

Implications of the Securitisation of Migration

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ELISABETH FARNY, JAN 29 2016

In the last decade, many countries have seen a rise in immigration, coupled with an increasing fear of “terrorists”, “illegal migrants” and other threats to internal safety. Thus the concept of securitization, which was first brought into the agenda of security studies by the so-called Copenhagen School of Security Studies, has become a major topic of discussion; in as far as what the implicative dynamics of securitization are, and what measures are needed in order to understand what exactly can be securitized. The Copenhagen School is represented in the writings of Barry Buzan, Ole Waever and Jaap de Wilde who responded to the Post-Cold War call to reframe security and examine its dynamics and distinctive character. In contrast to traditional understandings of security, the Copenhagen School suggests that the state is not the only referent object for security. The book *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* sets about broadening the subject of security to include, not just the military sector, but five categories: military, economic, environmental, societal, and political. Thus the Copenhagen School suggests a constructivist operational method, distinguishing the process of securitization from that of politicization, for understanding who can securitize what and under what conditions (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998).

The Copenhagen School’s theory of securitization has provided important revenue for research on converging and particularly moving toward some form of union or uniformity between securitization and migration. The term “migration” will be used in this paper as a general category including immigrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees.

Given this outlook, the first chapter “The Emergence of Migration as a Security Threat in the European Union and the United States” deals with the origins of the securitization of migration in the context of both the European Union and the United States. The aim of the first chapter is to give a critical evaluation of the implications of the securitization of migration. Although the reasons for securitization in the United States, i.e. the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and in Europe, i.e. the construction of the European Union and Schengen area were not the same, nonetheless the implications were very much similar: More restrictive immigration and asylum policies, new surveillance and control devices, and tighter external border controls were implemented and put in place.

Within the debate of the implications for a securitization of migration, politics and fear played an important role in the process of categorizing migrants as a potential security threat. This is noteworthy because fear is the result of an assessment of personal vulnerability to victimization and when politicized it can be quite effective. Hence, the following chapter “The Securitization of Migration and the Politics of Fear” will explain how the securitization of migration reinforces a politics of fear.

The correlation between the politics of fear and the securitization of migration generates another important dimension in the process of categorizing migrants as a potential security threat. This dimension is racism. The final chapter “Racism and the Securitization of Migration” will highlight the importance of racism in the process of securitizing migrants and how the securitization of migration reinforces a racist discourse.

The Emergence of Migration as a Security Threat in the European Union and the United States

Since the 1980s, Europe was marked by dramatic changes led by the development of globalization, the fragmentation of major states such as the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and the construction of the European Union and Schengen area. As the geopolitical context has changed, migration has become increasingly politicized at the

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European Union level. The political construction of migration increasingly referred to the destabilizing effects of migration and to the dangers it implied for public order. Many studies have explored the security logic of EU policies on migration and asylum, which have led to increased border security, deportations, and surveillance of immigrants (Huysmans 2000; Ceyhan & Tsoukala 2002; Karyotis 2007). Therefore, one can argue that the securitization of migration emerged first and foremost within the context of the European Union, and they should have a greater understanding of the complexities and all it entails. However, this is not the case. The production of similar discourses and the framing of migration as a part of security policies in the United States make it additionally difficult to evaluate the implications of a securitization of migration in a solely European context. Although some authors emphasize the role of the European Union in the process of securitizing migrants (Huysmans 2000; Karyotis 2007), some did not limit their analysis in the European context, but rather analyzed the securitization of migration as a phenomenon of “Western societies” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala 2002) or a “global phenomenon” (Tirman 2006). In order to critically examine the global implications of the securitization of migration, it is worth looking at these particular case studies, which the media and policymakers portray as potential safe haven for migrants: the European Union and the United States.

The United States has always been viewed as a country of immigrants, thus the issue of migration was never deemed or constructed as a threat to national identity, as in the case of the European Union. Yet in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11th 2001, the concept of migration as a security threat in the United States has emerged. John Tirman (2006) describes the ways in which the conception of migration has changed since 9/11. Up until 9/11, there had always been a correlation between migration and security in the United States. But it was mainly considered to be a threat to social security, such as jobs and welfare. However, after 9/11, terrorism quickly became the bases for framing the groundwork for discourse and practices relative to migration. The reaction to 9/11 and the subsequent securitization of migration affected in particular Arab and Muslim immigrants. At the same time other immigrants were affected, and most of those immigrants were from Latin America, particularly Mexico. A number of politicians and commentators have viewed the Mexican border as a security threat. So the initial focus of attention, reflecting the ethnicity of the 9/11 attackers, actually affected other ethnic groups in hoping to enter the United States. (Tirman 2006, pp.1-2).

In the case of the European Union, several scholars came to the conclusion that the discourse that links migration to security has been reinforced in the aftermath of the September 11 events, where migration appeared in the discussion of the campaign against terrorism (Karyotis 2007, pp.6-8; Togral 2011, p.219). Karyotis concludes, however, that in the EU, the 9/11 terrorist attacks did not initiate new insecurities in connection with the migration policy, but the actions and the framing was the continuation of the trend that existed prior to the attacks (Karyotis 2007, pp.12-13). Hence, one can argue that the issue of terrorism in the EU context was not the main driving factor for securitizing migrants.

More likely, the main driving factor for securitizing migrants within the EU was the protection of European identity and culture, fostered by the conception of “Fortress Europe”, which is based on the one hand on free mobility and the elimination of internal borders and, on the other, on restrictive external borders, focusing on exclusion and border management. In addition, the argument that immigrants have the potential to threaten the EU’s economy, served as the legitimizing factor for the development of a restrictive migration policy and for cutting back the rights of third-country nationals, which have led to frame immigration as a security issue. Huysmans has described this development as a transformation of an “economic project of the internal market into an internal security project” (Huysmans 2000, p.752).

According to Ceyhan and Tsoukala the increase of migration flows combined with the construction of the European Union and Schengen area, as well as with the emergence of new economic agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), “significantly affected the forms and the meanings of borders, individual and collective identities, and the sense and nature of state sovereignty and authority” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala 2002, p.21). It is important to stress here, that these new political and economic developments demonstrate the close relationship between immigration and economic globalization.

Tirman highlighted this relationship by the case of rising immigration from Mexico to the United States. In this

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particular case, the loosening or elimination of borders, a feature of the North American Free Trade Agreement, was pictured at first as a solution to irregular migration (Tirman 2006, p.3). However, soon the idea that the NAFTA agreement will implicate the long-term reduction of irregular migration was being criticized by several scholars. In the late 1990s Peter Andreas observed that “the combination of NAFTA and the side-effects of Mexico’s own domestic market reforms will add as much as several hundred thousand to the number of Mexicans who migrate to the United States annually though at least the end of the century” (Andreas 1998, p.609).

A recent analysis by the Migration Policy Institute along with data from the U.S. Census Bureau has shown, Andreas’ assumption proved to be correct. The Mexican immigrant population in the U.S. rose from almost 4.3 million in 1990 to 9.1 million in 2000. These numbers include naturalized citizens, legal permanent residents, refugees, persons on student or work visas, and persons illegally residing in the United States. As of 2012, 6.7 million (59%) estimated unauthorized immigrants in the U.S. were from Mexico. Thus, Mexicans represent the largest unauthorized immigrant group in the United States (Zong & Batalova 2014). However, statistics collected by government agencies are open to a number of interpretations and one should be cautious about any claims made for the accuracy of existing data. In particular, studies on irregular migration can hardly rely on quantitative research as statistics are poor, non-existent or contested.

The rise of irregular migration in the context of a new security era, where countering organized crime and terrorism was a top priority, has led to stricter public policies, new surveillance and control devices, and tighter external border controls despite discourses about globalization and open markets. Tirman points out that the securitization of migration makes it “much more difficult for migrants to cross borders, even as the world economy demands such movement” (Tirman 2006, p.3). In particular, border security measures are “costly in a globalized economy and unnecessary for security” (Tirman 2006, p.1).

These measures have led to a decline of Mexican immigration to the United States in recent years. But declining inflows appear to reflect not only the impact of tougher border enforcement, but also the impact of the Great Recession, and improved educational and economic opportunities in Mexico (Zong & Batalova 2014).

The US-Mexican border region can be also used as a model of reference or contrast with the Mediterranean setting, because it is at such strategic sites as these that we encounter the correlation between securitization, irregular migration, human trafficking, racism, and globally networked surveillance. These border areas can be considered as examples of extreme security, yet at the same time also of extreme insecurity for migrants, which most visibly emerge with the deaths of migrants crossing the Arizona desert and like so many who perish in the Mediterranean Sea. According to Ribas-Mateos, the complex Mediterranean context, characterized by sea borders, and the US-Mexico region with its extended land border “identify security-insecurity processes related to the restriction of borders in the age of globalization” (Ribas-Mateos 2011, pp.51-52).

The Securitization of Migration and the Politics of Fear

Within the debate of the implications of a securitization of migration, the role of emotions in the process of categorizing migrants as a potential security threat is noticeable. In a recent published article, Neta Crawford (2014) has pointed out that the discipline of International Relations has tended to ignore explicit considerations of the role that passions or emotions play in practices of international politics. Similarly, Claudia Aradau argues that the discipline of International Relations “generally has not taken stock of the emotional models that drive political interventions and strategies of governance” (Aradau 2004, p.255). Yet, in particular the process of securitizing migrants triggers an emotional expression, which should not be underestimated; that is fear.

The politics of fear developed specifically in the European context, not in the United States, which was presented as being more tolerant and open to migration. But the production of similar discourses and the framing of migration as a part of security policies in the United States as well, makes it difficult to argue the singularity in the European context. According to Ceyhan and Tsoukala “Western societies are witnessing the emergence of many existential and conceptual anxieties and fears about their identity, security, and well-being [...] By its transnational character, its dynamic, and its impact on people and institutions at all levels, migration is perceived as posing a serious challenge

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to the long-standing paradigms of certainty and order” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala 2002, pp.21-22). Therefore, the production of a discourse of fear and proliferation of dangers with reference to the scenarios of chaos and disorder can also become a governmental instrument that can be used to steer and control actions and attitudes of citizens towards migrants.

In line with the arguments of the Copenhagen School, migration was constructed as a security threat by political and security elites, who had the capacity to produce security knowledge about the level and seriousness of the issue. More specifically, their approach signifies that securitization refers to a “speech act” through which “the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure” (Buzan, Waever & de Wilde 1998, pp.23-24). In other words, securitization is the process through which migration becomes a security issue, not necessarily because of the nature or the objective importance of a threat, but because it is presented as such. Hence, “speech acts” can be identified as one of the catalysts for the construction of a discourse of fear and proliferation of dangers.

With this in mind, one has to consider the correlation between fear, and the perceived perception and the persuasive nature of politics and how it influences has led to a perceived notion of personal fear, for people who live in countries with a large migrant population. Based on personal factors such as one’s physical features and other social factors, the anxieties, angst and behavioral practices are tangible and real. It can influence one’s behavior and how they react in everyday life to their surroundings. Its cause can be summed up in one word; fear. The personal fear that some people have concerning perceived danger seem to focus mainly on migrants from varying racial ethnic groups. There is a vast difference between the general perceptions of fear, and reality. Fear is the result of an assessment of personal vulnerability to victimization. Aware of this, politicians have politicized its citizens through fear into believing that they are the victims and are being victimized from the upsurge of migrants who supposedly are the cause for their ills and drawbacks.

Perceived fear causes people to avoid certain places, because they fear being attack in one form or another and it is prevalent in communities where there are a high number of migrants. To combat their fear(s), an amalgamation of sort is created in order to justify their like behavior. It becomes an insular word in some sense, it provides the reassurance and confidence needed in order to continue the backlash against the influx of migrants to their country. What we see here is a fascinating case of how perceived fear can influence one’s behavior. They made radical changes based on how they perceived their situation and way of life.

How can one not understand the plight of those who fear these situations? Certainly, one can make the argument that it would make more sense to worry about one’s personal safety, rather than about perceived fear and the danger it entails. Even so, the migrants’ presence has left some in the community with no other choice, but to avoid them at all cost. This they believe will protect them from having any contact with them; thus changing their over-all behavior. One cannot blame them for taking this position, but is it a reality, is it factual, or is it solely a perceived fear? Notwithstanding, this is what the politicians used as a means to sway, convince and influence their citizens in some instances.

Public fears about potential large-scale movements were more significant than the reality of migration itself in influencing the geopolitical environment. Claims by journalists and politicians that dozens of people are on their way and will threaten the host country’s security and economy are exaggerated, nonetheless such ideas have an impact on how migration is perceived and dealt with in the political domain. This kind of perspective is relevant when considering the current growing intensity of migration controls on the Euro-Mediterranean and US-Mexican borders.

It is noticeable that in the public sphere fear is often connected to irregular migration. Claudia Aradau observed in her article the securitization of human trafficking, and assessed two constructions of human trafficking: as a security threat and as a humanitarian problem. Restricting its focus to trafficking of women for the sex industry, the article highlights the double identification of these women as illegal migrants and victims. Aradau attempted to understand how a humanitarian discourse constructed around women’s suffering can be connected to a logic of security and argued that “the constitution of subjects to be governed through pity or risk makes it possible for the vulnerable body of trafficked women to become the site of potential dangerous irruptions” (Aradau 2004, p.276). This literal

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embracement of pity into risk can also be observed in the recent events concerning the tragedy of drowned migrants in the Mediterranean Sea.

As outlined above, the politics of fear in the European Union and the United States is mainly constructed in relation to the differences in one's appearance, the undocumented migrant, or the refugee, namely, the "non-European", the "Muslim", or the "Hispanic" (Ceyhan & Tsoukala 2002, p.22; Togrul 2011, p.219). This particular creation of the concept of an enemy to the state and public order was not only reinforced by the media and policy debates, but also by scholarly publications. In 1993, Samuel Huntington developed his famous concept of the "Clash of Civilizations", which entered the public sphere and gained popularity beyond academia. The "Clash of Civilizations" is a theory, which suggests that people's cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the Post-Cold War era. Such an approach promotes a policy of fear against everything that is different and might propose a danger to cultural or religious identity and unity. Thus, migration transforms into a threat not only to the security, but also to the identity of the host country.

Such a promotion of fear against migrants can lead to a dangerous generalization, namely the determination of all migrants as a whole with extremely negative implications, which is being reinforced by the securitization of migration. The main problem attributed to the process of securitization, is the inability of the securitizing actor to see migrants as individual humans. Rather migrants are being merged into a general category and labelled as a threat. Lastly, the use of such a category in official discourses does have a negative impact not only on public perceptions of migratory phenomena, but also on real lives of migrants through enforcement of state policies.

Racism and the Securitization of Migration

Several authors highlighted the role of racism in the process of securitization of migration (Huysmans 2000; Ibrahim 2005; Togral 2011). According to Maggie Ibrahim, the securitization of migration can be examined as "discourse through which relations of power are exercised" and is "racism's most modern form" (Ibrahim 2005, pp.163-164). Certainly, the antagonism directed towards migrants is based on the beliefs that the host country views his or her race and/or culture as superior, thus excluding migrants from all aspects of their society. One way in which this is done is through discriminatory and prejudicial laws. Therefore, a critical evaluation of the implications of the securitization of migration should also include an analysis of the role of racism in this discourse.

As outlined by Ibrahim, the discourse of securitization of migration is built upon the concept that cultural difference leads to a "social breakdown" (Ibrahim 2005, p.164). However, how realistic is this notion, and is it a one-sided argument? What we do know is that this discourse has been possible through the broadening of the concept of security and the linking of risk and threat to migrants.

Once migration was viewed as a security threat, it led to a series of attempts to not only restrict its progression in countering organized crime and terrorism, but also to protect the "socio-political cohesion" (Karyotis 2007, p.1-2). Similarly, Huysmans points out that EU policies support the idea of "cultural homogeneity as a stabilizing factor" (Huysmans 2000, p.753) and that "the protection and transformation of cultural identity is one of the key issues through which the politics of belonging and the question of migration are connected" (Huysmans 2000, p.762). Therefore, the political construction of migration as a security threat should be embedded in the politics of belonging.

The position taken in this sense is one that highlights a broader contemporary European political point of view as well as attitude, one in which immigrants are viewed as undermining and weakening European cultural homogeneity. In this context, it becomes rather difficult for these policies to be one of inclusion, albeit when European culture and society are viewed as primary concerns. Thus, the challenge to assimilate or become a part of the European homogeneity will be a difficult task to say the least for immigrants, based on the strategies of supporting a securitization of migration agenda.

Ibrahim fosters this point of view by stating that the assumption that "cultural pluralism will lead to interethnic conflict which will dissolve the unity of the state" has been used for years as a means of limiting immigration in particular by right-wing governments (Ibrahim 2005, p.166).

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In order to provide and ensure security for their citizens, nations develop traditions and systems of justice and rights. Immigrants from different cultural backgrounds are seen as an imbalance to the nation. It is thus seen as rational to preserve one's culture through the exclusion of other cultural groups. This form of exclusion based on race and cultural difference and associating such difference with security threats should be understood as racism. By examining a shift in racism, from notions of biological superiority, to exclusion based on cultural difference, it is possible to understand that the new migrant-as-a-threat narrative reflects a racist discourse that is reinforced through the securitization of migration (Ibrahim 2005, pp.165-166).

Several scholars have classified this racist discourse, which capitalizes on cultural differences rather than on biological ones to discriminate and exclude certain groups of people, as "new racism" (Ibrahim 2005; Togral 2011). "New racism" is a term coined in 1981 by Martin Barker, in the context of the ideologies supporting the British Conservative Party's rise in the UK, to refer to what he believed was racist public discourse depicting immigrants as a threat. According to Burcu Togral this "new racism" is much more "hidden" and "respectable" than previous forms of racism, since it has been built upon configurations, such as "preservation of one's identity, own way of life and values in the face of the destabilizing and damaging effects of other cultures" (Togral 2011, p.220). Yet, "new racism" does not mean the replacement of older forms of racist practices that used biological discourses as a pretext to exclude and discriminate certain groups of people; rather "new racism" adds a cultural dimension to the already existing racist practices. Although the "new racism" discourse has no reference to "race" in the classical sense, it is still racism in that it "functions to maintain racial hierarchies of oppression" (Togral 2011, p.222).

"Euro-Racism" is also a form of "new racism". In the case of the European Union, Huysmans points out that the argument of a development of a "Euro-racism" is problematic because "national policies against racism and xenophobia, and the historical and political contexts in which racism and xenophobia have emerged, differ considerably across the Member States" (Huysmans 2000, p.764). Huysmans does not view the EU as actively implicated in the formation of a European-wide specific form of racism. Yet, he assumes, that the EU is indirectly involved in the rise of racist and xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants through its policy which uses the negative portrayal of migrant groups to promote a migration policy based on restrictions and control. Since the targeted groups often have an explicit link to Europe's colonial history, such a policy risks sustaining racist behavior towards migrants who have traditionally been subjected to racist stereotyping (Huysmans 2000, pp.764-765).

This point of view will be even more visible when considering that in comparison to the widely mediatized migration from African countries, migration from non EU-Eastern Europe or CIS countries to the EU has aroused less concern. The reason lies in the fact that migrants from these countries tend to be non-Muslims and are phenotypically less distinct from the majority populations of Western Europe.

The discussions concerning the securitization of migration in Europe and the implicated racism in this process also reveal a degree of Eurocentrism that is inherent in the assumption that Europe is the major destination of migrants.

Conclusion

At the European Union level, migration has become increasingly securitized since the 1980s, and was seen first and foremost as a threat to national identity. In contrast, the securitization of migration in the United States took place in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, where terrorism became the bases for framing the groundwork for securitizing discourses and practices relative to migration.

The securitization of migration is closely tied with the construction of the European Union and Schengen area, as well as with the emergence of new economic agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. Particular case studies concerning the US-Mexican border and Euro-Mediterranean border showed how the rise of irregular immigration in the context of a new security era, where countering organized crime and terrorism was a top priority, leads to stricter public policies, new surveillance and control devices, and tighter external border controls despite discourses about globalization and open markets.

Within the debate of the implications of a securitization of migration, the role of a politics of fear in the process of

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categorizing migrants as a potential security threat is also noteworthy. I have highlighted the danger that the securitization of migration might reinforce a politics of fear. A politics of fear can lead to a dangerous generalization, namely the determination of all migrants as a whole with extremely negative implications. In terms of real politics, each migrant that is “different” to the culture and identity of the host country constitutes a potential security threat. Therefore, the main problem attributed to the process of securitization, is the inability of the securitizing actor to see migrants as individual humans. Rather migrants are being merged into a general category.

The correlation between the politics of fear and the securitization of migration generates another important dimension in the process of categorizing migrants as a potential security threat; that is racism. By examining a shift in racism, from notions of biological superiority, to exclusion based on cultural difference, it is possible to understand that the categorization of a migrant as a security threat reflects a racist discourse that is reinforced through the securitization of migration.

The securitization of migration also implies a categorization of migration. Categories have always been an essential tool of political power. The use of such categories in official discourses does have an impact not only on public perceptions of migratory phenomena, but also on real lives of migrants through enforcement of state policies. The ways in which migrants are assessed by the state will affect issues of resource distribution, residential location, labor rights and ultimately for the most serious questions such as refugee status determination. Yet, the complexity, diversity and fluidity of migration makes it difficult to lump into one single category, and one should be aware that categorization often symbolizes discredited top-down approaches, which fix dynamic social processes into rigid structures.

With these aspects in mind, which have shown that the securitization of migration highly promotes negative implications, the question arises whether it is useful and necessary to define migration as an international security issue. The fact that even in the age of globalization we do not live in a world without borders, which are a part of the international security sphere and used as a means to control and restrict migration, proves that we cannot exclude migration from security debates. As evaluations of the US-Mexican as well as the Euro-Mediterranean border have shown, the correlation between securitization, irregular migration, human trafficking, racism, and globally networked surveillance is existent. Hence, migration can be defined as an international security issue but not one that should be protected against as a threat to “socio-political cohesion” and “cultural homogeneity” in the manner that Huysmans (2000) and Karyotis (2007) has highlighted. Rather migration is a security issue, because of the vulnerability of migrants and their susceptibility to exploitation and discrimination. Certainly, challenging the concept that migrants pose a security threat to Western societies should form a key part of any policy on migration, and one should be aware of the varied political intentions behind the label of the securitization of migration.

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