

The battle about Breivik's mind

Is mass murderer Anders Breivik sane or insane? Forensic psychiatry has been under scrutiny during his court case, which heard closing arguments last week. Per Helge Måseide reports from Oslo.

On July 22, 2011, Anders Breivik killed eight people by detonating a bomb in the Norwegian Government's building complex. Thereafter he moved on to the idyllic Utøya Island and shot and killed 67 people, one by one, at the annual summer camp for the Labour party's youth organisation. Another two died when they tried to escape.

Shortly after the crime, Breivik's defence attorney, Geir Lippestad, told the press that he thought his client was insane. However, he has spent the past 10 weeks trying to convince the court of the opposite. "For a political activist, the worst thing thinkable is being sent to a psych ward", Breivik told the court.

Breivik put together a large publication—2083—a *European Declaration of Independence*—in which a network called the Knights Templar plays an essential part. In the document, the defendant describes his alleged leadership role as a "perfect knight" in a civil war-like fight against multiculturalism and Islamisation. No one has been able to track down this network's existence. "He thinks it is his mission to decide who should live and die", said Synne Sørheim who, together with Torgeir Husby, undertook the initial forensic psychiatric assessment, diagnosing Breivik as having paranoid schizophrenia with persistent delusions.

The Norwegian court system employs the biological principle, which means that the presence of psychosis at the time a crime is committed will automatically result in a ruling of insanity, independent of the intent of the perpetrator. Any justified doubt in this regard should favour insanity.

Persistent delusions that are culturally inappropriate or implausible are one of the possible symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. A person

with this diagnosis is considered to have psychosis under Norwegian law. Cognitive abilities may remain intact, which might explain the fact that Breivik was able to successfully plan and complete his horrific attacks.

Both the methods and conclusions of the initial psychiatric report have been widely debated, including by several psychiatrists, after being leaked to the press. Critics said that Breivik's strange word usage, viewed in the first report as neologisms (made-up words or phrases that only have meaning to the speaker and often occur in the speech of people with schizophrenia), were not placed into a relevant right-wing political context. In January, the court decided that Breivik should be involuntarily observed in prison.

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Health personnel affiliated with the prison testified in court and reported that they had not seen any signs of psychosis. Neither did the new forensic psychiatrists, Agnar Aspaas and Terje Tørrissen, who concluded that Breivik had dissocial and narcissistic personality disorders with paranoid traits. They believe that the excessive violence on July 22 was the result of extreme political attitudes, and not delusions. Husby and Sørheim think that right-wing extremism is not the defendant's primary issue, but a repository for his delusions. They found that Breivik displayed mental stimulation chiefly when talking about killing and violence.

Although the public was appeased with the conclusion that Breivik did not have psychosis, the Norwegian Forensic

Commission, which peer reviews all forensic reports and statements, asked whether the general criteria for personality disorder were met. In court the commission also criticised Husby and Sørheim for a lack of follow-up questions when diagnosing Breivik.

It is unclear why Breivik moved back in with his mother in 2006, where he spent his days playing World of Warcraft on the internet. According to him, this was for training before the terrorist attacks. According to Husby and Sørheim this could represent the onset of schizophrenia—he quit working, began to behave strangely, and withdrew from social contact with family and friends. However, according to Aspaas and Tørrissen, his antisocial behaviour was already developed, and he may have chosen to live with his mother for practical reasons while he maintained social contact in a virtual world.

Only the first report by Husby and Sørheim was undertaken while Breivik was in isolation and the question has been raised whether he subsequently dissimulated and feigned sanity. In closing statements, because the prosecutors were in doubt, they argued in keeping with legal practice that Breivik is insane. "The most important thing is that he gets put into a cage, and is never set free. I think he knows exactly what he's done. But I'm not a forensic psychiatrist", says a mother who lost her son in the shooting. At that moment, as people cry in a silent courtroom, Breivik is smiling. The killer cried only once during the case, while watching his own propaganda video.

The court will announce their verdict on Aug 24. Whether he will be detained as a patient or a prisoner remains to be seen.

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