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Neighbor of lead Sept. 11 hijacker testifies in Germany that he seemed 'psychologically disturbed'

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HAMBURG, Germany – Sept. 11 suicide hijacker Mohamed Atta appeared "psychologically disturbed" and acted "distant" when encountered on the street, a former neighbor testified Wednesday during the retrial of a Moroccan accused of providing logistical support for the attacks.

Indra Andrea Braun, 34, lived next door to Atta in a Hamburg suburb and said she saw defendant Mounir el Motassadeq visiting him. Atta was also visited by suicide pilots Ziad Jarrah and Marwan al-Shehhi and others suspected of involvement in the Sept. 11 plot, she said.

Braun was married to an Iranian Muslim and lived in an adjoining building to Atta for several years, but she said her neighbor never spoke to her.

"For me, he was psychologically disturbed. He had communication problems," she said. "I didn't find him threatening, just strange and distant."

She said she and her husband would try to provoke Atta when they saw him outside his apartment.

"My husband would often kiss me on the street," she said. "Atta was disgusted ... my husband did it just to annoy his type."

Friends and family have said Atta was intensely uncomfortable around women, even once refusing to shake a female professor's hand when she told him he had earned his degree.

El Motassadeq, 30, is being retried on more than 3,000 counts of accessory to murder and membership in a terrorist organization. He appears in a 1999 wedding video with the three suicide pilots who lived and studied in Hamburg – Mohamed Atta, Marwan al-Shehhi and Ziad Jarrah.

He is suspected of providing logistical support for the Hamburg-based suicide hijackers.

El Motassadeq says he was close friends with Atta and others in the group but did not know of their plans to attack the United States. Atta is presumed to be the lead hijacker of the plot and is believed to have piloted American Airlines Flight 11, which crashed into the north tower of the World Trade Center.

El Motassadeq was convicted in 2003 on the same charges he now faces and sentenced to the maximum 15 years, but a federal appeals court threw out the conviction in March and ordered a retrial. It ruled that he had been unfairly denied testimony by key al-Qaeda suspects in U.S. custody.

Braun did not shed more light on el Motassadeq's role, saying he was only one of a group of people around Atta whom she would see in the neighborhood.

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