



Change and Continuity in German Landscapes of Fear and Imperialism after September 11th: “Nothing Remains” = “More of the Same”?

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After 9/11, there was a general feeling that “from this day on, nothing will remain the same”. Geopolitical projects, cultural life, and political constellations in North America and Europe seemed to have come to a confused halt, and there seemed a distinct need for reorientation. In this intervention, we would like to argue that the attacks of 9/11 actually resulted, not in a reversal, but in an acceleration of trends that had prevailed during the previous couple of years—what we will refer to as “more of the same”. Although we believe that this holds true most importantly for the US, today’s self-declared world-sheriff, we will focus on one of its deputies in the attempt to police the planet: Germany. We shall concentrate on the geographies of xenophobia, militarism and law and order and will conclude by discussing the possibility of a “left” and “geographical” position on the attacks. We assume this is especially important, as the first reactions of official German geography were neither. These included a statement on the homepage of the *Geographentag* (the biannual congress of German-speaking

geography, which took place in early October 2001) mentioning the “seemingly idyllic 1990s” that had been disturbed by the “barbaric attacks” and calling for solidarity with “the American people”, and a complete absence of the topic in the official program of the congress. 9/11 was mentioned only in the *Antipode* lecture, where Edward Soja commented on the events, and at an informal meeting we called which attracted 40 to 50 people. In what follows, we propose some preliminary analyses of the aftermath of 9/11.

“Germans to the Front”¹

As in many other Western countries, politicians and the national media in Germany were desperately awaiting a call to arms by the US following 9/11. Red–Green government and opposition alike emphasized the “unlimited solidarity with our American friends”, with the word “unlimited” meaning that military aid would be happily provided. But a request for troops was not made for weeks. Finally, in a press conference on 6 November, a proud Federal Chancellor Gerhard Schröder told the public that the US had requested military support—with US-American Minister of Defense Donald Rumsfeld humiliating him on the same day by pointing out that no formal request had been made but that the Germans might participate if they so wished. The next question was whether the Green Party, junior partner in the Red–Green government, with its history of pacifism and opposition to German military activities, would vote for the provision of German troops. The chancellor increased the pressure on the remaining pacifists in the Green Party, who were not (yet) convinced that bombing Afghanistan was the best means to achieve global peace. In the end, he linked the ballot to a vote of confidence. Finally—and to no one’s surprise—only four out of the eight Green “dissidents” voted against participation in the war, leaving a marginal majority to the Red–Green coalition and the government intact.

Nobody could have imagined this happening even a decade earlier, when the Greens would not have voted for military engagement by the German armed forces, nor was there a German army ready to engage abroad. Both developments hint at the substantial change in the geopolitical role of Germany since unification in 1990 and the parallel militarization of German society. Debates about active engagements of the Bundeswehr date back to 1987, launched by the governing conservatives, the Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU). At the time, public opinion was strongly opposed to sending German troops abroad. But soon Liberals (FDP) and Social Democrats (SPD) adapted their promilitary positions, and in 1991 German soldiers participated as United Nations inspectors in Iraq, directly after the Gulf War. This was the first “out of area” activity of the Bundeswehr. At the same time, its overall military strategy began to change from being based

upon a mere defense army to one based upon an interventionist force. In 1992, a working paper by the Ministry of Defense displayed a reorientation of the geopolitical strategies of united Germany. For the first time, the “maintenance of free world trade and access to strategic resources” was included among “Germany’s vital interests” (Pflügler 1998:13). The silent militarization of German society finally reached the left in 1995, with Jürgen Habermas pleading for military intervention in Bosnia and Joschka Fischer, today’s Green minister of foreign affairs, urging his party to get rid of its antagonistic pacifism. Thus, Germany’s engagement in the “war on terror” and its approval by the Greens mark further stages in both Germany’s new imperialist geopolitics and the ongoing militarization of German society—what we consider to be “more of the same”.

Wrapping up Security Bundles

We will now turn our attention to two aspects of recent German politics that are linked to the new security measures in Germany in fatal ways: the current debate on reformulating immigration policy and security on the one hand, and the “new geographies of fear” on the other, leading (among other things) to the election of a “law and order” regional government in Hamburg in late September 2001.

Since 9/11, new laws dealing with “security” and control have been implemented in many countries, acting under the cover of anti-terrorism legislation. Germany got its own version of the US Patriot Act, the *Sicherheitspaket* (“security package”). The *Sicherheitspaket*, set up by Otto Schily, the German Secretary of the Interior (SPD), came in two packages between September and December 2001. It contains a new paragraph in criminal law criminalizing membership of foreign criminal or terrorist organizations, allows the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation to carry out investigations “to prevent terrorism” without probable cause, announces that biometric features will be introduced to passports and ID cards (already compulsory today), and states that all data concerning social security, unemployment benefits, and income support can be used by the Federal Bureau of Criminal Investigation. A large part of the package is exclusively directed at non-Germans and migrants. Migrants who are suspected of being “radical”, “extremist”, or “fundamentalist” and/or of supporting “international terrorism” will immediately be deported without the possibility of appeal. Furthermore, all personal data of migrants and asylum seekers/refugees are transmitted to the Federal Intelligence Agency (Buckel and Kannankulam 2002).

Most of the new measures would not have helped to prevent the 9/11 attacks: the police would not have been able to identify the “terrorist sleepers” by their appearance, and “Islamic fundamentalists” are not discernible by their biometric features. All these measures aim at

people who have explicitly not aroused suspicion. This type of preventive policing without probable cause builds on the piecemeal establishment of an all-embracing state surveillance. In the past, the ideologies of the communist threat (1950s and 1960s), terrorist threat (1970s and 1980s), and foreigners' threat (1990s) had been used as legitimization. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 again serve to legitimize another step in the strengthening of state machinery in Germany by further restricting personal liberties and basic rights—especially for those who are not German by origin and thus not blessed with a German passport. By focusing on “fortress Germany” and non-Germans within Germany, the *Sicherheitspaket* results in the reinforcement of both the boundary between the inside and the outside and new boundaries within. Thus, the reactions to the attacks are again marked by a “more of the same” approach.

Law and Order in Hamburg

When it comes to the propaganda of “improved law enforcement”, of pushing new security measures and creating a xenophobic climate, there is both competition and silent collaboration between Schily and conservative opponents, including Bavaria's minister of the interior (Günter Beckstein, CSU) and a newcomer in German politics, Ronald Barnabas Schill. Schill is a former judge, nicknamed “Judge Pitiless”, who has held in Hamburg the function equivalent to those of Schily and Beckstein since the last elections at the end of September 2001. He is also the new deputy mayor of Hamburg, a city that used to be a social democratic stronghold from the end of World War II but is now governed by a coalition made up of the CDU, the “Party for a Law and Order Offensive” (*Partei Rechtsstaatliche Offensive*—PRO, or simply “Schill-Partei”) and the FDP.

Schill's party was founded in 2001 and ran an election campaign that was based upon a single topic: “law and order”. Accordingly, the party's election platform is written like a code of law. It promised to achieve the “restoration of law and order in the city” by fighting “two major problems: migrants and drugs”, “criminal refugees and useless migrants” (all quotes from the PRO campaign platform, PRO 2001). Amazingly, Schill emphasizes that he does not have a xenophobic attitude, and at this point the connection to the recently planned reformulation of German migration politics becomes significant. When the Schill Party writes that “we do not have any use for refugees and criminal foreigners in Hamburg”, their position is compatible with the new German migration policy that distinguishes between useful “Green Card/highly qualified labor migrants” and all the (supposedly) drug-dealing rest of them.

Consequently, Schill's election platform suggests the abandonment of the right to asylum in the German constitution. For both “citizens'

and migrants' rights", PRO has outlined zero-tolerance politics, promising to cut the crime rate in half within the first hundred days of being in power (they did not succeed, by the way). Apart from adding a massive number of police officers in the city, this politics aims at the immediate deportation of foreigners who have committed any kind of offense.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that on the one hand, Schill and the PRO have gained a lot from Schily's nationwide law-enforcement agitation after 9/11. On the other hand, the elections in Hamburg took place less than two weeks after the attacks and only a couple of days after two of the assumed terrorists had been identified as students who had been living inconspicuously in the city. These two incidents provided the PRO campaign with a "perfect proof" of the general danger and the particular risks people in Hamburg have to face. Terror could thus be reconnected to the local and be equated with young Arabs in particular and all non-German elements in general. The simple message was that these people infiltrate the homogeneity of the local with the terror of the global. This message of xenophobia appealed to one out of five voters in Hamburg: overall, the newcomer party got 19.4% of all votes. In the neighborhood in which the assumed terrorists had been living and studying, they reached nearly 40%. The PRO's success in Hamburg provides a clear example of how the attacks in the US have resulted in hostility to migrants, legally and practically. Again, there is nothing fundamentally new here, basically a radicalization of the xenophobic climate that had been stirred up by official politics and the media for decades—more of the same.

Critical Geographies of (in?) Germany

It looks as if, in the aftermath of the attacks, critical geography in Germany should have become much more prolific—there is simply much more to criticize. Geography as a concept (not as a discipline!) enters the debate in the German left where the mechanics of the world system are concerned (no spoon 2001), or where the moral geographies and geopolitics of Bush and bin Laden are criticized. It also enters the debate dealing with the perspectives of a globalized left (Hirsch 2001). The question of "Where are we?", in reference to the position of the left in the world order between "al Qaida" and "the US", has now gained major importance. Since the decline of socialism, the end of the East–West dualism, and the failure of third-world anti-imperialist liberation, a simplistic reading of the big picture does not work anymore. Since the opposition in many former third-world states has turned conservative (including fundamentalist), or the rulers of states imagine themselves as victims of liberalism and globalization, and none of the players (neither NATO nor Saddam Hussein, neither Milosevic nor bin Laden) possesses politics that are emancipatory in

any way, what does the left do? We must develop a critical politics that does not take sides with any of the great opponents, that escapes the imagined great conflict. It must be different from those who claim to own the truth and to be able to draw strict lines; it must try to draw its own political lines and identify conflicts that matter, to develop its own critical perspective, “an own point of departure that discloses itself, in its contradictions, its weaknesses, its utopias, its actions” (Wetzell 2001).

This is also a question of geography. The need for a position that denies great geopolitical codings forces us to redirect our gaze away from exotic landscapes of hope and empires of evil towards more intricate geographies.

Here, we decide to direct our gaze towards Germany. The growing xenophobia, new German imperialist and military geopolitics, growing surveillance and control: all these factors deliver much material to be analyzed and criticized—and to resist. And there is quite some geography in what is going on, too. The fortress geographies of Schill and Schily are combinations of classic racist geographies and new geographies of control, and the globalizing geography of the Bundeswehr is a postmodernizing one. And critical geography does not have to be reinvented: in spite of all the visible changes, they all point in well-known directions. All of them are actually reinforcements. This comes as no surprise, of course. Nothing has changed concerning the fundamental relations in Germany and elsewhere, drawing on produced differences such as class, race, gender, or religion.

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Endnotes

¹ “Germans to the front!” was the order of the British commander-in-chief of the multinational imperialistic troops, Lord Seymour, on 22 June 1900, when the attack on Fort Hsiku was initiated during the Boxer Rebellion in China.

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