

# Of Monsters and of Conquerors: “The Dimensions of the Crime Against Our Children Are Far Beyond Comprehension”

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*It's hard for me even to begin. I shall have to beware, as a man must beware of a rabid fox that he wants to chase out of his garden: how will he approach it so that it does not bite and infect him?*

I could not even begin to write about this monstrosity until after the judgment had been pronounced.

One of the two women, a single mother, 33, was sentenced to 20 years' imprisonment for attempted murder and ill-treatment, and the other, her lover and friend, 40, to 14 years' imprisonment for incitement and counselling.

The first-named did not deny the facts, but kept making excuses, saying she was just listening to her friend's advice.

The psychiatric expert stated that the woman suffers from a serious and irreversible psychological disorder which may lead her to repeat the acts resulting in bodily harm in the future.

She herself claimed that she had only wanted to raise her son, 12, who had allegedly rebelled against her and had been aggressive towards her, to make him “a successful and responsible person, both academically and privately”.

Similarly, the expert characterised her friend as mentally irreparably defective.

The latter admitted that she had advised her mother on educational measures, but claimed

that she was unaware of the extremes to which they had gone. (During the time of the Covid-19 isolation, the two women lived together with their mother, but later the mentor moved away as she found a new partner.) During last week's trial, the prosecution presented evidence that the two women were aware of the extent and intent of their actions.

At a critical moment, the mother searched the internet for information on how such acts are punished. The remorse she showed at the hearing, where she was once in tears (and another time after the verdict was handed down), and her statement that she doesn't understand how such a thing could have happened, do not match up with the video of her son in the cage, twitching in a comatose state, upon whom she comments, "Look at the idiot what he's at!"

The jury also found that there was no doubt that her older friend was the source of ideas what to do with the child — the one that had instigated the educational methods used by the mother.

The Austrian court also ordered punitive damages of €80,000 for both perpetrators. This small amount perhaps says something about the poor social situation of the convicted women.

The verdict was decided by an eight-member jury, which took 7 hours to reach its decision.

The abuse had been going on for years, but had intensified to the final degree, allegedly already in June, and absolutely certainly from the beginning of September 2022. The social services became aware of the problems in the family, they visited once in October and once in November, they noticed "abnormalities", but they considered that there was no need to separate the child from the mother or to take any other action.

The mother's educational measures were as follows:

### She starved the child

She locked him in a dog cage measuring 57 x 83 x 63 cm for punishment and for the time when she was away from home, including overnight.

She taped his mouth, beat him (and also stabbed him with a stick through the cage cracks), poured ice water over his clothes, and then left the window in the basement in which he was kept wide open so that the temperature in the room was only a few degrees above zero.

"He was in the cage because he said he was going to throw himself out of the window," she stated in her defence.

We know that she also mentally abused him, for example by humiliating, cursing and scolding him.

After seeing the boy's twitches in the ultimate coma, the friend contacted a social worker who was not connected to the previous visits by the social services, and this social worker then persuaded the mother to call an ambulance after all.

The description suggests that the social worker and the counsellor had been well acquainted

from before.

When the paramedics arrived, the child's body temperature measured less than 27 degrees Celsius and he weighed only 75 pounds.

He survived by a miracle of emergency medicine. But the aforementioned expert also stated that he is "psychologically, without a doubt, irreparably destroyed".

The verdict is not yet final.

The above did not happen, as you might think, here in backward Montenegro, about which I have dug up the following statistics on the opinion of Montenegrins as to what are the permanently permissible, occasionally permissible and impermissible behaviours by parents towards their child:

**Grafikon 1. Stepen ličnog svrstavanja odnosno nesvrstavanja određenih postupaka u nasilne činiove (2016.)**



As you see from the bottom three lines, there is a majority consensus that puts shouting on a child, a swish with a cane and the barehand slap on the bottom among permissible educational measures.

Yes, people here are old-fashioned and they like to stick to their traditions.

But every day, on my walks about Podgorica, I witness the bustle of children being left by their parents to play happily unsupervised among themselves.

There is a transformer station not far from our house, in the middle of the convergence of

three roads, and there is also a fenced-in basketball and football court added to this triangle plot. I keep seeing children there with the ball both in the rain and during the northern winds. They play, bigger and smaller mixed together.

No, the trial described above, which concluded this Friday with a conviction that is not yet final, took place in Krems, Austria, and the horrible acts I am describing took place in 2022 (and probably even before that) in the idyllic Tyrolean valley of Weidenthal.

I stumbled upon the newspaper report by chance: what I was really looking for was the streaming coverage of the elimination knockout between the Pustertal and Olimpija hockey teams. I found a [link](#), and when I got to the page in question, I was also offered a link to their 'Panorama' report on the Krems trial. The match had not yet started, so I indulged myself with a quick read – and that was that.

I didn't even watch the game. Couldn't.

The fate of the poor boy haunted me through the night and into the next day.

In fact, even now, I am seized by that feeling of utter helplessness and despair that, adhering to the principle of empathy, naturally comes over when one reads something like this.

Central Europe, and especially the German part of it, is considered to be the 'pot' in which this kind of behaviour is readily cooked: the pot is made of iron, polished by tarnished decency, and the contents, hidden under the lid, simmer unseen until they sometimes happen to overboil.

### "Of Monsters and of Conquerors". The Children of Palestine

I'm writing this part after another sleepless night. Yesterday, I realised that I was being unfair in my appalment over the case. Here I was, shedding tears over only one life lost, while every day during the last five months I've been witnessing on the TV screen exactly the same sufferings. The only difference was that the suffering of the Palestinian children was worsening almost imperceptibly through time – giving me a chance to gradually develop a resistance. I got used to the bad news and learnt to ignore them.

Only this morning, after having been unexpectedly acquainted with yet another case of sadism in the middle of Europe (this time in Lower Saxonia), the shield of *ennui* has crumbled and I stand here in awe and horror and despair.

So at last, my heart cries for every one of the at least 600,000 children in Gaza, condemned to unimaginable suffering — until death from famine, if not from shooting, by those who demand that Palestinians do not "express their ingratitude".

Those who are saying in scorn: "Kill a man and you're a murderer. Kill a million of them, and there's a conqueror."

But they are wrong: the crime is the same, only the dimensions are enormously enlarged.

There are even additional similarities, like the perverse connection between the mother and her counsellor, the doer and the supporter.

What could be a just punishment for both?

But wait – the punishment for 30,000 murdered and 600,000 tortured children is even not defined by the Law.

Nobody could expect it to happen, not after Nuremberg.

And so, there seems to be no judge, no prosecutor, no jury, just the terrible silence of Yahweh who should step in as He used to do in other times when His chosen people had been drowning in sin.

Maybe He just cannot fathom – maybe the dimensions of the crime are too far beyond comprehension even for a god.



Emaciated 10-year-old Palestinian child, Yazan al-Kafarneh, now dead from severe malnourishment and insufficient healthcare. Source: Al-Jazeera

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*Written on March the 5<sup>th</sup> 2024 by Branko, citizen of a former Austrian province.*

*Featured image: Displaced Palestinians wait to receive free food from a volunteer-run hospice near Nasser Medical Hospital in Khan Younis, southern Gaza, on Tuesday, January 9, 2024. Bloomberg*

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