migrant woman. In other words, it allows me to apply the lessons I have learned from the university of life.

Did you have to face any challenges along the way?

When I returned to Germany with my family, I faced completely different challenges than when I was a student. My family is with me. Balancing work and life became an important issue. As I mentioned earlier, this was a big challenge during the pandemic. After the pandemic, new challenges popped up. I was amazed that schoolchildren only go to school until midday and parents have to organise their afternoon care or activities. If your children take part in activities or join a sports club, you have to finish your work earlier and pick up and drop off them at different locations. In Colombia, children stay at school or nursery all day so that parents can concentrate on their work. Here, parents adapt their timetable to the school schedule and spend much more time with their children. No wonder that in most families here only one parent can work full-time, which is quite traditional for me. That's what I didn't expect at the beginning.

Finally, do you have any tips, especially for our international students, for finding a job or starting a new job in Germany?

Learning German is the most important thing before you start anything. Be open and flexible. Maintain and expand your contacts so that you can share and exchange ideas and information within your network. They are very supportive and helpful. And finally, don't forget where you originally come from. Your roots will give you the strength to carry on and overcome any challenges.

Photo & Interview conducted by Bayreuth International Alumni Services