Mondialisation.ca
Centre de recherche sur la mondialisation

Media, Migration and Militarization in Germany

"Yes, since Paris that is normal."

Par Elena van den Berg
Mondialisation.ca, 24 janvier 2016

Région : Europe
Thème: Media Disinformation, Police State & Civil Rights

The Paris Attacks, the current flood of migration, and the incidents in Cologne on New Year's Eve: it is hard to tell fact from fiction these days; the lines separating these incidents become increasingly blurred. What they have in common: they illustrate the supposed threat under which we all live.

The German media does not get tired of stressing and discussing the ungraspable foreign threat. However, beyond engaging in discussions deliberately inciting public fear of terror, and discussions that either condemn or romanticize the refugee, the crucial point is to see how these incidents create dynamics that will fundamentally change German society. The pattern at the basis of these dynamics: Strategies of threat-creation and othering enable a development toward an increased militarization, both in terms of foreign and domestic policy.

Let's first look at the German reaction to the Paris terror attacks. It encompasses militarizing consequences on the foreign-policy level, and consequences heightening the threat-perception on the domestic level. In terms of German foreign policy, the Paris attacks and the way they were mediated have clearly served to publicly justify increased military engagement. Through the media, Secretary of Defense, Ursula Von der Leyen stressed the need to show solidarity to France, to help France defeat the threat of terrorism, and the need to take on responsibility in the foreign-policy realm in the form of military intervention. Consequently, it only took the government a little more than two weeks after the attacks to ratify a German military intervention in Syria.

However, helping out France in defeating the terrorist threat is only the purpose that can be sold most comfortably to the public. At the same time, there is another purpose that blurs the lines between the Paris attacks and the refugee crisis: Military intervention is focused simultaneously on the official quest to combat terror, and on enhancing the possibilities of "refugee repatriation. » According to the Spiegel International article, the strategy behind Germany's military participation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Mali,and Syria seems less focused on a long term establishment of peace, stability, and order, and more focused on a short-term solution for the German refugee crisis.

The Spiegel article exemplifies this point by talking about Berlin's primary goal in Afghanistan, which is to ensure "that at least part of the country remains safe enough that rejected asylum-seekers can reasonably be deported." Germany is expanding its missions in Iraq and Mali, the article states, for the same reason. A mission to Libya, to secure the region and "slow the wave of refugees" is also considered. Consequently, there is a lot more

to Germany's foreign-policy militarization than the constantly mediated threat of international terror.

In terms of German domestic policy, the Paris attacks have served to further instill the fear of terror in the German population, and to militarize the German public sphere. Two personal first-hand experiences illustrate these dynamics. Nine days after the Paris Attacks, I went to a fairly small concert (maybe one- or two thousand people) in Leipzig. In order to get in, you had to take off your hat, scarf, gloves, open your jacket, and let security pat you down and look into your bag. I was very irritated by this measure since I could remember, from other such occasions, only having to let them take a look into your bag and show them the ticket. So while the security lady patted me down, I asked her: "Excuse me, is this normal now?" and she actually answered what I had expected but nevertheless hoped not to hear: "Yes, since Paris that is normal." This was a small concert a little outside of Leipzig! To me, this is ridiculous. The point here seems to be to ensure that every individual is constantly reminded of the big, looming terrorist threat.

The same can be said about another domestic consequence: On December 20th I went home for Christmas by train. Upon entering Leipzig main station, I immediately noticed two police officers patrolling the station. The sight itself is neither new nor troubling. However, one of them carried a machine gun at the ready, which I had never before seen anywhere in Germany. When I related my observation to friends from Stuttgart and Munich, they told me it was the same in their cities. Quite clearly, this constitutes a militarization of the public sphere and, just like the concert-incident, serves to heighten the public awareness of the looming threat.

Now, turning attention to the incidents of New Year's Eve in Cologne and the way they are mediated, it is possible to see that they serve as a strategic continuation to further enhance the dynamics of militarizing the public and the private sphere, and of instilling fear within German society. One of the first government resolutions in response to the Cologne incidents comprises the creation of four thousand additional police positions from 2016 to 2018, three thousands of which will be deployed to secure train stations and borders. Probably, as it seems to be the new normal now, they, too, will carry their machine guns constantly at the ready. There are demands, yet to be discussed, of the SPD party to increase the number to up to thirteen thousand positions in total. The fact that police academy experts such as Professor Rafeal Behr cite studies that clearly show that more police never simply equals more safety speaks to the primary quest of militarizing the public sphere.

The constantly mediated threat of the criminal migrant that was incited by the Cologne incidents also serves to create acceptance of increased public surveillance measures. Parts of the German government demand more surveillance, as discussed in the article above. This probably also entails a further normalization of incidents like the one related at the concert, incidents that slowly but steadily infringe the citizenry's personal rights and heighten its awareness of constantly being under general suspicion. Moreover, the recent law on data retention plays into this dynamic. In the discussion of the consequences to be drawn from Cologne, there is repeated emphasis on the fact that the German intelligence service can access the collected data, and that it can, and should, make use of its possibility to hack computers and run online searches.

Apart from the official political consequences drawn by the government, the incidents of

Cologne have resulted in a militarization of the private sphere as well. According to a statement by Daniela Lindemann, spokesperson of the police in Cologne, there is a clear increase of official requests to own a weapon (you need a special firearms certificate in order to own a weapon in Germany). As of January 15th, there have been three hundred requests, whereas there were only four hundred of them in all of 2015, she stated. Shockingly, an increasing number of the population in Cologne seems to deem it necessary to own a weapon, and consequently seems to deem the possibility of using it against another person in real life a normal measure of self-defense, which illustrates the shift toward a normalization of militarization.

Finally, the mediated process of othering the refugee is a pattern at the basis of German domestic militarizing dynamics, as it serves to create a concrete threat. It works along the lines of age-old discrimination patterns and perfectly complements the looming ungraspable threat of terrorism, in that it gives the threat a "dark face," that is supposedly looming in front of everybody's door, on the public spaces through which we navigate every day. Labeling all dark-skinned men existing in a status outside of mainstream white society as criminal, savage-like, rape-prone threats, especially to the white woman, does that ring a bell? In terms of historic US race relations it sure does. There is a part of the current discourse in Germany that works in exactly the same way, and therefore discriminates in the same way. The recent covers of the FOCUS magazine and the Süddeutsche Zeitung demonstrate the racist discourse on the sexualized, dark threat to the white woman most clearly. Since the discriminatory discourse implicitly stresses the urgent need to counter the threat, it crucially advances and legitimizes the agenda of domestic militarization.

There remains the question as to why these methods of militarization are created and pursued so thoroughly. What comes to mind first on the national level is of course Germany's economic power in terms of arms exports. Although China has outrun Germany in 2015, Germany still ranks fourth on the world scale. Hence, German wealth, like that of many other countries, largely rests upon arms exports. However, Germany's methods of militarization cannot be examined in isolation as they go hand in hand with the international dynamics of increased militarization that started after 9/11 and led up to the consequences of last year's Paris attacks. Following the French example, the German government now wants to play its very own part in the geopolitical power plays. Therefore, public feelings and opinions are channeled in directions convenient for the overall cause, and the increasing militarization of German foreign and domestic policy generates both a slow and often unconscious intimidation from above, and a general obedience within society in regard to the international geopolitical power plays.

Elena van den Berg is currently enrolled in the American Studies Master's program at Leipzig University. Her research interests include foreign policy, contemporary US literature, and notions of tourism in US culture.

La source originale de cet article est Mondialisation.ca
Copyright © Elena van den Berg, Mondialisation.ca, 2016

Articles Par : Elena van den Berg

Avis de non-responsabilité : Les opinions exprimées dans cet article n'engagent que le ou les auteurs. Le Centre de recherche sur la mondialisation se dégage de toute responsabilité concernant le contenu de cet article et ne sera pas tenu responsable pour des erreurs ou informations incorrectes ou inexactes.

Le Centre de recherche sur la mondialisation (CRM) accorde la permission de reproduire la version intégrale ou des extraits d'articles du site Mondialisation.ca sur des sites de médias alternatifs. La source de l'article, l'adresse url ainsi qu'un hyperlien vers l'article original du CRM doivent être indiqués. Une note de droit d'auteur (copyright) doit également être indiquée.

Pour publier des articles de Mondialisation.ca en format papier ou autre, y compris les sites Internet commerciaux, contactez: media@globalresearch.ca

Mondialisation.ca contient du matériel protégé par le droit d'auteur, dont le détenteur n'a pas toujours autorisé l'utilisation. Nous mettons ce matériel à la disposition de nos lecteurs en vertu du principe "d'utilisation équitable", dans le but d'améliorer la compréhension des enjeux politiques, économiques et sociaux. Tout le matériel mis en ligne sur ce site est à but non lucratif. Il est mis à la disposition de tous ceux qui s'y intéressent dans le but de faire de la recherche ainsi qu'à des fins éducatives. Si vous désirez utiliser du matériel protégé par le droit d'auteur pour des raisons autres que "l'utilisation équitable", vous devez demander la permission au détenteur du droit d'auteur.

Contact média: media@globalresearch.ca