

## **Article in Stern September 2018**

Stern is a weekly magazine produced in Germany since 1948 and now sells just under 500,000 issues each week.

### **Stern conversation: Separation from Arafat Abou-Chaker**

#### **Bushido: "If anything happens to me, my family will be taken care of"**

Over the years, rap superstar Bushido had submitted to the head of a criminal clan. Now, he and his wife Anna-Maria Ferchichi describe how they freed themselves from his clutches - and why they seek the support of another clan.

Bushido alias Anis Mohamed Youssef Ferchichi grew up with his German mother in Berlin-Tempelhof. He had little contact with his Tunisian father. The word "Bushido" comes from Japanese samurai mythology and means something like "way of the warrior". The rapper recently celebrated his 40th birthday and released his new album the same day.

Anna-Maria Ferchichi was born in Delmenhorst. The 36-year-old is the younger sister of pop star Sarah Connor. From 2005 to 2009 she was married to the football player Pekka Lagerblom. After that, she dated Mesut Özil. In 2011 she met Bushido at a party. One year later they got married. The couple have two daughters and two sons.

*Bushido and his wife Anna-Maria Ferchichi appear on a sunny September morning in a studio in the south of Berlin for an interview with Stern. He wears a jogging suit, she high heels.*

*Stern and Bushido have a special relationship. Five years ago, a Stern issue appeared with the caption line "Bushido and the Mafia". In it, we revealed the existence of a general power of attorney, with which the millionaire rapper was connected to the boss of a criminal extended family in Berlin of Arab origin: Arafat Abou-Chaker. Both sued Stern. The lawsuit ended after five years last June, the Cologne Higher Regional Court dismissed the action on its main points.*

*Shortly before Bushido had announced the separation from his notorious business partner - a dangerous step in the milieu of organized crime. It was followed by threats, investigations into attempted blackmail, shooting at Arafat's café, raids in Bushido's new environment - the atmosphere is*

*challenging. And this at a time when tensions between the rival family clans of Berlin are escalating anyway, as hit-killers executed a man with eight shots on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of Berlin, under the eyes of children and families. The bosses of the Arab clans appeared for the funeral of the victim Nidal Rabih, also a great offender, who is said to have allied himself with the Abou-Chakers, with a total of nearly 2000 men - images like from a mafia movie.*

*Bushido and his wife Anna-Maria say we can talk to them about everything. They only have one condition: at 5 pm they have to be at their daughter's parents' evening.*

**Bushido, you were a member of the Abou Chaker clan for more than 14 years. There are proceedings against members of this family for assault, pimping, extortion, drug trafficking, robberies for millions. How great is your fear now that you have made the extended family an opponent?**

Bushido: The first thing we did after the separation from Arafat was to make our wills. If something should happen to me, my wife and children are taken care of.

Anna-Maria: Of course we are afraid that someone will shoot me or my husband out of revenge. Actually, we expect it every day. But you cannot live in constant fear, so we try to not to think about it. There's no other choice.

**We did not think that we would sit down with you after all the legal disputes between us.**

Bushido: Times are changing. We say what we think.

Anna-Maria: We are no longer intimidated by Arafat. He benefitted from us financially for long enough and nearly destroyed our marriage.

**Mrs. Ferchichi, you married your husband in 2012. Did you realise what kind of milieu you married into then?**

Anna-Maria: The extent was not clear to me, no. When I met Arafat Abou-Chaker, I did not even notice what kind of people these were. Arafat and his brothers were nice to me. He was charming. We went out, it was relaxed and good fun. That changed slowly and then suddenly with our wedding. He suddenly set quite different standards for me as a wife.

### **What standards?**

Anna-Maria: Arafat insulted and cursed me more and more often. For little things. If my T-shirt slipped up my back a bit while sitting, he said: "How can you run around like that? You look like a hooker! That's not for a woman." Or, "Why are you smoking?" Small stuff. Too long nails, too short skirts. All this displeased him. Also that I had a cleaning lady and a nanny. And it made him mad when I asked too many questions or resisted his demands. This is something people like Arafat are not used to - certainly not from women. He told my husband that he was a dog, that he did not control his wife.

### **It offered you rare insights into the milieu of criminal clans. What can you tell us about the role of women in extended families?**

Anna-Maria: These are complete parallel societies in the middle of Germany. The role allocation is very clear. The women have nothing to do with the business, that's down to the men. The woman is there to have children, to run the household, to obey the husband, to be subordinate. The women have no education, stay mostly at home. On vacation, men and women go to Islamic hotels with separate areas. The women walk around veiled, which is particularly absurd because the Abou Chaker women did not even wear a headscarf when they came to Germany.

### **How religious are the members of the Abou-Chaker clan?**

Anna-Maria: They go on pilgrimages to Mecca and go to the mosque, but at the same time they run hookers on the Kurfürstenstraße. Even the Salafist preacher Pierre Vogel should speak at the funeral of my father-in-law. Fortunately, we were able to avert that.

### **Bushido, for over 14 years Arafat was your business partner, maybe a friend. On March 21, there was a breakup. Your wife Anna-Maria played an important role in this.**

Anna-Maria: The separation from Arafat was inevitable. We could not have lived like this anymore.

Bushido: Anna-Maria was the factor that decided me to finally make the break. Which does not mean that I was happy before. But the day my wife separated from me changed everything.

### **What exactly happened that day?**

Anna-Maria: It escalated on that day. My husband and I had a quarrel, Arafat was there too. I wanted to move out and called the police. That's why ten heavily armed LKA (State Criminal Office) officials stood in our house. I told them I wanted Arafat to leave the house immediately. It was the first time that I completely lost control because of him. He then snapped. Arafat lunged at me through the LKA officials and threatened me. At the same time, I had our twins, who were still babies at the time, in my arms. It was really bad. And then the officials escorted Arafat upstairs with Anis, my husband. I was finally able to pack my things in peace.

### **Why was Arafat with you that day?**

Anna-Maria: He was always with us. Or Anis with him. The two formed a kind of symbiotic relationship.

### **Was the quarrel about Arafat?**

Anna-Maria: Yes, indirectly. Of course, as in any marriage, we had normal disagreements, but we have always argued about Arafat. He had recently insulted me again, and my husband had been silent. That's why I exploded. I thought he was my husband, why is he behind Arafat and not behind me? Why does not he defend me? At that time I did not understand that Anis was sitting between stools, that he was silent so that the situation did not escalate any further. He has taken it all for years.

*At this point, it is necessary to explain how Arafat Abou-Chaker and rapper Bushido got to know each other and how Bushido became part of the clan. The story begins in 2004. Bushido was dissatisfied with his record label Aggro Berlin, he felt that rapper Sido was given preferential treatment. It came to a dispute, Bushido wanted to go, but the label refused to release Bushido from his contract. Meanwhile Bushido got to know Arafat Abou-Chaker on the streets of Neukölln. He and his brothers got him out of the contract - how exactly, is not known. Only that several bearded men appeared in the office of the label boss. After that, Bushido's contract was dissolved.*

*From that time on, Arafat and his brothers were earning off Bushido. It is said that they received 50 percent of his revenue. Bushido has so far sold about three million records, had countless stage appearances, a best-selling biography and the film adaptation of his life by Bernd Eichinger. In the music industry it was*

*said that there would be trouble if Arafat and his brothers did not get what they wanted. Managers have been blackmailed and threatened. Hardly anyone wanted to say anything. It's better not to mess with the Abou-Chaker family.*

**Bushido, so you were between Arafat and Anna-Maria, the two people you were closest to after your mother's death in 2013?**

Bushido: Yes, but for different reasons. Anna-Maria is the woman I love, the mother of my children. Above all, Arafat was important to me because he had been very present in my life since 2003. But the relationship with him involved from the beginning a lot of control and pressure. And we also had shared business relationships. If I could have decided freely, which of course I could theoretically have done at anytime, but well, somehow it did not happen ...

**How - "somehow it did not happen"?**

Bushido: Arafat was a master at getting stuff he wanted. And to subtly convey the feeling that something had to be done exactly according to his ideas. It was not always about a specific threat. Rather an emphatic request. But the intrusions into my private life became more and more massive. Sometimes I had a real stomach ache when I saw that he was calling on my mobile. The relationship made me bleak, I got depression. Nevertheless, I did what he asked me to do.

Anna-Maria: I always say that Arafat could also be a cult leader

**Please describe the Arafat-Bushido-Anna-Maria triangle.**

Anna-Maria: After my husband's mother died, Arafat's influence on us grew even bigger. He determined our entire life, all my husband's thinking. What we have to do, what kind of food we buy, how we are buried. How we educate our children.

**Can you give us an example?**

Bushido: When my mother died, Arafat demanded that it be an Islamic funeral, so that men and women have to go to the grave separately. I did not want that because I knew that my mother did not want it either. She had educated us partly Islamic, for example we did not eat pork, but she was not deeply religious. My mother's family are German! So there were also Catholics with other rites, my aunts, my grandmother, and I had to explain to them that they were not allowed to go to the grave together with their husbands. My aunt said, "Wait, that's my sister's grave, after all!" But Arafat did not care about all that.

Anna-Maria: I thought that impossible. I had looked after my husband's mother until the very end, and now I was not allowed to stand by her grave with my husband. Instead there were some rockers and half Neukölln.

### **Why did not you resist Arafat's will?**

Bushido: Of course, from the outside, it sounds absurd that a grown man like me does not resist another grown man. But it was like that. And honestly, in truth, it was all much, much worse.

Anna-Maria: It took me forever to understand this construct. Actually, it was only when my husband stopped defending Arafat and confided in me. Before that, I was always completely exhausted. I even went to the psychologist for half a year because of this incomprehensible triangle.

Bushido: And I always thought that if I stopped mediating, if I stopped being loyal to Arafat, then things would escalate really badly. And I really wanted to avoid that.

### **In your 2008 biography, you wrote: "I will always be loyal to Arafat."**

Bushido: But this biography and what I rapped back then, that's art. I could not say or write down the truth. Because the truth was that I had nothing to report. That Arafat decided everything.

### **There were rumours about it again and again. The rapper Kay One also claimed at the time in Stern that you had nothing to report about the clan.**

Bushido: I know. It was said that I was Arafat's serf, his dog. And of course I always said: all nonsense. When my wife saw the Stern title back then, I also said: oh, all nonsense, mafia, pff. But what should I have done? I made a good face for the bad game. I saw no other way than to continue to play along. I lay like in a coma all those years.

### **The clan is known for its evil methods. Often its will, it is said, was enforced by force and pressure. You too will have benefited from that. It can be said that there is blood in your career.**

Bushido: Of course, I'm not just a victim. I am also a confidant and therefore I am partly to blame. It is absurd. I'm actually an intelligent boy. I know the difference between good and evil. It offends me if anyone thinks I have not seen

all these injustices from Arafat. Of course I have. But I have not said or done anything. I looked away. All those years. Yes, I did.

**When, for example, did you look away when something went wrong?**

Bushido: I was good friends with producer Bernd Eichinger. He was a great guy and wanted to film my life. I was flattered: a movie about me! I should even play myself. The other roles were cast by actors. Moritz Bleibtreu was to play Arafat. But when Arafat heard that, he snapped.

**What does that mean?**

Bushido: Arafat was always active in the background before. I thought that was okay too. But at some point he pushed forward. He wanted to see his face on the screen.

Anna-Maria: He was jealous of my husband.

Bushido: Anyway, Arafat said to Eichinger, okay, then we have to talk about the rights. He said he had to give him permission to let Moritz Bleibtreu play him. Arafat got Eichinger to pay him money.

**Arafat got money from the film company Constantin for a role he had never been promised?**

Bushido: Yes. The people of Constantin just all shook their heads. They said something like that had never happened before

**How much did Constantin pay?**

Anna-Maria: 200,000 euros.

Bushido: The money was somehow declared as a donation to a parrot association or something. Anyway, I was watching and not saying anything, even though I knew it was wrong.

**It is said that Arafat got 50 percent of its revenue. But how did you benefit from it?**

Bushido: He always negotiated good deals. For example, if we wanted a kitchen that cost 60,000 euros, then Arafat could trade it down to 30,000, in whatever way. But of course, Arafat has benefited more from my bottom line than I did from his.

Anna-Maria: He earned millions through my husband.

**Let us return to the initial situation. It is said that you, Mrs. Ferchichi, filed a complaint of assault against your husband on the day of the move.**

Anna-Maria: Yes, that's right.

**What happened then?**

Bushido: I remember exactly how I watched through the window of our house as my wife disappeared with our children and the LKA officials. I stood there and thought that cannot be true. I just wanted to have my peace, I wanted to be alone and think. That evening, a gig in Zurich was planned, to which I wasted no more thought. It was about five o'clock, it was December, it was dawn outside. Arafat looked at the clock and said, "Okay, see you at the airport at 8pm." I said, "How do you imagine that, Digga. My wife and children have just left, how am I supposed to stand and rap in a disco at three?" He replied, "Sure, that's okay. Don't be like that."

Anna-Maria: That shows once again, what kind of person Arafat is

**And did you then appear?**

Bushido: Yes. I was only at the lawyer's office for the complaint. After that I am on to the airport. I just worked. But inside me, I was like dead. Nevertheless, I got on the plane. I looked out of the window and said nothing. Outside, violent blizzards were raging outside. I usually have a lot of paranoia from turbulence, but I did not care that day. I looked at the snowflakes and thought, if we crash now, at least it's all over.

Anna-Maria: First of all, I moved with the children to my mother near the city of Bremen. It was clear to me: that was it. I want a divorce. I do not want this life anymore. I could not stand this pressure, this fantastic life and the influence of Arafat. It seemed unthinkable for my husband to leave Arafat. I wanted to keep my children away from Berlin and send them to school near Bremen. I tried to find a lawyer, but nobody wanted to represent me for fear of the Abou-Chakers. That's when I realized in what kind of circumstances I had actually lived.

**Why did not you divorce Bushido after all?**

Anna-Maria: One morning I just put the laundry in the drum and wanted to vomit. My daughter was standing next to me. She knew the nausea from the

pregnancy with the twins and asked: "Mummy, are you pregnant?" Actually, it could not be, I thought. Carried out a test, which was positive. A big shock.

### **Bushido, how did you learn about the pregnancy?**

Bushido: Anna-Maria called me and told me. I just thought how great is that? I was euphoric, even though I did not want to press her. I just told her: I'm happy, and I'm behind you - at all costs.

Anna-Maria: He was really great, which of course moved me. To summarize, this time, these five months we have lived apart, this time without Arafat and the news of my new pregnancy brought us back together. Anis came to visit me and the kids regularly, and it was like falling in love again.

Bushido: At the same time, I withdrew internally more and more from Arafat. For the first time in 14 years, I also resisted his demands. I did not go to the mosque on Friday, as he had long been asking me to do, because I drove to Anna-Maria at the weekends. I just wanted to have my family back with me.

### **How did Arafat behave?**

Bushido: He called me a dog because I took her back. But I did not care. Anyway, Arafat was just afraid that I was moving out of Berlin, to Bremen or somewhere. He was afraid that then he would have less influence on me. In Berlin he had me well under control.

### **Under what conditions did you, Mrs. Ferchichi, move back to your husband in Berlin in 2015?**

Anna-Maria: I told my husband: I'll only come back on the condition that we do not move with Arafat to a shared property in Kleinmachnow as we had planned. And that Arafat does not enter our house anymore. He agreed.

### **How exactly did you break with Arafat then?**

Bushido: Once again there was a big fight, again Arafat insulted me, I was a dog, my wife would fuck me with a dildo. I listened to it all, and suddenly he says: Do you know what? I'm not up to you at all. I do not want to work with you anymore. Do what you want. And me: Wow! Alright, let's do it. It was as if your tormentor released you after 14, 15 years.

Anna-Maria: Of course he changed his mind again. He then let him dance like at a tribunal, his brothers next to him - and these are such animals. My husband was on his own. And then Arafat said: Like, you want to part with us? How does that work? Remember: There is no Bushido without the Abou-Chakers! And at some point there was this very massive meeting in the office.

### **Massive?**

Bushido: That does not matter now.

Anna-Maria: When I saw my husband after that, I burst. I insulted Arafat in a mail terribly. I really wanted to reveal everything and put him in jail.

### **You had a pact with the devil.**

Anna-Maria: He wanted to intimidate us. After each of these meetings, we talked with friends at home for hours. We did not know what to do anymore. We were ready to pay a fee, just to get him out of our lives.

### **How much did you want to pay?**

Anna-Maria: We were so desperate. We would have gone up to 2.5 million. Just buy out. Buy freedom! Can you imagine that? We would have paid extra for all he did to us. How good that it did not happen!

### **2.5 million euros? These are Mexican conditions.**

Bushido: That would have been worth it. But as I said, it never came to a transfer fee. Arafat and I met for the last time at his house in Kleinmachnow on March 21, 2018. I had prepared a termination agreement with my lawyer. I went to Arafat and showed him the contract. The plan was: we talk to each other, we enter a number, sign both - and done. The field for the number was free. It was like a blank check. We sat in his living room. He took the contract, crumpled it and slapped it in my face. I got up, ran to the door, and he yelled after me: Piss off, run to your wife, run to the LKA! I'll fuck you all, shit.

Anna-Maria: He later demanded that he cash in for another 15 years. 15 full years, my husband would have been 55 years old. He just wanted to cash in on us for a lifetime.

### **Why did Arafat actually let you go?**

Anna-Maria: Because of two things. I went to his older brother and told him what I know so well and that certain information is deposited with the lawyer. I

do things that my husband does not do, I said. They cannot handle a woman who goes crazy. Besides, I am with the police. And I got our files from the common office.

**We believe there is another reason. Ashraf Rammo is your new protector. He belongs to a notorious extended family, with 500 members about twice as large as the Abou-Chakers, and was already in prison himself. A recent LKA report lists 1,146 cases in which members of the Rammo family are suspects. Recently, investigators confiscated 77 real estate properties worth more than nine million euros on suspicion of money laundering. With your new protectors, the Abou-Chakers also got cold feet.**

Bushido: I've known Ashraf forever. He supports me as a friend. And it's true that I'm doing business with him now. But in your whole Arab clan obsession you also have to recognise: Ashraf has been in the music business for a long time, I was with him on the Bravo Supershow ages ago. For example, he used to manage the rapper Massiv. He has brought Capital Bra to the label Ersguterjunge, knows about 50,000 people and knows exactly how much he is now in my focus because of his surname. But you cannot allege a clan attachment for coming from a family that also has criminals. And now that Arafat is gone, many doors are opening for me on business. Because of Arafat, many did not want to work with me anymore.

**But is not it completely naïve to get involved in a clan again? You only repeat your destiny.**

Bushido: No. Because there is one big difference: Ashraf is polite, elegant, understanding, he does not call constantly, he leaves you alone. He did more for me in three months than Arafat did in 14 years. And besides, I trust him - and he does not want to dictate to me.

Anna-Maria: Never again will anyone have any influence on our lives and our business except the two of us. But I'm also sure that if Ashraf were not there, the danger would be even greater for us. Without a bit of support, we might have to move to Canada or the USA. If Ashraf were not there, something would have happened to us long ago.

Bushido: We also told the police. We legally conduct the war with Arafat. But different things are happening on the streets that nobody talks to the police about.

END OF INTERVIEW