

3. Report by Lia Büttner and Benedikt Poser

After Benedikt flew to Germany, the school holidays began and there was nothing left to do at the secondary school of Gbetagbo. Lia decorated the Christmas tree at home with Dassi and set up the nativity scene, which made her personally feel very good, because she really got into the Christmas mood and could feel this "Christmas magic" for a short time. Because they found "real" bread in Calavi in the Super U, they thought that there was nothing better than bread and butter on Christmas Eve. This perfect Christmas dinner will always be remembered by Lia. The next day, the bread dumplings that had actually been planned were cooked.

On December 27th and 28th, Lia went to the Weloveya Festival with some friends, where they danced and sang a lot. The festival was in Cotonou on the "Place de L'Amazone" and really big and modern with very famous artists. Unfortunately, you had to stay awake until 4 a.m. for Omah Lay and Rema's show, which led to the occasional stumbling over sleeping fans on the lawn. For the big acts, however, all energy was gathered again and the audience was enthusiastic.

In the days before New Year's Day, Lia was able to help with the final bill in the office by numbering the invoices. Faridath, a girl from the sponsorship program, also visited over the holidays, so that four of us could start the new year. Dassi, Faridath and Lia went to Bruno's apprentices on January 2nd to listen to music together and dance a lot. That was a lot of fun, but Lia was a bit homesick over Christmas and New Year's Eve, which sometimes depressed her mood a bit.



Lia was then in Agbagoulé with Dassi and a few other people for almost a week to build the school garden there. She became the "Apprentis Maçon", but luckily she was allowed to take a lot of breaks. There Lia really got to know the village life and the work on the construction site, which was a great experience for her and she had a lot of

fun. Sleeping on a real bed and having running water is very pleasant, but there she could realize that it is very easy (for a certain time) to get along without these things. To her the work on the construction site was wonderful,

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as you could see exactly what you had achieved in one day and not just sat at your desk. Within six days the garden was already built.

Benedikt was still in Germany at the beginning of January and flew back on January 8th. Arriving in Benin was overwhelming, if not in the same way as when he first arrived. The first time it was the strangeness and uncertainty that overwhelmed you and the second time, on the other hand, it was more the heat, which is contrary to the winter cold in Germany. Christian and some other friends picked him up at the airport. Benedikt had brought a salami and rye bread for Christian, which he was very happy about. The next morning, Benedikt took care of all the important



things and started to set up chairs and tables with Dietmar and Roswita in Adjagbo. It was a nice feeling for him to see all his friends from Benin again. In the evening he went to Ouidah for the Vodun Days. On the first evening on the festival grounds, many live acts could be heard, from local artists of the music genre Afrobeats to local anthems. The next morning in Ouidah, an interdivided atmosphere of foreign rhythms, unknown smells and soundscapes of various languages could be heard on the one hand, and on the other hand, one perceived a city that was uncharacteristically flooded with tourists and commercialized by the government.

On Thursday, Lia went back to Golo so that she could go directly to Ouidah for the Vodun Festival the next day. On her first day there, unfortunately, she couldn't watch much anymore, because most of the program was already over. But she could see how Ouidah was dressed up for this festival and all the tourists. That didn't surprise her very much, but she did impress her. Afterwards we went to the big stage on the beach in the evening together with many friends, where traditional music was played and we met many other volunteers from Togo and



Ghana. The next morning we went to the "Fort français" to see the "Zangbeto", watched various dances in other places and went to the "Forêt sacré" in the

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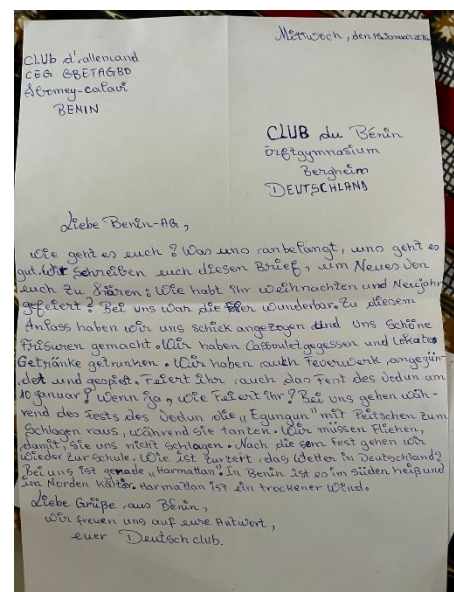


afternoon, where a friend was able to explain the background of the dances to us. You got a lot of new impressions of Vodun, but unfortunately you usually don't know what you're looking at and what meaning is behind it.

The next week, Lia applied for the visa for her intermediate seminar in Ghana and we wrote a letter to the students of the Erftgymnasium with our German club.

We want to continue this correspondence regularly so that the intercultural exchange can also take place directly between the students and the school classes.

On Thursday we were at our first school opening of the Actions de Solidarité in Agbagoulé. This was a wonderful experience, as we were finally able to participate in the celebration and saw the happy students, teachers, principals and parents. For Lia, the experience was twice as great because she had a lot to do with some



students on the construction site a week before. That's why she came across familiar happy faces that day. In the evening, Lia drove further north with Dr. Kemmerling, Benoît, Jean and Erika to visit two finished school projects in Ouaké, the construction site in Tchalahadé and the "Dames de la beurre de karité" in Assode, while Benedikt drove to Sokponta with Dietmar and Roswita to deliver computers for the learning center and sports equipment for the women's soccer team. Both of us were assigned to translate for the German guests.

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Lia found the work of the women in Assode very impressive and there is real potential in this association. Shea butter would be worth a lot in Germany or Europe, as it is 100% natural and handmade. Benoit, Dr. Kemmerling and Lia drove to Savalou in the evening to look at the grounds for the new school buildings in Kpakpavissa very early the next morning.



With that, they ended their sightseeing tour and drove back to Golo-Djigbé.

On Sunday, Dassi offered us to watch "Egungun" in Calavi, because Lia hadn't seen them in Ouidah. Since they were already whipping people when we arrived, we quickly fled to a roof to watch the spectacle safely from above. It was worth it, and you immediately captured this excited and at the same time quite anxious mood.



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The next week there were exams at the CEG Gbetagbo, which is why Benedikt and Lia helped Dietmar and Roswita with the table assembly at CEG 4 in Aïtchédji. That was also fun and the students worked very well. As translators, we were also able to help a lot there, because you often don't get far with only English. In the afternoon we always drove past the EPP Aïtchédji to look at the construction site there.



On Friday, Lia went to the Via intermediate seminar. She made a stopover in Lomé over the weekend, where she met some other volunteers. They lazed around during the day, but went to a very cool reggae bar one night. On Sundays, she went to Accra, where the intermediate seminar is taking place. Lia immediately noticed a very strong difference to Togo and Benin, even if she can't really describe why, apart from the higher prices. Her everyday seminar consists of a lot of



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exchange of experiences, self-reflection, the role in the deployment site, colonial continuities and many other things. It's very good to be able to exchange so much and to have a break from working on the beach together. Once a queer-feminist collective "Drama Queens" from Accra visited and they were able to ask questions. Their work was incredibly impressive and interesting, as they still have to struggle a lot with rejection in Ghana and as queer people they always have to pay attention to their safety. Lia will stay at the intermediate seminar until February 2 and will be able to make a lot of contacts for her upcoming Togo-Ghana trip.

On the day of Lia's departure, Benedikt set up Antoinette's photocopy shop together Madame Toda, Dietmar and Roswita. In the evening he was out in Cotonou with friends for the first time since he arrived and the next day he learned to bake bread together with Roswita so that we can make our own rye bread in the future. On Monday evening, Dietmar and Roswita were taken to the airport by Christian, Benoit and Benedikt.



In the house, where many people had previously lived for several weeks, it suddenly became empty again. But the calm did not last long, because Benedikt had started the first independent attempt to make Igname Pilée with peanut sauce. Christian acknowledged the attempt with a simple "The Igname Pilée was good, only the sauce was too thick.", which can be seen as a compliment. Benedikt was obliged to cook for everyone for a week, as we had always eaten together the weeks before. On Wednesday, he started to go to the school classes of the CEG Gbetagbo to inform them about the school festival and the associated charity run.



The idea of helping another school in northern Benin as CEG Gbetagbo and building classrooms there was received as very positive, of course also under the mantra of patriotism. In the German Club, we dealt this time with the comparison of winter in Germany and the same period in Benin. The students gave free rein to their imagination and thought about what sledding looks like exactly. On Thursday,

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Benedikt corrected the students' work and was pleasantly surprised. On Friday, he unfortunately had to recover from food poisoning. For Benedikt, being in Benin for the second time is more difficult, as he realizes how big the difference between Germany and Benin is in many ways. Benedick would not recommend anyone to take a break in Germany during their stay abroad, as it is much more difficult to both let go of Germany and mentally adjust to Benin again.