

THE PERSECUTION OF A WORD AND A CALL FOR ACTION
23RD JUNE; 2007; 2PM CENTRAL TRAIN STATION
NATIONWIDE DEMONSTRATION IN DESSAU

I hadn't realized that they even took away our right to call the most gigantic deportation in the history of humanity by its name. And that only because the slave traders, their descendants and their historians neither at that time nor at the present day used the word deportation or authorised its use to describe their practices.

Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Uribe

The Persecution of a Word

Those familiar with the brutality and horror of the apartheid regime can picture all too well the scenario: a Black man is tied at his hands and feet to a fireproof mattress in a holding cell at a police station. Hours later the man is dead, his body burnt like charcoal, the upper regions of his fingers burnt completely away. The official thesis: suicide.

On the 7th of January, 2005, Oury Jalloh, a human being converted into an eternal refugee, died under exactly these conditions in the city of Dessau, Germany. On that very same day the life of another African was extinguished: Layé Konde, who ten days before had chemicals forced down his throat by the police who were looking for possible drugs, had his life taken from him after not coming out of the coma induced by the police action. The number of police sentenced for the two deaths until today: 0.

Since that time, diverse refugee, migrant and anti-racist organizations have joined together to fight for truth, justice and restitutions. Under the slogan OURY JALLOH DAS WAR MORD, we organized ourselves in the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh.

Our words, however, provoke fear and subsequent persecution on the part of the authorities. According to their logic, without knowing the exact incidents surrounding the events of the 7th of January, it is not a crime to describe the death of Oury Jalloh as self-murder (i.e. suicide), but it is a crime to describe it as a murder.

The power of language, the power of definition is decisive and a fundamental pillar of totalitarian—and colonial—power. It is used to silence opposition and to maintain hegemony over words and thoughts.

We must, however, never forget what past experiences have taught us; how often and ruthlessly genocide was committed so that all traces of the truth would be eliminated together with its victims, such as happened in Europe during the time of Nazi terror and with the separation of mothers from their children during the time of slavery, for example.

But, as the executioners, their descendants and their historians have been forced to repeatedly recognize: no matter how many are killed, no matter how far those in power are willing to go in order to fulfill their objectives, you can never eliminate a collective memory—and no oppression can last forever.

Selective Memory and the Non-Persecution of the Truth

That Justice is a blind goddess
is a thing to which we Blacks are wise:
Her bandage hides two festering sores
that once perhaps were eyes

Aimé Césaire

On the 27th of March, 2007, court proceedings finally began against two of the police officers implicated in the death of Oury Jalloh. Andreas Schubert and Hans-Ulrich März have been accused of negligence in the death of Oury Jalloh. Within the formal accusation presented by the state prosecutor—the only entity allowed to formulate such an accusation in Germany—neither racism nor any other possible cause of death play a role other than the official version: suicide. Likewise, the broken nose and broken middle-ear discovered in the second, independently financed autopsy, are not considered within the trial-based evidence permitted by the court (in other words, these facts are not even considered when the judge is to make his decision).

Until now, the trial has been nothing more than a confirmation of our deepest mistrust. For over two years we have consistently denounced the cover-up and the intentional attempt to win time. As expected, every single police officer

or related state employee who has been called as a witness has shown remarkable coincidences between each other: all of them have a perfect memory—except that which involves the death of Oury Jalloh. There is, however, one exception: all seem to remember clearly that Andreas Schubert, accused of negligence for not having reacted in time, was swift in his response of running down into the basement, where Oury Jalloh had been chained down—and burnt to death—to a fireproof mattress.

The issue of racism, however, has remained just as absent from the trial as has any word of truth spoken on the part of the police. On only two occasions was racism made an issue: Once, as an African man was forced out of the courtroom for shouting „What have we ever done to you to deserve this,“ as the racist protocol between Andreas Schubert and the doctor who ordered Oury Jalloh to be chained, Dr. Blöda, was read aloud, and, secondly, as an African man was ordered by the judge to sit as the accused and apologize for his behavior or be accused of allegedly having offended a Nazi-party member.

Additionally, at the middle of May a scandal appeared (and disappeared just as quickly) in the national media: Hans-Christoph Glombitza, acting vice-director of the police in Dessau, was recorded in a conversation with members of the German state security office in which he said, referring to crimes committed by right-wing extremists, that, “one doesn't have to see everything.”

Adding that the federal government programs to combat Nazi crimes and thought were, “really just for the art galleries anyway,” he pointed out that there are ways “to write reports slowly.” Citing a lack of evidence of a crime having been committed, the leading state prosecutor in Dessau, Volker Bittermann, has already refused to open investigations.

For their part, the police have seen the trial as an opportunity to intimidate and persecute members of the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh. At least one hundred police—including dogs—have been set to surround and occupy the court inside and out.

Activists have not only been subject to massive security controls and the photocopying of their identity papers, but also direct persecution, as described above. Additionally, civil-clothed police have tried to control and intimidate members of the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh.

Why we must fight—not just protest or question

“My tongue shall serve those miseries which have no tongue, my voice the liberty of those who found themselves in the dungeons of despair.”
Aimé Césaire

We have neither de ceased in our struggle for truth and justice nor in the conviction that only we will decide which words we will use. The fight for truth and justice in the case of Oury Jalloh—like that of Dominique Koumadio, shot to death by the police in Dortmund on April 14, 2006—is a question of survival. The arrogance and lack of human understanding—especially toward non-whites—within the police is exactly that which permits Oury Jalloh to die in such a vile manner. Moreover, the fact that it is so systematic and historic is one of the many reasons why we have and will continue to speak of murder.

This goes far beyond a question of simple protest or questioning official versions of Oury's, Laye's or Dominique's deaths. On the contrary, it is as much a question of self-determination as it is the rage against so much perpetual brutality.

We cannot and will not let ourselves to continue functioning within this murderous normality, accomplices of our own death and persecution. By refusing to speak out and by silencing our own beliefs, we are only contributing further to the duration of our common suffering.

We refuse. We refuse to obey. We refuse to continue being a part of our own oppression. We refuse to remain silent, much less be silenced. That time is over.

**MOBILIZE AND COME TO DESSAU ON THE 23RD OF JUNE!
ORGANIZE GROUPS IN YOUR CITIES TO ACCOMPANY THE COURT
PROCEEDINGS ON SPECIFIC DAYS!**

RISE UP AND BREAK THE SILENCE!

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