

**PATRAS  
BWANSI**

**LYDIA  
ZIEMKE**

**MY NAME IS  
BINO BYANSI  
BYAKULEKA**



**mikrotext**

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**PATRAS BWANSI, LYDIA ZIEMKE**  
**MY NAME IS BINO BYANSI BYAKULEKA**

**Double essay**

**a mikrotex**

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Patras Bwansi, Lydia Ziemke

**My name is Bino Byansi Byakuleka**  
**Double essay**

**Patras Bwansi**

**My name is Bino Byansi Byakuleka**

*There is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death again and again before we reach the mountaintop of our desires. Nelson Mandela*

## **A woven flag for the president**

I was beginning to think that this was a good idea. That it might actually work. The General slept in a nice hotel, while the soldiers and I shared rooms in the cheapest hotel in the village. But I did not care about that at all. My focus was to sleep and to reach the next day. Before meeting the Brigade I had felt lost. Now, briefly, I had the feeling, I could achieve something with my work.

At home in Uganda people had liked my art. Since I was little I had constantly been doing something with my hands and always loved fibres and colours. I had always known I wanted to create something special out of them.

When I finished university my art pieces - paintings and woven pieces - were displayed in galleries, among them the “Cassava Republic Art Gallery Kamwokya” in Kampala. One of my favourite pieces I donated to the head of the Orthodox Church in Africa, seated in Alexandria, Egypt. But more about the church later.

I realised, that there was not enough support given to the arts. Artists were not taken seriously in their communities. Many people mistrusted this kind of work. To make my profession more visible, I decided to give my best piece to the president of Uganda himself: a Ugandan flag woven as a wall carpet for Yoweri Kaguta Museveni. This was meant as a call for his support and to convince the general public that talented artists are an important and positive force in our society. That they are using the local resources and create beautiful art pieces out of them, as well as jobs for a better future of many young people. In my country if we want someone to do something we give presents and compliments to that person.



So I contacted the Member of Parliament in Lubaga, in the North. He told me that “it is not like just anyone can give a present to the president!”. He asked me to make an application, and in this application I had to explain why I wanted to give the president my art piece. Then he wanted to assess if it was a nice piece for the president or not. I hung up and made a decision: I would go and see the president directly. Because soon he was going to speak publically on the 30 year anniversary of his ever ruling party, that had come to power on 26th of Feb 1986. Idi Amin Dada was overthrown in 1979 with the help of the army of Tansania by Milton Obote. When he rigged the elections in 1980 the current president went to fight him. In 1986 he won this war and started his rule. People were in favour of him, however today the majority does not trust him anymore.

This ceremony took place in Nakasongola district, about three hours from Kampala. I arrived there the day before but it was already very dark. As I knew no one there, I observed and finally I spoke to some security officers hanging posters. I approached them carefully, but they asked me to say loud and clear what I wanted. They liked my idea a lot and admired that I had come alone so far. Thus they introduced me to Captain Mugisha who introduced me to General Mwondo. The General also liked me, the idea and the carpet, too. So he ordered Captain Mugisha to find a sleeping place for me. Later that night I had to go out with them, as the Captain wanted to drink something. People brought food for us from the village, and invited us to the bar. I did not drink alcohol at the time, and only acted as if I enjoyed it. The others got very drunk, and I enjoyed observing them secretly sober: I saw how these people become hot-tempered when drunk. You have to be careful not to talk too much or say

the wrong thing, as they like fighting. The General was the most professional, he behaved quietly, was not talkative, just gave orders to the soldiers not to be excessive and not late in the morning. “For you”, he said to me, “we will talk more tomorrow, but don’t worry, you will meet him.” The General had promised to introduce me to the president during the ceremony, and so I went to sleep content - with that feeling of possibly achieving something with my work.

In the morning all was very simple: breakfast consisted only of tea and bread.

During the last preparation before the arrival of the president the General suddenly received a new order and had to go back to Kampala immediately. Disappointed I said goodbye and handed over my art piece to General Mwondo as he promised to make a special appointment for me to meet the president. He never managed to arrange it because of all the preparations for the elections in 2006. And just after the election - I did not vote for the president - I left to take up my scholarship for three years of studies in Iconography at St. Arsenios Monastery and School of Art Ormylia, Thessaloníki in Greece. But more about Greece later.

But all in all it had been a good idea. And for a moment it had seemed possible.

### **A day in the life of a protester**

In our living room in Wildenbruchstrasse in Berlin there is a frame, in it is a net and on it are a few rows of woven thread. Pink and blue, some green. I often look at it with longing but I just do not have enough time to work on it. At least I think so.

My normal day in Berlin might well look like this: “Ok, I have a meeting at 10. With? Let me see, oh yes, initiative

x who want to speak to me about an event they are planning. But at 11 I have to be at this 'Verein', we are going to open a refugee café there in two months time, for exchange between students, locals and refugees ... i still have to find out where to go. (The phone rings) Hang on ... Hello? Yes, I am fine, how are you? What can I do for you? ... Ok, can you call me back tomorrow, we need a little time to talk and I have a meeting now ... hang on ... around three? Oh no wait, at 2, that could work. Ok, I look forward to speaking to you. Ok, in a minute there is the theatre group who want to work with us. And in the early evening I lead an ARU meeting, the African Refugee Union. Now we are preparing an event in honour of Mandela next month, no this month, its this month, tomorrow we start preparing the exhibition ... it will be there for a month, until ... April ... Following that on the 15th we shall have the actual event. We are also planning other things. Next month we will start the programme at Humboldt University, a weekly programme, to talk about our political problems in Germany, and to see how refugees can be integrated into the university to continue their studies. We are also coordinating something with the Free University. (The phone rings) Hello, I am Bino Byansi ... ah yes, hello! ... yes, ok – Patras ... when did you want to meet? You sent the email? Ok, but I don't know, if I am in Berlin then, there is an appointment with a syndicate, with a trade union in ... Frankfurt, I have to check the dates. Aha, I have to be there? Ok, I will be there. Let me call my colleague, and ask when exactly we go to this meeting in Frankfurt ... and late tonight there is an event in a theatre, Asylum Monologues, I am a speaker on the podium for the discussion afterwards ... where is it again?"

I really need a secretary!

But more often lately I just sit down and I weave. It makes time. It opens the mind, it moves the thoughts, it makes everything easier. In those moments I consider how much solidarity there is already in Berlin, but how much energy is spent on creating those structures and opportunities, most of which would be automatic with ‘stately permission’, and how much of that energy could flow into actually building lives. It makes me speechless.



At the weaving frame at Wildenbruchstrasse in Berlin.

### **Hard family. No father, no mother.**

My childhood was not happy. I lost my father when I was two years old. In a way I also lost my mother at the same time. She had just given birth to my small brother and did not return from her family to me. Her family had not let her go, as I was told later. My fathers family were angry with her but agreed because they wanted to keep my fathers large inheritance. They all quarrelled over it. I was at my grand

parents for a while and finally my father's aunt took me into her house. It was pure sadness for me not to grow up with my mother and siblings. But more about my father later.

### **Early protest**

It is the moment before the cane hits your bottom. Somehow they always position you in a way your eyes are filled with the sun. But you know they are all there, you can hear them. It is embarrassing, everyone looking on during school parade. Some with pity, sure, but quite a few planning to add their own funny ideas later to this punishment. You just ask yourself: why are the teachers doing that? The fact that it will not stop me is so obvious, so clear. My actions will become more determined, no doubt about it - why do they not see that?

And when the hit comes, and it really hurts. A small moment of weakness follows. The pained body briefly appeals to my will: please make it stop, its not good! But then strength returns and I can expect the second hit with ease. The third one is met with a tight ever more determined bum that almost makes the cane break. I say: tetwazalibwa na luzungu! mu tuleke ffe! - we are not born with English, leave us alone! and promptly get an extra hit.

I had been caught speaking my mother tongue again: Luganda, instead of English, as was demanded in school. And that always seemed a good reason for my teachers to beat us. Sometimes the teachers asked students to beat other students, when these could not speak English. So many just kept quiet until school was over.

I hated English because it was forced on us. Every day a student was elected to be 'English Master' among the students. He had a chain with a pig bone on it, and he had to

put it on the first person he heard speaking their vernacular language. It was shameful to carry this bone and so whoever had it wanted to get rid of it quickly and tried quickly to catch another person speaking their native language. Each one who found someone they passed the bone on to, had to write that persons name on a list. Sometimes they used a large colonial coin on a thread instead of the pig bone.

However, some of my teachers supported and encouraged me to keep doing art and I did, although I had to do 14 other subjects which were all compulsory: Mathematics, English, Fine art, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Agriculture, Geography, Accounts, Divinity, History, Political Education, Luganda, and French! Luckily it became less and less with the years, and I could always keep fine art. And English, but only because I had to.

In school I became politically active and popular as a result. Only with the students, of course. I wanted to become assistant head boy but the teachers were against me. No wonder, as I criticised them for the way they treated us: a lot of beating without any reason, sexual abuse on young girls, expulsion of students motivated just by antipathy. I wanted to make the students aware of our school rights. I planned to report our problems to the school authorities as well as the Uganda national students' association (UNSA). In addition I used to draw cartoons of the teachers and publish them in the school weekly newspaper called EYE FOCUS CLUB. So, the beatings during school parade happened surely not only because of my bad English.

Finally out of school and at University I studied Art and Design (DAD) at the Buganda Royal Institute of Business and Technical Education in Mengo, Kampala. During my course I was totally convinced and confident and hopeful. I

believed in the work of my hands, in the art and the crafts I was learning, and I saw my future clearly ahead. But it had been a long hard way to get to this point through school. During this two-year Diploma course I chose six out of 17 different subjects - history of art, drawing (nature and still life), weaving, fabric decoration (motif patterns, application, mosaics in paper, glass, and cloth pieces), painting (portrait, landscape and composition), and marketing/ management - in my first year. In the second year I dropped fabric decoration because I wanted to focus more on painting and weaving. This way I came closer to realizing my future dream of becoming a professional iconographer and industrial textile designer.

### **German surprises**

I became a refugee on July 29th 2010. In the early morning hours I arrived in Berlin by plane in order to ask for asylum in Germany. I had travelled with a friend and for some reason no one asked for our passports at the airport. It was all a new experience for me as I had never been a refugee before.

The office for refugees in Turmstrasse (the central office for all asylum seekers in Berlin) was closed and I waited as the day was getting warmer. I enjoyed the sun; I was convinced that they will accept me and that I will stay in Berlin. I had no idea what would happen, as no one had explained to me how this will work: Asylum. I thought they would say “hello, nice to meet you, how can we help?” But no one said “nice to meet you”. At home we would welcome new people, give them time and treat them as a guest. With time you get to know a person and find out what they need. I thought they would give me a room and then speak to me a few days later: “what do you want? How can we help? What

qualifications do you have?" I had all those papers ready, and was planning to continue my studies in art, after having a secure status. But no chance until today of a secure status. However, late 2014, I did find a position: an internship in my profession, with the idea of finally developing my career. Once, when I was doing layouts and printing t-shirts, I got talking to the owners of the shop. They welcomed me, I explained what I had done back in Uganda, and expressed my wish to do an internship in their workshop. They looked at my designs, they discussed it and then they accepted me into the team. Now I am in the right mode of my profession: making artistic designs and then creating formal designs from them, using all available technology and materials, in order to transform the political ideas into an item of powerful public communication!

Anyway, back to Turmstrasse: also I had not expected that they would take my fingerprints before anything else, it was a very strange greeting. The doors opened around 1:30 pm, I went in and with the fingerprints they asked me a few quick questions immediately - my names, where I come from and why I was here. I did not want to talk much, I was so tired. I showed them my bag and said: "All of me: I'm here." I had to fill in a form and then wait for further questions. After one hour they gave me 25 questions and I thought finally that was all I had to do, that now they would grant me asylum. But oh no - on the contrary, it was only my introduction to German bureaucracy!

Those people in Turmstrasse, they looked very tired of welcoming people, tired of those people altogether who stood in front of them full of hope. Their eyes and bodies said: "you black people, why do you keep coming here? We have so many other people we have to take care of, go some-



where else ...” They were clearly making a distinction between the people who were listed on their papers as ‘eligible’ and me. There were many other people they called in before me and none of those were black. This hierarchy of refugees was also a strange surprise.

Finally they said I had no chance of getting asylum in Berlin, and instead they would help me to go to Bavaria, apparently it was easier there. But because it was the weekend, they first sent me to a lager in Berlin called Manchester that was full of Asian people. They told me not to move around outside, as the police would control me and then I would be finished. They put me in a room with a guy from Somalia who had been there three days. They thought we would get on as two Africans but unfortunately we had no language in common.

Monday morning I had to leave the lager and go to the police station directly. They took my fingerprints again; it really makes you feel like a criminal. After that they gave me my ticket and a travelling guide to Bavaria and advised me to leave Berlin only after 8 pm. I had to take slow regional trains, that would take twelve hours, and leaving now I would get there at night, when the office down there would be shut. But travelling through the night I would find it open in the morning. Twelve hours, my god, I thought, is Bavaria another country? As I know now, yes, it is somehow a country of its own.

But at the same time I was very excited to be in Germany hoping to have total peace and freedom soon, so I did not mind much to wait or about where I was going. I had one day in Berlin and would have liked to do some sightseeing. But after the encounter with the tired people in Turmstrasse and the angry police officers I was scared to move too

much. I saw quite a lot of the U-Bahn - it was fun to move so fast exactly where I wanted to go. There were nice people in the U-Bahn. People in Berlin seemed different and more open than in Greece, and also in Bavaria as I found out later. No wonder, I found my way back to Berlin. I spent most of that day at the Hauptbahnhof. I really liked the big glassy architecture, and all the different perspectives outside were very impressive. Back then I did not know that I was staring through the glass straight into Angela Merkel's work windows! I should have gone to say hello then. Exactly at 8 pm I was in the train from Berlin Hauptbahnhof ready for my journey to Munich. The train was different to the ones in Uganda, the leftovers from colonial times. Back then the trains carried gold, cotton and rubber; now that they are nearly dead they carry people. The railway lines had only been extended to distant places because of the goods and for the trade connection to Congo. Not for people at all.

I could not sleep because I was so excited. This train felt good, because I was not alone, but at the same time no one disturbed me, touched me or harassed me. Only the one police control. And when we reached Munich, we all parted. No one said "This way!" but everyone went on his or her own way. We had been on this train together, and once outside I felt a tired loneliness. But I had to find my own way, too.

Somehow I found the U-Bahn up to Obersendling on the Western side of Munich and there I found the Ausländer-

behörde in Beibrunnerstrasse. And there the bureaucracy continued. But even more about bureaucracy later.

## **Early protest II**

Since my childhood I am a rich man at heart. I used to quote verses from the bible, like “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” That is Matthew 4:4. Or from the Sermon on the mount: “happy are the poor because the kingdom of heaven is theirs”. Approximately it goes like this. These divine words gave me more courage to serve God and I was happy to know the secret words of salvation.

However, this did not stop me from being politically active here as well. Like in school I was very critical of the arbitrary governance and corruption that was common with the so-called moral leaders - from the bishop down to the local priests. The bishop had to cover up his incompetence with power games. And so, after his enthronement in 1997 as the new archbishop of the orthodox church in Uganda he immediately utilised the tactics of ‘divide and rule’ he remembered from colonial times. He divided the church into the left and right wing. The leftists were portrayed as useless and uneducated, as thieves, liars and lazy people while the right wing were considered as the serious people. This arrangement discouraged many young people from being active in the church politically. Not me - I was a youth leader at St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. At the headquarter in Namungoona, Kampala, I organized conferences, youth workshops and festivals in order to bring people back to the church which they had left behind for many years. It succeeded in some instances but my critical work was heavily compromised due to a lack of moral and financial support from the

local reverend and the church leaders, because they were being criticised in it.

### **Loosing my religion**

Believe it or not - I was baptized in Passau. The ceremony was a warm amazing evening, although it was almost winter. I had a full baptism, together with an Austrian guy, a friend of mine, who studied at Passau University. At first of course there was a speech from the pastor, but then I held a speech about accepting and wanting to serve the Adventist church and so on. Then we took off our clothes, dressed in a gown and all went into the baptism pool. The pastor put my head under water three times - for the lord, the son and the holy ghost. I was very wet but spiritually I felt new life inside. Back then I still believed in Jesus Christ, and in church ceremonies. We celebrated this with wine and food, with gospel and flute music.

In Uganda the church had always been in my life, and also in Greece of course, studying iconography. In Germany at the beginning I still had hope in religion. I wanted to practice and found a church in Passau, near our lager - the short form for the German "Flüchtlingslager" - refugee camp. The first visit was cold and frustrating - in my country people will welcome you as a stranger, but here no one minded about me, even after the service no one said to me: "Hey how are you?" and so I went back to the lager sadly confused and lonely.

I thought about the lovely spiritual practices in my country, the Christian and the older connections with the spirits of the dead - some might call it witchcraft. In contrast, it all seemed very earthly in Passau. In the Uganda church it does not matter so much, if people are catholic or protestant

or Muslim or of another faith, as long as they all believe in God. And most people also have their small gods, in their houses. They feel those work and heal them better, if there is a problem. Although publicly they say they are pure Christians or Muslims. Looking at the people in the church in Passau I thought that in Germany there is no courage to engage with the spirits of the dead or the small gods in their houses. They would easily upset all the strict order here.

In Greece I had decided to join the Adventist church. In Passau I thought I need to give it another try and went back. This time it was a bit warmer. They asked me if I was baptized, I said no, and so I was baptized in Passau! It made me strong at that moment; I even joined the church choir. However, when the government rejected my asylum case, I approached the church and explained my situation. The church committee called a small meeting where pastor asked me: "What do you want to do, what is your plan? What can we do for you?" I said: "You can support me, for example, to pay my lawyers". But a little later he asked me again who was going to pay the lawyer ... he embarrassed me with these questions and questions about my life at home and why I had come to Germany ... he asked me: "So you are a gay yourself?" I said "I am an activist for the rights of all LGBTIQ people". The people in the church knew that being gay publically or being a political activist is very dangerous in Uganda. But he said: "No, I won't pay your lawyers, I advise you to do what the government is saying. I think", he went on, "there is the Adventist church in Uganda, so you can carry your cross there and they will support you. If you want to find a way to go to Uganda we can help you. That is all, we cannot act against the decisions of the government, we can not do anything for you here."

I was even scared that they might give information about me to the government. That day I signed off. They were real cowards. No house gods. German church: bye bye!

### **My father. And me.**

One day the phone rang, I was about 15. One of my uncles said: "Come on, it is time to speak about your father." From then more people started to tell me what had happened to him.

Before people have always said to me, that they saw him in my face and that I had his temper and his strength. That is how I knew him so far, and it was a good feeling because they all seemed to like and respect his memory. They used to say: "Oh! your father was a man who could listen well, and would talk slowly like you, polite and friendly, wise and good in counting. He could share ideas with people, he was ready to support you whenever you approach him. He was a small man like you and used not to drink alcohol, always with a sober mind." It had made them happy and sad at the same time to see him in me. Because they liked him, they wanted to support me. For me also, it was wonderful to hear them talk and somehow knowing him, and so all the more painful never to be able to meet him.

Now I learned he had been murdered. People shed tears narrating how he worked as an accountant in the local coffee and cotton cooperative trade union Busoga-Jinja, and that others were jealous because he was young, clever, creative and successful. Apparently some people planned the murder and bought others to carry it out. My uncle told me that, in fact, I had been with my father at the time, I was two years old. The killers had not expected me there, and, so I was told, just threw me over the fence to the neighbours.

After the murder people who knew my father became very angry and organized a search for the killers all over the region. They destroyed the houses of those who were suspected and chased them far away from the region. But the killers were never brought to justice. Times back then had been hard and confused. The killers took advantage of the political chaos and civil wars following the fall of Idi Amin Dada. People were living in fear, especially those who had money. Money was also the reason why my father had to die. Envy and the evil eye on others is a disease in our society to this day.

After I found out the truth from my uncle and the others, I decided to change my names and took those of my father - Byansi Biyakuleka. Bino is a political name, which I took when I started the protest here. Altogether it means - leaving behind the things of this world. Bino - 'things' - like this teapot for example. Byansi means 'this planet, this world', so together 'the tea pot from this planet', and Biyakuleka means 'leaving the things behind'. So - you want more tea, ok, then you drink it, but you will not take the teapot with you, when you die. The idea behind it is: No one should focus on material things or appearances, on genetic make-up, sexuality or education. When it is time for you to go, you will leave the tea pot behind, and also the PHD and the Mercedes, you go alone, you only need your spirit. This is equality; there we are all equal finally. But why do we have to wait until death? At the moment, as a person with refugee status in Germany, I feel reminded of the circumstances of my father's death and the family situation it created. There are people in the world who do not let others live. Who protect what they have with an evil eye and refuse to share. Being reduced to an animal in the lager with no plan and very little freedom

or hope is a slow form of murder. The memory and the spirit of my father made me say “no” and let me put up my first tent in Passau Klostergarten.



Bino's first banner, made in Passau in August 2012.

### **Mature protest**

I said “No!” to the caretaker. No, thank you. No more ‘Essenspakete’ (food packages) for me. I will not eat anything until I get out of here for good. So all of a sudden I was on a kind of hunger strike. Hunger clears the thinking - and there I was and thought: how is this possible? How could this happen? For us it was always so obvious: in Europe and especially in Germany everyone has the same rights, everyone can participate in the democracy, there they have freedom. So why am I sitting in a tiny room and can not go where I want to go? Suddenly the whole absurdity was crystal clear in front of my eyes. And so I decided, I do not have to sit here and wait, I will just leave. Therefore also no more Lager for me and no Residenzpflicht. This I told the passers-by at Klostergarten in Passau. There we made our protest public



and erected our tents. A lot of people were unfriendly, well its Bavaria, but in the end we had more than one thousand signatures. And there I painted my first poster, which I still have. That is how the protest started for me.

The first night sleeping in the tent was amazing; I was over the moon that I had succeeded. I did not worry about what was going to happen the next day, I was proud that I had left the lager. It was a white tent, many good friends visited, lots of people came past, they asked what we are doing there, some said we should go away, some not. I was ready to fight and to die if necessary. The Nazis for example always said they would attack us in the night. They are also governed by fear. Sometimes my friends left me alone in the tent, when it was too cold for them. The camp started on the 8th of August, but it was already cold. September was also cold that year, and October even more, the weather was really unfair to us. But I also just said “no” to the weather - “I will go further, it is time to take my rights now!” I knew that I will not get my rights just by sleeping in a tent, but this was about public awareness - to let the people feel how life is in the lagers. Because they had no idea about this.

Often I slept outside under the stars. There were some benches in Klostergarten, they were really well constructed - I could take my sleeping bag and hide in the bench, it was comfortable and I could watch the tent. From this protest my pride and motivation grew - I was convinced that all I was doing was right. I felt it inside but also from all the support I got.

Soon there were other protests, in Regensburg, Augsburg, Munich, Köln and elsewhere. I travelled around and met many of my present co-protesters. It gave me even more strength to be with them. Suddenly - it was not a demon-

stration, but the police were ‘accompanying’ us somewhere on our march to Berlin, it was near Magdeburg - NO BORDER NO NATION STOP DEPORTATION: it broke from my mouth. My voice of protest! Protest had always been part of my life, but for the first time I really heard my voice in public. Now the protest was not only for me, but my voice had decided that I want to change the system as a whole, for everybody. I often miss my family, yes, but somehow I feel my father would have done the same.



An early banner from Cologne, autumn 2012.

## **Holy Nation Greece**

They made me cry. They let me wait for three hours. Then they laughed at me and insulted me. When we had left the plane, they said: “Ok, Europe and Schengen-Visa here, please, on this side, and all the rest on that side. A fast and a slow row. I was part of the rest in the slow row. And although they were

dealt with first and very quickly, some people from the other line were calling to us in English: “Why are you here? You black people, why do you come here?” Some from our line, who had lived in Greece for a long time, spoke calmly in Greek to make them stop. It was horrible being in that line but it became even worse. They put me in a small room, and let me wait. They went through all of my luggage, looked through all of the papers, asked me all sorts of questions and called the monastery and the University many times. It was embarrassing. They were smoking a lot and whispering in their language. Oh! My friend, it was really too much for me and I just wanted to say: “Give me all my papers, I will go home to Uganda!” I had everything I needed for a quick entry; there was no justification for these problems. Finally after this long and mean introduction to the Greek/European Bureaucracy they set me free and I ran to get my transit to Thessaloniki. It was in December 2006.

Outside in the waiting room there were two friends from Uganda who were studying at Athens University. They had been waiting for me; we had planned to spend the generous transit time together. Unfortunately we had no time to talk much except for exchanging our equally horrible experiences in the transit office.

Really it was horrible because I used to think of Greece as a Holy Nation. It had been the root of all religion for me - from here came our Orthodox church, and all the saints whose images we saw and whose life stories we had studied.

My flight to Thessaloniki took about an hour and the landscape below improved my mood. The shadow of the plane was gliding over the beautiful mountains. Landing at Thessaloniki Airport is special. It is similar to Entebbe International Airport Uganda because they are both located on

the seas shores. One is marvelling at the large and historical buildings, churches and the white tower and suddenly the plane is literally falling between the buildings. It has to go slowly meandering between the buildings like Bino weaving his carpet, like an eagle in the air. It's really scary, and people are either silent or calling all the saints of Thessaloniki to save their landing.

I was serving in the church as usher and altar boy: everything had to be clean and ready on time, the doors had to open at the right time for the service, the candles had to be lit and the books open at the right page ... my teachers were very strict! For big events we started an hour beforehand, and otherwise half an hour before. Wednesdays and Fridays we had big events: Wednesdays the night prayers (for Jesus' anointment), and Fridays (because on good Friday Jesus had died) the long night prayers, 9 pm until 1 or 2 am. If high Bishops come to these events then it could take until 3 am. Saturdays there was no service, just lots of cleaning for Sunday as the day of resurrection. And Sundays had the longest service. Each service was different according to the saints and always we had to know the order of the prayers and arrange the books correctly - it was complicated and we sweated a bit now and then. People from outside also came to hear the service and receive the body and blood of Christ.

Normally we woke up at 3 am in the morning to prepare the service that began at 4 am. It had to be so early so that the priests could get them done before their workday.

I liked most of the reverends. Some were distant from me because I was black but others helped me to get acquainted with everything in life and work. Some really rejected me, but others again appreciated my deep voice as support for the choir and asked me to humm along the prayers.

The church building is a beautiful memory: in front of the iconostasis, there is a wall with all the saints on it, and there were chambers on the sides to worship some of them especially, all warmed by the Greek sunlight.



Bino, still Patras, in Greece.



Bino at a LGBTIQ action in Berlin.

## **Being a refugee without a status, in Germany, every day.**

First it is important to distinguish: being a refugee or being a refugee activist?

The everyday life of refugees is stress. Nothing else. Stress and trauma from the constant threats of deportation. Not to have the right to work, the right to move - all this uncertainty about being able to stay or not destroys people. Some people wait two years for a first interview! There is nothing good for us in the lagers. We eat and sleep and go to the toilet and wait, that is all. They do not want us to die but they certainly do not want us to live. Many have paid a lot to come here, they have sold everything at home to pay the visa, the traffickers and all the rest along the way. People come with high expectations to be able to earn the money back. And when that is impossible, people kill themselves. Or, as clearly visible in Berlin, they start dealing drugs. You want to send them back, but back where? There is nothing there. Like me. I am all here. All alone. And after taking such a decision it is hard to tolerate having to ask permission to go out and even to pay ten Euro for it! Here I include the paperwork that went into leaving the lager. The work value and time that goes into this paperwork exceeds ten Euros, and for me it was a nightmare to save or to find the money: so why??? Nothing is gained by it other than making life difficult. You have to eat less or to steel money or to lie: only to have a bit of freedom.

## Document examples of the immense bureaucratic effort necessary to leave the refugee camp.

Flüchtlinge für Flüchtlinge  
c/o The Voice Büro  
Böblingerstr 105  
70199 Heslach-Stuttgart

### Einladung zur Teilnahme am Asyl-Informations-Workshop am 11.03.2012 in Frankfurt am Main, Bockenheim

Zur Vorlage an die zuständige Ausländerbehörde zur Beantragung einer  
Verlassenserlaubnis

**für Patras Bwansi**

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

der Verein Flüchtlinge für Flüchtlinge, zusammen mit dem Verein The VOICE Refugee Forum, veranstalten am 11.03.2012 einen Asyl-Informations-Workshop im Frankfurt am Main, Bockenheim, Studierendenhaus / K2 Mertonstr 26 – 28, für und mit Flüchtlingen.

**Patras Bwansi (geb. 23.01.1979)** wohnhaft in der Asylunterkunft in **Breitenberg** ist ausdrücklich und persönlich zu dieser Veranstaltung eingeladen. Wir bitten Sie daher, um Erteilung einer entsprechenden Verlassenserlaubnis für den Zeitraum Samstag, 10.03. - Montag, 12.03.2012 (zur Ermöglichung der An- und Abreise).

Verpflegung und Unterkunft stehen zur Verfügung. Auch die Fahrtkosten zur Veranstaltung werden getragen. Für die Flüchtlinge fallen keinerlei Kosten an.

Vielen Dank für Ihre Bemühungen!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen aus Stuttgart,

Rex Osa  
The Voice, Baden-Württemberg

Bei Rückfragen können Sie mich gerne persönlich unter der Rufnummer 0176-27873832 erreichen.

i.A.



Application from inviting groups for Patras Bwansi for the temporary leaving of his restricted area of movement.



Landratsamt Passau  
Ausländerbehörde  
Domplatz 11  
94032 Passau

09.03.12  
Sachbearbeiter: Haslinger  
Telefon: 0851/397-449  
Telefax: 0851/397-342

Nachstehend aufgeführtem Ausländer wird die Erlaubnis erteilt, den Bereich der Aufenthaltsgestattung in der Zeit vom **10.03.2012** bis **12.03.2012** vorübergehend zu verlassen:

Name: Bwansi  
Vorname: Patras  
Geb.-Datum, -ort: 23.01.1979 in Kaboale  
Staatsangehörigkeit: ugandisch  
derzeit wohnhaft: Passauer Str. 4  
94139 Breitenberg



Bedingungen/Auflagen:

Die Erlaubnis wird für die Fahrt nach Frankfurt am Main erteilt um am Asyl-Informations-Workshop am 11.03.2012 (Veranstalter: Flüchtlinge für Flüchtlinge, The Voice Büro, Böblingenstr./105, 70199 Heslach-Stuttgart; Veranstaltungsort: Frankfurt am Main, Bockenheimer, Studierendenhaus / K2 Mertonstr. 26-28) teilzunehmen.

94032 Passau den 09.03.2012

  
Haslinger

Hinweis:

Die Erlaubnis gilt nur in Verbindung mit der Aufenthaltsgestattung.  
Ein Verbleiben außerhalb des Bereichs der Aufenthaltsgestattung über die erlaubte Zeit hinaus kann als Ordnungswidrigkeit geahndet oder im Wiederholungsfall mit Freiheitsstrafe bis zu einem Jahr oder mit Geldstrafe bestraft werden (§§ 85,86 AsylVG).

Approval for the temporary leaving of the restricted area of movement.

## Bestätigung

Hiermit wird bestätigt, dass

Herr/Frau BWANSI Patras, geb. 23.01.1979

am 09.03.12 in der Zeit von 10<sup>00</sup> Uhr bis 12<sup>00</sup> Uhr in folgender

Angelegenheit beim Landratsamt Passau, Ausländerbehörde vorgesprochen hat :

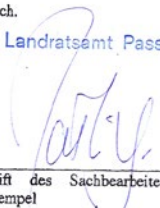
Erteilung eines Verlassenseitenausweis (Teilnahme  
an Asyl-Informations-Workshop in Frankfurt  
am Main)

Die Vorsprache war aus ausländerrechtlicher Sicht erforderlich.

Landratsamt Passau  
Ausländerbehörde

Passau, 09.03.12

Landratsamt Passau

  
Unterschrift des Sachbearbeiters mit  
Namensstempel

Haslinger  
Verw.-Obersekretärin

Confirmation of the approval for the temporary leaving of the restricted area of movement.



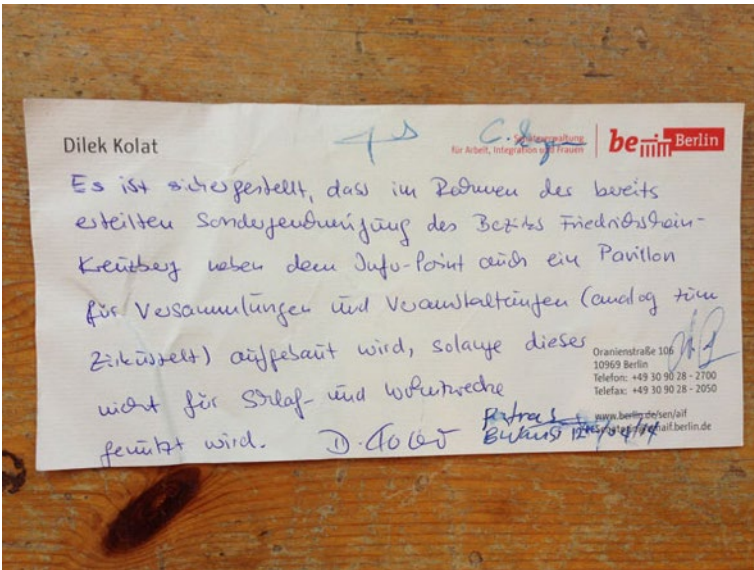
So I said: “No, I cannot live this life anymore!” Inside the lagers people talk about their backgrounds, their expectations, they try to give each other strength - but only in the protest can they really support each other. If you look at Kloostergarten Passau, how big it is, you will say: “You are crazy to occupy this!” But I knew we have to be crazy to change the system. Capitalism and Imperialism, you have to face it directly. That is why our great men are assassinated.

For refugee activists every day life is also stress, as I described before. And the great challenge is to keep going despite all the setbacks. Activists must not focus on their own personal issues but give their time and strength to the protest. Most people cannot earn money; some are lucky to be in local support initiatives, for example crafting furniture. There is a lot of support in kind - food, material, clothes, phones, tickets - which need to be shared well. Often there is too much, people are generous. But this humanitarian help is not so important. Solidarity is what is needed. The people who want to support refugees need to make the next step. Meeting us, respecting us, listening and sharing their time and expertise - that is priceless for us.

Many refugees who came from Italy did not understand the protest at Oranienplatz. They came and found tents and toilets and food and tickets. But they did not know the situation in the lagers, as they came directly from the sea. Generally they kept to the people who speak their language. You speak my language, you are my man, it is normal. But they also should have taken the next step. Slowly they understand that the group activism is the only thing that will actually benefit their personal situation. I am personally still at Oranienplatz. Once you start you should not give up.

It is dangerous. That is why I am a little annoyed with my friends, who stopped when they felt they were not gaining something quickly. The fight for freedom takes time, its not a fight with guns. You cannot expect to change things for good quickly. With a gun you can change something quickly but not for good. Only with words slowly slowly you gain. And even with the words you do not convince people, it is by living the protest with stealth and determination. Now, luckily, some of my friends are coming back in the protest. For both groups - refugees and refugee activists - the arbitrary and changing politics in Berlin is the main enemy. Very successfully and no doubt knowingly the District government and the Berlin government are blocking each other from any progressive action or even from keeping their word. They begin something; sign a paper with the refugees and then it is dismantled step-by-step and eventually forgotten. That way they maintain the impression that they are doing something and they keep the broader public in the certainty that refugees will not take away their homes. In order to illustrate this I have included here a legendary document: an agreement that was signed at the foot of a tree in Oranienplatz by Dilek Kolat, Senator for Employment, Integration and Women, myself as a witness and one my protester colleagues, Napuli Langa. She had endured sitting on the tree for four days with very little to sustain her. Activists managed to give her some food and water and a blanket although the authorities forbade it. Only when doctors warned about her health and the Senat started fearing a scandal, Dilek Kolat came, signed this paper and agreed to Napulis demand. Napuli had climbed the tree when the square including the information building was evicted with the help of an impressive “Divide and Rule” strategy by the

District and Senat. Napuli's demand has not been met - to this day the group at Oranienplatz are fighting with the District Government about certainty for a permanent building - Dilek Kolat says she can not override them. Since then the agreements made in this context have been declared legally valid by a court. Originally the District had said it was in their own interest to have an information and contact point at Oranienplatz for refugees and anyone interested.



Agreement between Dilek Kolat, Senator for employment, integration and women in Berlin, and Napuli Paul Langa, with witnesses Turgay Ulu and Patras Bwansi (Bino), signed the 12th of April 2014 at Oranienplatz Berlin.

These opaque and indecisive methods of the governments create an uncertainty on all sides. We refugees lost all trust in collaborations with the authorities, and the people of Berlin - those who are not part of the protest feel they are completely left alone. They are afraid and I believe it is one

of the reasons why they take to the streets on Mondays in Dresden now.

Perhaps I should try our strategy and give a wall carpet to the Minister of the Interior Frank Henkel, who has the most power of influence over our fate - a woven German flag.

I am lucky now. I have a room for my growing carpet. For the banners from the first protest. For my books and some belongings. I have friends whom I share a flat with. Their presents are in this room, too. My personality is being seen, I am being heard, taken seriously, asked for my opinion, asked for my wishes, criticised, challenged to take responsibility. I cook and we eat together. We take turns cleaning the bathroom. All very normal, but in this context it is rare and I value this position. However, I know I struggled for these people, for these friends. I am not here because of their solidarity but because of what we give each other. It was and still is hard work, like any friendship.

### **Europe: Golden streets and happy colonialism**

I do not know if I should say this. But it is partly my reason for being here. It is why I stood outside the Turmstrasse office and thought, my asylum application would only take a few days. I assumed they would treat me according to my human rights.

I do not speak about this phenomenon much, somehow it has become a secret of the past and I feel it is a little crazy, but here it is:

Many people in Africa trust the Europeans more than they trust themselves, than they trust other Africans. Because of what the colonials did: they built hospitals and schools... the first school in my town was also built by missionaries. They say, the first person to make an airplane was a white man or

woman, the first person on the moon as well. They feel they could not do this.

And as children we looked at a caterpillar, no, a millipede, and said that the white man made the train from the example of this small animal. That he was wise ...we never believed that we had the technology to do this.

To this day many Africans believe that the white people are organizing them. When the twenty-year war started in the north of my country in the late Eighties, the people asked why are they not helping us, the US and Europe? But the US only came in 2011, saying that they want to help Uganda. In fact, they only came because we had found oil and because they wanted to have a military base with a view to Congo and Sudan. And still people clapped their hands when they arrived.

Only the president said: "No, we have to help ourselves!" In the end he had to accept their help, in order to strengthen the USA-Uganda relationship and to prevent further bloodshed, although he did not like the intervention. Even now he is encouraging the African peoples to develop their countries independently of the Western forces. But he is leaving his shoes to rot, as we say. He is dealing a lot with the conflicts in the surrounding countries, sending troops to be killed there. He is a dictator and people feel he has to go now and make space for someone younger. I would be happy if he would call me to take office. No need for guns or a PhD, I would use art to institute real democracy.

Before colonialism my country was well organized, because we had clan leaders and chiefdoms.

The colonial forces destroyed the structure by planting little misunderstandings here and there. In the end they even supplied guns. The kings loyal to the colonialists be-



came greater than the others. The whites helped them to get land, land that did not have owners before. In the 1900 Buganda agreement land from this region was sold to the British government and became a protectorate. The British also helped the central king of the region Buganda to get land off the region Ankole - and the King of Ankole went into exile. In the north similar things happened. In the same year they sent as a new chosen representative Sumaika Kakunglu from Buganda, as a 'governor' from the British protectorate to my region Busoga in order to collect taxes. With it he was to establish administrative offices and political structures on behalf of the British government. They sold land of my region, which used to belong to the people as a whole.

The British chose a clan in the centre of Uganda over all the others to work for them. They used them as instruments to colonise other regions. They used indirect rule. The people in the centre, they said, are wiser and this created a breach in the society as a whole. Only in the centre they built good schools, big colleges, and hospitals (like Namilembe or Albert Cook hospital), and in the centre of the Mengo district was the home of the king. All new good things were there. The rest of the country got nothing, apart from one bridge that connects the centre to the east. But this was not built for the good of people, only for the colonial goods, like the trains. They often said proudly that they built this bridge for us, however we were paying for it until 2005! We had to pay for everything that was built but they always acted as if they were giving presents. They also bragged about abolishing slave trade, but they used forced labour to build the things we had to pay for - it killed many and was very badly paid. Still people were and are happy about the hospitals. In school we only learn about the positive side of colonial-

ism: the hospitals and the termination of certain diseases, the schools and western education, but nothing about the cheating, forced labour, violent treatments and the oppression of native language and culture. The downsides of colonization are not taught. In fact they do not teach African history at all, but mostly European success stories.



Bino at a demonstration. Photo: Andrea Linss

### **Imagine a life without protest**

I cannot imagine a life without protest. There are too many problems still to be solved.

I understood the system we were living in in Uganda, I felt that things are not ok. Why else should I come to Germany? And then I come to Germany and find the same - things are not ok in this society. They say one thing and do another. The democracy that is being praised so highly is not practiced in reality. So I have to raise my voice again and say: Hey, this is a serious issue, can we please join hands and

change it? If in Germany everything was 'alles klar', why are people on the streets - protesting? Or homeless? It means that Germany is not 100% alles klar.

Practical awareness is the root of ideological change. That is why we put up the tents outside - to make the population see the problems in their own society.

The so-called supporters are aware of these problems already and are grateful for our presence and energy. And this 'give and take' is real solidarity. It always gives me power, when people are able to identify and criticize the problems constructively. Those who are conservative refuse to see and make us suffer. They support global capitalism without much criticism. If you confront them directly, they say: "No, but we do criticize it!" And then they vote for a chancellor who is very good at putting financial strain on other societies while not seeing the consequences strongly enough.

If I was not here now I would have continued my protest in Uganda. I had started it and I would not have stopped so easily. But for sure, I would be in jail now. Despite all the problems - being here saved me. It gives me power and security, even though I do not have a legal right to stay. Still, just being here, I feel safe, I am at work.

If everything would have turned out like I thought during my first visit in Turmstrasse:

I would still be a human rights activist. Mainly I would be active for the LGBTIQ campaign in Uganda. I am active for the LGBTIQ community here, but it is complicated because it creates trouble with other refugees who disapprove of that community. Therefore I am kind of fighting on two fronts.

Furthermore I would campaign to uncover the injustices of the old and new colonial crimes. This is happening grad-

ually with the African Refugee Union. More information can be found in the manifesto that can be downloaded [here](#). In better circumstances, naturally I would have extended my studies in textile design. I would have earned my living as a freelance artist or employed somewhere, or as a lecturer. I would have a flat of my own or with the person I love, and a small office. With my internship in the printing shop I am slowly going in this direction, and can combine it with the political protest.

### **Where is the carpet now?**

I believe it is still with General Mwondo. He has become a Pastor now - from the army directly into the church! He found religion, I lost it. He recognised me on facebook only after I explained the situation from back then in detail. All he said was “great”. Then I asked him about the carpet, but he did not reply to this question. That is why I think it is with him still.

But who knows, perhaps the president received the carpet, because in the year when I arrived in Germany he started supporting the textile factories as well as encouraging younger people to be more creative and learn crafts. He seems to understand now that young artists should develop their talents, and that they need support at the beginning.

I will continue to encourage the president. For example to support this practical initiative in Uganda: SAVE THE PEARLS OF AFRICA (SPA). ‘The Pearls’ stands for the children and young people. This started in 2007 with the aim of reaching out to the vulnerable children, financing their school education, providing Entrepreneurship skills and start up capital for small businesses. So that they can make a living and become independent. In addition SPA runs activ-

ities for improving the social well being of the youth in general. On the local level the organisation provides assistance for children from socially weak communities, but also aims to support children coming to Uganda as refugees from the war zones of Rwanda, Congo and Sudan. That was my only experience with refugees so far - they come to us because they have to, and we help them because they are here.

Without colonialism Uganda would be a great nation today. Because it has been one before the chiefs signed away their country in 1884 to Carl Peters of Germany (sent by Kaiser Wilhelm, grandson of Queen Victoria) and HM Martin Stanley of the United Kingdom: all after the initiative of Bismarck and the big conference in Berlin 1884/85. But more about that in the manifesto!

Now in Berlin, I am the living proof of the lasting effects of his politics until today and I am appealing to his successors - Frank Henkel, Thomas de Maizière and Angela Merkel - to stop neo-colonialism in all its forms, and to acknowledge the reasons why so many African refugees are coming to Europe and Germany today.

I weave more now, I write more now, but I still believe that a piece of art will not move them. The individuals of the society have to move them to change things. Thank you, reader.



Temporary banner made by Bino's friends in front of the embassy of Uganda, when he was summoned for identification, spring 2013.

## **Picture credits**

All photos private property of Patras Bwansi, and one photo at a demonstration by Andrea Linss.

**Lydia Ziemke**

**“I am pouring water into the sand.”**

**The paradoxes of helping**

**Mentally and physically**

When I heard about the violence and saw the videos of private security personnel mistreating individual refugees in the north-west of Germany, (<http://www.spiegel.de/panorama/justiz/nrw-wachleute-sollen-fluechtlinge-in-asylunt-erkunft-misshandelt-haben-a-994228.html>) a part of me was glad that through these physical tortures their constant mental mistreatments would also finally be transmitted widely to the public. The association comes quickly because as a theatre maker I seek to physicalise mental and emotional states on stage, in order to treat them metaphorically and thus build a visual narrative in addition to the verbal one. It was like that here: the physical harassments showed precisely what most refugees are going through mentally every day in Germany. On the floor, with bound hands and a boot against their neck - emotionally this is like the effect of sitting in badly equipped refugee homes for years without any idea of what the future brings. They do not dare to ask or plea as it might have a bad effect on their asylum case. So they have a stately-bureaucratic boot against their necks all the time. Sitting, as in the other video, next to a mattress full of vomit with the command to lie in it - emotionally that means to be permanently sick, disgusted, powerless, humiliated and fearful because the reality here is so very different from their expectations. The dangerous travel here they describe as bearable because the dream image of a just and free state was glimmering on the horizon. As absolutely unbear-



able they describe the limbo of the asylum process, being tangled up in arbitrary, impenetrable, foreign language bureaucracy that liquidates their future in front of their eyes. Vomited dreams that stink, dry up and vanish.

During all processes, in all the paperwork, in each conversation it is being communicated without doubt that, as a human being, they are worth less than: the policeman they first encounter, the woman in the Asylum office, everyone else in the street, the refugee with the “eligible reasons”, the Minister of the Interior, the security guard. This is institutionalized psychological torture in its most basic form. The consequences are invisible, individually varied but always cruel. A feeling of self-worth, planning a future, sustaining a love life, in short - living - requires first practical, material basic care, and secondly, just as important, a mental, emotional stability. But even the initial material basis offered to them is of such shockingly bad quality that many regret having left their homeland in the first place. Psychological stability or future perspectives are never even mentioned in the process. Their expectations and the reality they find here differ so widely that an all-encompassing psychological treatment is necessary in order to enable a positive integration for the people, be it short or long-term. The experiences here come on top of everything they experienced at home or on the way, and it creates an enormous pressure on everyone.

It starts with the entry to Germany. Stemming from the times of the October Revolution and the Nazi rule, when a lot of political refugees were moving inside Europe, the logic of the German asylum system is over a hundred years old. It is out of date, as today other reasons of seeking refuge exist, and the asylum systems in all of Europe should adapt.

That would only be logical and is still very far away from the more progressive question of rethinking the whole concept of closed borders and full freedom of movement. The tumourous growth of global liberal markets and the constant longing of the World Bank for more ruthless business has grown over the last one hundred years as well. The effects of that are the stories with which many people arrive here.

Depending on the political mood, certain groups of refugees are being privileged during the asylum application process on the grounds of the situation in their countries - as for example the Syrians in the years since 2012, but first and foremost those who are being excepted officially via Lebanon. Through an elaborate process those are being integrated directly into a living space and job in Germany depending on their education and profession. This goes for very few people relative to the overall number, and it does not negate the equal claim to such treatment by all the others.

For most refugees who come to Germany, among them all the other Syrians, the journey is long and very dangerous. The asylum claiming process they walk into is very confusing. But because very simplified information leaks to them before they arrive a culture of lying has developed. The people do not know why, but they are told by fellow refugees or supporters that they need to do or say this and that but certainly not that and this, in order to be recognized, in order to “qualify” as a political refugee. In the present climate it also leads to some non-Syrians to say that they are Syrians. These lies are painful first and foremost for those having to lie. They are forced to disavow themselves in order to fit into an obviously flawed system, which seeks to criminalise them. That is the first boot-kick in the neck and it erodes any mutual trust from the outset. But the individual

reasons for seeking refuge have not changed. Even if this reason is an “eligible individual political persecution in the home country”, the system will prevent in most cases that it can be “proved correctly”.

My own sensitization carries on in my work with Patras, or rather: Bino. In the autumn of 2012 I had had my first appointment with him. Back then, when I got to the information tent in Oraniensquare, I was shocked to realise that I could not distinguish the African men. Luckily he found me, read the panic in my face and laughed it away. After that I had the opportunity of learning to ‘see’ them each individually. With a thus sharpened sight I tried to be more observant and productive. But it was not that easy.

### **An experience**

He says his name is A. He says he was sexually assaulted in Oraniensquare - the place in Berlin where the thin walls of the tents are supposed to give a sense of community and communal protection against everything else. It is midnight, we are standing in the street, friends in a large flat share nearby agree. In their flat on the 6th floor he narrates horrific periods of suffering in different places - Greek neo Nazis without any inhibitions, Hungarian prisons that only release those who are close to death in order to avoid scandal, and cold of all kinds on the streets of Germany - after six years he speaks nearly perfect German. He saw many people die. When we meet he is planning to reopen his rejected asylum case: with the lawyer I recommend, just to see what might be possible.

On the balcony he says, as other guests of this flat share before him, that return is not an option. Not only because of the programmatic violence of the Moroccan police and the

drug mafia, but also just because this most important part of life, youth, has been invested in this adventure, this test, this rebellion against what had really been in store for him. And because his mother had told him so. Because she had said every night at the harbor: “Go down there, under the big lorries and hold on fast.” Europe equals Paradise. Since the lorries are being checked with body-warmth detectors, he has tried several times on a boat. On Facebook he showed me friends who drowned during those attempts.

*The challenge was to listen and to just believe him. To imagine illegal life in Berlin. Of course I wanted to help in this concrete situation and so the inner barriers of caution, antipathy and tiredness were overruled. Some things were realistic and good: paying the lawyer, getting all old files together, and retracing the steps of the initial application. What else was possible practically? Money of course, a limited amount, a month-long ticket for public transport, putting him in contact with people for potential housing and medical aid. The bigger challenge: the human interaction and my own limits.*

He demands friendship. Above all else. For once not to talk about the court case, the files, the police or the drugs. But rather simply watch a film together. Cook together. Not always having to ask for something, making silly jokes, wanting to drive fast cars, admiring each others' clothes. Such close contact reveals the contrast painfully: we have the right and he does not have the right to decide where and how he wants to live. But I have the right to decide where he cannot live. The ‘right’, in the sense Hannah Arendt used it, “as a system of relations in which my actions and opinions count rather than my origin.” This is a quote from her essay “We refugees” which was published in 1943 in the Jewish *Menorah Journal*. I live in a firm relation to a society, he is

constantly negated by this society. Seeing this, I experience first hand what it means for his body and soul to be declared a criminal here in Berlin, and to spend the day not by simply living but by operating under the radar, and organizing a legal surfacing somehow and not to go mad because everyone around him is in fact simply living. His eyes are trained to maintain a forced normality and lightness - he attempts only to be seen as “one of us”. He has become a brilliant artist of adaption and survival. These eyes glow brightly in conversation before they slip down again into a tearful staring down left. Not to be able to be himself, being forced to be “invisible and useless”, Hannah Arendt again, eats him up from the inside, but his youthful energy is rebelling against this negating stately power. This energy that was able to rescue him from the drug mafia simply evaporates in orderly Germany. He is one of countless young people whose energy evaporates in the limbo of the asylum system. What strength of character is required to stay focused in this situation! In his case the mind has to be numbed periodically and thus the body erodes more and more and thus exclusion becomes more manifest.

So what effect might my solidarity have? It seems obvious to defer my own needs. I attempt to find time for briefings of the situation and for accompaniment to the lawyer because he is very afraid of police controls, furthermore to help financially where it seems right, i.e. pay the pizza and the S-Bahn.

*Would a friendship have developed under “normal” circumstances? Was it in fact only a mixture of guilt and emotional blackmail? I sought to see him as little as possible as a refugee and to treat him as normal as possible within the framework. Was that a useful approach? I was very uncom-*

*fortable throughout, mental stomach cramps. I thought it would pass, but then it was clear: one has to clearly mark the limits. To know the limits and stay inside them. And constantly question what is realistic and what has to be denied. Not only for my well being but also out of respect for him.*

The attempt of a partial integration into social life, the invitation to parties, the sharing of mind-widening experiences in the cultural programs - exhibitions, premieres - fails. My offer to stay one night in our spare room he accepts but it goes wrong. Because as soon as a kind of normality emerges, he demands more of it. The realization of how far he has come away from it makes him very angry. And so it seems like treachery to him when we want to close our door. The assumption that he would also appreciate his privacy is only arrogant to him: it is not about privacy - he simply does not want to be alone. Neither is there any sexual tension. Apparently this is his smallest deficit. It is more about big-sisterly affection. That is what he calls me: "sister". Uncertainty on all sides. So it is an evening characterized by manipulation, emotional blackmail and potential auto-violence. Any feeble trust is lost. If I ask him to leave, he says, he will hand himself over to the police. Provoke them, commit a crime, that way he would have a warm place to stay the night at least. Attention deficit paired with paranoia.

*The special problem in A's case: drugs. They are the motor for the painful cycles, unfortunately accompanied by the doubtful kudos to have been his motivation to seek refuge in the first place - the hashish mafia as well as the police in the mountains of Morocco. The addiction poisoned everything and especially tentative friendship. Money, pleas, promises, more and more unrealistic ideas, paranoia, growing despair and the youthful energy that keeps breaking through at times*

*with the conviction to be able to do anything, always sobered up hard by the omnipresent injustice. Victim-Tactics. But his longing for quitting and a therapy were genuine. So I should not treat him as a refugee, but definitely as an addict.*

To adhere to my limits is essential. And to act in the context of a group rather than alone. He projects all the injustices on to the person in front of him, which makes him ashamed at the same time, but he cannot deal well with groups either. Alltogether too much suspicion and too much forced-upon independence.

The realization is liberating and frustrating: I cannot do this. I could hide him temporarily, but I cannot create a situation in which his day is more normal and the future more tangible. I would feel guilt and he would not gain long-term material or emotional stability.

*We both found ourselves in an unnatural situation. I was only able to hide him. Only the lawyer could find a way into legality. We experienced directly what Hannah Arendt postulated in her essay mentioned above: "Human compassion can only take hold, when the refugees have been given legal justice."*

The big surprise: his story in Morocco, in Europe, in Germany is only partially true, it is definitely not complete and the names are invented. And then suddenly he is gone, to a different country. The lawyer had worked a lot but in vain. Later he told me what his file revealed. That the boy, whose name we still do not know, had had a student visa for a first entry to Germany and had only been one language exam away from a longer-term permission to stay. What had happened? Did the organization go wrong? Were drugs in the way? Did he actually have enough school education to study here? Or was the student visa just the entry ticket? Was the

bureaucracy too much for both sides? For me it makes no difference that he lied to us. The suffering he experiences is the same, the permanent apprehension and confusion is further explained by the lies. All this illustrates his desperate attempts to get his feet onto the forbidden soil. It also said in the file, that his family members already in Germany wanted to be disassociated from him. Two of his brothers are married to German women in the south and seem to earn well with drugs. Both those things A. always rejected: no more drugs and marriage only for love. Naturally that also inspired my trust in him. “I want to build a life!” He always said. “Like this I pour water in the sand.”

After fleeing on to another country my phone rings, and he tries to pressure me into sending money, including threats, no doubt in cold turkey. I simply decline this now, without any hesitation. I only provide the contact details of the lawyer, I can not do anything else. But the caller is being eroded; the begging feeds the self-hatred from which he seeks relief in the drugs. A vicious circle. And it gets less and less likely that he will be a functioning member of society, of any society.

Whether he would stay here for long? I asked him. “Yes, but only as the basis for security, education and work”, he said and that he would travel a lot, and, of course, spend much time in the warmer weather of Morocco.

### **Actually seeing**

The gatherings of the closemouthed “people” with the long acronyms (PEGIDA, a right wing political movement that started in Germany in the winter of 2014 and whose full name is “Patriot Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident”) encourage leading politicians who want to take



the “people” seriously, to say publicly: the good ones can stay, the rest (who cannot prove their potentially “eligible” case) have to go.

Those governing would implement well their responsibility if they assured the community (of voters) of their material wealth and safety in order that they can act freely emotionally and politically. But on the contrary, they strive to ensure the guidability of the people by way of exaggerated measures of safety procedures on a governmental level and by way of advertising to ensure inflated individualism on an economical level. Government and economy are cultivating the fear of people for their possessions. Like this, no widespread openness for others can thrive. Our social and cultural values are not re-examined and not practiced.

This makes it much easier to root the inner European strategy firmly in the people’s minds. That strategy is called: deterrence on all levels. The material basic care in Germany, which is obligatory by law, is only acceptable in quality in comparison with worse facilities in other European countries, and becomes a monstrous framing of the nightmare that is the psychological-emotional strain. The strategy is not working. It does not keep away but only produces broken people who are turned into what the system is accusing them off - being hard to integrate.

We forget that once our social and cultural values had to be established by way of protest and have to be constantly reclaimed and defended. But in fact we stand by while they are systematically denied and reduced. We stand by as long as the denial is not actively brought to our attention. In an interesting paradox they were brought to our attention, defended and fought for in the refugee protest at Oranienplatz in Berlin. The protesters help us seeing that the values would

be adhered to better not only once refugees are able to ask for asylum in dignity but once they can live and work during the assessment period which increases their chances. Their protest, which is demanding the practical implementation of the values, could help us take them more seriously again. The consequences of denying them include young Muslims joining ISIS from Germany, individual attacks within Europe, the numerous dead in the Mediterranean sea and in a larger sense the nationalistic movements in Europe. In retrospect I speculate more critically what was happening when A. went into a mosque and came out with lots of money and invitations to dinners. During the dinners he would be invited for political events and of course to more prayers. He was flattered back then, they were very polite to him, but he did not want to become more closely affiliated. God and politics had never worked for him, he said. That was lucky, since he had also experienced a lot of rejection, which had turned him aggressive, ill and easy to manipulate. There was a lot of undirected energy in him that could have easily been directed against us.

For this - that we see the denial of our values and can resist the consequences - many of those work hard, whom I met during my work with Bino. Among them the lawyer Inigo Valdenebro. He has too much work and seeks to reduce it by giving workshops about strategies of citizens aiding refugees in their dealings with officials and paperwork. (*Those interested can contact the publisher for details.*) Above all he seeks to expose the politically-polished fairy tale of Germany's generosity as such. According to him it has to be scrutinized and compared to reality. In his view the assumption that our political players are acting according to our wishes with regard to these values must be abandoned.

I test this assumption on my parents, hardworking doctors in Potsdam. They are often a measure for me to find out the general knowledge in the population about topics such as this. And they do think it's 'unbelievable' what they hear from me about the reality of the asylum system and its effect on the individuals: the damage of health due to bad living and eating conditions, the frustration and traumatization due to the long uncertain waiting periods, and suicides. In short, how refugees are being mistreated physically and mentally. Unbelievable in the sense of "not sensible", of "contrary to what is right" which they view as the basis not necessarily of our society but surely of our collective intelligence. They do not get this information from the state, like many others. Those moments unveil a progressive instability in society to me. In a society, that is not sure of itself anymore, neither materialistically nor ideologically, in a society, that, because of this instability, opts to kick refugees in the neck and into their vomit instead of treating them as equals.

At every opportunity I introduce my parents to Bino and other colleagues and somehow feel, it enables them to see those people, who happen to be refugees at the moment, not only as refugees. In them and still in me, Bino occasionally sees the panic and laughs it away.

## About Patras Bwansi

Bino Byansi Byakuleka, formerly known as Patras Bwansi, born in 1979 in Kebale, Uganda is a Textile Artist who currently lives in Berlin. He was engaged in the Orthodox Church Uganda from a young age and gained a certificate in Counselling/Trainign with the Focus on HIV and literacy. He studied Industrial Art and Design from the Buganda Royal Institute of Business and Technical Education Mengo in Kampala, Uganda. 2007 he accepted a scholarship to live and study Iconography at the St. Arsenios Monastery and School of Creative Art Ormylia in Thessaloniki, Greece. In 2010 August he became a refugee in Germany and spent almost two years in the refugee camp in Breitenburg near Passau in Bavaria. In August 2012 he started a protest tent in Passau Klostergarten and in October he joined the refugee protest camp in Berlin-Kreuzberg at Oranienplatz. Since then he is a full time political activist to change the asylum system in Germany and for LGBTIQ rights. In 2013 he founded the African Refugees Union (ARU) and in 2014 the campaign “WE ARE BORN FREE! MY RIGHT IS YOUR RIGHT!” which is aiming at refugees being intergrated increasingly in everyday life. In this context he gives many workshops in schools, universities and other institutions.

## About Lydia Ziemke

Lydia Ziemke, born 1978 in Potsdam, lives in Berlin. She studied Classics at the University of Edinburgh and was running the Gilded Balloon Studio Ensemble there for three years. Since 2006, after completing LAMDA's one-year directing Programme, she divided her time between London and Berlin as a freelance director and dramaturg. In 2009 she assisted Ramin Gray and Mark Ravenhill at the Royal Court Theatre, was directing and dramaturgical assistant at the Schaubühne, Berlin, took part in the International Forum of the Berliner Theatertreffen, and founded the international company suite42 with the piece LAND WITHOUT WORDS by Dea Loher, which toured internationally until 2013 and has recently been restaged by the company in German and French. 2010 Ziemke was the German recipient of the British Council Cultural Leadership scholarship and travelled in five arabic countries and theatre scenes. 2011-2014 the company produced plays by contemporary Arab writers for the Heimathafen Neukölln and since then cooperates with companies in Lebanon, Palestine and Morocco. Ziemke writes radio features, i.e. about the refugee protest movement on Oranienplatz in Berlin Kreuzberg for Deutschlandradio Kultur, and articles for regional and international magazines. German theatre critic Patrick Wildermann called her a "translator of the unspeakable" in the theatre magazine "Theater der Zeit". Since 2014 she curates and co-moderates the salon "ÜberMorgenLand" at the Radialsystem V, Berlin.

## About mikrotext

mikrotext is a digital publisher for short digital reading, founded in 2013 in Berlin. Publisher Nikola Richter is a member of the curatorial team of the Electric Book Fair, Germany's first ebook fair, and was awarded the Young Excellence Award of the Börsenblatt in 2014, the magazine of Germany's publishing association.

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## A Syrian blacksmith turned poet on Facebook



*What it is about:* About Saeed writes anecdotes, aphorisms, prose poems and commentary. About his mother, smoking, Facebook, love, and daily life during the violent Syrian conflict. Displaying a dark humor in sharing the absurdities of his life, he provides a different and more humane perspective on current events in his country than all the news and reports that usually reach us.

His postings in the Arab language have now gained a huge followership – this ebook makes them accessible in English and thus opens our eyes and mind for a free spirit from Syria. Saeed has also become renowned internationally. Excerpts from this ebook have for example been published in an avantgarde poetry collection by the New Museum in New York.

But don't let us convince you, have a look for yourself and discover a great young writer!

09 May, 2012, 12:25pm

Also, despite the civil war /

While my mother and I sit and smoke together, I tell her, “Mom, take a long drag, drag so deep you feel the smoke playing in your heart.”

My mom takes a drag and laughs happily. “Mom, tell me, you want to enter paradise right? Then repeat after me, ‘Fuck the Sunnis and the Shi’ites and the Christians, and the Druze, and the Jews, and the non-believers, and the Muslims...all of them.’”

My mom hesitates, looks at me, her eyes all red from the smoke, and she asks me, “But is it ok to say something like that?”

“Sure mom of course! Whats wrong with that?”

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*The Syrian Bukowski. (Aspekte, German TV channel ZDF)*

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*“For Those Who Are Still Asking Who Is Aboud Saeed.” Interview with Jennifer MacKenzie and Omar Andron for Coldfront Magazine <http://coldfrontmag.com/for-those-who-are-still-asking-who-is-aboud-saeed/>*

About Saeed: [The Smartest Guy on Facebook. Status Updates from Syria.](#) October 2013.

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