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IR 472: Europe and Migration

Final paper

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The Impossibility of “Sending Back”

How can a security threat be constructed? Which tools are used for that? This essay shall give a closer look on the election campaign by Roland Koch for the regional elections in Hessen, Germany in 2008. An analysis

In December 2007 two young Germans with a migration background – one Turkish and one Greek – attacked an old man in the subway of Munich and almost killed him. By doing so, they referred to him as a “German asshole”. For Roland Koch, member of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), running for the regional elections in January 2008 in the German *Bundesland* Hessen, the shock that this incident caused among society seemed to be a reason why he soon put it on the agenda of his election campaign. When giving an interview to the German newspaper *Bild* he started questioning the behaviour of migrants – asking them “to behave” and to not “hide behind their migration background”.

What followed was a nation-wide discussion about youth crimes especially among young people with a migration background. The topic was soon handled as a threat on society and what was discussed, was rarely the reasons, but the consequences of that problem and how they should be dealt with. Koch’s claims were for instance that of a *Warnschussarrest*, which would mean a faster judgement for prison to those who committed a criminal offence the first time. Another of his suggestions was that of a faster deportation of migrants “back” in their home-countries. The violent migrant youth was shown to be a serious threat on the German society, harsh solutions seemed to be necessary.

There can be a lot of connections drawn to the securitization theory of Buzan/Waever – as I want to show in the first part of this essay. Later I am going to examine the negative results for Roland Koch during the regional elections. Finally I am going to finish with some thoughts about the influence of media and the pictures it produces on the securitization act.

I. *The theory of societal securitization*

It is generally accepted that the term “security” nowadays has to have another understanding than it had during the Cold War era. The military element and the state as main variables concerning security have to be questioned, since now the territory of nation-states is almost nowhere questioned anymore in Europe, but their inner stability. The inner stability is according to Buzan/Waever depending on “those ideas and practices that identify individuals as members of a social group.¹” So insecurity is produced when these ideas and practices seem to be under a threat. It has to be considered that these identities actually are “imagined communities”, which makes the threat of them a constructed one as well.

Starting directly with a reference to Roland Koch and his interview given in the German newspaper *Bild*, he states:

*In Deutschland gibt es seit vielen Jahrhunderten eine christlich-abendländische Kultur. Wer sich als Ausländer nicht an unsere Regeln halt, ist hier fehl am Platze.
[There has been a Christian-western culture in Germany for many centuries. If a foreigner is not acting according to our rules, he/she is out of place here.]²*

The construction of a “we” in relation to “them” is overwhelmingly present here. At first, he is labelling the “bad” foreigners as those, not belonging to the “Christian-western culture” – to be clear: the foreigners coming from a Muslim or eastern society. Actually the interview is given in the context of the attacks in Munich – done by young Germans with yes, a Turkish migration background, but also with a Greek migration background. Greece is actually considered to be the cradle of democracy and western values – the values that he is then referring to in the next sentence. By saying that someone, who is not acting according to “our” values, should leave, would obviously include a much larger amount of people than just those, who are considered as foreigners. Here again the problem of a constructed identity can be seen.

¹ Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole; de Wilde, Jaap: „Security. A New Framework for Analysis“, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, London, p. 119

² <http://www.bild.de/BILD/news/politik/2007/12/28/koch-roland/interview-deutschland-faust.html>

In one of Williams' essays I will be referring to more often in this paper, he is citing McSweeney, who is criticizing the simple connection between "security" and "identity" – since it then becomes reduced to subjective judgement and the floor is given to xenophobic or racist visions³. It can be of course discussed, if a state can speak objective security, but for this essay it shall be enough to emphasize that "identity" in a nation-state like Germany must be something having to do with being a German. That draws a quite clear line to the objects or persons that could threaten this identity – the so-labelled foreigners. Someone, threatening the "German identity" must be someone that we do not define as German – which is a twisted thing in Germany since it is possible that a person is born, raised up and socialised in Germany and still is not an official German, but belonging to the German society.

So according to Roland Koch this group that can loosely be called Germans and their identity is threatened by some "very violent juveniles, often with a foreign background".

*[...] Was lassen wir uns gefallen von einem kleinen Teil äußerst gewaltbereiter Jugendlicher, häufig mit ausländischem Hintergrund?*⁴

The perpetrators that called their victim a "German asshole" even support the emphasis on the foreign background – and it is underlining the self-definition of young Germans with a migration background as foreigners. An older survey also shows that 73 percent of the eighteen-to-twenty-four-year-old immigrants "felt strong bounds to the home culture and denied a "German identity."⁵

They themselves see the "we" of the Germans and "them" foreigners, which should not be confirmed by the state, but highly alarm it. Confirming this thinking means sharpening the placement of these juveniles as a threat to "our" societal security. This is again a construction of a threat, since the real problems are structural problems within. Hans-Jörg Albrecht is also considering this fact in his survey on ethnic minorities and crime in 1997:

³ Ibid., p. 436.

⁴ <http://www.bild.de/BILD/news/politik/2007/12/28/koch-roland/interview-deutschland-faust.html>

⁵ Albrecht, Hans-Jörg: Ethnic Minorities, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Germany, in: Chicago Journals, The University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 56

*Theories of deprivation predict higher levels of crime among immigrants who experience unemployment, poor education, low average income, and low socioeconomic status, just as those variables predict crime involvement among similarly situated Germans.*⁶

He is also giving numbers from 1994, when the “foreign youth” – there are no more specific categories in the statistics by the police – made up 57 percent in the Hessian youth correctional facilities. Roland Koch became prime minister of Hessen in 1999 the first time⁷. So the problem he is now showing could – and actually should – have been seen before. This leads to the aspect that his construction of a security threat still did not let him success for the elections.

II. The failure to success

When talking about security, especially the concept of societal security, the social construction of security, is important. And within this argumentation special emphasis is given to securitization being a speech act, which means that it is “located with the realm of political argument and discursive legitimation.⁸” Just by talking about a security threat, which must be existential, the threat is done. But also the “[s]uccessful securitization is not decided by the securitizer but by the audience of the security speech act [...]”⁹.

*“Conditions for a successful speech-act fall into two categories: (1) the internal, linguistic-grammatical – to follow the rules of the act [...] and (2) the external, contextual and social – to hold a position from which the act can be made. [...]”*¹⁰

A survey presented by the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung¹¹ is trying to analyse the miserable result of the elections in January 2008 in Hessen. Their conclusion is that the topic itself – youth crimes – met with good response, but that Roland Kochs’ suggestions for solutions

⁶ Albrecht, Hans-Jörg: *Ethnic Minorities, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Germany*, in: Chicago Journals, The University of Chicago Press, 1997, p. 68

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 80

⁸ Williams, Michael C.: „Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics“, *International Studies Quarterly* (2003), p. 512; Blackwell Publishing.

⁹ Quotation of Buzan (1998) in: Williams, Michael C.: „Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics“, *International Studies Quarterly* (2003), p. 523; Blackwell Publishing.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 512

¹¹ Neu, Viola: “Landtagswahlen in Hessen und Niedersachsen am 27. Januar 2008. Wahlanalyse“, Online-publication, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2008

were not convincing. In a survey 66 percent of the interviewed citizens said that the claim of the CDU for a stronger youth criminal law was just made for the election campaign. So maybe in this case the construction of a threat was too obvious to actually have the wished result. It can be said that the “audience” of this specific security speech act accepted the security threat, but not the person talking about it. For instance: 78 percent of the interviewed said that the deportation of criminal Germans with migration background could find a consensus.

It is actually amazing to see that the topic of youth crimes was before Koch’s statement not considered on a political agenda, but when it was, 23 percent of the interviewed persons found it even more important than the topics of “family” and “economic situation”. So it seems that the attempt of creating youth crimes as a serious security issue was accepted by the audience, but Koch was not the right person to do so. His opponent, Andrea Ypsilanti (SPD), was under the interviewed persons more trustful concerning social justice¹². So the topic of a societal problem would have been more hers. But confusion might have arisen under the voters by Roland Koch bringing it on the agenda. Before the said *Bild* interview Roland Koch and his party was leading the surveys – when he was sticking to his usual programme.

Roland Koch is known for being very competent in his job and a strong leader, but having a hard time of presenting himself and his ideas in a positive way to the voters. This leads to another important factor that should be considered when talking about securitization – media.

III. Media and Securitization

As Williams states¹³, “modern media is a central element of security relations.” The words spoken cannot be considered without also taking into account the pictures that are produced. Also Buzan/Waever state:

*When ethnic or religious categories are established as the interpretative instruments for understanding a situation, the media has often played a role in this.*¹⁴

¹² Neu, Viola: “Landtagswahlen in Hessen und Niedersachsen am 27. Januar 2008. Wahlanalyse“, Online-publication, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2008, p. 11

¹³ Williams, Michael C.: „Words, Images, Enemies: Securitization and International Politics“, *International Studies Quarterly* (2003), p. 512; Blackwell Publishing.

By for instance a constant showing of the pictures from the attack in the Munich subway, especially since the victim was an old man, a fear within society is produced. When looking at the *Bild* interview with Roland Koch a strong attitude is already given by the newspaper when asking, if you, as a German, can still feel safe in the own country: “[...] muss man nach dem Überfall von München nicht fragen, ob man als Deutscher im eigenen Land noch sicher ist?”¹⁵

The answers given by Roland Koch during this interview take place in a somehow constructed sphere: He is reacting to the overwhelming presence of the incidents’ pictures in media, which signalled him that this topic might be one that the German citizen is concerned about – and by German citizen meaning his possible voters. But until the Election Day the voter is actually an unknown variable since media does the first reference to what might concern the citizens. This circus is also giving a good example of the “social construction of reality” as Berger/Luckmann¹⁶ defines it.

¹⁴ Buzan, Barry; Waever, Ole; de Wilde, Jaap: „Security. A New Framework for Analysis“, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, London, p. 119

¹⁵ <http://www.bild.de/BILD/news/politik/2007/12/28/koch-roland/interview-deutschland-faust.html>

¹⁶ Berger, Peter L.; Luckmann, Thomas: The social construction of reality : a treatise in the sociology of knowledge, Penguin Press, 1967, London

IV. Conclusion

The constant repetition of images seems to be a legitimization for extra-ordinary sanctions, as considered within securitization theory. An argumentation line as the one of Roland Koch would almost make no sense without the direct or indirect medial support. Youth crimes among Germans with a migration background have been surveyed already before, but the media or even the politics has paid no attention¹⁷. This has to do with the long journey of Germany until realizing that they actually are a country of immigration and that immigrants and their children are especially vulnerable to unemployment, poverty or insufficient education, as mentioned before.

In the 1990ties the focus of attention was more on violence, especially in eastern Germany, against foreigners. And actually the reasons for racist actions like 1992 in Rostock or somewhere else are the same or at least very similar to those in Munich – they are done by young adults, who have a poor education, feeling left behind society, having no positive experience in life, no perspective and no idols.

Here we are at the point of realizing, that the problem of a violent German youth with migration background is not as simple as it might seem – it is a holistic societal problem. Pushing the insecurity of a society, caused by general structural problems, onto young juveniles is simply irresponsible. These young Germans are already opposed to a multiple versions of insecurity– just to mention shortly the regulated double citizenship law. And when we see our society under a threat we must accept that the threat comes from within and will not disappear by “sending back” young Germans to the countries of their parents, because their own country is Germany. And this is the place where the problems should be dealt with.

¹⁷ see: Albrecht, Hans-Jörg: *Ethnic Minorities, Crime, and Criminal Justice in Germany*, in: *Chicago Journals*, The University of Chicago Press, 1997

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