Out there in the forest

Malian Human Rights activists visit the „forgotten“ asylum seekers in the camp in Möhlau

From Alessane Dicko / Association Malienne Expulsés (Malian Assoziation of Deportees)

206 persons are housed in the refugee's camp Möhlau close to the Luther town Wittenberg in Saxony-Anhalt. What is officially called GU „Gemeinschaftsunterkunft“ [community accommodation], is simply known as „jungle camp“ by the inhabitants of the camp and as well as by anti-racist groups, like the regional „Flüchtlingsrat“ [refugee council]. By naming so they indicate in fact a practice which has been criticized by human rights organizations for many years: the isolation of asylum seekers and their accommodation, as remote as possible from towns and villages, invisible, in dilapidated buildings made from prefabricated slabs of former military bases. The closure of the camp Möhlau, supported by the administrative head of a Landkreis in charge, is hardly enforceable in the district assembly. In the face of a significant share of racism among the Saxon-Anhaltinian population many politicians in the rural constituencies restrain themselves to stand up offensively for a more human, but more expensive accommodation for asylum seekers. Within the frame of a presentation tour Ousmane Diarra und Alessane Dicko from the Malian Association of Deportees (AME) visited Möhlau together with medico and the anti-racist network NoLager. That was the first visit of African Human Rights activists to learn how refugees are accommodated in Saxony-Anhalt. Alessane Dicko noted his impressions down for us.

We had to ask twice for the way. Finally, after leaving the village of Möhlau, we got to the former military barracks where the asylum seekers are housed. The terrain and the weathered building of prefabricated slabs in which once the soldiers of the Soviet army lived is in a desolate state. It is a place of the past made available to those „who you don't want here“. In the parking space we are welcomed by some asylum seekers: „Here where nobody wants to spend more nights as absolutely necessary“ is the comment of one of our hosts – hardly anyone is healthy, many suffer from physical or mental impairment. First conversations with Roma, Kurdish or African asylum seekers begin. They revolve immediately around the inhuman conditions, the feeling of insecurity and the missing perspectives.

A place of depression

We are invited to have a look at the rooms of the inhabitants. The dark stairwells are musty, the sanitary facilities are narrow, plaster flakes off the ceiling, water from higher floors penetrates through the ceiling, cockroaches dart around. The sparsely fixtures are of bad quality and the inhabitants are responsible for the maintenance. The other empty buildings are also in a state of dilapidation. We come across an especially damaged building.

The door is broken open, the windows are smashed. In former days that was the auditorium of the Soviet army. A yellowed portrait of Lenin and some Cyrillic letters are still on the walls. Here starts what the camp inhabitants call the „dangerous zone“ where the local adolescents from the village meet. Sometimes the noise is unbearable. The asylum seekers assume that the authorities „do not interfere in order to intimidate the migrants.“

Because the refugees are frightened. Several times they were attacked by a group of racist adolescents. We meet with further inhabitants of the camp. Their spokesperson from Benin describes the disdain they experience daily: only 60 euros as pocket money per month with simultaneous working ban, an insufficient medical attention, the arbitrariness of the

Residenzpflicht [residence obligation].To get a vacation certificate applicants have to cycle to the district principal town Wittenberg which is 37 kilometers away. Above that there is the system of awarding shopping coupons which makes it impossible for asylum seekers to decide independently about their financial expenses. An African refugee tells how he was attacked with a knife by a group of racist adolescents in the nearby village; today still his anger is noticeable when he reports that the attack did not entail any reaction of the department.

In Möhlau I have seen how persons who are deported are already morally broken in Germany. We know from our work with deported persons in Mali about the psychological problems of those who are deported back to a country which they have left by raising all their strength and in which they have lost everything. The camp of Möhlau should become a historical memorial place or it had to disappear in order to let the nature breath again and to heal the wounds caused by inconsiderate political decisions.

First published in: medico rundschreiben 02/2010