

Interviews with people that had experiences of torture through emetics

A (Woman): The following interviews took place in summer 2013, nine years after the killing of Laye Condé. A lawyer friend of mine got me in touch with men that had experiences of torture through emetics by the police. We quickly connected, a few phone calls later I found myself in a room full of angry men.

I told them that I would like to conduct the interviews for an event, if they didn't want to talk in public themselves. That I didn't receive any money for this work and neither would they. That I would much rather talk with them in smaller groups. That there wasn't much I could do for them, just record their voices, so more people would be able to hear them. Despite of all this, great hopes were attached to our talks. Some of them wanted to jointly demand compensation. Some of them carried unresolved traumas that they wanted to deal with. Others wanted to sort out the unjust treatment that had happened to them.

All of them want Justice. In this first meeting, they said: "We have to talk; we have to fight, for our rights!" Some immediately began to talk about their experiences. Others kept silent. They wrote down their phone numbers and were surprised when I gave them mine. Everyone I talked to was scared of their picture being taken, scared of being recognised, scared of further harassment. Everyone wanted to talk to me without any pictures, just with voice recordings. Some have kept these experiences with the police secret until today, even from their family and friends, and therefore wanted to stay anonymous.

Trauma as a stigma of the victims. I was ashamed, because victims of German racism are left so alone and have to be so scared. I am grateful for their trust. I hope that the mood that took hold of my interview partners during the interviews will survive the changes I had to make in order to keep their identities safe.

B (Man): I was arrested and taken to the police station. One of them said to me: "Soon a doctor is going to come and give you an emetic." After an hour a doctor came. I don't know where they took me, I was new in Germany and I didn't know my way around here in Bremen.

Then they said, I was supposed to drink water. I asked: "Why shall I drink water?" Well, because I supposedly had swallowed drugs. I said: "No. I didn't swallow any drugs." Then they said: "Yes, you have to drink water!" I fought against it, but they held me tight and pushed that thing into my mouth. Then I started to throw up. I vomited and vomited. Eventually, they said I should go. They gave me a plastic bag. I had to throw up the whole way. I lived on a boat that was a home for asylum seekers at the time. Afterwards, two to three more days I was feeling weak and continuously needed to throw up. My stomach still hurts from time to time.

C (Man): I think that was at the train station or in the Neustadt, one of the two. That is where I was arrested. There were three officers, who made fun of me. At the time, I hardly spoke any German. They gave me the emetic in a glass and I had to drink it. One of them said: „That is to spew. Everything in your stomach is supposed to come out again”.

I could not defend myself, they were three huge guys. If I would have understood better, I would have resisted, but at the time...I didn't know how things worked here. I didn't have a chance. Then I was supposed to drink water.

I drank, drank, then I went vomiting and then more water, I drank more, vomited more.

I had swallowed two or three pellets. I don't know exactly how many. But it definitely wasn't much. I had wanted to earn some pocket money. I was very naive; I didn't know how things worked here. I had, let's say, the wrong friends. And the water went through my nose and then I threw up lots. I felt really bad. As I said, I hardly had a chance, my German was bad. Then I walked a few meters away from the police station and I continued to feel very bad. They said, if I had to throw up more, I should use the plastic bag. They also verbally abused me.

A: Did the doctor at the police station examine you?

B: No, not at all. There were two persons. One of them arrested me and took me to the police station. From the police station they brought me somewhere else. Two policemen held me down and a doctor gave me the emetic.

C: I did get examined. He did one of those routine things, he measured my pulse. Then I had to get back into the car and they took me away. One of them was a detective with no uniform. The others had green uniforms.

A: Do you know many people something like this has happened to? That were arrested and then given emetics?

B: Yes, I even know someone who they gave something so he threw up blood, when he came back to the boat. He constantly threw up blood.

A: Have you often been arrested?

B: Yes, I have been, that is normal for black people. I went for a walk at the train station or at the Steintor and then I got arrested. They wanted to check if I had drugs on me. Which I did not. Never.

A: Do you know women that had to take emetic?

B: Black women, no. I don't know any.

A: Do you know white people that had to take emetics?

B: No, only black people.

A: Do you remember particular officers?

B: Yes. I know several, some by name. They know mine also.

C: I still see them around. Sometimes at the train station, sometimes shopping in town. They have family, I also. Of course, I knew it was shit to have drugs on me. I hold this anger: I am so angry with myself, that I have done this. But I am also angry with the way, they have treated me. Maybe there are people that are not bothered by this, but these are things that stick with you. To put it in plain German: That was Scheisse - a shit experience. I think, no one would do this to white people. None of my girlfriends know about this, I would not tell them - embarrassing, having to do with drugs. This crap also, what they did to me - that makes me very angry. Even though I know that hatred is no solution.

A: Are there parts of town where you got arrested more often than others?

B: I mainly got arrested when I was at the main train station or at the Steintor. Neustadt also, but not as often as the Steintor or the train station. You get scared, you feel under shock. You don't always know who is attacking you. These nightmares, how can I explain that? The fear that someone is following you. You stand somewhere and suddenly someone comes and says: "Stop! Police!" and "Open your mouth!" or doesn't even say "police" and just comes and grabs you. Some are in plain clothes. And you are not allowed to defend yourself, because defending yourself means, that you have fought against the police, even though they did not identify themselves first and they are not recognisable as policemen. They simply attack you. One doesn't feel safe in Germany. You hear someone behind you and immediately get scared because you don't know what's coming next.

A: Do you go out in the evenings?

B: Not very often. Since this thing happened, I don't go out often. You are scared that something happens. You don't only have to be scared of the police but of Nazis as well. When they are in a group of four or five, then they attack black people and beat you up. That didn't only happen once or twice. It happened more often. You don't sleep properly, because the whole time you think something is going to happen. You don't sleep properly and when you hear a noise, you are awake. I haven't slept well for a long time.

A: Did you know Laye Alama Condé?

C: Yes, I have seen him a few times. He was a quiet person. I know that he actually didn't want to have anything to do with drugs.

You totally don't know what's going on here. You are simply looking for work, when you arrive here from Africa. All the plans you have and what you want to do is gain a foothold, everything is really really difficult. Just the language and to get an idea of the whole system here; all that is really hard.

And I know Laye Alama Condé, he absolutely did not want to sell drugs. He kept on saying: „No. Never.“ He didn't want anything to do with it. He wanted to take his girlfriend to the disco, buy clothes, maybe that forced him to do this. It was bad luck for him to be caught the first time. He wasn't aware of the consequences. That is nowhere written down and you don't know what the consequences are.

At home, we would have never had anything to do with something like this. Actually, no one wants to have to do with this crap, but you just get into it. Of course, the penalty was severe. In his case the very first time, they also gave him this liquid and he had to pay with his life. Sad, very sad.

A: Do you talk to your kids about this?

B: They don't get it yet, but one day I will. Sometime I'd like to.

A: What do you wish for?

B: That it stops. That they are going to treat black people as humans. We are all humans. It is just the colour of the skin, but other than that we are all humans. Black people have feelings the same as Germans. People should try to imagine that someone would treat them like that, how it would feel like. Yes, I want it to stop. It is supposed to stop, that is my wish. I have lived longer in Germany than in Africa. I came to Germany when I was 15 years old. I have been living here for years. But you still feel like a nothing, even though you've lived here for so long. No respect, nothing. You don't feel like a human being, you feel like the scum of the earth. And I want it to stop. I would like it to stop.