

RACIST TERROR ATTACK IN HANAU: THE POLICE RESPONSE

The second investigation by Forensic Architecture (FA) and Forensis into the Hanau terror attack of February 2020 finds police failed to secure the perpetrator's house for extended periods throughout the night, and contradicts the testimony provided to police by the father of the perpetrator. The investigation is launched in the context of the exhibition *Three Doors* at the Frankfurter Kunstverein.

The case

The far-right terror attack that took place in Hanau on 19 February 2020 was one of the deadliest in Germany's modern history. Nine people were killed in a racially motivated attack over two locations; the perpetrator later murdered his mother, before killing himself. His father, who is known to share his far-right racist worldview, was the only survivor in the house. He claimed not to have witnessed the murder. Police knew the home address of the murderer shortly after the attack but did not enter the house for a further four-and-a-half hours.

A new investigation

This is the second investigation that Forensic Architecture, a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London, and Forensis, its Berlin-based sister NGO, have undertaken on the case. (The first is available to view [here](#).) The investigations were commissioned the victims' families and the Initiative 19. Februar.

There were apparently no eyewitnesses to the murder of the perpetrator's mother, and the perpetrator's father claimed that he only heard shots coming from outside the house. The police claimed they didn't hear any gunshots. A major component of this investigation, therefore, was an analysis of the audibility of those gunshots. FA/Forensis examined thousands of pages from the case files produced by the federal investigation, including a first detailed analysis of the footage recorded by a police helicopter, to map police movements throughout the night, and raise questions about their conduct. FA/Forensis also designed a 'sound experiment', in partnership with UK-based acoustic engineers Anderson Acoustics, which recreated the sound of two gunshots fired by the perpetrator to murder his mother, to show where those shots could have been audible within and around the neighbourhood.

Investigations conducted by FA/Forensis are always collaborative: the 'sound experiment' undertaken by FA/Forensis was co-produced by the Frankfurter Kunstverein and was built with the support of members of the Initiative 19. Februar Hanau. Additionally, FA/Forensis' investigation was supported by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.

Conclusions

- Either the official time of death report for Gabriele Rathjen was incorrect, or SEK officers lied in their testimony about not hearing the shots that killed her.

- The testimony given to police by the father of the perpetrator is contradicted not only by the research conducted by FA/Forensis, but by evidence in the prosecutor's case files. The sound experiment conducted by FA/Forensis, and evidence from the federal case files, both point strongly toward this conclusion.
- Efforts by police to secure the perpetrator's house, and ensure that he did not escape, failed critically.
 - The rear door and garden of the house was not surveilled until sometime between 00:25am and 1am, nearly three hours after police knew his home address.
 - The front door of the house was only surveilled for a maximum of 18 minutes during that same time. As a result, the perpetrator could easily have exited his house unseen by police during this time.
 - A police helicopter could also have provided surveillance, but it was never informed of the address of the perpetrator. As a result, it only surveilled the perpetrator's house for 14 minutes during the night.
 - The helicopter footage demonstrates that a police car driven by plainclothes officers, whose mission was to observe the front door of the perpetrator's house, spent a maximum of 18 minutes on this mission, before leaving his post. As a result, for much of the first two hours following of the attack, the front door of the house was not under surveillance.
- The 'sound experiment' conducted by FA/Forensis underlines that if police did not hear the shots fired in the perpetrator's house, it is because they were not in the right position to surveill the house, or to create a secure perimeter.

Quotes

Dimitra Andritsou, Research Coordinator for Forensis, said: "The blunt mishandlings of the police around the perpetrator's house at the night of the attack must be viewed in light of the overall chain of state failures and controversies that have since been exposed: the unanswered emergency calls, the locked emergency exit of the Arena bar, the racist treatment of families and survivors, the presence of right-wing SEK officers on duty that night. The struggle of the families and their allies for a complete clarification of these questions has not yet been heard -- much like the shots around the perpetrator's house. In fact, the state's refusal to hear -- on the night of the crime, and for many years afterwards -- is a political choice, and indicative of deeply entrenched racist structures within the German state."

Robert Trafford, Research Coordinator for Forensic Architecture, said: "Our findings underscore what the families of the victims, survivors of the attack, and their allies, have been saying for more than two years: the police response on the night of the attack was a failure. Every citizen of Hanau, of Hessen, and of Germany should be shocked at the lacklustre approach of local police to a murderous extremist: they did not keep eyes on him, they let civilians walk and drive right past him, and they failed to communicate basic information among themselves. Answers are urgently required, and it falls upon the committee members of the ongoing state parliamentary inquiry to get them. We must hope they are up to the task."

About Initiative 19. Februar

Initiative 19. Februar is an initiative founded to provide solidarity to the survivors and families of the victims of the attack, and to demand clarification and political consequences for the attack, and the state's response.

About Forensic Architecture/Forensis

Forensic Architecture is a research agency based at Goldsmiths, University of London. We undertake spatial and media analysis for international prosecutors, human rights groups and NGOs. Our research is presented in political and legal forums, truth commissions, courts, and human rights reports, as well as in exhibitions and public events. Forensis is FA's sister organisation, founded in Berlin to carry the agency's techniques into new contexts.

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