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The Chameleon Racism in Germany

I am living outside of Berlin in the county Brandenburg - in the midst of an idyllic UNESCO protected area - full of seemingly unspoiled forests, fields, moors, lakes, rivers, historical water channels and foremost what I love the most: these wide horizons. Hundreds of cranes land on the field behind my house which changes its face year by year from yellow (sunflowers) to red (poppy



flowers) or green (different sorts of grain)...here I am at my house "Ananda" (Ananda means "bliss" in Sanskrit), retreat center, Sufi home, home/refuge for the many, and cultural meeting point of the region, and of our International Dance Network.

Our nearest town Eberswalde, is an attractive meeting point of international students as it hosts a university for sustainable development which belongs to the German wide initiative "OPENMINDED HIGH SCHOOLS

AGAINST RACISM". The Finowgymnasium, the school my daughter Aisha had visited, belongs itself to a European network "Schools without Racism - Schools with Courage", where students actively research the mechanism of racism, work on solutions and create events for the region.

Despite the positive and future orientated education system Eberswalde has, the town become famous because of his former citizen Antonio Amadeu, a workman from Angola, who was beaten to death by youngsters because he was black. He was the first victim of racism in 1990 after the Berlin wall came down. His son, Antonio Amadeu Jr. has never met him, because he was born a few weeks after the death of his father. He still lives, together with his family, in our region and states that racist insults are part of his daily life.

Statistics show that its more dangerous for migrants to live in the East German area than in the West. When the wall came down the people here were promised to get "blossoming landscapes" and a prosperous future. These promises were not kept. Factories and businesses were closed, jobs were lost, hundreds of thousands of people moved to the West. High positions in politics, economics and justice were given to West Germans. The average salaries of the East Germans are still much less than in the West. The frustration of the population which feels betrayed is mirrored in rageful demonstrations against the successes of antiracist, rightwing groups, movements and parties. The

rightwing activists succeeded indeed to create new Nazi structures. At our local elections the extreme rightwing party AFD had the second highest vote, and the government party of Angela Merkel only reached 13.5%.

There are far more easier places to choose to live in and I have seen and lived at the most beautiful places on this planet. The historic vicarage I made my home here was built 1871 and stands historically in the Lutheran tradition as a meeting point of culture, social activity, community-building center, home for the needed, and culmination point of political resistance. Despite all unexpected challenges I made it my home. "House Ananda" has become my favorite place on this planet and it finally helped my globetrotter heart to settle down.

My work has been planted in the region since 2002. It started as a retreat- and international sufi center where i could host my trainings and events for the dances of universal peace, where colleagues and friends from all over the world have been warmly welcomed and received. Right from the start I founded together with the local church "Golzow's Children's Culture Club" and since then have been the main and mostly only provider of events for the village, slowly developing into a network with the regional schools, kindergartens and pedagogic High schools to become a training center for students.

Especially in East German rural areas like ours, Nazis are dominating the youth culture as many youth clubs are under their guidance. Nazi-outfits, Nazi-symbols, Nazi-music is mainstream. Hip-Hoppers are mostly the only visible anti culture. They stand for tolerance, multicultural aspects, joyful living. Nazis can only be strong in presence and appearance where other youth cultures are weak. That's why one of my main concentrations in the village is connecting with the young generation. Together with our young teamer Arya, coming from a Kurdish background, we established a hip-hop dance group and we are a part of **BAFF (Bands auf festen Füßen) - means Bands on Firm Feet**. Kids from the regional refugee groups come together with village kids to make music in bands, and they perform twice a year in the parc or in December in the church.

All bands and dance groups rehearse in the church of our neighbor village or in front of our churches (reminding me of the vision of our beloved spiritual grandmother Ruth St. Denis). The kids initiated a secondhand shop with clothes for free for refugees and they have a self-organised youth parliament where strategies and initiatives against local racism are worked out. In the beginning our priest and the kids have been attacked several times. At all public concerts there are undercover security police men for their protection. Still there are some rightwing extremists in my neighbor village. But they have no power anymore. More or less every child over the last 20 years has been part of this BAFF Project and by being part of it they realize that the world is much more colorful and wider as the Nazis present it.

Please join me in watching their vibrant engagement here and enjoy with me their team song:
BAFF: <https://youtu.be/32BKEosseBs>

*"Us...together...a few arms are sufficient to carry you... helping hands you cannot beat...
open doors...we are determined...this is our homeland...but everybody is welcome...
we are engaged... taking care of one another...you are not alone...come follow us
...more human rights...more righteous humans...be united...open the borders...music in the church...dance at
the altar...on firm feet...together we are strong...tolerance, diversity, family, friendship...everybody is welcome
here...all together...we are engaged...taking care of one another...you are not alone...come follow us"*

- lyrics Damian Davis, music: Uwe Kolberg

My house “Ananda” is a social and non-commercial orientated place of living, learning and serving offers jobs for people with migration background - war refugees, long-term unemployed persons or the ones with handicap.

International guests and teachers come from all regions of the world bring diversity, colours, individualism, inspiration and creativity into this little village and leave if they have something to offer an impact. I take them to schools and kindergartens, offer garden cafes, family events, open evenings and more. The invited press supports my work here with engaged articles about what’s going on.

Thus it comes that my dear friend Rabbi Yehoshua Witt, a close disciple of Shlomo Carlebach, sits under the hazel bush in my garden blessings kids, surrounded by the horses of the local horse club and the parents having their coffee and cake and my Maori colleagues visit our village bakery and sing their songs to the customers and I thank our baker for the heaps of cake he generously sponsors for our events.



Over the years I learned to take my stand here. Why here?? I guess the land of my ancestors was calling me. I had and still have this call and I need to follow it. I had not been prepared for what I had to face here: My neighbor to the right said: “Make sure your gardener is not working in front of the house. He should not be seen by the villagers”. He talked about Obi from Nigeria. My neighbor to the left who hosted parties for a gang of young Nazis said: “I tried to take the boys to the open-air concert but I could not get through all the roads that were blocked and that was nerve-wracking.” He wanted to take them to an open-air event of a Nazi band in the neighbor village where more than 1,000 guests were expected.



A guest teacher of a therapeutic training approached me: “Do not misunderstand me, I am leftwing and liberal. But I think it’s better you ask your coworker to take a leave while we work here with our group. Because of his background he might be disturbed by our work”. He talked about my teamer Mohammed, a 21-year old refugee from Syrian war with Muslim background.

I had to learn to live with skepticism, criticism, racism and antisemitism in various forms. I was threatened. I was attacked. I was fearful. I was in panic. I felt helpless. I had to call the police and realize that they were of no help. Several times I had to ask the Federal criminal police office which is focusing on racism crimes.

I am still here. I will stay here. My place is known and loved by people all over the world who keep coming back. Most of them have no idea about the background or what this house has been going through. It calmed down over the years and it's much easier/easy now.

I do not believe it's about endurance or courage in the first place. It's about the path. The call and to be true to yourself. Recognizing this voice within, through all veils, distractions and emotional upheavals. This call is the motor of my life. My backup is my chosen spiritual family. I feel you all standing with me. Sometimes some of you come through my door and we embrace. My support comes with the teachers I love who have been guiding me along since. My tools are my spiritual practices. My resource is the land, my land, my garden and all the fields, forests and places of water surrounding me. My nourishment and ongoing joy is my active prayer and vibrant dialogue in close friendship and love with Jesus and Mother Mary. My one and only reality were all worlds meet and where i connect to all my resources is the silent cave of my heart where i connect with highest consciousness which for me is named Arunachala SIVA before it enters the realm of undefined blissful oneness. There only is what there is only. The breath at this moment in unity.

Racism comes in many forms and faces. Sometimes it is easy to recognize in its stupidity and brutality, sometimes it is hidden and manipulative and asking for high awareness, self-criticism and unlearning of old habits or views. It has a variety of clothing and behaves like a chameleon, adapting to its environment to survive.

Let's all learn to hold our stand, recognize what our call is and what needs to be done.

May GodEss bless and protect us all.

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PS. In our capital city Berlin, 45 minutes away from me, you find a tube station named "Mohrenstraße" which recently was renamed with graffiti into "George Floyd Street". "Mohr", (let's use "M." instead) is a discriminating racist term for a black person and goes back to colonialism-times. Around 1700 this former "Sand Street" was given its specific name as close by "M." lived. We have no given proofs if they were military musicians or servants of the German king. But it is sure that they did not come by free will from West Africa. They were slaves.

The politician Yonas Endrias in 2004 founded the initiative "Colonialism and Racism in Public Street Images" which led into a protest movement consisting of 20 more initiatives and independent people. They engage to get rid of colonial terror signs in the public and rather, to rename streets related to black resistance fighters. In some cases, they succeeded, in many others the Berlin local committees refuse. Like at the "M. Street" station.

If you get off this tube station at “M. Street” you will come to the office of the “Representative of the German Government for Migration, Refugees and Integration”. One way of dealing with this sarcastic truth is through humor: some Berlin people renamed the “Mohrenstreet” into “Möhrenstrasse” which means “Carrot Street”. I wonder what happened to the graffiti in the meantime.