



**THE CENTRAL CRIMINAL COURT
OLD BAILEY**

Rex

v

Shaun Pendlebury

Ashana Studholme

Lisa Richardson

Sentencing remarks

HHJ Angela Rafferty KC

1st March 2024

Two children gave evidence in this trial. Publication of any matter that could lead to their identity being revealed is prohibited under section 45 Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

You may all remain seated. Given the complexity of the facts in this case these remarks will take some time to deliver.

1. On 11th December 2023 you were all convicted by a jury of the murder of Shakira Spencer and preventing her lawful burial. The trial lasted 12 weeks. The jury heard evidence of such a grim nature that I have excused each juror from jury service for the rest of their lives if they wish.
2. Shakira Spencer was a healthy and loving young woman of 35. Images of Shakira before she fell under your influence show her full of life, healthy and smiling. She is unrecognisable at the end, emaciated and broken. All who watched it will be slow to forget the CCTV footage of her trying to walk on scalded feet in the middle of the night. You, Pendlebury, lived in her flat whilst she slept in a bike shed. You Studholme started as a friend but ended as the worst kind of enemy a person could have. You Richardson showed Shakira nothing but exceptional contempt and aggression. Leading up to her murder she was routinely and continually humiliated, degraded and dehumanized.
3. I heard you, Shaun Pendlebury and Lisa Richardson give evidence. The lack of pity, empathy or decency towards Shakira was marked in everything you said, even when on trial in front of a jury. I read a pre-sentence report about you Ashana Studholme. None of you take any responsibility and continue to blame each other. You have no remorse. Your only concern continues to be for yourselves.
4. I want to ensure that the valuable life of Shakira Spencer is not forgotten in this sentencing exercise. I have heard and read those who knew her describe her and her particular qualities of innocence and vulnerability. She was loveable, soft and trusting, easy to take advantage of and she needed a lot of help and support. She was shy and

timid. She was sweet natured and adored her two children. She had succeeded in living an independent, productive life for quite some time, not without difficulties, her friend said that a calculated person would easily be able to exploit Shakira. She was no match for the three of you.

5. Shakira's son has described the heartbreak caused by his Mum's killing. He never got to say goodbye to her and that the thought of her dying alone and feeling unloved is something he will think about forever. Her mother described her attempts to help her child and how much love she has for her She says life will never be the same. Her own health is shattered, and she has nightmares about Shakira being in the dark, trapped and dying and calling for her. Shakira's father described the complete despair of all the family. He says that Shakira was a beautiful soul but vulnerable and that it is unimaginable that she could have been treated this way.

The lead up to the murder

6. The jury heard how before her death you all isolated your victim and treated her like a servant. You frightened, assaulted and starved her. The jury heard details such as Shakira being forced to eat ketchup sachets for food, other people being invited to join in the abuse, constant insults and belittling and a growing sense that you could behave towards her in whatever way you saw fit. They heard from witnesses who were shocked at her physical decline. She was seen with dramatic injuries to her face and her mother saw terrible bruising all over her body as if she had been trampled on.
7. You all seemed to enjoy the power you had over Shakira Spencer. There was evidence of a kind of pack mentality between you. There is footage the jury saw that you filmed of her being degraded and assaulted on 4th September. Shakira had become a commodity and an object to all of you. The cross examination of you Lisa Richardson made it clearer than it had ever been that you were involved in

prostituting Shakira. The messages on your phone showed a litany of savagery and depravity which of course culminated in murder.

8. Only you three know what made you behave like this, and you have offered no explanations other than to blame each other and try to evade responsibility. From the evidence it is clear that you all acted together throughout this catalogue of brutality. The filming of Shakira's murder has never been recovered – you Ashana Studholme wiped your phone. You Sean Pendlebur deliberately disposed of yours I am sure. It is clear from the messages that are available on Lisa Richardson's phone that violence and degradation was planned, discussed and threatened towards Shakira, regularly. You were all in it together. I look to your proved conduct when assessing the gravity of this offence.

9th to 12th September: The Murder of Shakira Spencer

9. This murder was marked by extreme cruelty, brutal violence and torture. By the morning of 9th September 2022 Shakira was already bleeding and already badly injured to her head, feet and body from assaults. This is the state she was in when the final fatal attacks began.

10. The jury heard from Child A aged 12 and Child B aged 10. Child A saw the torture start in the kitchen. All three of you attacked Shakira Spencer for hours. Child A saw you SP tell S to kneel and then you hit her on her head with a glass bottle. You then kicked her in the back causing her to fall. You all three then circled her as she tried to ask you to stop and was crying out in pain. Bizarrely at one point you all had dinner with the children and then returned to the violence. Shakira was told to strip by you AS and was filmed. Child A was ordered to fill a kettle and then Shakira was scalded with boiling water. She was screaming. Then Child A told the court that the “blowtorch” thing happened. An aerosol spray with a lighter and used it to burn Shakira. When your thumb, Ashana Studholme's became sore from pressing the

lighter you passed it to Pendlebury to continue. Following this first bout of violence Shakira passed out, hit her head and she was dragged by you SP to the hallway where she slept under newspapers in her own urine. The smell of burnt dead skin was described by Child A. The next day Shakira's torment continued. More depraved violence took place.

11. Child B drew images of you Ashana Studholme with an angry face hitting Shakira Spencer who had an indented mark to her cheek and mouth. He said you hit Shakira in the kitchen and she had a sad face. Shaun Pendlebury you were "whacking" Shakira in the head with your bare hands and Child B showed, in his drawing, saliva coming out of her mouth. Lisa Richardson was slapping Shakira's face, and then he said was "squishing" her head "*like it was a banana....It was so hard it took her brains out*". He also drew fire being thrown and made a whooshing sound. This made him feel sick. When he last saw Shakira she was acting in a strange way he did not like and was incoherent.
12. It is one of the starkest features of this case that A and B were drawn into this horror and that you three acted in this savage way in the presence of young children. The effect on them will not become known for some considerable time.
13. Despite her grave injuries Shakira was then put in the boot of a car and driven to her flat on the 12th September. No attempt was made to give or get her any kind of help or medical assistance. The last footage of her alive shows her stumbling and falling. Once inside she was placed in a cupboard. This is one of the worst things for her family to have to think about. Leaving Shakira in that cupboard was barbaric.
14. Given this orgy of violence I am in no doubt that you all intended to kill Shakira Spencer.

15. I am also sure, on all the evidence, including that given by you Pendlebury and Richardson, that this was a sadistic killing in which you all took pleasure in inflicting pain, suffering and humiliation on a vulnerable woman

Preventing burial facts

16. The clean up and cover up had begun even before Shakira died. In the days after she was put in the cupboard you all worked together to conceal her death and make it look as if she had died of natural causes. The contempt for her continued even in death. Incense sticks and ice packs were placed around the body. You attempted to borrow vehicles to dispose of her. It could not have been a more concerted effort to conceal the truth of what you had done. The outside world was alerted only by the maggots crawling from under her front door. Her body was found badly decomposed on her young son's bed

17. On 25th you Pendlebury were taken to your uncle's and you told him some of what had happened. Your Uncle did the right thing and called the police.

18. The fact that Shakira's body was so decomposed that a cause of death could not be pathologically ascertained was explored in detail at trial. The pathologist said she had degloving injuries to her feet and hands. There were six areas of injury to her head including 4 separate areas of full thickness lacerations, which would have been caused by blunt trauma. There was a possible fracture to her left eye socket and her left ear had been crushed, consistent with her head having been stamped on. The Pathologist told the jury about the possible effects, which can be delayed, of head injury. Given what the children saw her suffer there could have been no doubt that she died of her injuries.

Minimum term

19. There is no difference to make between your roles. I reject all the offered mitigation that you have differing levels of culpability. You all joined in this killing and cover up with equal ferocity and planning, albeit playing different parts.
20. Having considered the provisions of Schedule 21 of the Sentencing Act 2020 and in particular paragraph 3(1) (e) I conclude that your offending is of particularly high seriousness. The levels of brutality were wholly exceptional, and Shakira's suffering was extreme. As I have said it was proved beyond doubt that this was a sadistic murder.
21. By law I must set a minimum term that you must serve before you can even be considered for release. **This is not your sentence. Your sentence is life imprisonment.**
22. The starting point for the minimum term is set by law at 30 years. This takes into consideration the sadistic brutality in the killing. I must consider what other factors make these offences even more serious.
23. I have heard about all your previous convictions. I questioned the relevance of yours Ashana Studholme as they involve previous attacks on a woman and neglect of a child. Those of the others are not relevant to this. I have decided that given the very long sentence you all face I will not increase the minimum term for these matters, as I am urged to do by the Crown and Defence.
24. However, the additional aggravating features here are significant. They are the prolonged campaign of humiliation and violence leading up to Shakira's murder, including encouraging a child to get involved, premeditation and planning involved in both the violence beforehand and the murder itself, the group nature of all the offending and you filmed her suffering and degraded and humiliated her when you killed her. Count 2 I will treat as an aggravating factor. Most serious of all was

committing this sadistic murder in the presence of two young children. None of you have shown any remorse for what you have done. Before mitigation the minimum term would be 35 years.

25. I must consider any mitigating factors under Schedule 21 as well as any personal to you. It is a struggle to find any mitigation for any of you.
26. Pendlebury have a low IQ and I have read reports about your functioning. It is said you are compliant and a follower rather than a leader. However, I saw you give evidence and in my judgment, you were a fully involved member of this group who tortured Shakira sadistically. You had ample opportunity to step away. You took a full part in the ill treatment, lived in her flat whilst she slept in the bike shed. The film of you all taunting Shakira on 4th September is instructive. Child A made your role in Shakira's murder very clear to the jury, and it was central. I saw nothing in you to suggest that you were unwillingly under the power or control of any others. You are 26 and lived independently and I do not accept the submission that you are a child yourself. That was not the way you presented to me. I will give you some limited credit for your psychological problems and deficiencies and your background.
27. Studholme you are not mentally ill or psychotic. You have a personality that is aggressive, dominant, and manipulative. You took full advantage of Shakira Spencer. You have provided evidence of what you are doing in prison. There was considerable evidence that you look to systems and individuals with an eye to control and benefit and in fact this became an issue in the trial towards the end when you wrote notes to Lisa Richardson in the dock. You have told the probation officer a pack of manipulative lies and shown no remorse whatsoever. You too have very little personal mitigation other than some personal factors relating to your background and your children set out in the Pre sentence report and sentencing note.
28. Richardson your tone of aggrieved self-regard continues as do your denials and prevarications. You played a central role in the beating and degradation of Shakira Spencer leading up to her death. In fact after your arrival on the scene the

mistreatment of Shakira intensified considerably. The messages make this clear. No one hearing and seeing it will forget what Child B described you doing to Shakira's during her murder. Even Child A, loyal as she was to you, described violence from you. It is said you are showing yourself to be a caring and sympathetic individual towards others in custody. This is a side that Shakira Spencer didn't see. Your complete lack of empathy came across throughout your evidence. The probation officer recognised in assessing you, as have I, your sadistic motivation. I will take into account some limited personal mitigation in relation to your own children and illness and background matters I have read about you.

Sentence

Stand up please.

29. The sentence for murder is fixed by law and is a life sentence. I sentence all three of you to **life imprisonment** for the murder of Shakira Spencer. 5 years concurrent for Count 2.

30. Please understand that you may never be released. The prison service will manage you and try to reduce the risk that you are to the public, if that is possible. You will be subject to the terms of your life sentence for the rest of your lives

31. The minimum term that must pass before the Parole Board can even begin to look at your case is 34 years minus 522 days.

These remarks should go to the prisons and the Parole board and any authority involved in managing these offenders in custody.

HHJ Angela Rafferty KC

1st March 2024