

The lies of Thilo Sarrazin

Part two

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This is the second part of a two-part article. The first part was posted September 28.

Finally, Sarrazin claims that “in no other religion is the transition to violence and terrorism so evident” as in Islam. In making this assertion Sarrazin is highly inventive, claiming that “20 percent of all acts of violence in Berlin are committed by just 1,000 Turkish and Arab youths.”

First of all, the so-called “most persistent criminals” in Berlin consist of 3,000 people who come from every ethnic group living in the capital city. They are responsible not for 20 percent of all violent acts, but for 20 percent of all criminal offences, primarily simple shoplifting.

Troublesome concentrations of crime are to be found not only in typical “immigrant districts” such as Kreuzberg and Neukölln, but also in Köpenick, where practically no immigrants live but pauperisation of the community has rapidly increased since 1990.

Today, no informed and objective observer can seriously doubt that characteristics like race, ethnic background and citizenship are meaningless as explanations for crime. To equate crime with Islam and Muslim youths or, as Chancellor Angela Merkel has done, to declare that “the statistically greater propensity to commit violence on the part of fervently religious youths should not be made a taboo” constitutes an incitement to racism.

Sarrazin and Merkel and many other commentators are here drawing on a Criminal Research Institute of Lower Saxony (KFN) study published last July under the leadership of the institute’s director, Christian Pfeiffer. Entitled “Children and Young People in Germany: Experience of Violence, Integration and Media Consumption,” the study presented analyses of adolescent violent crime in the context of the perpetrators’ religious disposition. The finding concerning young Muslims was that, “Increasing religiosity was accompanied by a slight increase in acts of violence. Very religious Muslim migrants were linked to the highest rate of violence in the different groups of Muslim youth.”

It is telling that these relatively unimpressive results could

gain so much media attention. When the study was first released, an article appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* with the sensationalist headline “With the Fist at Prayer.” The article quoted Pfeiffer as saying, “Even when one takes these factors (number of criminal friends, use of violent computer games, the general media’s legitimising of violence) into account, there remains a significant connection between religiosity and the propensity for violence.”

The implication was that Islam produces violent young people.

In fact, the connection between violence and religious feeling is quite nebulous, and—for some people—the study says something very different from what Pfeiffer claims in the interview. On page 116 of the study it states “that this heightened propensity to violence is largely due to other debilitating factors.... This leads to the conclusion that there is no evidence for affiliation to a religious community affecting a tendency to violent behaviour.” And two pages later one reads: “However, as this connection was not shown to be significant, it cannot be assumed that there is a direct link between religiosity and violent delinquency in young Muslims.”

There exists no gene for crime and no ethnic culture of crime, as Sarrazin would have us believe. But the ex-central bank official and former Berlin finance senator claims just that when he talks about the violent deeds of young Muslims and tries to account for the existence of Muslim youth gangs. From the standpoint of serious criminology, his argumentation is characterised by ignorance and stupidity.

Sarrazin is of the opinion that male Muslim heads of family want to impart to their sons a traditional view of honour and aggressive manliness, but the sons are frustrated because they believe they are seen as failures by Muslim girls who perform better at school. According to Sarrazin, “Frustration at school combines with sexual frustration, both contributing to a build-up of aggression in the young men.... For religious reasons, however, the young girls are not sexually available before marriage. Even harmless sexual

gestures are ruled out.... Inappropriate role models, low-level educational achievement and sexual frustration can lead to an increased readiness to commit acts of violence, principally exercised in youth gangs that are the de facto homes of many Muslim immigrants.”

Sarrazin has in all likelihood never set foot in the residential districts or schools where young Muslims live. Nor has he been willing to take a good look at the appropriate literature. The youth gangs, which do indeed exist and are based on various ethnicities, are largely a reaction to the young people’s experience of discrimination.

Deprived of the prospect of a decent education or job training, some Muslim youth do react by accepting labels meant to be derogatory and responding with “Yes, I am a Turk.” This bolstering of ethnic identity is played out in ethnic groups that at times express their hatred of harassment and their social despair in acts of criminal violence, often aimed at institutions and people representing the social consensus. But cause and effect should not be confused. This has nothing to do with a traditional “culture of honour.”

Sarrazin vehemently denies that he is a racist because he “only” wants to point out the cultural differences between Europe and Islam. For him, Muslims are from birth intellectually less gifted, shiftless and criminally inclined. He reduces social problems to problems of ethnicity.

In Berlin, social problems are accumulating, not because of immigrants, but in part because of the policies carried out by Sarrazin when he was finance senator for the city. For nine years he supervised the slashing of social benefits and cuts in schools, universities and youth centres. Training opportunities and jobs have been destroyed, and the social crisis in the city has intensified. Now Sarrazin blames immigrants and the poor for the consequences of his own policies.

In this respect, Sarrazin is spouting not only racism, but also class hatred. In addition to stirring up hatred towards Muslims, he has disparaged all Hartz IV recipients, denouncing them as a “less efficient” and “largely unalterable, jobless under-class.” According to Sarrazin, the problem in Germany is not material poverty, only “spiritual and moral poverty.”

Here he lines up once again with the previously mentioned theses of Charles Murray and Richard Herrnstein. Their sorry effort, *The Bell Curve*, did not purport simply to show that blacks in the US are less intelligent than whites, and thus more often poor, unemployed and involved in crime. It was a political tract justifying cuts in social benefits.

Already, during the presidency of Ronald Reagan, sociologists like Murray and Lawrence Mead were providing a pseudo-scientific rationale for attacks on the working class. Appearing in 1984, Murray’s book *Losing Ground* was

embraced by the Reagan administration.

Its argumentation is exactly the same as that used by Sarrazin. According to Murray, the state’s far too generous benefits for impoverished layers of the population were responsible for the social problems in the US. They were seen as having the effect of rewarding idleness and the unbridled propagation of children by so-called “welfare mothers” and leading to the moral degeneration of the masses. By this was meant illegitimate sexual relations between man and woman, which Murray saw as the cause of urban decay.

Sarrazin revives these reactionary theses and combines them in an unwholesome brew with anti-Muslim provocation. His recommendations for remedying the alleged problems reveal the ideological sources of his book.

Forced labour should be introduced for those receiving state benefits; immigration should be virtually abolished; a witch-hunt should be launched against immigrants involved in the informal economy; immigrants should have to carry their own special identity cards; and uniforms should be introduced into the schools. School lessons should consist of memorization and recitation.

It must stand as a serious warning that such a shabby work, full of errors and inconsistencies and devoid of any scientific merit, has been given such prominence. It is part of a deliberate campaign to re-introduce racist arguments into the political debate so as to justify brutal attacks on social and democratic rights.



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