

THE PERSECUTION OF A WORD AND A CALL FOR ACTION

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NATIONWIDE DEMONSTRATION IN DESSAU –

Power feeds itself on fear. Without the demons it produces it would lose its source of justification, impunity and wealth. [...] Fear confuses and deviates us. Without the services which power provides, that which is evident would indeed become evident: in reality, power looks at itself in the mirror and terrorizes us with the stories of what it sees. "Danger! Danger!" Shout the dangerous.

Eduardo Galeano

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 Black man and African was extinguished as a result of police detention; 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.

The Persecution of a Word

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-Urbe

Since that time until today, 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, actions, demonstrations and informational events have been carried out throughout Germany and in countries like Colombia, Ecuador, Guinea, Togo, Spain and Italy.

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. Nevertheless, we have neither decried in our struggle for truth and justice nor in the conviction that only we will decide which words we will use.

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. This is just one of many reasons why it is so vital to defend our beliefs and the words we choose to express them.

For those who so loudly and falsely preach freedom of opinion it should be no problem that we express ourselves freely. But they do have a problem with it—and they always have.

That is exactly the reason so many of people who fought for their freedom from colonial dependence were silenced to death; this is why they killed and murdered so many people such as Stephen Biko, Rosa Luxemburg, Salvador Allende, Ken Saro Wiwa and many, many others—past and present.

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. Today, we still remember fascism, slavery, and what was done to Oury Jalloh. In this manner, no matter what they do, both our words and our struggle continue.

The Persecution of a Human-Being

“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

If there is any one person to thank for the struggle in remembrance of Oury Jalloh coming as far as it has—even to the extent of forcing there to be a trial against at least two of the police involved in Oury Jalloh's death—it has been Mouctar Bah. A friend of Oury Jalloh's and the international

spokesperson of the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh, Bah has tirelessly engaged himself in the quest for truth and justice. And has paid the price.

Until February, 2006, Mouctar Bah was the owner of a small Telecafé in the city of Dessau. In a town renowned throughout Germany for its racism and anti-Black police controls, the Telecafé was the meeting place for Africans living in the region, many of whom are there only by the force of the German legal system.

Already in 2004 the authorities began attempts to close his store with the justification that food products were being sold illegally. Nevertheless, this accusation proved to be false: Mouctar Bah had a license to sell comestibles.

Likewise, a search of his store also found no incriminating evidence which could be used against him. For a year the Administrative Office in Halle had the case before them yet undertook no action. As an official employee of the Administrative Office explained, there was no reason to close his store.

Officially it was said that Mouctar Bah tolerated people who sell drugs in the neighboring park to come around his store. There was no word of drugs being bought or sold in his store, nor did any concrete evidence exist. Apparently, the racist attribution "black skin = drug dealers" was enough.

As a result, Mouctar Bah's commercial license was revoked—out of "public interest." He has gone through several legal proceedings in order to save his store, all to no avail. Consequentially, the means of existence have been taken away from him and his family. Mouctar Bah was forced to sell the store over to a German, for whom he now works as an employee.

More recently, other disturbing attacks have taken place against Mouctar Bah. Not only has he been physically attacked twice in the Telecafé by the same person (who claimed he was angry because Bah's store „stinks“), on the 14th of May the window of the Telecafé was painted with a large Swastika. Shortly thereafter, claiming that there is still a problem with drug dealing in the street where the Telecafé is located, the city authorities of Dessau have now threatened the new German owner with removing his commercial licence as well.

We are seriously concerned about the safety and well-being of Mouctar Bah.

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 --- 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. Without exception, 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.

Oury Jalloh's mother, Mariama Djombo Jalloh, who travelled all the way from her village in Guinea to assist the first six hearings, was never given any sign of respect or recognition neither from the court nor from the hundred or so police officers who were surrounding the courthouse. Others did find words for her, however.

Swen Behrendt, known member of the German neo-nazi party NPD, wrote: "The first day of the trial was accompanied by the behavior of the mother, planned to fit into the scene. As the prosecuting and defense lawyers gathered around the judge's table in order to observe photos from the location, the time came for her to please all those present with a real 'singsong'".

Although African trial observers showed great courage and actually managed to have the nazi removed from the courtroom, upon hearing that he had been taken out, the judge insisted that the next time he comes he will be allowed to assist the trial as any other observer. Indeed,

he did return, and on the day of the last hearing on the May 24, Swen Behrendt was present with two other Nazis.

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 having committed libel (among other reasons, for verbally shouting at the nazi).

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 one member of the Initiative in Memory of Oury Jalloh for defending his conviction: OURY JALLOH WAS MURDERED!

Why are so many police needed in Dessau? Why were they filming all around and everybody, turning the court into a fortress? Who is being protected and from whom? Who is being intimidated and who is doing the intimidation? Why do they obey such wicked orders? More questions in a case where everything will be done to see that they are not answered, and that the only ones to be punished are those who refuse to remain silent.

White on White: The Banality of Evil...

Oury Jalloh died three deaths said a friend: His past died in Sierra Leone, his future died in the refugee camp in Rosslau, and he lost his life in the detention cell of a police station.

From the film, 'Tod in der Zelle'

Within the colonial structure, no value has ever been placed on human lives, especially those of non-whites. Power has systematically torn out the hearts and made us numb to the ever deepening barbarism of their—and our own—inhumanity. As the benefactors from these crimes, all those privileged have been made part and parcel of a seemingly eternal chain of dehumanizing enslavement. Yet we can not simply blame power or others: we are the barbarity, too, and many in society have simply accepted it willingly yet unknowingly.

It is not something inherent in a group of people or a certain nationality but systematically built-in to the every day structure of our lives. We don't see it, recognize it or feel it (unless of course, we suffer under the weight of its oppression). Within societies like the German, it is something that goes without question, with the very questioning implying that one is a risk or a threat to the foundations.

It is the inhumanity of accepting and promulgating a sick and dangerous system which promotes some people to a position of privilege and others to a position of submission, exploitation and fear. It is the complete lack of respect for human life and human dignity, and systematic murder. The order has been established and there is nothing left to question—much left the belief in one's own superiority.

And we have all been caught up in the normality of it all. Whatever our position may be, we helpless watch the crimes against humanity in Irak or Afghanistan, the torture and cruelty of Guantanamo and the secret European prisons, the brutality of deportation and the thousands of human beings who lose their lives in the seas and on the borders of the colonial fortresses built to protect Europe and the U.S. from people in search of the survival of their families. Indeed, we have all been converted into accomplices of a truly genocidal normality.

We should all ask ourselves why are equal rights denied to all Blacks and almost all non-whites—without exception—throughout the entire world? Where was and is the solidarity from those benefactors of the perpetrating governments? Where have the people of Dessau (and beyond) been, even when we are not present and when we do not use the word murder?

...and the Purpose of Segregation: Normalizing the Unthinkable

Human rights were never meant for Oury Jalloh; they were never meant for the colonized and enslaved. Very few people of the so-called "first world" ever even considered the colonized to be holistic beings, i.e. entirely human. And until today it is still so. It is our everyday normality, no matter if we accept it or not.

Whether left to rot under the military and economic policies imposed by Western governments and their local mercenaries or excluded, abused, deported and sometimes even murdered in the countries of Europe or the United States, the colonized remain eternally banned from the protection of international treaties and the right to a dignified life.

And whether we accept it or not, white solidarity has been limited—at best. It can be seen in so many cases that it is beyond dispute. Be it in South Africa, any period of history of racial violence and segregation in the United States, in the genocidal destruction of Africa or in the treatment and even murder of refugees and migrants here in Germany, to name just a few examples from over 500 years of barbarity, the progressive sector of German society (or other colonizing societies) is not willing to become actively involved, much less submit to the position of the colonized in their struggle for liberation.

This reality continuously leads to new divisions and separations and/or segregations. Colonial power has always tried to separate, keeping white solidarity at most limited to charity, if at all. Indeed, whites who rise up against their "fold" are made to pay a heavy price, serving as examples for other whites to remain silent and distant. This, in turn, makes it easier for non-whites to be isolated, controlled, and dealt with as seen fit by the decision-makers. Like the Jewish ghettos established under the Nazi period or the South African Bantustans, the purpose of the system under which asylum-seekers in Germany today are made to suffer is to isolate and eliminate or expel, the former simply being the means to achieve the latter.

It is within this context which the incidents of Oschersleben must be seen, when exactly one year ago this month, a bus returning to Berlin from a trial against the neo-nazi party NPD for hate crimes and libel against Mouctar Bah and Oury Jalloh in particular, and Blacks, refugees and migrants and Muslims in general, was surrounded by approximately 40 police.

Whereas all Blacks on the bus were allowed to leave without being controlled, each and every "white-looking" person on-board had their papers controlled and two pictures taken of them by the police.

In this sense, the persecution of a white activist inside the court of Dessau for his use of the word “murder” is also intended to incite other white activists to distance themselves from the use of the word and those who defend it.

Thus it is also no surprise that as an African activist stood directly in front of the police officer in charge and said his name and that Oury Jalloh was murdered, he simply responded, “I am sorry. I cannot help you,” or that other Black activists have not been (directly) persecuted for openly using the word murder.

But in the end, it all comes down to one question: being human. All of us have been deeply scared by the barbarity of the historic continuity of enslavement, deportation and dehumanization.

It is inevitable that we first must be conscious of the gravity and pathological destruction of our human condition, in which we all play a direct and major role. The bonds that mutually tie us at different some more privileged some less parts of the chain will be broken eventually, no matter who agrees or disagrees, and we must rise up—or drown together like the thousands of human beings in the Mediterranean.

Why we must fight—not just protest or question

The monopoly over words is anything but harmless. On the contrary, it is a fundamental aspect of manipulation and of controlling how history is interpreted.

Rosa Amelia Plumelle-Urbe

Though much more so for some people than for others, the fight for truth and justice in the case of Oury Jalloh and that of Dominique Koumadio 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.

They have always feared most our most non-lethal weapons of all: our consciousness and our word.

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.

We are not begging for anything. We are making clear that all our actions have consequences. The exploitation and brutality must end now and it will not be in the terms set out by power. On the contrary.

Rise up and break the silence!

They are said to now be living in your voice.
Sustain them with your eyes,
sustain them with your words.
Sustain them with your life.
Don't let them be forgotten,
don't let them fall.

Daniel Viglietti

This is a call for everybody to question themselves and whether or not they identify with the content expressed above. It is especially directed toward other refugees and migrants. For those who are in general agreement with the principles outlined above we propose the following:

1. To help us mobilize for and attend a nationwide demonstration in Dessau on Saturday, the 23rd of June, 2007. The demonstration will begin at 2p.m. Those requiring financial support for transportation should contact us directly.
2. To see that you or people you are close to attend the remaining court procedures and public vigil in Dessau. The next dates are from the 12th to the 15th and the 18th to the 22nd of June. The trial, which is foreseen to extend into October, will continue thereafter on the 6th and 19th of July. Transportation costs, food and accommodations can be organized for those who need it.
3. To make known the case of Dominique Koumadio, which the regional state prosecutor has already closed arguing that the police officers involved acted in „self-defense“, and to join the struggle for truth and justice for Dominique.
4. To support, promote and participate in the self-organization of refugees and migrants.