

## ARTICLE

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# Delinking the Migration-Terrorism Nexus: Strategies for the De-Securitization of Migration

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### Abstract

*The notion of a “migration-terrorism nexus” is gaining political momentum, despite the lack of evidence to support it, and even the existence of evidence to the contrary. This paper, while assessing the validity of the supposed link between terrorism and migration, will seek to show why and how the crackdown on migration and liberties actually create conditions conducive to terrorism. The answer as to why we tend to easily associate migration with terrorism lies in the securitization of migration and asylum, which will be analyzed in this paper. The broader securitizing discourse constructing migration as a security and even a terrorist threat has been shaping migration policy-making for almost three decades. A series of policy practices with a very heavy human cost, such as borderization practices, interception at sea, push-back operations, and the building of fences or walls to stop the refugee influx, which prioritize border security over human lives, show how this securitizing discourse is effective or “successful”. The paper argues that the over-securitization of migration has very negative implications for human lives and rights as well as for democracy and liberties. It seeks to make a case for delinking migration and terrorism and for policy strategies that could be pursued to move migration out of the security framework and ultimately desecuritize migration.*

### Keywords

Critical security studies, Copenhagen School, migration-terrorism nexus, securitization of migration, migration policy-making, desecuritization strategies.

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## Introduction

The “migration-terrorism nexus” is gaining political momentum; an increasing number of policy-makers, scholars and representatives of global media link the recent terrorist attacks in the Global North to the “migration/refugee crisis,” particularly following the growing instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and human mobility after the Arab uprisings.<sup>1</sup> Since the end of the Cold War, but particularly in the aftermath of September 11, the claim that migrants and asylum-seekers pose serious risks to security, national identity, and the way of life of receiving societies, and that through migration terrorists are infiltrating into Europe or the U.S., is insistently repeated and loudly expressed. The increase of mixed flows seeking entry to Europe or the U.S., consisting of irregular migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing poverty, conflict, violence, and environmental degradation, turn migration into a highly politicized issue. The terrorist attacks in Paris in 2015 and other terrorist attacks in Europe in its aftermath transformed perceptions of security and migration, linking the “terrorism crisis” with the “migration/refugee crisis”.<sup>2</sup>

As boats or dinghies carrying refugees and migrants keep sinking and people seeking safety and protection lose their lives, mainstream and radical right-wing political leaders and parties, the media, and the other actors push for border enforcement, detention of asylum-seekers, and the deportation of irregular migrants.<sup>3</sup> These political figures and actors argue that migration is the main reason behind growing crime rates and fundamentalist terrorism, a discourse that serves to accentuate the perceived link between terrorism and migration. One of the main claims is that countries receiving large numbers of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers are more prone to be exposed to terrorist attacks. Another important concern is the possibility of terrorists re-entering Europe through human smuggling networks, which is mainly due to the allegations that two of the suicide bombers in the November 2015 Paris attack entered into Europe among refugees. Even if there is still no significant evidence to support this claim or fear,<sup>4</sup> it has negatively affected public perceptions of irregular migrants and refugees. Moreover, it is possible to observe that these claims are becoming more pervasive among European societies. A Pew Research Centre survey, conducted in ten European countries in Spring 2016, reveals that in eight of the countries more than half of the population believe that “incoming refugees increase the likelihood of terrorism in their country.” According to the survey, a median of 59% of the populations in ten countries see a close link between refugee flows and terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

The populist right, which is on the rise in the world, particularly in Europe, skillfully transforms this perception into fear and increases its votes by claiming that mainstream political parties have so far failed to stop the mixed migration flows. Radical right politicians argue that there is a need for stepping up security measures, putting

emphasis on border enforcement and adopting more restrictive immigration policies. The same rhetoric was employed by President Trump in his election campaign. After getting elected, he continued to use anti-immigrant rhetoric and started to pursue a restrictive policy towards migrants and refugees. In January 2017, he issued an executive order introducing a travel ban for the nationals of seven countries (Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, and Yemen). He claimed to have taken the decision to temporarily block their entry into U.S. territory with a view to protecting American citizens from the terrorist attacks of foreign nationals.<sup>6</sup> Another important promise President Trump made in his election campaign was that he would build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border to curb irregular migration, and he remains committed to it. Disagreement between the President and the Democrats about the funding of the border wall paved the way for the longest government shut-down in U.S. history.<sup>7</sup> This move by the President places the migration issue at the heart of the political agenda and the gridlock has even reached to a point where President Trump has threatened the Congress that he will declare a national emergency to fund the building of the wall.<sup>8</sup>

It is not only radical right parties or populist politicians that associate migration with terrorism or recent terrorist attacks however. It is possible to see figures from different parties or movements across the political spectrum expressing similar opinions or voicing similar concerns. Therefore, different set of actors construct migration, particularly irregular flows and border crossing offences, as a security issue and increasingly a terrorist threat to national security, national identity, public order and the European or American way of life.

Given the very negative implications of the over-securitization of migration for human lives, rights and democracy, this paper seeks to make a case for

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delinking migration and terrorism. With this goal in mind, the paper, while assessing the validity of the supposed link between terrorism and migration, will seek to show why and how the crackdown on migration and liberties actually creates conditions conducive to terrorism. As will be discussed in the following section, despite the lack of evidence to support a link between migration and terrorism, and even despite the existence of evidence to the contrary, the anti-immigrant discourse associating migration with terrorism and violent extremism is gaining currency. This has to do with the broader securitizing discourse that has been constructing migration as a security and even a terrorist threat for almost three decades. Therefore, after the deconstruction of the migration-terrorism nexus, the securitization of migration will be discussed and problematized. The last section will evaluate to what extent it is possible to desecuritize migration, which entails delinking the migration-terrorism nexus and moving migration out of the security and terrorism context.

### Migration-Terrorism Nexus?

If we could assume the existence of a link between terrorism and migration, it is mainly that terrorism leads to more migration, particularly forced migration. A complex set of factors, including violent extremism and terrorist attacks targeting civilians, leads to forced human mobility.<sup>9</sup> This has to do with the changing character of warfare in the post-Cold War period. As Mary Kaldor argues, the new wars are internal conflicts, mainly in less-developed states linked with identity struggles, ethnic differences, processes of state formation and struggle for control over economic assets. These wars are transnational and involve diaspora populations as well as foreign fighters and external powers' troops. Rather than seeking to gain territory, fighting factions aim to control the population through mass killings, ethnic cleansing, violence against civilians, forced displacement and resettlement.<sup>10</sup>

In many cases, population displacement is one of the strategies pursued by terrorist organizations. The higher the lethality of terrorism, the more outward migration is observed. As data reveals, the increase in the number of deaths due to terrorism in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Pakistan led to an increase in the number of asylum-seekers from these countries in Europe. Counter-terrorism measures or operations also destabilize a region and displace people.<sup>11</sup> Drone strikes against the terror networks in Pakistan and Yemen killed and displaced the local populations.<sup>12</sup> In certain cases, such as the Assad regime in Syria, the civilian population was deliberately targeted to deprive the insurgents of the

logistical support they could get from the inhabitants. In Syria, the majority of the 6.5 million IDPs (internally displaced persons) were displaced by the regime's attacks rather than those of DAESH.<sup>13</sup>

There are certain situations that do link migration and terrorism. Some “professional jihadists” who cannot or are not willing to return to their country of origin, ‘migrate’ from one theatre of war or conflict to another (e.g. from Afghanistan to Bosnia, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Libya). Some terrorist fighters returning to their countries of origin could be seen as “return migrants” and they may get involved in terrorist acts back home. But it has to be acknowledged that they are already radicalized before they leave or return.<sup>14</sup>

One way migrants or asylum-seekers might become entangled with terrorist organizations is through abduction. For instance, DAESH in Libya is abducting transit migrants from Sudan, Eritrea, and West Africa, and, while killing non-Muslims, is sending Muslim migrants to training camps to make them ready for combat.<sup>15</sup> However, DAESH also abducts civilians in regions under its occupation. For instance, it abducted 1,000 children in two Iraqi provinces and Syria in 2015. There are concerns that they could be trained and brainwashed into being suicide bombers.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Boko Haram abducts civilians, particularly girls and women, imprisons, rapes and forces them to participate in armed attacks, even against their own towns or villages.<sup>17</sup>

There are also those who argue that rather than the incoming migrants or refugees, the focus should be on the members of the second or third generation, i.e. the children of immigrants born and raised in Europe, who have joined terrorist networks. A recent report by Crone, Falkentoft and Tammikko states that EU citizens were behind most of the terrorist attacks committed in 2015 and 2016 in Europe.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, rather than refugees and asylum-seekers, it is the migrant-origin EU citizens who are vulnerable to radicalization and recruitment by terrorist networks.

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What are the factors behind so-called “home-grown” terrorism? Why are second generation youth more vulnerable to violent extremism? The descendants of immigrants may face

discrimination, and feel discriminated against or marginalized by the society they are living in. They face xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes and are denied access to certain opportunities because of their ethnic or religious backgrounds. Growing Islamophobia in Europe has the potential to pave the way for extremism.<sup>19</sup> Among the jihadists who joined DAESH in Syria and Iraq there are a number of European citizens, many of whom are second or third generation European Muslims. In their search for identity and meaning they may be radicalized or recruited by terrorist organizations. Resentment against a society unwilling and incapable of integrating and accepting people with migrant backgrounds might motivate some migrants or asylum-seekers, particularly their descendants, to radicalize.<sup>20</sup> By withholding citizenship, by not granting long-term residents the same rights as citizens, by restricting or denying migrants and refugees access to rights and services, states themselves may create a disenfranchised community susceptible to radicalization.<sup>21</sup>

Religious terrorism should be understood within the framework of the crisis of the nation-state to accommodate ethnic and religious diversity or divisions. Both the terrorism and refugee “crisis” are in fact indicative of the internal crises of the nation-states.<sup>22</sup> As migrants or their descendants

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demand inclusion, they pose a challenge to the ‘homogenous nation’ myth of the nation-states and national identity. Their mobility challenges the fixed borders of the nation-states. Growing terrorism pushes nation-states to social exclusion, restricting mobility, enhancing borders, adopting martial law-type security measures,

bypassing democratic procedures and going beyond the limits of liberal democracy. Therefore, rather than a migration or terrorism crisis, it is possible to talk about a crisis of Europe.<sup>23</sup>

What Europe should be concerned about is not limited to marginalization and should include the radicalization of second-generation youth. Similarly, a growing number of migrants and asylum-seekers are living in Europe without a clear status and with partial or no access to rights, a situation which goes against the founding principles of equality and liberty. The treatment they receive throughout their journeys to Europe, upon arrival and throughout their stay, affects their perceptions about the European way of life and its values, and leads them either to cherish or despise it.

More importantly, it has to be acknowledged that the overwhelming majority of migrants and refugees do not engage in terrorist acts and have nothing

to do with terrorist organizations. Just a few cases make the headlines. Peter Neumann, the Director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization and Political Violence in London, stated that among the 600,000 Iraqis and Syrians who arrived in Germany in 2015, only 17 have been investigated for having links to terrorist organizations.<sup>24</sup> According to the Migration Policy Institute, among the 745,000 refugees who resettled in the U.S. from September 11 until 2015, only two have been arrested on terrorism charges. It is not clear whether these two were already linked to terrorist organizations or were recruited after they migrated.<sup>25</sup> In the U.S., out of 85,000 Somali refugees who arrived in 2016, only 36 were suspected to have links to terrorism. An average of 0.2% or less is a clear indication that the fears and efforts to label refugees as terrorists are unfounded.<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes refugee camps could turn into a recruiting ground for militant or terrorist groups, such as certain Afghan refugee camps in Pakistan or Somali refugee camps in Yemen. Living in horrendous conditions in refugee camps for long years due to the protracted refugee crisis could make some refugee youth more prone to radicalization and to violent extremism. Research shows us that not having access to education, not having the right or chance to work and the absence of freedom of movement are the main conditions conducive to radicalization.<sup>27</sup> Radicalization and recruitment by terrorist organizations also become more likely where fighters have access to refugee camps.<sup>28</sup>

In certain cases, militant refugee groups can destabilize a country by engaging in cross-border attacks from the host state's territory or towards it, and sabotage cease-fires. Refugee camps may turn into recruiting grounds for militants and may have strategic importance for the control of food and health supplies. If a state is failed or weak, the presence of refugees may contribute to the further weakening of the state. Refugee warriors may ally themselves with certain political factions in the host state and become part of the internal power struggles.<sup>29</sup> However, these kinds of security implications of forced migration are more serious in the Global South than in the North, and they are entangled with underdevelopment, weak state institutions, and violent conflict.

86% of the world's refugees live in the Global South, in developing countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia.<sup>30</sup> Hosting refugees in overcrowded camps or in make-shift shelters in the Global South is delegated to neighboring states where refugee crises erupt, while the countries in the North fund the refugee relief efforts. Moreover, threat perceptions are not always linked to

the actual numbers of migrants or refugees. In the period between 2001-2005, despite a significant drop from 75% to 54% in the number of asylum applications in North America and Oceania, threat perceptions linked to the arrival of asylum-seekers increased.<sup>31</sup>

Fears about the infiltration of terrorists alongside irregular migrants who cross borders via transnational human smuggling networks, lead political leaders and policy-makers to push for border enforcement. It is possible to talk about a symbiotic relationship between criminality and terrorism. The “crime-terrorism nexus” existed long before the emergence of global terrorist organizations such as DAESH.<sup>32</sup> Terrorist organizations establish links with

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criminal groups such as drug cartels to fund their operations or purchase arms. As the end of the Cold War led to a fall in state financial support for terrorism, we witnessed the growth of transnational crime and an accentuation of the crime-

terrorism nexus.<sup>33</sup> It has been revealed that DAESH had cannabis farms in Albania in 2016 and then started recruiting people from the organized crime networks in the area. It has also been revealed in reports about European recruits to the DAESH that the majority either had criminal records, were known to the police, or had a history of delinquency. A study conducted by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) showed that many European-origin members of DAESH continued to use alcohol and drugs and commit crimes. This also applies to the DAESH members who committed the terrorist attacks in Paris.<sup>34</sup>

As states adopt restrictive migration policies with a view to protecting their borders, territory and people, and shirk their international protection responsibilities, refugees and migrants arriving in the North through mixed flows are left with no other option but to resort to human smugglers. As there are many transnational criminal networks involved in human smuggling and trafficking, the right-wing populism seizes the opportunity to merge the crime-terrorism nexus with the migration-terrorism nexus to construct asylum-seekers as security threats or terrorists.<sup>35</sup>

In this section, the claims about associating migration with terrorism have been discussed and evaluated. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the link

between migration and terrorism is increasingly and immediately drawn by political actors, in the media and in public debate. The answer as to why we tend to easily associate migration with terrorism lies in the securitization of migration and asylum. In the next section below, securitization in general and the securitization of migration in particular will be discussed in detail.

## Critical Security Studies and Securitization

The meaning of security has been taken for granted in traditional IR. Literally, it means being free from threats or, to put it rightly, having guarantee of protection against threats.<sup>36</sup> According to the military understanding of security, which dominated the IR discipline throughout the Cold War era, security is what states strive for. Security studies, as defined by Stephen Walt, is “the study of the threat, use and control of military force.”<sup>37</sup> In this understanding, security basically means the survival of the state. Security in this sense is described more in terms of a zero-sum game, i.e. more security for one state means less security for the other.<sup>38</sup> This definition in geopolitical terms reflects the conservative understanding and desire to ensure the permanence of the established order and increase predictability.<sup>39</sup>

Despite its frequent use in the discipline, the meaning of security has remained vague and ambiguous, making security an essentially contested concept.<sup>40</sup> What we experience in the post-Cold War era is a broadening of the definition of security, the enlargement of the security agenda, and the expansion of security questions which present new threats, vulnerabilities, risks and enemies. Issues such as environmental degradation, aid and development, health, migration, and international terrorism became issues dealt with within the field of critical security studies. There

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are different schools of thought, named for their place of origin within the critical security studies field, which have theorized the concept of security. The Aberystwyth or Welsh school is linked with Aberystwyth University, particularly with the work of Ken Booth and Richard Wyn Jones, who associate security with the goal of human emancipation. They focus on the conditions essential for ensuring individual security and for the individual to be free from broader threats such as poverty, political oppression, envi-

ronmental degradation, violence or conflict. Ole Waever, Barry Buzan, and other scholars linked to the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) introduce a sectoral approach to security and study how the invocation of security affects particular issues. Scholars working at Science Po and connected to the academic journal *Cultures et Conflicts* edited by Didier Bigo developed a sociological approach analyzing the conduct of everyday security practices encompassing policing and border control. The Paris School focuses particularly on how security professionals do security and questions the distinction between internal (policing) and external (military) security.<sup>41</sup>

Buzan from the Copenhagen School of critical security studies provides a sectoral approach to security, which challenges the artificial division between high and low politics issues. Security can be divided into five sectors, each sector having its own referent object(s), namely, military, political, economic, societal and environmental security. The referent object refers to what is to be secured. Traditional approaches to security focus on military threats to the security of the state and therefore the referent object is the state itself.<sup>42</sup> Military security is concerned with the military capabilities of states based on the perceptions of each other's intentions.<sup>43</sup> "Political security is about the organizational stability of social order(s)." Economic security is related to access to the resources that are essential to bolster the power and welfare of the state. Societal security, which is also designated as identity security, is about the protection of patterns such as language and cultural and/or national identity.<sup>44</sup> Environmental security is about the sustenance of environmental resources on which human survival and development depend.<sup>45</sup> In the military sector of security the referent object is the state, while in the political sector, the sovereignty and ideology of the state emerge as the referent object. In the economic sector, the referent objects are the firms or multinational corporations (MNCs) that are threatened by bankruptcy and rivalry, while in societal security it is collective identity such as that of a nation or religion. In the environmental sector, it is the maintenance of the biosphere and survival of the species. This list is not exhaustive, given the fact that different actors can securitize different referent objects.

It can be argued that existential threats and vulnerabilities do not exist objectively but emerge as a result of self-referential practice. Security has its roots in the speech act in language theory, according to which, saying something is doing something. This has moral, political or legal consequences depending on the context, as the context gives meaning to the act. Security could be un-

derstood as a particular rhetorical or grammatical structure: defining phrases such as “existential threat, point of no return, and a possible way out,” appear in the particular dialects of different sectors.<sup>46</sup>

It is not possible to ignore security, since it is an authorizing word which contributes to the construction of social life. Security practices organize the social life to eliminate the threats and insecurities to which social life owes its very existence. Security issues become ‘security issues’ through securitization. Security, according to the Copenhagen School, is a political and relational concept, which helps us to understand “how human collectivities relate to each other in terms of threats and vulnerabilities.”<sup>47</sup> The construction of the political community is dependent on the definition of threats. Security is about ethico-political choice about a certain order. Restating security as a thick signifier enables us to see how “security” expresses a particular way of organizing life. Therefore, it is not “an entirely objective matter of military force calculation” and it should be questioned in order to unveil what kind of political order is secured.<sup>48</sup> Through this approach, the security agenda is also constructed in search for a meaning of security. The signifier ‘security’ gains a performative role in ordering social relations into security relations.

The Copenhagen School’s conceptualization of security is based on Carl Schmitt’s definition of the “political”. In Schmitt’s work, the friend/foe distinction is at the heart of his concept of the “political”. Schmitt argues that a political community would cease to exist without a friend-foe distinction. Securitization challenges the neutral political sphere that liberalism has established. It stands against the pursuit of liberal politics and ongoing process of rationalization by means of calling for immediate action against an existential threat in order to constitute a new political regime. Schmitt’s political realism is against “the liberal neutral state”. It represents a critique of liberal parliamentarism and democratic procedures.<sup>49</sup> The “political” in this regime is based on particularism and passion against universalism and reason. In this regime there is no universal ground, and thus conflict between the self and the enemy cannot be reconciled through reasoning.<sup>50</sup> Socially agreed-upon rules are left aside while social and political life are reconstituted based on the decision of the political authority, or rather the judgements of the sovereign, ready and courageous enough to face the enemy or the existential threat. Therefore, securitization introduces “exceptionalism” and “decisionism” to political life by activating what could be termed as Schmittian politics<sup>51</sup> or, according to Huysmans, “the logic of political realism,” which is “a technique of government” using the

fear of violent death to reorder social relations. “Decisionism” reduces the state to the decision, not based on reason and deliberation.<sup>52</sup> In decisionism political life is “an act of free will, personified in authentic, passionate leadership,” which unites the people with the leaders. Fear of the enemy would require a bold decision to eliminate the imminent threat by the (dictatorial) leader that would unite the people to the political community.<sup>53</sup>

The securitizing agent or actor, by claiming something to be or labelling something as a security threat, defends dealing with the threat to eliminate it with extraordinary means, breaking or bypassing the rules,<sup>54</sup> levying extra taxes, limiting certain liberties, or channeling resources to certain specific tasks. In democratic politics, political decisions are implemented in accordance with strict procedural rules, which takes time and are subject to deliberation, dissent and revision. Securitization challenges democratic procedures by means of institutionalizing speed or limiting public or judicial review on bureaucratic processes. Therefore, the politics of securitization is undemocratic.<sup>55</sup> When an issue is securitized, the government can impose laws or restrictions on individual liberties which otherwise would face opposition. The presence of an enemy hierarchically organizes human activities and privileges certain ones for the sake of the survival of the state and nation.<sup>56</sup> The constructed enemy poses a threat, which creates an emergency and disrupts the routine or procedural policy-making and implementation. An emergency requires an exceptional response. Legitimizing actions for extra-ordinary procedures by using security rhetoric leads to the institutionalization of the emergency procedure and the formation of black security boxes in the political process. A “move from liberal democratic to exceptional politics” takes place when the possibility of war becomes the utmost priority of the state.<sup>57</sup>

The political agencies that act on behalf of the referent objects cannot securitize an issue alone. They present the issues to the audience in the political arena and get their approval.<sup>58</sup> This means that those who have positions of power – whose voice is accepted as legitimate – and who make decisions about security within the grammatically structured field of security, do not have absolute power. Political agencies gain credibility and assert their position through imposing certainty and making the order they are acting in more meaningful and understandable.

### *Securitization of Migration and Asylum*

The migrant has emerged as the “anchoring point of securitarian policies” and has been at the heart of fears about security and identity from the 1990s

onwards.<sup>59</sup> There have been two important junctures in the securitization of migration, i.e. the presentation of migrants and asylum-seekers as existential threats. Following the end of the Cold War, political actors began to frame the migration issue in terms of security; in the aftermath of September 11 with the “war against terrorism,” the migration-terrorism nexus was created.<sup>60</sup>

With the end of the Cold War, when asylum applications in the North spiked, EU member states responded by changing their national legislation to restrict the number of asylum applications and access to refugee status. During the Cold War years, the refugee movements could be used as ideological tools in proxy wars, as refugees were instrumental in anti-communist propaganda. From the 1990s onwards, the refugees lost their ideological or geopolitical value and refugee movements came to be seen as an international threat rather than an issue to be dealt with by individual states.<sup>61</sup> Some analysts started to portray refugees as bringing instability into the host state, from the poorer, underdeveloped parts of the world to developed countries. Kaplan (1996) argued that forced mass migration could carry misery, crime, and destruction. Simultaneously, the EU bureaucracy formed an internal security field in which it categorizes and deals with issues such as labor migration, forced migration, drug trafficking, organized crime and border control. The threat perception of infiltration by communists during the Cold War years was transformed into a fear of the penetration of Islamic fundamentalism into Western societies in the post-Cold War era. Since the 1990s, migration and asylum have been constructed as “existential threats” to the state.<sup>62</sup> Some analysts describe refugee movements not only as a threat to the sovereignty of the state but also to international peace and security.<sup>63</sup>

As migration transgresses borders, migrants pose a challenge to state sovereignty. Borders are markers of identity, both national and political. The challenges posed by migratory crossings to state sovereignty allowed for the linking of irregular migration with different types of crime, organized, petty or financial, drug trafficking or terrorism.<sup>64</sup> Alongside the securitization of irregular migration and labelling of asylum-seekers as “illegal” or “bogus” in the European context, the international refugee regime went through a significant transformation from the 1990s onwards.<sup>65</sup> This transformation consists of the shift from durable to temporary solutions

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and from protection to containment, the establishment of a temporary protection regime through a restrictive interpretation of the 1951 Convention, declaring certain countries to be “safe,” delegating the responsibility of international protection to countries neighboring refugee crises, funding the containment of refugee crises where they occur, if necessary undertaking military interventions to prevent mass exodus from conflict zones, and shifting responsibility for processing asylum claims to transit countries.<sup>66</sup>

The transformation of the international refugee regime within the post-Cold War context is related to the replacement of the bipolar friend-foe relationship, on which securitization was based during the Cold War, with the unipolar “cosmos-chaos” divide, which delineates the EU, NATO or the Global North from the turbulent ex-communist states and Global South.<sup>67</sup> The NATO and EU enlargements could be seen as attempts to enlarge the cosmos and bring stability to chaotic Eastern Europe first and later on to the Southern Mediterranean.

The securitization of migration and asylum gained new momentum after September 11 within the context of the “war against terrorism”. Until the Terrorism Act of 2000 was passed in the UK, the main focus of terrorism legislation in the UK was the conflict in Northern Ireland and Irish terrorism. With this new legislation, the UK defined the terrorist threat to be international in nature.<sup>68</sup> Following September 11, the international character of terrorism has been accentuated.

Terrorism could be defined as a “political communication strategy for psychological mass manipulation” seeking to influence and intimidate governments and public opinion. Terrorism is basically “psychological warfare.”<sup>69</sup> Terrorism affects the security of both the state and individuals, and it intends to instill fear in the population. This enables the sovereign state to exert more control over the population and legitimizes its moves to protect the population from terrorism. Therefore, the state can use the fear as an “asset”. That is what the U.S. as the sole superpower did and other states followed suit. Like security, insecurity is also politically and socially constructed, that is what has happened through the “war on terrorism”. In the aftermath of September 11, it was not necessary for states to explicitly define asylum or migration as a security threat. As the issue was already well-integrated into the policy frameworks related with policing and defense, it became easy to transfer security concerns from terrorism to migration and asylum.<sup>70</sup> This allowed states to prioritize national security interests, while downplaying their humanitarian

obligations. States could detain asylum-seekers who are then forced to live in detention centers in prison-like conditions for long years.<sup>71</sup>

Frances Webber describes the process of criminalizing immigrants and asylum-seekers in Europe as “crimes of arrival”. Mere arrival has become a criminal act for which people may be detained, and in fact imprisoned.

When people are subjected to continued fingerprinting, when they are locked up, when they are restrained by body belts and leg shackles and thirteen feet of tape, or forcibly injected with sedatives to keep them quiet as they are bundled on the aircraft, it seems reasonable to ask: what have they done? The answer is that they have tried to come to Western Europe, to seek asylum, or to live here with their families, or to work here, and the whole panoply of modern politics, with its associated rhetoric, is applied against them.<sup>72</sup>

In the post-September 11 context, we see depictions of migrants as “barbarian hordes” seeking to destroy Western civilization overlapping with depictions of terrorists trying to destroy Western states. The EU’s securitizing rhetoric, like that of right-wing populism, portrays migratory flows as “barbarians at the gates,” a “barbarian invasion,” and even “barbarian warfare” threatening the EU.<sup>73</sup> Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán at the 2017 Malta congress of the European People’s Party argued that the EU’s refugee policies during and after 2015 helped terrorists, and stated that “migration turned out to be the Trojan horse of terrorism.” This speech came one week after a new law came into force in Hungary, requiring the detention of asylum-seekers in camps while their applications are processed.<sup>74</sup>

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The radical right parties and leaders are very successful in agenda setting and placing migration high on the political agenda of European states. It is however not solely the radical right actors that associate migration with terrorism or recent terrorist attacks in Europe. It is possible to see conservative, social democratic, liberal or left-wing political figures using a securitizing rhetoric. In Germany, Christian Social Union and Bavarian Finance Minister

Markus Söder saw a link between the November 2015 attacks in Paris and the refugee influx to Europe. Sahra Wagenknecht, a German left-wing politician, economist and author, argued that due to growing migration poor Germans may have to compete for accessing food.<sup>75</sup> A leading German feminist Alice Schwarzer, following the sexual assaults on New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015-16, argued that "Young men of Arab or North African descent are playing war in the middle of Cologne," which became possible due, according to Schwarzer, to "misplaced toleration" and "failed immigration" in Germany.<sup>76</sup>

Within this securitizing discourse migrants are portrayed as dangerous or constructed as threats so that "we" can be made secure. A series of policy practices such as the temporary reintroduction of border controls in the Schengen area, the building of fences or walls to stop the refugee influx, and border policing or push-back operations in the Mediterranean that have led to the drowning of migrants and refugees, show how this securitizing discourse is effective or "successful".<sup>77</sup> This goes against democratic politics, as some are provided with security at the expense of others' security, breaching the principle of equality.<sup>78</sup> In the documentary, "The Other Traveler" by Pieter Boeles, Emeritus Professor of Migration Law, one of the members of the research team, Tamara Last, collecting data on the deaths at the border, shares what an Afghan man told her in Lesbos: "They are your borders, it's you they are defending;" they [the migrants/refugees] are dying for you."<sup>79</sup> As result of the securitization of migration, the security, well-being and even lives of migrants and refugees are at risk. The European and American people, in whose name the securitizing acts are done, are not feeling more secure either. Securitization, rather than eradicating threats as it promises, breeds more insecurity and fear.

## Securitization is the Problem, Not the Solution

The securitization of irregular and forced migration has reached to the point that it can be described as over-securitization, which creates more threats where there were none, while putting the lives of migrants and refugee protection at risk. It is time we consider whether this is the best way to deal with migration problems and provide security. Why should we give up securitizing migration and asylum?

First and foremost, it does not work. When the September 11 attacks took place, al-Qaeda had 300 *mujahedeen* in Afghanistan. In the 15 years of "war on terrorism" al-Qaeda and its successor terrorist organizations and most

recently DAESH have recruited thousands of militants. 30,000 foreign fighters from 100 countries joined the war in Syria. In 2001, there were a handful of training camps in Afghanistan; in 2014 and 2015 DAESH took entire provinces in Iraq and Syria under its control and claimed to be a state, challenging the borders and sovereignty of many countries in a region extending from Nigeria to Afghanistan and the Philippines. In 15 years-time, in 61,000 terrorist attacks 140,000 people have died and we feel nowhere safe on earth any longer.<sup>80</sup> The war on terrorism, or securitization of international terrorism, did not make us more secure.

Following September 11, the link between terrorism and asylum-seekers were accentuated more and more, even if none of the committers of the attack were asylum-seekers. It is not clear why asylum-seekers are deemed to be more prone to commit terrorist acts as compared to a country's nationals. Moreover, terrorists do not enter a country only through the asylum system or as migrants, actually they tend to enter through other ways, with business, tourist or student visas.<sup>81</sup>

It was the two decades of EU policy-making and borderization practices aimed at restricting migration that led to the construction of the so-called "Mediterranean migration crisis".<sup>82</sup> Borderization practices, interception at sea, and similar push-back operations prioritizing border security over human lives would not stop people fleeing persecution and generalized violence. The British poet Warsan Shire in her poem "Home" states that "you have to understand, that no one puts their children in a boat unless the water is safer than the land."<sup>83</sup> Despite the non-arrival regime in the North, many people fleeing poverty and persecution take enormous risks to cross the borders. Economic globalization facilitating the flow of capital, goods and cultural globalization facilitating the dissemination of ideas and values are the main reason behind this urge to migrate. As Castles argues, growing inequality between the North and South, growing instability in the South, and the cultural attraction of the Northern lifestyles are among the main factors that lead to voluntary and forced human mobility.<sup>84</sup> The impact of neoliberalization, the removal of control over multinational corporations and social safeguards in the Global South, enhance inequalities and create incentives for migration. New military humanism, as Noam Chomsky calls it, exacerbates the problems.<sup>85</sup> Following military intervention in the name of the protection of human rights or civilians, a political and economic system in line with the interests of the North is imposed on those countries.

These interventions create fertile ground for local conflicts, terrorism and forced migration.<sup>86</sup> As long as local and global disparities exist and they are exacerbated by global processes of inclusion and exclusion such as border controls, deportations and detentions will not stem the tide of irregular migrants and asylum-seekers. Moreover, linked with restrictive migration policies, human trafficking and smuggling becomes a “high yield low risk” business and part and parcel of the globalization process.<sup>87</sup>

Through border enforcement, a new form of state sovereignty is being constructed. A new form of sovereignty with flexible rather than fixed and even expanding or shifting borders is taking shape. In a way, sovereignty becomes deterritorialized. Borders are “spatially and temporally produced” through state practices such as policing. As states seek to protect their order and borders they also yield violence. As criminological research shows there is a “symbiotic relationship” between policing and terrorism. Strict policing measures against terrorism limiting civil liberties have the potential to alienate individuals or groups seeking safety and protection.<sup>88</sup> Refugees seeking international protection are increasingly exposed to borderization practices and policing efforts and are now portrayed as posing a threat to national security. As crime and national security issues are increasingly intertwined, the border between internal and external becomes blurred and national security issues spill over into internal policing domains.<sup>89</sup> In this process, law enforcement and border enforcement come to overlap and border policing becomes a high politics issue. As a result, policing functions extend beyond national territory toward the neighboring and sending countries as well as transit zones, particularly to detention centers in other countries. For instance, the border policing functions of the Australian Federal Police extends beyond Australia to Indonesia.<sup>90</sup> Within this context, forced migration is no longer seen as a humanitarian issue but a security threat. This turns refugees into the target of policing activities against transnational organized crime (human smuggling).<sup>91</sup>

Second, the securitization of migration is self-defeating and counter-productive. Restricting and regulating migration as a measure against terrorist attacks or threats is increasingly used. However, the securitization of migration to curb irregular migration leads to an increase in irregular migration. Moreover, it hurts “bona fide migrants and legal foreign residents more than mala fide terrorists” by strengthening xenophobic attitudes. Many refugees and asylum-seekers become victims of racist attacks. The

arson attacks in asylum centers in Europe could also be defined as acts of terrorism. In 2015, there were 900 xenophobic incidents in Germany.<sup>92</sup> Data from Germany's Federal Criminal Police Agency show that refugee centers throughout Germany suffered near daily attacks in the first nine months of 2017 (211 attacks plus 15 additional attacks until October 23).<sup>93</sup>

The securitization of forced migration in public discourse and academic works in the last two decades has turned into a “self-fulfilling prophecy”. Exclusionist and restrictive measures, racial profiling, and prioritizing security at the expense of human rights lead to growing political tension among communities. It is highly unlikely that forced migrants running away from war, conflict, situations of generalized violence, or persecution would choose to attack a country that provides them with international protection, safety and a chance for a new start. They use their energies in building up their lives from scratch and are more interested in bringing up their children in a secure environment far away from violent extremism. However, “panic politics” leads to feelings of anxiety

**The securitization of forced migration in public discourse and academic works in the last two decades has turned into a “self-fulfilling prophecy”.**

and rage against the receiving state and society, and alienates the migrant populations and newly arriving migrants.<sup>94</sup> Marginalized or alienated communities, particularly youth deprived of rights to education and empowerment will pose new security threats.<sup>95</sup>

Joshua Seidman-Zager argues that within the UK context, the association of refugees with terrorism in public discourse did not lead to an increase in human security, but rather to an increase in the host society's fears of asylum-seekers and refugees. Therefore, the securitization of refugees is “self-defeating”.<sup>96</sup> One of the fundamental aspects of security, particularly human security, is “freedom from fear”. A much broader definition of human security also includes “freedom from want,” extending the concept to issues such as the right to education, health, protection from poverty, etc.<sup>97</sup> As a result of securitization, rather than an increasing sense of security, fears of terrorism and along with it of asylum-seekers have increased.<sup>98</sup> If securitization and heightened security measures do not reduce but rather lead to increasing fears, this poses a threat to human security. Migration control as a counter-terrorism measure, which is used to control a country's citizens, might in turn hurt them, rather than making them feel more secure.<sup>99</sup>

Third, fueling anti-immigrant or refugee sentiment detracts attention from real priorities. Many DAESH militants are returning back to their countries, and their rehabilitation is an important issue. The formulation of better integration or harmonization policies and models for newly arriving migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees is another priority so that migrants and their children will not be vulnerable to extremist propaganda.<sup>100</sup>

Fourth, the securitization of migration hurts the very values that we want to protect. Over-securitization undermines the basic premises of liberal democracy and strengthens authoritarian tendencies. If individuals compromise their freedom in return for invasive security measures, this could not be considered a positive development.<sup>101</sup> As Webber rightly states: “In the name of the defense of our way of life and our enlightenment values from attack by terrorists or by poor migrants, that way of life is being destroyed by creeping authoritarianism, and those values – amongst which the most important is the universality of human rights – betrayed.”<sup>102</sup> Therefore, it is actually the citizens of the receiving countries that should challenge the curbing of the rights and freedoms of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers. Citizens of liberal democracies will have to acknowledge the fact that it is their freedoms that will eventually be limited by counter-terrorism measures.<sup>103</sup> They will have to make a decision to stick to democratic norms and principles of equality and inclusion, or abandon them in search for more security.<sup>104</sup>

## Desecuritization of Migration: The Way Forward?

If the securitization of migration creates more problems than it promises to resolve, we have to ask ourselves: “Do we have to “associate the good life with policies nurturing insecurity towards strangers?”<sup>105</sup> If the answer is no then we have to search for ways of desecuritizing migration and asylum.

Desecuritization hitherto has been “undertheorized”. Furthermore, efforts to conceptualize it to date have been “unsystematic or even contradictory”.<sup>106</sup> Desecuritization simply means taking issues out of the security frame, not phrasing them as security issues, and moving them into the public sphere, i.e. back into the sphere of “normal politics”.<sup>107</sup> Briefly, it is a move from “panic politics” to “normal politics”.<sup>108</sup>

Both Huysmans and Aradau argue that desecuritization represents an ethico-political choice in organizing the political. It is a “political strategy” offering an alternative basis for political community<sup>109</sup> against a move away from democratic politics to exceptional politics. Desecuritization, like

securitization, also constitutes a speech act, offering an alternative viewpoint or way to deal with migration, diversity or other issues.<sup>110</sup> Desecuritization, however, cannot take place by merely uttering the phrase “I hereby declare this issue to no longer be a threat.” Desecuritization cannot materialize simply when the members of the political community agree not to “speak security,” as securitization does not occur when the word “security” is uttered. Therefore, desecuritization is “performative”.<sup>111</sup>

Desecuritization requires choice, which is as highly political as securitization. If securitization is a political choice, moving away from this choice and moving issues to the public sphere to be genuinely debated and negotiated is also a political choice. With choices comes responsibility. Therefore, we have to display “a morally committed agency”. This is why, rather than advocating a strategy of desecuritization valid for all times and places, the Copenhagen School puts emphasis on the unique contexts which require actors to make choices.<sup>112</sup>

Here, how desecuritization can be successful in a securitized environment is the key question. Cherishing diversity is essential. However, it would not be sufficient for the desecuritization of the migration issue. The migration issue cannot be desecuritized through multicultural policies alone either.<sup>113</sup> Certain cases, such as the case of Greece, show that if the securitization of an issue is successful and if the public starts to perceive that issue as a security threat, it becomes quite difficult to desecuritize it. Over two decades Greece, which had been defined as a country of emigration, went through a migration transition and became a country of immigration. Alongside a growing migrant population, the securitization of migration framed the migration issue as a “cultural and personal security threat”. In the early 2000s the political elites sought to desecuritize the migration issue, which means that rather than criminalizing migrants the emphasis turned to integrating migrants. The ambiguous stance of the politicians, emphasizing both the social inclusion of documented migrants and the need to expel undocumented migrants, was the reason behind the failure to “move the issue off the security agenda” and “return the issue to its former status.”<sup>114</sup> A move away from “panic politics” requires consistent political leaders with the will to redefine the issue outside of the security framework. Desecuritization, however, does not take place only when the dominant elite discourse and policies are changed. In the Greek case, one has to take the newly emerging conditions of increasing fear and uncertainties into consideration, such as the 2007-8 financial crisis and the influx of refugees from 2015 onwards.<sup>115</sup> More

importantly, for desecuritization a “genuinely open or progressive debate” is necessary.<sup>116</sup> As some forms of political deliberation may serve to further securitize the issue by operating as a platform for exclusionary ideas about the “other,” “progressive” debate is essential.

Desecuritization, to be successful, has to offer an alternative way of organizing social relations based on the principle of equality, accommodating diversity and opening up channels for different voices, particularly of those who have been silenced or rendered vulnerable, to be expressed and heard. For this to occur, “dangerous others” have to be considered as “legitimate” participants in dialogue. Therefore, the principle of equality should guide the desecuritization process, where women should not be viewed as women but equal citizens and migrants not as migrants but workers with equal rights.<sup>117</sup>

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Balibar argues that emancipation has to be defined with reference to universal values or already existing constitutional rights, which means that the struggle for emancipation has to show that there is a contradiction between the officially declared principles and what is actually happening.<sup>118</sup> Emancipation entails the struggle of those integral parts of the political community against the state’s securitizing or discriminatory practices. Those who are not members of the political community cannot pursue an emancipatory strategy. Those who are waging an emancipatory struggle have to come up with ways to link the “other(s)” to the political

community. This is possible through a “strategy of dis-identification from securitizing institutional practices such as the anti-war “not in my/our name” movement. The desecuritization of migration requires developing a new solidarity with migrants such as the “no one is illegal initiative” or fighting against extraordinary measures such as deportation, detention camps or push-back operations.<sup>119</sup>

Desecuritization, though not impossible, is practically quite difficult as the discussion above reveals. Still, there are different strategies that could be followed. A deconstructivist desecuritization strategy requires fragmentation of the “unified cultural alien” into many shifting identities. Roe suggests the

option of “moderate securitization” or the management of securitization, which means the establishment of deliberative institutions or mechanisms that would reduce the need for emergency politics. Reconstructionist strategy, suggested by Matti Jutila, puts emphasis on the reconstruction of identity in order to change how one sees the other.<sup>120</sup>

A desecuritization strategy could involve prioritizing individuals as referent objects, rather than states, by emphasizing the human security concept, which includes both the physical and psychological well-being of individuals, and the humanitarian obligations of the state to refugees.<sup>121</sup> The desecuritization of forced migration would not only mean the reinstatement of asylum but also ensuring better protection for refugees and asylum-seekers.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, we would be able to provide protection for, and not from, refugees. The Welsh School puts forward an alternative to state-centered security based on the concept of emancipation. Emancipation could be defined as security at the individual level: the absence of hunger, fear or poverty. However, the Welsh School’s reconceptualization of security amounts to replacing one referent object with another, rather than providing us with the means to desecuritize an already securitized issue.<sup>123</sup>

Hansen identifies four forms of desecuritization. The first form is that of *change through stabilization*. In this form, despite successful desecuritization, the conflict looms in the background. Desecuritization may take the form of loosening of the friend-foe division as was the case with the end of the Cold War, when the evil Soviet Empire was no longer seen as an enemy.<sup>124</sup> A case of successful desecuritization could also be found within the context of the Cold War during the *détente* period, when Western bloc countries and institutions sought to convince the Eastern bloc political elites that political change is possible through political dialogue, which led to the onset of Helsinki Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) process. This constitutes an example of the *change through stabilization* type of desecuritization. Desecuritization achieved during the *détente* period was a slow process. A key point is that the actors involved recognized each other as legitimate parties and opted to move away from the securitizing logic.<sup>125</sup>

In the case of *replacement*, which is the second form of desecuritization, when an issue is desecuritized and moved out of the security context, another issue that is securitized would replace it. *Rearticulation* is the third form of desecuritization; it entails a fundamental redefinition and therefore transformation of the identity and interests of the actors involved. One

important example is the way in which Gorbachev recast the Cold War rivalry and East-West (friend-foe) divisions and relations. Actors who once viewed each other as enemies may opt for collaboration and negotiation rather than conflict. In this case rearticulation was voluntary, but there are other cases of involuntary rearticulation, such as the EU putting pressure on candidate states for further democratization or protecting minority rights through desecuritization, which reveals that there are power dynamics involved in the process of rearticulation.<sup>126</sup> One last form of desecuritization in Hansen's terms is *silencing*. While the speech-act is constitutive of securitization, the silencing of security speech might be considered desecuritization.<sup>127</sup> This however does not resolve the issue, but rather postpones it.

Different issues might require different desecuritization strategies. However, a certain set of preferences can still be identified, such as a preference for politics over violence, inclusion over exclusion, and deliberation over emergency security measures. As Aradau argues, desecuritization entails making a decision about the type of policies we want. Presumably, desirable policies would be ones linked with democracy or further democratization, more freedom, inclusivity, transparency, and accountability.<sup>128</sup> Huysmans suggests that desecuritization entails "a more pluralistic understanding of the political," which would allow the production of security knowledge in a more pluralistic political context, or alternative understandings of the political. Desecuritization would mean not considering the friend-enemy dichotomy as the basis of political unity. Therefore, it means seeking alternative approaches to political community and what constitutes it.<sup>129</sup> Arendt's idea of politics is not based on a friend-foe distinction, but on the ability of members of the political community to engage in debate as equals and act to create a common political realm. Reconstitution of the public sphere would also require the involvement of a much more diverse and wider range of actors than the actors involved in securitization.<sup>130</sup>

Within this logic, the desecuritization of migration entails not seeing or defining migrants and asylum-seekers as existential threats. Desecuritization questions the "validity of security knowledge" in understanding migration and asylum.<sup>131</sup> It is a call to see security issues from a much broader perspective, which would allow us to better understand global, transnational and local political, socio-economic and cultural dynamics at play.

Rather than portraying irregular migration as an invasion, the focus could turn to the very experience of irregular migrants, the harsh conditions

and local and global inequalities that make them set out on a dangerous journey to their destinations, the transformation of welfare regimes that increase the demand for migrant labor, the structural dependence of certain sectors on migrant labor, the ageing of the population in the North, etc. Remembering that migration and asylum were not securitized in the 1950s and 1960s might provide us with certain insights, even if the dynamics at play are quite different and more complex. When Europe needed migrant labor for its growing economy, asylum-seekers had practical and ideological value. Therefore, labor migration could be regulated in accordance with the requirements of the labor market. Refugees could be perceived as human beings with rights, and therefore from a human rights perspective.<sup>132</sup>

The securitization of migration becomes possible when it can capitalize on everyday fears, such as the fear of growing crime rates with growing migration. For desecuritization to be successful it has to establish itself in everydayness.<sup>133</sup> Huysmans suggests the “sociology of everydayness” as a starting point which contextualizes issues or events in a wider social, economic and political context.

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Migrant riots could be understood and analyzed with reference to the deterioration of the living conditions of migrants, their segregation in ghettos, their growing unemployment, the discrimination they face in everyday life, etc. Contextualizing migration-related issues would serve to humanize migrants and show that they have concerns, desires and goals similar to those of the members of the receiving society.<sup>134</sup> Desecuritization in this way could actually lead to a state of security for all.<sup>135</sup>

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