

Arab woman stabbed to death in German courtroom

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On July 1, the 31-year-old pregnant Egyptian Marwa El-Sherbini was slaughtered with a knife in open court in Dresden. Her killer was the Russian-German Alexander W., a racist who had been found guilty of defamation against El-Sherbini. A police officer in attendance did nothing to aid the stricken women, instead shooting down her husband, causing him serious injury.

Unlike when Islamic fundamentalists carry out or merely threaten to commit a terrorist act, there was no outcry in the media or on the part of the political establishment. On the contrary, both the popular press and as well as supposedly respectable media outlets did everything possible to play down the importance of what had occurred and deny the event had any political or social significance.

At the end of last year, El-Sherbini, who worked in a pharmacy, asked Alexander W., 28 years old and unemployed, to let her small son play on the swing in the local playground. He immediately insulted the woman, who wore a headscarf, as a “slut, terrorist and an Islamic fundamentalist.” He was charged and found guilty of defamation, and was fined. An appeal was subsequently lodged; however, it is unclear whether it was Alexander W. himself or the public prosecutor who had lodged it.

Tagesspiegel reported as follows on the events in the courtroom where the appeal was being heard: “The examination of the witnesses was concluded, when the Russian-German asked to address the court. He asked to be allowed to ask a question, to which the court did not object. Alex W. turned to Marwa El-Sherbini: ‘Do you have any right at all to be in Germany?’ There was silence in the room. ‘You have no reason to be here.’ Alex W. became louder. And he threatened, ‘If the NPD [the far-right German National Party] comes to power there will be an end to all that. I voted for the NPD.’” He then threw himself on the defenceless woman and began

to stab her with a knife. Her defence counsel is said to have thrown a chair at him, but this did not stop him.

El-Sherbini’s 32-year-old husband, Elwi Ali Okaz, came to his wife’s aid and the court sounded the alarm. A court official and two police officers who were in the building stormed into the courtroom. Without warning, one of the officers immediately began shooting Ali Okaz, also an Egyptian. Okaz, who had already been seriously injured in the knife attack, was shot in the leg. A little later, Marwa El-Sherbini succumbed to her injuries, having been stabbed 18 times. The couple’s three-year-old son witnessed the entire proceedings.

Just for a moment, consider if the crime had been committed in reverse. A Muslim insults a German-Russian as a “Christian dog” and a “Crusader,” then in court admits support for an Islamic fundamentalist organisation and afterward stabs the victim. Could there be any doubt about the reaction in media and the political establishment? The chancellor and every minister would have immediately rushed before the cameras to condemn the crime in particular and Islamic fundamentalism in general. Over the following weeks, countless “experts” would warn of the radicalisation among Muslims and their refusal to integrate and the formation of a parallel society. Islamic organisations would be called upon to dissociate themselves from such crimes; the mosques would be told they should cooperate more closely with the German police. And Interior Minister Wolfgang Schäuble would repeat his demand for the deployment of the Armed Forces on the streets of Germany.

Anyone who considers this (still) hypothetical scenario to be exaggerated should recall the reaction to the murder of Dutch film producer Theo van Gogh, the defence of the “Anti-Prophet Mohammed cartoons” in Germany, the Regensburg speech by Pope Benedict XVI, or the cancellation of a performance of Mozart’s opera *Idomeneo* three years ago in Berlin.

What has been the reaction in Germany to the murder of Marwa El-Sherbini? Practically none, initially. The political establishment at first said nothing at all, and the popular press merely reported it in the margins, talking about “a growing controversy over a swing.” Saxony’s Justice Minister Gert Mackenroth said that in future the principle of “open justice” would no longer be possible, meaning that comprehensive security checks would be introduced in all courts.

Beside various Islamic groups, one of the first organizations to condemn the murder was the Zentralrat der Juden (Central Council of Jews). Secretary-General Stephan Kramer said, “Those who have so far dismissed concerns about Islamophobia in Germany as a phantom debate have been proved so wrong by this terrible event.” Kramer criticized the reaction of the federal government, who kept quiet for days, and commented later: “It seems that German society did not recognize the consequences of the Dresden attack. The realization is lacking that the murder of Marwa Al-Sherbini is quite obviously the result of the fact that the almost unhindered hate propaganda against Muslims has seeped from the extremist edges of society right into its core.”

A demonstration in Dresden to commemorate the victim and against right-wing violence drew approximately 500, the majority of whom were non-Muslim Germans who had been honestly shaken and angered by this bloody racist deed.

Following popular protests in Egypt, and the appearance of articles highly critical of Germany in the Arabic and Egyptian press, foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier finally wrote a letter on July 10 to his Egyptian counterpart, in which he offered his condolences and said that “xenophobia and Islamophobia” had “no place” in Germany. Chancellor Angela Merkel’s press spokesman said that she had “personally” expressed her sympathy to Egypt’s President Hosni Mubarak during the G-8 summit. Since then, however, neither Merkel nor any other federal minister has spoken out publicly.

Meanwhile, German newspapers have hardly expressed any indignation about the murder, but have filled their pages with reports of anti-German protests in Egypt and Iran, where president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accused the German state of being in part responsible for the bloody deed.

The liberal media, like the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Die Zeit*, maintain aggressive debates as to whether there is any hostility to Islam in Germany. *Spiegel Online* has not expressed an opinion in a single editorial, although the

site has reported the reaction to the murder. And this is no wonder: Their house columnist on Islamic questions is Henryk M. Broder, a man who for many years has systematically agitated and written provocatively against Muslims. In a comment on July 16 on the web site headlined “The axis of the good,” he mocked the fact that the federal government does not reject every criticism from abroad as an interference in Germany’s internal affairs. He deplored the “general suspicions” that are supposedly now being expressed, without saying against whom these are allegedly are being levelled. He closed his outpouring with a cynical remark—one that could easily have come from the NPD—about the nearly simultaneous killing of a German by a Turk, saying that “neither the chancellor nor the Turkish Prime Minister” had made any statement on it.

However, last weekend’s online edition of the conservative *Welt* newspaper already carried articles about a “thrust to radicalize [Islamic] women.” In an article quoting the Hamburg state secret service, it wrote, “In extreme cases, this development leads to the complete abandonment of self and isolation—or to a terrorist camp. Partly convinced, partly pressured, these women become both victims and supporters of jihadist efforts.” The reason for this “radicalization thrust” is, according to the newspaper, that these women regard the solution to be “a pious life, subordinated to a man.” The wearing of a headscarf and the reading of the Koran lead thus “in extreme cases” directly to terrorist camps, they argued, and both the newspapers and secret service agree. It was in this political climate that Marwa El-Shebini was murdered.



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