

Book Two



Lethal Operation

Police officers have shot at least 133 people in Germany since 2010. Every second victim was probably in a psychologically distressed situation. Why did they have to die?

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On good days, Mouhamed sings and dances, is talkative and helpful. The 16-year-old has only been in Germany for a few weeks. His long journey took him from Senegal via Mauritania, Morocco, Spain and France to Worms. That's what he tells social workers after his arrival there. He is moving on to Dortmund, where he wants to become a professional soccer player with BVB, that is his dream. On Whatsapp, he already calls himself Sadio Mané, like the Senegalese star of FC Bayern Munich. He has talent. Some boys from the St. Antonius youth facility in Dortmund's Nordstadt district, where he is staying, have already taken him to training. On bad days, however, Mouhamed can't stand any noise, withdraws, and seems absent and very sad to his caregivers. He tells them that he suffers from nightmares and homesickness. When he arrived in Worms at the end of April this year (2022), they heard him out, the usual procedure when a young person travels alone to the country and wants to stay here. A transcript shows that he asked to speak to someone about his experiences during the flight. He no longer sees well and his knee hurts. He had a large scar on the back of his neck, which he said was from abuse in Morocco. And he told that he was an orphan and that his little brother had drowned during the crossing. Why Mouhamed Dramé claimed his family was dead, his brother Sidi cannot explain. Mouhamed has six siblings. The last family photo, taken in 2020, according to Sidi Dramé just before he left, shows him with his extended family. "He was a good boy, a support for his family," Sidi Dramé says via cell phone in the southern Senegal village of Ndiaffate Socé. His family sent Mouhamed to Europe to earn money. He dreamed of helping his family escape poverty, he says. "He wasn't afraid," Sidi Dramé says. "Young Africans take a lot of risks."

But the bad days - Aug. 8, 2022, is one of those. Mouhamed Dramé has only been in Dortmund for a week then. When the police officers arrive in the garden of the youth facility, he is crouching against the wall between the church and the fence, according to several witnesses. He has tied his red T-shirt around his head like a turban, his upper body is naked. In his hand he holds a kitchen knife, it has a 16 centimeter long blade. He has pointed the tip at his belly. He does not move. Only a day earlier, he had been diagnosed in a psychiatric clinic as suffering from a "severe depressive episode" and a "post-traumatic stress disorder." He was released again because "suicidal intentions" had safely subsided. **At the end of this day, Mouhamed Dramé will no longer be alive. And he will find his way into a statistic that doesn't actually exist - because no one systematically collects how many people in exceptional mental situations or with mental illnesses are shot by police on duty in Germany every year.** The Süddeutsche Zeitung has compiled such statistics on the basis of press reports, police reports, a documentation of the association "Institute for Civil Rights and Public Safety" and figures of the police psychologist Clemens Lorei of the Hessian University of Public Management and Security. According to the figures, at least 133 people have been shot by police officers in Germany since 2010.

Of those, at least 63 may have been mentally ill or suicidal, or in an exceptional mental situation. In addition, at least seven people were drunk or under the influence of other drugs. Thus, about half of those killed may have had impaired judgment during encounters with police officers. Such people react differently to police officers than healthy people, often unable to follow instructions, psychologists warn. Police officers, accordingly, should perform differently than in ordinary operations, where they are good at resolving situations quickly. "It's about buying time," says psychiatrist Matthias Albers, who is also spokesman for the Network of Social Psychiatric Services. "States of maximum agitation don't usually last for several hours." Therefore, police officers should "send a signal of relaxation." What used to be the question "Do you want a cigarette?" might now be a drink, a blanket or a jacket. "Something the person isn't expecting, to reduce the emotional pressure." In the case of Mouhamed Dramé, this apparently did not succeed. With the help of interviews with residents, witnesses and confidential documents, the SZ has reconstructed the events. The Dortmund public prosecutor's office is still investigating five of the twelve police officers involved; charges could be filed against them in the next few weeks. In response to a question from the SZ at the time, **the public prosecutor Carsten Dombert already raised doubts in September about the proportionality of the fatal operation.**

He does not want to comment on the circumstances of the case, which have not yet been communicated publicly. The accused police officers did not want to comment on request of the SZ. Dramé must have been crouching there for some time on that Monday-a good three months ago- when the police arrived. The knife, the turban, as if frozen. The corner is not visible from the courtyard of the facility where Mouhamed has been living for a good week, but it is visible from the street behind the fence. Passers-by have drawn the caretakers' attention to Mouhamed. When they approach him, he does not react. At 4:25 p.m., the home's director calls the Dortmund police. "I have the following situation," he says. One of his youths "is standing with us in the outdoor area right now and has a kitchen knife, holds it to his stomach and is unresponsive to us because he doesn't speak our language." He doesn't respond at all, he said. "So now the question is, am I in the right place there with you or would I rather call the ambulance?" Seven minutes after receiving the emergency call, at 4:32 p.m., police officers from the North Guard arrive at the scene. The following minutes could have played out roughly as shown in these graphics. Their police station is only about a kilometer away. They have pepper spray, tasers - stun guns - and, in addition to the pistols in their holsters, a machine gun. Radio patrols in North Rhine-Westphalia have been equipped with these as standard for several years due to the abstract terrorist threat in Germany. Some of the officers go behind the fence into the courtyard where Mouhamed is crouching, others stay on the street. A witness later testifies that he heard the officer-in-charge instruct his team to distract and overpower Mouhamed. The police officer with the machine gun was told that

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"I can't go back to business as usual when my son was obviously murdered," Baker says. They want to create awareness of the problem. And they want to achieve that there may yet be a criminal prosecution in the Netherlands, after the public prosecutor's office there certified the police officers involved in the operation acted in self-defense.

Sammy Baker drove from Wetzlar to Amsterdam with two friends on August 10, 2020, to celebrate his 23rd birthday. On the very first evening, they go to a coffee shop, smoke joints and eat a space cake, a cannabis pastry. This is how his friend Maximilian Riepl, who was there, tells it. Sammy Baker behaves differently than usual afterwards, distant. He leaves the shared accommodation and goes underground in the city.

On August 12, around 9 p.m., Maximilian Riepl, in consultation with Sammy's parents, reports his buddy missing to the Amsterdam police. The mother prints out search posters and drives to Amsterdam herself the very next morning.

Sammy Baker's parents now assume that he suffered a psychosis due to cannabis consumption; this assumption is also recorded in the autopsy report. Never before had he struggled with mental problems, say the parents. And he had hardly ever drunk alcohol. "He was always the driver," Justine Seewald-Krieger says. Baker offered fitness coaching online, and his Instagram account had a good 170,000 followers. The trip to Amsterdam was a spontaneous idea, his mother says, finally getting out after the Corona lockdown.

Once in Amsterdam, Sammy's mother, Maximilian Riepl and two other friends used the last known locations to narrow down where Baker should be - and found him. "But he was very different, was almost a stranger to me," says Justine Seewald-Krieger. Sammy Baker carries a fishing rod and some kind of scarf around his waist. When she asks him if he wants a drink, he says, "You drink first." He doesn't want to go back to the shelter with them. "I just couldn't get through to him, I was desperate," Seewald-Krieger says.

When Maximilian Riepl asks a passing policeman for help, Sammy Baker suddenly runs away.

The escape ends in a green courtyard. His mother is standing about 200 meters away; at that moment, she says, she thought "everything will be all right now." She calls her sister. While still on the phone, she hears gunshots.

There are videos of what happened in the courtyard, residents have recorded them.

Baker initially stands at the end of the courtyard, behind and beside him a fence, on the other side a hedge, in front of him sometimes four, sometimes five policemen in uniform. They block the only escape route. Baker holds a knife to his neck.

Static situations like this, in which a suspected attacker barely moves, are actually a "gift" for the police, says police scientist Martin Thüne, who has seen the videos.

Because there were no third parties at risk. He thinks the way the Amsterdam officials reacted was "absolutely screwed up. And he says: "This could happen in Germany in exactly the same way and has happened in exactly the same way" - for example, when Mouhamed Dramé was shot dead.

Or when homeless Robin L., 21, was shot in Bad Oldesloe on October 7, 2018; he was considered mentally ill. He was holding a knife in his hand. Because he did not put it down despite requests from the police, they pepper sprayed him, shot in the air and then, as he walked towards them, shot him twice in the chest. Investigations on suspicion of manslaughter and failure to render assistance were later dropped.

Or when Emrah K., 29, was shot in Holzminden. He too was mentally ill, but refused to take his medication. Before the operation on December 19, 2013, he had threatened family members.



A special task force broke down the door to his apartment, sent in a dog, which K. severely injured with a knife. Shortly afterwards, Emrah K. was hit by two shots. The case was later dropped, the prosecution saw an act of self-defense by the shooter.

Or when Maria B. was shot in Berlin, a petite woman of less than 50 kilos, 33 years old. On the night of January 24, 2020, a roommate called the police because Maria B. had threatened him with a knife. She also subsequently barricaded herself in her room, again the officers kicked in the door. When B. approached them with a knife, the fatal shots were fired. The investigation against the shooter was dropped because, according to the prosecution, he acted in self-defense.

Or when, on June 18, 2020, employees of a housing association in Bremen wanted to look at the apartment of Mohamed Idrissi, 54.

The employees came because water was said to have flowed from the apartment into the basement. Since it was known that Idrissi was mentally ill, they came accompanied by the police. In the courtyard of the apartment block there was a confrontation, Idrissi suddenly held a knife in his hand, did not drop it. When he finally ran toward an officer, fatal shots were fired. The investigation by the Bremen public prosecutor's office is still ongoing.

In Germany, police students are prepared to suddenly face an armed person. The police school in Königsbrunn, Bavaria, allows students to watch a day of training. "We can simulate these situations so well that people forget they are in a training session," says Police Senior Superintendent Daniel Windmüller, specialist in charge of weapons and shooting training at the Bavarian Riot Police. To create realistic stress, trainers can

shorten the time to resolve the situation, create more movement or poor lighting conditions, or even reduce the distance to the suspected perpetrator.

What is striking is that throughout this day, there is always talk of "offenders." Not about the desperate, the confused, the tired of life, the stunned, the frightened, the panic-stricken or the mentally ill.

Practice is held on an athletic field-like training ground. One police student plays a man who wants to scratch his boss's car, with a

screwdriver in one hand and a dummy knife in the other. Two other police students are supposed to stop him. As soon as the officers see him, the conversation turns only to the object, not the person behind it. "Put the knife down," the police officers yell. One of them pulls out his gun. "Okay, okay," the assailant says, puts down the screwdriver and lets himself be led away. All went well in this training.

In the debriefing, the instructor will address the danger of stabbing weapons. "To prevent an attacker from getting too close, we can verbally and nonverbally announce a shot," he will say. "If I point a gun at you with full body voltage, you will exhibit different behavior than if you think the officer is unsafe."

But what if the alleged attacker can't even interpret those signals because he's mentally ill? In exceptional situations, criticizes criminologist Tobias Singelstein, "the actions of the police can contribute to escalation if police officers either do not recognize such an illness or recognize it but do not know how to deal with it."

Because mentally ill people need "not the speed, not the volume" at such a moment, says police scientist Martin Thüne. Schizophrenics, for example, perceive many things as if through an intensifier. "When police officers talk at them, it sounds as if a jet plane is flying past them." That's something you have to know as a police officer, he said; otherwise, according to traditional police training, you're just doing it wrong.

But because, as criminologist Tobias Singelstein says, "you can't turn police officers

into psychologists," you can't avoid making the crisis situation "a static one, as far as that's possible, and getting professional help."

Sammy Baker reportedly asked to send for a doctor. But no doctor comes

Irene Mihalic agrees with this, but specialist staff costs money, and the social psychiatric service is underfunded in many cities. Mihalic also doubts the political awareness of the problem: "If I say that in the plenum of the Bundestag, then the Union accuses me of throwing cotton balls." Members of parliament, she says, have the image in their minds "of the perpetrator running amok in the inner city - and then the Greens come along, they want to send a psychologist."

Sammy Baker, tells his friend Maximilian Riepl, also asked to call a doctor during the police operation. The prosecutor's office in Amsterdam explains on request that they did not involve the medical doctor specialized in psychological help, who was on the scene, because the situation was not under control.

At some point, however, he starts to move slowly in the direction of the police officers, as can be seen on the videos. The officers back away with their weapons drawn and ask him to stop, in English and in German: "Stand still, otherwise we'll have to shoot." Then, from behind, a policeman with a dog abruptly approaches the young man with a knife, bringing him down. Sammy Baker goes to the ground. He screams. The other policemen approach, shouting. Three shots are heard, one hits him in the chest.

Sammy Baker is no longer moving.

The parents have never watched the videos. They can't, they say. Later attempts have been made, his parents see it, to make Sammy Baker look like an

attacker. Amsterdam's

police chief claimed in an interview that Baker had stabbed an officer in the vest - but it later turned out that the vest was intact. And

a local resident, who happened to be a journalist himself, told Bild TV in an interview that the police had told him that Sammy Baker had a kitchen knife 30 centimeters long. Later, Bild

TV had to correct this statement: Sammy Baker was carrying a fold-out carving knife with a seven-centimeter blade. His mother had given it to him herself at some point.

She doesn't know why he had it with him in the first place.

An aggressive man with a 30-centimeter knife who cuts a police officer's vest would undoubtedly be a perpetrator from whom officers must protect themselves. A disturbed youth with a cannabis psychosis and a carving knife would possibly be a person who needs help in the first place. Help, as Mouhamed Dramé would have needed.

The day before Mouhamed was shot, he made a video call with him, says his brother Sidi Dramé, "we discussed, laughed, he didn't tell me anything about him being bad." Sidi Dramé is convinced that his brother did not mean to kill himself. "There was a family that stood behind him and expected something from him," he says. That family now has expectations of the German justice system: "That justice will be done for us and that the policeman will be punished. He killed a child," says Sidi Dramé on his cell phone.

Maximilian Riepl also wants to understand what happened; he was in Amsterdam six times after the death of his friend Sammy Baker. He collects documents in a thick folder, a city map with purple and pink markings of accommodation and crime scene, the printed chat histories, photos of the courtyard. He often wonders whether it was right to involve the police. But who else should he have called?

According to his parents, it was later tried to make the police victim look like an attacker.