

# Securitizing Migration: Aspects and Critiques

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## Securitizing Migration: Aspects and Critiques

Andreas Themistocleous

### Introduction

Migration has been discussed extensively in recent years. A significant number of studies, from different ideological and political origins, have dealt with the nature, causes and consequences, but also the different types of migration. Among others, migration is considered as a contemporary security threat with serious implications for the socio-political and socioeconomic stability both domestically and regionally<sup>1</sup>. According to official statistics of the International Organization for Migration<sup>2</sup> the number of migration flows per year, is increasing steadily. The main drift of these flows is from developing and the so called "third world" countries to the developed world.

The term migration can be considered as a general category that includes in its definition terms and concepts such as economic migrants, political asylum seekers, war refugees, and so on. This fact,

combined with the variety of different approaches about the effects of the increasing migratory flows in various host countries, creates the formation of a highly controversial issue. Migration has been approached in two main theoretical ways, the classical or traditional school of thought, and critical theories. The classical approaches explain migration based on a materialist ontology, by analyzing various "objective" aspects of the issue<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, critical theories have questioned the materialist explanation of the classical materialist analysis<sup>4</sup>. For critical theories,

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin McGahan, "The Securitization of Migration in Malaysia: Drawing Lessons beyond the Copenhagen School," (paper presented at the annual conference of the American Political Science Association Toronto, Canada September 3-6, 2009) 9, [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1449344](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1449344); Simon Dalby, "Geopolitical Change and Contemporary Security Studies: Contextualizing the Human Security Agenda," Working Paper 30 (Institute of International Relations - The University of British Columbia, 2000), 2-5, [http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/icip/Continguts/Publicacions/WorkingPapers/Arxiu/WP7\\_ANG.pdf](http://www20.gencat.cat/docs/icip/Continguts/Publicacions/WorkingPapers/Arxiu/WP7_ANG.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> International Organization of Migration, Official Statistics, 2012, <http://www.iom.int/jahia/Jahia/about-migration/developing-migration-policy/pid/269>.

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<sup>3</sup> Wæver Ole, "Securitization and Desecuritisation," in *On Security*, ed. Ronnie Lipschutz (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1-3; Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998), 40; Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, "Slippery? Contradictory? Sociologically Untenable? The Copenhagen School Replies," *Review of International Studies* 23 (1997): 241-250.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Leonard, "The 'Securitization' of Asylum and Migration in the European Union: Beyond the Copenhagen School's Framework," (paper presented at SGIR Sixth Pan-European International Relations Conference, Turin, September 12-15, 2007), 7-9, [http://turin.sgir.eu/uploads/Leonard-sgir\\_conference\\_paper\\_final\\_sleonard.pdf](http://turin.sgir.eu/uploads/Leonard-sgir_conference_paper_final_sleonard.pdf); Catherine Charrett, *A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security* (Spain: International Catalan Institute for Peace, 2009), 17, 19, 27-28; Sarah Leonard, "FRONTEX and the Securitization of Migrants through Practices," (paper to be presented at the Migration Working Group Seminar, European University Institute, Florence, February 9, 2011), 9-10, <http://www.eui.eu/Documents/RSCAS/Research/MWG/201011/SLeonardpaper.pdf>; Thierry Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," *European Journal of International Relations*, 11 (2005): 171-173.

such as constructivism, migration is explained as an issue which has been securitized by various actors in order to serve their "elitist" interests and objectives<sup>5</sup>.

Based on the above, this paper aims to examine the phenomenon of migration in order to answer the question of whether migration is a securitization product, and to what extent the securitisation process causes political and / or ethical implications. To do so, the first part of the paper raises a theoretical framework which examines in brief the various aspects of securitisation as theoretical tool of analysis, and also the evolution of migration as a security threat. The second part, deals with the securitisation of migration and the ways different types of migration are securitized. The third part presents the various critiques on the securitisation process by explaining the political and ethical implications that arise from the securitisation of migration. Finally, the last part concludes that migration, regardless of its different types, is securitized with extremely negative political and ethical implications in domestic societies of the various host countries.

### Explaining Securitization

Securitisation is a theoretical tool through which various aspects of international security are examined and analyzed. In international relations it emerged as a theoretical reflection of the Copenhagen school and hence the analytical framework of securitisation is based on the constructivist worldview<sup>6</sup>. As a concept, securitisation had been first presented by

Ole Wæver in 1995, in order to redefine the terminological meaning of security, by questioning and criticizing all previous, ontologically materialistic, theoretical approaches to security<sup>7</sup>.

The constructivist ontological analysis of securitization approaches security in a completely different basis. In constructivism, the classical concept of security is unable to comprehensively reflect reality, due to the exclusively materialistic way the term is approached<sup>8</sup>. Classical theories approach security based on the interactions between "objective" materialistic factors, such as military power, economic and political capabilities and so on<sup>9</sup>. Instead, for securitization, the concept of security is constructed by relative and subjective norms, and depend on the political purposes of each actor in each case. In other words, "the word security is (by itself) the act", a security which is determined by a sequence of "speech acts"<sup>10</sup>.

More specifically, securitization is the process during which a normal or typical political issue, is altered by the speech act, and creates new security threats. That is, the moving of an issue from the realm of typical politics to the realm of exception (e.g. the new migration policy of the US due to 9/11), so as to create conditions for "legitimate" or/and "non-legitimate" action, avoiding this way the bureaucratic rules that normally apply<sup>11</sup>. This process involves three basic phases, the securitization of the actor, referring to the object, and its acceptance by

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<sup>5</sup> Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation,"1-3, 51; Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 24-28; Leonard, "The 'Securitization' of Asylum and Migration in the European Union: Beyond the Copenhagen School's Framework,"13-15.

<sup>6</sup> Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, (London: Routledge, 2006), 26-28.

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<sup>7</sup> Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation,"2-4.

<sup>8</sup> Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*.

<sup>9</sup> Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, 26-28; Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation,"2-6.

<sup>10</sup> Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation,"13-17; Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 27-29.

<sup>11</sup> Leonard, "FRONTEX and the Securitization of Migrants through Practices," 13-15.

the audience<sup>12</sup>. The securitization process begins with a verbal statement or a reference to a specific actor as a potential threat. Subsequently, the potential is specified as a real threat that requires immediate countermeasures, and finally the successful cultivated of fear and /or acceptance by the audience, in both the existence of the threat and the need to respond<sup>13</sup>.

In practice, a securitization actor can be an individual, a group, or various political, social, and economic elites, including but not limited to political parties, governments, or religious leaders,. The securitization subject can be various political, economic, and social issues such as terrorism, immigration, or a possible war<sup>14</sup>. The securitization of a subject can be characterized as successful or unsuccessful depending on the degree of fidelity of the audience. The war in Iraq in 2003 for instance, can be considered as a failed example of securitization because of the unsuccessful attempt of the U.S.A. to securitize the existence weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, in order to convince the audience (general public and international community). As a result of the failed WMD securitization process, the U.S. and U.K. changed their tactic, transforming the nature of the threat as a substantial lack of democracy, and human rights' violations by the authoritarian regime<sup>15</sup>.

## Evolution of Migrations as a Security Challenge

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<sup>12</sup> Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation," 39-44; Buzan, Wæver, and De Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, 33-35; Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," 191-193

<sup>13</sup> Leonard, "FRONTEX and the Securitization of Migrants through Practices," 8-10.

<sup>14</sup> Balzacq, "The Three Faces of Securitization: Political Agency, Audience and Context," 191-193.

<sup>15</sup> F. Grogory Gause, *The International Relations of the Persian Gulf* (Cambridge University Press: New York, 2010), 228-233; Charrett, *A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security*, 23, 28, 42.

The population mobility constitutes a timeless phenomenon. Throughout the years a number of people, have been moved from one area to another regardless of the asymmetry in numbers in each particular case. However, although the reasons for these movements vary, the most common causes of these movements have been the need for survival and/or better living conditions<sup>16</sup>. Historically, migration began to increase sharply at the beginning of the last century due to the increased demand for labour as a result of the change from the pre-monopoly to monopoly capitalism and the emergence of industrialisation<sup>17</sup>.

Since then, the issue of migration has become a subject of concern on the debates related to international security. In particular, migration along with a number of other "contemporary security challenges," has emerged as a significant issue at the international security agenda as a result of the end of the Cold War<sup>18</sup>. The reason lies in the new political circumstances that have been caused by the intra-systemic alteration from the stage of bipolarity to unipolarity, due to the end of the Cold War and the predominance of the U.S. as the only global

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<sup>16</sup> Sanjay Barbora et. al, "Migration Matters in South Asia: Commonalities and Critiques," *Economic & Political Weekly* 43 (2008):61-63; Jef Huysmans, "The European Union And The Securitization of Migration," *Journal Of Common Market Studies* 38 (2000): 52-53; Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, 10.

<sup>17</sup> Dalby, "Geopolitical Change and Contemporary Security Studies: Contextualizing the Human Security Agenda," 2-5; Robert Dover, "Towards a Common EU Immigration Policy: a Securitization Too Far," *Journal of European Integration* 30 (2008):114-117; Paul Sweezy and Maurice Dobb, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism," *Science & Society* 14 (1950): 134-167.

<sup>18</sup> Maggie Ibrahim, "The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse," *International Migration Volume* 43 (2005): 164, 167-168; Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity: Fear, Migration and Asylum in the EU*, 16.

superpower<sup>19</sup>. More specifically, at the interval between the end of World War II and the end of the Cold War, the main issue of international security was the relationship among the two superpowers, their zones of influence, and the potential of nuclear war. Thus, due to the state-centric approaches during the cold war, all other security issues have been automatically passed into the background<sup>20</sup>.

At the mid-1980s onwards, migration has been approached by several scholars and analysts as a substantial challenge to international security. The subsequent discussions have dealt with both the nature and causes of migration but also its political, economic, and social effects and implications on the host countries. However, the debates have started taking into serious consideration the impacts that the different types of migration bring on security at a regional level, and to less extent on the previous domestic-focus and the state-centric analysis due to the process of peripheral integration in various regions (e.g. EU)<sup>21</sup>. This new regional concept of migration has been further strengthened by the terrorist attacks in 9/11 in the USA. The 9/11 attacks have fundamentally affected all security issues, by placing them under the

new "anti-terrorism" framework both regionally and internationally<sup>22</sup>.

### Securitizing Types of Migration

The securitization of migration is a process which can be analyzed at the international, regional, and local level. This distinction among different levels of analysis is apparent not only by different types of migration, but also the reasons that securitization is applied in each case. At the global level, the securitization of migration occurs in a limited extent, because of the dissimilar institutional regulations and political conditions that exist in the relations among different international actors. The emergence of migration as a security threat does not constitute a common strategic priority, for all actors. It could be said that the securitization of global migration, had been achieved to a relative extent, as a consequence of the terrorist attacks on 9/11<sup>23</sup>. This is due to the direct reaction of the U.S. through the infamous War on Terror declaration<sup>24</sup>. In this way, combined with the unipolarity that characterises the international system, the U.S. managed to securitize international terrorism. However, the securitization of terrorism by the U.S. had the "incrimination" of Arabs and Muslims in the developed world as indirect result, cultivating the perception that every Muslim or Arab constitutes a potential terrorist threat<sup>25</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> Charrett, A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security, 9-10; Dover, "Towards a Common EU Immigration Policy: a Securitization Too Far," 113.

<sup>20</sup> Ibrahim, "The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse," 169-170; Charrett, A Critical Application of Securitization Theory: Overcoming the Normative Dilemma of Writing Security, 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Dominique Van Dijck, "Is the EU on Illegal Migration Securitized? Yes Of Course! A Study into the Dynamics of Institutionalized Securitization," paper to be presented at the 3rd Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, Istanbul, 21-23 September 2006, 3-4, 24-27; Leonard, "FRONTEX and the Securitization of Migrants through Practices," 2-6; Jef Huysmans, "The European Union And The Securitization of Migration," *Journal Of Common Market Studies* 38 (2000): 754-758; Dover, "Towards a Common EU Immigration Policy: a Securitization Too Far," 126-128.

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<sup>22</sup> Irina Ghughunishvili, "Securitization of Migration in the United States after 9/11: Constructing Muslims and Arabs as Enemies," (MA diss., Central European University, 2008), 44-47.

<sup>23</sup> Ghughunishvili, "Securitization of Migration in the United States after 9/11: Constructing Muslims and Arabs as Enemies," 23-25.

<sup>24</sup> George W. Bush, *Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the United States Response to the Terrorist Attacks of September 11*, September 20 2001,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=64731&st=&st1=#>.

<sup>25</sup> Ghughunishvili, "Securitization of Migration in the United States after 9/11: Constructing Muslims and Arabs as Enemies," 3-6.



At the regional level, although migration is securitized to a larger extent, the institutional and political situation slightly differs in comparison to the international circumstances. In addition, the determination to "regional level" refers to entities and actors which act within a prescribed policy framework, with common institutional provisions. A perfect example of a regional actor is the European Union<sup>26</sup>. In which the process of securitization takes place within a common institutional framework which is formed jointly among various members of the Union<sup>27</sup>. However, in the case of migration the possibilities for a successful securitization process are extremely limited, for three main reasons. The first reason is the different political and economic interests that exist among individual actors, making the creation of a common line extremely difficult. The second reason results from the different impact degrees of migration in each state, due to the asymmetry created by the migratory flow. The third reason is the heterogeneity among the audience. The heterogeneity is due to the fact that locally, the securitization of issues varies greatly from one country to another, thereby creating different perceptions among the audience.

In contrast to the global and regional level, the securitization of migration locally is observed as an event that occurs in most states. Admittedly, the securitization of migration as a process occurs mainly in countries with intense migratory flows<sup>28</sup>. In

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<sup>26</sup> Van Dijck, "Is the EU on Illegal Migration Securitized? Yes Of Course! A Study into the Dynamics of Institutionalized Securitization," 3-4, 24-27; Leonard, "FRONTEX and the Securitization of Migrants through Practices," 2-6; Jef Huysmans, "The European Union and The Securitization of Migration," *Journal Of Common Market Studies* 38 (2000): 754-758; Dover, "Towards a Common EU Immigration Policy: a Securitization Too Far," 126-128.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> European Commission-Eurostat, *Asylum Applicants and First Instance Decisions on Asylum Applications:*

the local level, the securitisation actor could be the state through the intrastate and intergovernmental institutions, political parties, individuals and so on<sup>29</sup>. In the case of migration, it has been observed that securitisation occurs either by one actor, for instance a political party, or by a group of actors such as a political party, the media, and a religious organization. The most common arguments used by the internal securitising actors, are related with the fields of economic, social cohesion and political stability<sup>30</sup>. More specifically, regardless of the different types of migrants that are entering in the host country, the most common argument that presented, is the extremely negative effects on the economy<sup>31</sup>. That is, the increasing unemployment due to the unfair competition against to the domestic labours, given that immigrants are a cheap labour force. Simultaneously, the securitising alarmist includes a number of other sectors related to the social and political structures, such as the risk of changing the demographic and cultural traditions of the country<sup>32</sup>. Nevertheless, in several cases, it has been

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Second Quarter 2011, Issue Number 11/2012, [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product\\_details/publication?p\\_product\\_code=KS-SF-12-011](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-SF-12-011).

<sup>29</sup> McGahan, "The Securitization of Migration in Malaysia: Drawing Lessons beyond the Copenhagen School,"

8; Leonard, "The 'Securitization' of Asylum and Migration in the European Union: Beyond the Copenhagen School's Framework," 3.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Russo, "Security, Securitization and Human Capital: The New Wave of Canadian Immigration Laws," *International Journal of Human and Social Sciences* 3 (2008): 296.

<sup>31</sup> McGahan, "The Securitization of Migration in Malaysia: Drawing Lessons beyond the Copenhagen School," 14-15.

<sup>32</sup> Jef Huysmans, "The European Union And The Securitization of Migration," *Journal Of Common Market Studies* 38 (2000): 758-761, 767-770; Katja Franko Aas, "The Securitization of Migration: Whose Justice and Whose Security?", Norwegian Research Council KIM Program, (2005), 9. <http://org.uib.no/imer/14Nordic/Papers%20fra%2014.%20Migrasjonsforskerkonferanse/Aas.pdf>.

argued that there is a potential for the spread of diseases among the local populations, and also the potential increase of violence and delinquency.

### Implications of Securitisation and Its Criticisms

The securitization of migration is a field of intense controversy both in terms of academic debate and also in terms of the policy making. The reason lies in the great political and ethical dilemmas that arise from the promotion of migration as a contemporary security threat, and therefore due to the subjectivity that characterise the different viewpoints. The common component among the various criticisms of the securitization of migration lies in the suggestion for de-securitization and the parallel repositioning of migration to "the realm of normal politics", which means the re-politicization of the issue<sup>33</sup>.

More specifically, the main problematic attributed to the process of securitization, is the inability of the securitising actor to make the distinction among the different types of migration. This inability leads to a dangerous generalization, namely the determination of all migrants as a whole with extremely negative implications, meaning that, in terms of real politics, each migrant constitutes a potential security threat<sup>34</sup>. For instance one of the most common generalizations is the grouping in a whole of the asylum seekers, the so called illegal economic immigrants and war refugees without making any distinction.

In practical terms one of the most negative consequences of the securitization of migration is the growth of racism and

xenophobia among local populations<sup>35</sup>. Through the invocation of various pseudo-biological cultural erosions, and other socio-political pathologies, securitization actors, create deeply phobic syndromes within the community against anything "different". In this way, the conservatization of the society increases dramatically with extremely negative medium and long term implications. This phenomenon can be established by empirical evidence from a number of cases worldwide; where due to the securitization of migration, the domestic political balances have changed to a large extent, favouring the rise of right-wing and neo-Nazi parties and movements<sup>36</sup>.

An empirical example for the conservatization of the society could be the case of Greece, with the increasing influence of the neo-Nazi organization "Χρυσή Αυγή" (Golden Dawn) succeeded in the Greek society<sup>37</sup>. The basic arguments of this organization is characterized mainly by the invocation of racial and religious purity, while some of their main slogans include "Foreigners Out", "Every immigrant causes an unemployed Greek", and "Greece belongs to Greeks." A similar situation has developed in a number of other countries including Russia with Chechen groups in France and Italy with the Roma populations, in Canada with

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<sup>33</sup> Matti Jutila, "Desecuritizing Minority Rights: Against Determinism," *Security Dialogue* 37 (2006): 168-69,175,182.

<sup>34</sup> Aas, "The Securitization of Migration: Whose Justice and Whose Security?," 3, 11.

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<sup>35</sup> Ayhan Kaya, "Securitization of Migration in the West and Integration of Migrants," (paper presented at Istanbul Kultur University Conference on "Migration, Turkey and the EU", Istanbul, March 23, 2007), 2, 8, [http://www.fes.de/aktuell/focus\\_europa/5/Docs/FES\\_Tuerkei\\_Beitrag\\_Ayhan\\_Kaya.pdf](http://www.fes.de/aktuell/focus_europa/5/Docs/FES_Tuerkei_Beitrag_Ayhan_Kaya.pdf).

2, 8; Huysmans, 200, pp. 764-765; Ibrahim, "The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse," 165-166.

<sup>36</sup> Wæver, "Securitization and Desecuritisation," 20-21.

<sup>37</sup> Dimitris Karantinos, and Anna Manoudi, "Country Report II: On Employment, Ethnicity, and Migrants," Network Of Socio-Economic Experts in The Anti-Discrimination Field, 2010, 8-9, [http://www.antigone.gr/en/library/files/selected\\_publications/greece/EKKE%20Report%20on%20DISCRIMINATION.pdf](http://www.antigone.gr/en/library/files/selected_publications/greece/EKKE%20Report%20on%20DISCRIMINATION.pdf).

mostly Asian groups, in the Nordic countries with migration flows from mainly the former Soviet Union,<sup>38</sup>.

### Conclusions

There is no doubt that the securitization of migration is a phenomenon that occurs in a large number of states. However, although it is a reality in contemporary world politics, the comprehensive examination of the question presupposes a deep analysis in various levels. In this paper, the distinction has been made at the global, regional, and local level in order to attribute the main limitations that exist in the implementation process of securitization. The nature of each securitizing actor and the methodological tactics that are used for the securitization have been discussed in brief. Additionally the major political and ethical implications arising from the conversion of migration as a security threat have been put forward.

This paper mainly argues that although the securitization of migration constitutes an extremely controversial issue, there is a number of serious political, social, and ethical medium and long term implications to local communities. These implications can be seen as extraordinary political and sociological alternations that occur among local populations due to the increase of racism and xenophobia. This fact, in terms of empirical evidence has a direct implication in the political balances within the securitising country with the emergency or the uprising of extreme political parties and neo-racist/neo-Nazi movements. As a concluding remark, based on the empirical paradigms which have been examined, the current

conjunction of the ongoing global economic crisis and simultaneous passage towards the new intra-systemic stage of regionalization and multipolarity are two crucial factors that favour the potential for increase of the securitization of migration locally, regionally, and internationally.

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<sup>38</sup> Russo, "Security, Securitization and Human Capital: The New Wave of Canadian Immigration Laws," 298-302; Leonard, "The 'Securitization' of Asylum and Migration in the European Union: Beyond the Copenhagen School's Framework".

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