

# What neutrality are we talking about? Racist police violence and its effects

## - the experiences of a concerned person in Göttingen

[CN: Acts of violence are described]

Racist police violence and arbitrary checks on Black people and people of color are a common and strongly condemnable practice in Germany and here in Göttingen. Nevertheless, very few people really know what this means for those affected, let alone what far-reaching effects these racist - and usually completely unfounded - repressions can have on the lives of those affected.

As an example, the following text reports on R. (the person wishes to remain anonymous due to the situation), who has lived and worked in Göttingen for several years and has a social network and family in the city. R. is a Black person. In the summer of 2022, he experienced massive police violence near the Carré shopping center in Göttingen and now fears for his future. The charges that followed the violence are the consequence of an arbitrary, unfounded and, above all, false accusation by a security guard at the shopping center.

### **Summer 2022: Police violence after unfounded accusations**

In the summer of 2022, a security employee calls the police after claiming to have "recognized" R. in the Carré shopping center: R. is the person who allegedly committed an assault in the shopping center in 2021. However, the accusation has no basis, as R. was demonstrably on his work shift - far away from the Carré - at the alleged "time of the crime".

The police arrive and ask R. for his ID on the street. R. is understandably irritated and asks several times why he should show his ID. The police officers refuse to answer him. The police officers also only speak German to R., despite his request to switch to English.

The situation is charged and there is an increasing number of observers and witnesses, several people are taking videos.

The police ask for his ID over and over again. R. is surprised at this control, which for him comes out of nowhere. We know from the court case that will follow later that the two patrol officers are already calling for reinforcements and a car to take him to the police station a few minutes after the first request to show ID. Nothing has happened yet, apart from the unfounded request for R. to show his ID. After some time, R. shows the papers he has with him, but does not want to hand them over to the police officers without providing information about the reason for the check. Instead of making the reason for the check transparent, the police become violent. Two police officers restrain R. and shout at the bystanders. They push R. against a house wall and finally drag him onto the street, which is still busy.

Two police officers, one of whom is about 1.90m tall, bring R. to the ground in the middle of the street in front of about 30 bystanders. The three of them hold him down on the street with their knees. After a while, R. is handcuffed, dragged up and taken to the police car that has arrived in the meantime. None of the police officers explain what it is all about.

R. is pushed into the car and, as R. tells us later, is punched in the ribs by a police officer (when he is already in the car and handcuffed).

The fact that R. loses a shoe during this violent abduction does not interest the officers in the slightest. R. is simply taken away barefoot.

As a reminder: all this happened as a result of a false accusation! R. could not have committed the crime that was supposed to justify the identity check, as he was demonstrably at work at the time of the crime. Nevertheless, he was forcibly arrested in public, in front of many passers-by, handcuffed and taken to the police station. At the police station, he has to justify himself for something he never committed. An escalation of a situation whose brutal police violence serves the sole purpose of an oppressive, humiliating and racist demonstration of power. The image of a dangerous criminal is thus constructed for the audience.

### **Theater of the absurd: double jeopardy and grueling trials**

R. actually deserved an apology and compensation for the violence he experienced, the false accusation and the public, humiliating arrest. But instead, R. suddenly has to defend himself in two court cases: first the false accusation of assault, which the security guard claims to have witnessed in 2021, and on top of that, the police officers are now also accusing him of assault and resisting arrest during the identity check.

In the initial proceedings, it is quickly established that R. is innocent: he cannot be the person the security guard claims to have recognized, as he was at work at the time of the crime. R. is acquitted in the prosecution after a very short time and the verdict is already available when the second trial begins. It becomes all the clearer here that all the police violence and the martial behavior of the officers was completely unfounded.

The course of the second trial is simply staggering. R. and his lawyer actually assumed that the chances of an acquittal were good. After all, they had access to video documentation that documented the police violence during the identity check in detail.

But what actually follows can only be described as absurd, cynical theater.

The trial takes place in four individual hearings and lasts more than 6 hours in total. During this time, R.'s lawyer speaks for perhaps 20 minutes, R. himself does not get a chance to speak at all. The rest of the time, R., observers in solidarity and the lawyer listen to the police officers in turn as they tell a completely different, invented story. This is riddled with racist attributions, absurd accusations and the claim that the escalation of the situation is the fault of the "angry, unmanageable left-wing mob", i.e. the witnesses of the situation. R. is also generally described as aggressive and violent, which is not questioned by either the public prosecutor or the judge. When questioned by the defense, the prosecuting police then have to admit that R. was neither violent nor insulting. The violent pushing down of R. by three police officers is glorified as an "unsightly ground fight", the fact that R. stumbled while being led away is interpreted as an "attempt to violently break away". One police officer admits to hitting R., but describes this as a necessary measure to "immobilize" him. However, R. was already handcuffed in the police car at this point.

They cynically add that it couldn't have hurt because R. hadn't even cried out after the punch.

### **Anger & bewilderment: Residence permit in jeopardy after harsh verdict at first instance**

The verdict is devastating: R. is found guilty and sentenced to 6 months in prison on probation (for three years) and 80 hours of community service.

The severity of this sentence is absurd. Even more absurd, as R. is completely innocent. He is appealing immediately, the trial is still pending.

But that is not the end of the harassment: the extension of R.'s residence permit has now been made dependent on the outcome of the appeal proceedings!

It is unacceptable that the right to a good, dignified and above all safe life should depend on arbitrary accusations, racist police treatment and court proceedings.

The sentence leaves me stunned and angry and makes me wonder what kind of political independence and neutrality the courts are supposed to have.

The case of R. is one example and is exemplary for many other such racist cases.

More critical trial observation and, above all, the publication of these stories is urgently needed to bring this injustice out of invisibility. It is unacceptable for police officers and judges to disguise themselves in the guise of "democratic impartiality", but in reality only those with more power (in this case police officers) are heard and taken seriously. This is a political trial in which the collaboration between security, the public prosecutor's office, the police and the judiciary against Black people became clear. Such trials and convictions influence social development and only fuel more racism. Again and again, the aspects and arguments of the authorities dominate and largely influence the outcome of the trial and deprive Black people of their voice.

R. also describes how no one believed him and how overwhelming this racist treatment and injustice was for him on so many levels. Many Black people are criminalized in court cases. It is therefore all the more important to create a large solidarity movement and public mobilization, to critically accompany such processes and to jointly oppose the criminalization of Black people.

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