



Caught in-between: Spying and therapy in Intercultural Cities in the context of the ‘New Wars’

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ABSTRACT

Established in 2008, the Council of Europe’s Intercultural Cities Network “supports cities in reviewing their policies — and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realize the diversity advantage” (ICC, 2018). According to their website, **the ICC approach “helps build trust between members of the community** through policies which encourage mixing, interaction and participation” (ibid). More than a hundred cities are now members of the ICC network, but their discourse — based on dialogue and trust — is challenged by another apparently contradictory discourse.

According to Asa and Yaari (2014), two Israeli military experts, the era of wars between nation-states has passed, but has not brought about a kind of ‘world peace’ as expected. What has emerged are the ‘new wars’ — which are conducted within a civilian environment, between the authorities and enemies who are citizens of the state or its residents. Unlike the ‘enemy of the past’, who could be identified by means of his uniform, language, appearance or simply being a foreigner, the new enemies are hard to recognize, as, in the age of globalization, the cosmopolitan city is full of aliens — most of whom, of-course, are not enemies at all. (Asa and Yaari, 2014). According to Arjun Appadurai (2006) the globalization process makes it very difficult to define who ‘we’ are and who ‘they’ are, thus creating feelings of constant uncertainty. This is **the discourse of mistrust and suspicion, which challenges the ICC’s discourse of trust and dialogue.**

The current paper is part of a PhD research done in the years 2015–2018 for the Haifa University Anthropology Department, supervised by Prof. Amalia Sa’ar. It was based on about 20 interviews with integration officers in European cities which are members of the ICC network, as well as observations in different conferences and trainings held by the organization. **The paper examines the complex and fascinating ways these two discourses challenge each other, contradict, react or get entangled with one another in trying to deal with the reality of these years of terror.**

KEYWORDS:

Intercultural Cities, New Wars, securitization, safety policy, prevention of terrorism, diversification

BETWEEN BRUSSELS AND STRASBOURG

March 2016.

I wake up in my hotel room overlooking the modern Strasbourg train station, looking forward to my planned participation in a meeting of the Council of Europe, which I intend to visit as part of my research about the implementation of the principles of the Intercultural Cities Network. Established in 2008, the network “*supports cities in reviewing their policies through an intercultural lens and developing comprehensive intercultural strategies to help them manage diversity positively and realize the*



diversity advantage". This is an optimistic starting point, and I have been attracted to it for a long time — in my role as the Head of the Haifa Shared City Project in a local Israeli NGO I have worked with city and ICC officials and was involved in the process of Haifa's joining the network and implementing the guidelines. My interest in their implementation in other European cities has been a focal point in my decision to make this the main theme of my PhD research — but when I turn on the TV in my room the dream of the intercultural city seems as far from becoming a reality as one can think of. This is so because the pictures on the screen show the ruins of the Brussels airport, and passengers fleeing from the bombing which took place a few minutes earlier in the local subway. Like glimpses from some unbelievable horror film, people are seen walking in the dark tunnels of the underground, stuck somewhere in the middle between two stations, trying to find their way out while screams and shouts are heard in the background. Frightened passengers are shown huddling outside the airport.

It is against the backdrop of these images that the conference I came here to observe is supposed to take place later in the day. Its title reads "*Rising to the Challenge of Creating Intercultural Societies at the local level*". A challenge indeed, I note to myself, wondering how the two discourses — the harmonious, optimistic discourse that works to promote positive cooperation between the various communities, and the suspicious militaristic discourse which sees terrorists around every corner, will clash or be entangled in each other. When I leave the hotel to walk to the Council of Europe conference center, the website I am reading reports 28 dead. When I arrive at the entrance with the fluttering flags, the number rises to 30.

Inside, in the huge conference hall, delegations of all European countries are taking their places. There is something impressive, I think, in the mere fact that this is happening — that the conference was not cancelled or postponed following the horrific news. In and of itself it is also a statement — an expression of an unwillingness to give in to the reign of terror, a show of strength, resistance and unity in face of the will to see enemies everywhere. From the chairman's opening words it is clear that the day will move along an obvious tension — between the need to meet the agenda as originally planned, and the inability to ignore the events, unfolding in the EU's sister-city, Brussels. "Terrorism is a matter for the security forces, but our role is to deal with the radicalization we see today through dialogue at the local level" says the chair of the meeting as he opens the session.

"We believe that prevention and de-radicalization are more important measures than oppression, and here local authorities have an important role to play," says another speaker, a German mayor. "We need to help people who want to leave radical movements. We must not give up our task of building inclusive societies and we have to rise to the challenge" Other delegates suggest similar strategies, or report on work in their cities. In the evening, the television broadcasts pictures from Brussels, where the residents are gathered in the main square around lit candles. The light reads: *Unis contre la Haine* — united against hatred.

1 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities/about>. (link active to 31. 7. 2022)



NEW WARS

In their book *Fighting Differently — The New Concept of Combat* Asa and Yaari, two Israeli military experts, claim that the era of great wars between the nation-states has passed, yet this has not brought about a kind of ‘world peace’, but rather a new kind of ongoing low intensity wars. Unlike the ‘old wars’ these wars do not occur at the borders of the nation states against external enemies but rather explode in their urban centers. The foes are not uniform-wearing soldiers of other nation states, but citizens or residents of these cities, unrecognizable as enemies until the moment in which they blow themselves up and thus expose themselves as such. Planes, missiles, tanks and submarines turn out to be useless in these wars, and the most important role belongs to the intelligence, responsible for finding out who the enemy is and what he is planning to do (Yaari and Assa, 2014; Muenkler, 2005). The realization that peace is not imminent and that the ‘new wars’ will play a leading role in future cities deepened after the attacks led by Da’esh in France in January 2015 (Kepel, 2015a, Kepel, 2015b). As the dominance of this point of view became clearer in the years of my research, I set out to find out how the Heads of the Integration Departments in cities which are members of the Intercultural Cities Network go about dealing with this discourse.

THE POSITION OF THE ICC REGARDING THE ‘NEW WARS’.

The principles and guidelines of the Intercultural Cities Network are based on the assumption that respect and protection of rights will reduce the motivation for violence. The alternative argument is that the conflicting aspirations — for example, between the vision of the Islamic State and the Western way of life cannot be resolved in these ways. The writers of the ICC principles resist the idea that violence is connected to a certain culture: “Until quite recently, the most familiar manifestation of radicalization and extremism within Europe and North America was likely to be ‘home grown’” they wrote in a document published a year after the conference. (ICC, 2017). According to this position “Common sense would suggest that in a global media-scape no city can make itself inviolate to extremism, particularly to the act of a lone individual”. The danger seems to lie elsewhere: “Many cities would argue that the very process of trying to fortify itself against extremism — through securitization of public space and repressive policing of targeted groups — would undermine the very freedom and openness they are trying to defend” (Ibid, p. 19).

ICC, then, also assumes there are two contradictory points of view — the security discourse is seen as opposing the intercultural one, which (is) —” based upon the active maintenance of good relations, de-segregation of habitat and urban space, dialogue and interaction” (ibid, p. 20). The ICC’s formal position, then, is clear:

- It denies deep cultural differences between groups or claims that some groups have higher tendency to violence than others

- It criticizes the efforts to ‘spy’ on certain populations and suggests the price of these in creating mistrust is too high to be paid.
- It sees intercultural dialogue and universal protection of human rights as the best tools to fight potential radicalization.



This is an admirable position, and it expresses a position developed in similar organizations at the same time, such as the “Shared Society Commitments” developed by the Club de Madrid at approximately the same time (Club de Madrid, 2009). But as I was to find out, the reality on the ground forces the Heads of the Integration Departments to develop more complex positions in dealing with these two discourses.

THE NEW WARS AS SEEN BY THE HEADS OF INTEGRATION DEPARTMENTS

In interviews I conducted I could see a variety of strategies which the Heads of Departments or mayors use to manage the movement between the two discourses. These included:

- **Separation and Continuation:** In this type of strategy, the Heads of the Departments agreed that the terror attacks were indeed horrific, but claimed they were very limited in size, rare between, and thus did not affect their work or belong to their field of responsibility. They claimed the police or the national security forces should deal with them, while they go on concentrating on integration in schools, public events etc. This strategy was chosen, for example, by the chair of the meeting in Strasbourg on the day of the bombings in Brussels.
- **Protection of Muslims as victims and strengthening cooperate with Muslim communities:** Other Heads of Departments (or the same ones using an additional strategy) believe the attacks are particularly dangerous for the Muslim community, most of whose members, of-course, have nothing to do with ISIS. They see their main role in strengthening relations between this community and other city residents.
- **Building a shared identity based on opposition to terrorism:** a leading strategy chosen by some department heads is based on efforts to build a shared identity, based on the assumption that opposition to violence is common to them all. This was expressed, for example, by holding ceremonies and demonstrations in several European cities following the attacks in Paris in November 2015 (as one example). It was also based on the belief that cities and urban citizenship can create social cohesion in ways that nation states now fail to do (Holston and Appadurai, 1996).
- **Questioning the multicultural position.** Some Heads of Departments, who had worked for many years to promote multi-culturalism, have second thoughts about their work. Thus, for example, two Heads of Departments in Germany, who had worked hard to establish the possibility of Muslim religious education in schools, began to suspect that the religious teachers sent from Turkey thanks to their



efforts were actually messengers Of Erdogan and do not educate according to the principles accepted in schools in Germany.

- **Combining Strategies:** Still other Heads of Departments do not oppose the war discourse, but use it in their own ways. Some of them get involved in intelligence efforts, trying to ‘find the enemies’ in their cities, while others see it as an opportunity to expand their work using other titles, thus creating a new hybrid and mixed position along a continuum between the two discourses. I will devote the rest of my talk to describing this phenomenon.

LOST IN TRANSLATION BETWEEN THE DISCOURSES? OF THERAPISTS, SPIES AND INTEGRATION OFFICERS

1. THE SPY IN THE INTEGRATION OFFICE

The first sign of the fact that the discourses were not as separate or contradictory as I first assumed could be found in the first sentences said by my first interviewee — the Head of the Integration Department in a city of Germany whom I interviewed in his office in the summer of 2015. This is how he introduced himself:

*I am the Head of the Department of Integration and Immigration; I have been in the position for eight years. My task is to find groups, clubs and initiatives that help to integrate, and to find balance when there is tension between the various group interests. This includes, of course, being in touch with all the relevant people in the fields of culture, health, education — **but also the police. The police have never been as interesting and important as these days.***

Later in the meeting, M.A. proudly pulled out a booklet produced by his department, which describes the community initiatives with which he cooperates. There is a group of Turkish women who teach reading and writing, a club for Muslim youth working on behalf of one of the local mosques, etc. But this is not the only booklet he had describing these initiatives. According to German law, the Federal Service for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV — Bundesamt fuer Verfassungsschutz) is obliged to publish an annual summary of the threats to democracy in Germany. Some of the publications are focused on specific cities or regions, and describe the activities of the organizations operating there. Thus, from a publication relating to his city, M.A. showed me that some of the community organizations which were included in his brochure publicizing their community work, also appeared in the BfV publication, where they are perceived as a risk for democracy.

*So here, you see — here they have the mosque, which is the most conservative mosque, and we know that the preachers there preach hatred. Their leader sits in Lebanon, and he is one of the important Salafist leaders there. Sheikh — There are **thousands** of people every Friday, and a few hundred women. Yes? This is a focal point of mistrust and conservative attitudes, yes? For God’s sake, sometimes when I think about it. And they’re sitting*

here on the street, not far from here. With their preachers who preach hatred. Sheikh Rafiq. He was here, but after hearing what he said, he is not allowed to enter Germany now, because he preaches hatred against Israel and this is forbidden by law —



The BfV is not seen as a neutral body in Germany, and after the events in Chemnitz in August 2018, its Head, Hans-Georg Maassen was harshly criticized for having claimed that no ‘hate campaign’ (Hetzjagd) had taken place following the murder of a German citizen by two refugees. Leftist political activists would claim that the BfV has right wing tendencies and is politically close to the AfD movement. But at the time of the interview, M.A. presented the agency as a reliable source of information. And it was not the only source he used for his intelligence work.

When I asked him how they actually know what is going on in the mosques, whether they have ‘local spies’ who listen to or record the sermons, he explained that there is an Israeli website called Memri TV. This website, he explains, was founded by veterans of the Israeli intelligence community, and in his role as Head of the Integration Department, he uses its services to find out what is going on in his city.

“Exploring the Middle East and South Asia through their media, MEMRI bridges the language gap between the West and the Middle East and South Asia, providing timely translations of Arabic, Farsi, Urdu-Pashtu, Dari, and Turkish media, as well as original analysis of political, ideological, intellectual, social, cultural, and religious trends” the organization declares on its website. Its board of directors, it turns out, include “distinguished figures in government, media, law and academia. Among them are former prime ministers — (and) former United States government officials, such as the director of the CIA; Secretary of the Navy; Director of Operations with the FBI — Deputy Defense Secretary” etc. So the office of the Head of the Integration Department, I slowly figured out as I analyzed the text of my interview with him, is part of a complex network of agents who work — who knows how and where — as part of the intelligence gathering mechanism in these new urban wars. Partly building dialogues and intercultural bridges, partly spying or using intelligence materials sent to him by other agencies, M.A. is a hybrid new-war-intercultural creation. During the interview, he tells me that ten youngsters who live in his city have recently packed their cases and gone to Syria to join ISIS. When I ask him how he knows, he says:

We get lists — there are the intelligence services, the Americans, the Israelis, they work with the Germans, we follow up on these things. (So) we get a lot of stuff from them, sometimes from journalists who pass it on to us, sometimes from the constitutional protection service (BfV). Sometimes people are sent to the mosque to listen ... We know only part of what is happening there, it’s just the tip of the iceberg. And sometimes people from the mosque themselves publish their sermons, they put it on their website and then Memri translate it.

M.A. Shows me the duplicity again — here is the mosque that appears on the list of its community organizations as an activist for girls, here is the booklet of the Organization for the Protection of the Constitution.



In our brochure, you see? They appear with the name, with their address, with pictures of people, with the detail of the service they offer. For example, they offer advice to immigrants who have just arrived, social counseling, schools, everything you can think of. But what do I read in the report of the BfV? That they are connected to Hamas, so that is the kind of challenges I have to deal with, there are many wonderful things, but there is also that.

M.A., then, is not the only hybrid entity around — the organizations or people he is working with also seem to him to be elusive or postmodern hybrid creations whose identity changes frequently and cannot be categorized clearly. According to Gurevitch (1997) while modernism was based on the premise of the continuity of identity, with a clear national identity at the center, the postmodern era raised questions about this stability and described identity as a product of invention and a combination of new possibilities: the postmodern self is not uniform, it is a bricolage of different parts, it improvises and connects many worlds which differ and combine with each other in new and unexpected ways. Using the peaceful dialogue of the intercultural cities network, hybrid post-modern entities can be perceived as an expression of creativity. But using the new war discourse, they become ‘suspicious objects’. In this complex world, M.A. continues to do intercultural work — he organizes dialogue meetings, local festivals, women’s study and training groups. But he does this alongside his ‘spying’ work, which he believes helps him find his ‘true’ allies. Thus, he combines the two discourses, rather than separating them or seeing them as contradictory.

2. THE POLICE AS AGENTS OF THERAPY

The interview with M.A. was held in the summer of 2015 — after the declaration of the establishment of the ‘Islamic state’, when young people from European cities began to leave for Syria in order to join what they perceived as an ideal state. The details of this process are described by Dounia Bouzar, a French Moslem anthropologist, in her book titled “How to Get Out of the ‘Jihadist’ Hold” (Bouzar, 2015). In the summer of 2014, when Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared the establishment of the Caliphate and young French people began to flock to Syria, she realized that their families needed intervention, professional support and assistance, and established the CP-DSI — a center for the prevention of cults associated with Islam. Among the staff of the center were experts on cults, sociologists of religion, security personnel, educators, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Within a few months, Bouzar describes, dozens of families whose children have gone through the process of radicalization had approached her, including middle class educated parents. The staff at the center used anthropological and psychosocial research methods to try and understand this new phenomenon. The research product was a list of indicators that serve as a tool for identifying risk situations — including disengagement from school and previous social relationships, seclusion, change in dress patterns, emotional disengagement from parents and family, increased use of social networks and more.



In her book, Bouzar also describes how the French government quickly identified the importance of her work, turned her modest hotline into a national center funded by the Interior Ministry, and asked her and her staff to train the rapidly growing hotline teams. Thus, in a training about ‘anti-radicalization’ held by the ICC in the city in France in October 2017, a police officer appeared, presenting a list of indicators developed by Bouzar and her friends to the participants. He also spoke about the strategies he uses in his work, whereby police representatives collaborate and work hand in hand with the welfare authorities in order to identify potential terrorists among the city’s residents.

In his brief remarks during his lecture (he was one participant in a panel of speakers on the issue) and in an interview I held a few days later with him in his office, captain O. assumed it was agreed that “you never know who the enemy is and where he is hiding”, since he is often a close relative who has been a victim of IS incitement

For example, there was one mother who was really worried. She said that her son He goes to the mosque four times a day and prays there, that is all he does — and all he talks about is jihad .

The possibility of having a close family member become ‘an enemy’ is a typical and frightening phenomena of the ‘new wars’, and the state, as Ya’ari and Asa describe, reacts to it by developing an intricate intelligence system. Captain O.’s description of his work is a brilliant example of this kind of system: when a worried relative, friend, teacher or neighbor calls the hotline, he describes, the risk level of the person being reported is assessed according to the list of indicators (based on the study of Bouzar and her colleagues). “If we are told about plans to travel abroad, for example, it is a flickering red light for us — in such a case will try to intervene immediately to stop the suspect’s departure” he explained. In an interview in his office, he expanded this theme:

Every school has someone who collects the information, from teachers, educational counselors or other students, there are many possible sources — we look at the overall picture, the parents, the family environment, personality traits, whether the suspect believes in conspiracy theory, if they change their behavior — We also try to find out if they have a criminal record. For each indicator we will have grades for ‘strong signs’ or ‘weak signs’, and depending on where the person is in relation to this list, — we make the decisions accordingly”.

So far the intelligence system, but after the assessment — quite surprisingly — comes the therapy part:

For example, we could call the mother and offer her psychological assistance to help her develop the relationship she wants to have with her child, who is obviously having a hard time.

This interview left me stunned because even while I was listening to my interviewee, I understood that the two discourses I had assumed to be contradictory were getting



entangled or collapsing into each other before my very eyes. The spying of the new war discourse, and therapy of the intercultural discourse, had become one. Were the psychologists helping the mother of the radicalizing teenager working as therapist or as intelligence agents? Obviously, they are doing both. But does this mean that the agents of the intercultural cities have given up on their discourse and become part of the war discourse? I don't think so. It can also be claimed that they understand they cannot ignore the securitization point of view, and thus engage with it but try to use it for their own goals. Suggesting therapeutic help to a mother of a distressed youth is not **'only** a 'new war tool'. It can be interpreted in different ways.

When I raised this hypothesis in the final round of training in France, the participants confirmed that this combination of strategies was indeed taking place — but also claimed that it allowed them to receive more resources, which were previously blocked. The head of a similar hotline in a Swiss city explained she suddenly got a huge budget to work with youth which she would never have received before.

In the course of the year since we began operating there were 48 applications — that is, about one call per week. In another situation the city would have closed this kind of service, but because of the political atmosphere politicians will not close it, so we continue to work.

Ironically, it appears that the seemingly contradictory logic between the need to do intelligence work and find the enemy, and the need to hold dialogue and offer assistance, is eroded when interests meet. I do not think that the war discourse took over the discourse of integration. Equally, it can be argued that this is at least a mutual exploitation.

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² You can find it on: <https://www.shatil.org.il/sites/default/files/2020-08/hyph.pdf> (link active on 29. 8. 2022).