

Arabs who kill are mentally ill; nothing to do with religion ?

by Theodore Dalrymple

I was in France when a friend told me that a woman had been stabbed to death in Russell Square and five other people injured. He challenged me to guess the origins of the perpetrator. A little later, I looked at a report of the incident on the website of the *Guardian* newspaper. There was no mention in the article of the origin of the perpetrator, a Somali of Norwegian nationality. Even the next day, the article devoted to the subject mentioned it only *sotto voce*, as it were, halfway through the article, which until then was mostly about how excellent a woman the victim had been.

Why the reticence, one might ask? Would there have been the same reticence had the perpetrator been, say, a shaven-headed, tattooed lout belonging to an English nationalist party? One rather suspects not.

The police have so far not found any evidence that the perpetrator had a link to any terrorist organisation, though one at least of the latter rejoiced on its website in the murder. I am perfectly prepared to believe that the crime was not terrorism: after all, such horrible incidents occurred before terrorism so preoccupied us, and will continue to occur after terrorism has ceased. The young man was said to have had 'mental health issues,' a loose phrase that encompasses everything from losing one's temper to smoking cannabis – which, incidentally, might well have played a part in the events. Another possible contributor might have been the Somali national drug of abuse, khat, which might have caused a kind of madness.

I was impressed once again by the police's ability to find just the wrong word to describe a high-profile crime. They did not think that this crime was linked to terrorism; rather, they said, they thought it was just a 'random' attack.

It seems to have escaped their notice that one tactic of terrorism is to attack at random, a random attack sowing terror in a population much more effectively than an attack on a target chosen for understandable, even if reprehensible, reasons.

As for the delicacy of the *Guardian* in the matter of the culprit's origins, it could hardly be because it imagined that its readers would go out and lynch Somalis wherever they found them. Rather, it was a manifestation of what Freudians call reaction-formation, that is to say a response to its own deep-seated, and therefore much feared, racism, another manifestation of which is its obsession with race and racial politics.