

by Sharon Dodua Otoo
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Fiction

This is Kinda How It All Went Down…

So, in etwa, ist es geschehen

review

Sharon Dodua Otoo's *So, in etwa, ist es geschehen* is a road novel set in contemporary Germany, and centred on Amata Haller, an Afro-German woman who kills her boss during a car journey to the Baltic coast. On the night before her trial, Amata writes an account of the day's events for her publisher and close friend, Nkechi.

Every year on 3 May, Amata travels from Berlin to the coastal town of Timmendorfer Strand to meet her mother and commemorate the sinking of the Cap Arcona in 1945. The event led to the deaths of thousands of concentration camp prisoners; Amata's grandfather was among the few survivors. On the day in question, train delays lead Amata's boss, Heinz Brockhaus, to insist on driving her to the coast himself. Over the course of the journey, he talks continuously, issuing a stream of remarks that Amata experiences as demeaning and invasive. By the time they arrive, Amata has missed her mother, and the accumulated tension of the day culminates in her strangling Brockhaus in the car with a scarf.

Brockhaus's monologue during the drive, presented as a transcript of an audio recording, makes up nearly half the book. Over the course of his speech, he speculates about a decades-old photograph of a Black woman, offering a series of justifications for an unnamed

man’s behaviour towards her, while presenting himself throughout as tolerant and self-aware.

The novel is structured as a sequence of documents: Amata’s confession, written in four parts from her prison cell; the transcript of Brockhaus’s monologue; and a closing note from Nkechi, addressing the events from a legal standpoint. This structure sets Amata’s internal account against Brockhaus’s extended speech before closing on an external, legal perspective on what has happened.

The novel’s different registers, confession, monologue, and legal commentary, give a shifting form and feel, moving between road novel and crime narrative. It addresses everyday racism and its cumulative effect over time alongside inherited family memory of historical atrocity. Otoo, who won the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2016, is also the author of the novel *Adas Raum* (*Ada’s Room*, tr. Jon Cho-Polizzi, Riverhead Books 2023).

Find out more:
https://www.fischerverlage.de/verlag/rights/book/sharon-dodua-otoo-so-in-etwa-ist-es-geschehen-9783103977059

press quotes

> *… a dazzling book … As soon as you get into to the details, it becomes clear just how confidently … Otoo deals with life.*

Judith von Sternburg, Frankfurter Rundschau

> *A gripping, socially critical and at the same time morally ambivalent portrait of a lawyer who can no longer distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, law and justice."*

Leila Herrmann, Vogue

> *Deeply unsettling and well worth reading.*

Bernd Melichar, LeseZeichen

about the author

Sharon Dodua Otoo, who was born in London in 1972, is a writer and political activist. She writes prose and essays and edits the English-language book series *Witnessed* (edition assemblage). In 2016, she was awarded the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for her short story *Herr Gröttrup setzt sich hin* (Herr Gröttrup sits down/Herr Gröttrup takes a seat, tr. Katy Derbyshire, Judith Menzl, and Patrick Ploschnitzki, *Still Magazine*, 2020). Otoo is politically engaged, being involved with the Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland e.V. and Phoenix e.V. initiatives, and has links with the Adefra e.V. Black queer-feminist forum. *Adas Raum*, her first novel, was published by S. Fischer Verlag in 2021 and has been translated into many languages including English (*Ada's Room*, tr. Jon Cho-Polizzi, Riverhead Books, 2023). She lives with her family in Berlin.

Previous works: *die dinge, die ich denke während ich höflich lächle*, edition assemblage (2013); *Synchronicity*, edition assemblage (2014); *Adas Raum*, S. Fischer (2021); *Herr Gröttrupp setzt sich hin*. Drei Texte, S. Fischer (2022).

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