

**The 'Securitization' of Asylum and Migration
in the European Union:
Beyond the Copenhagen School's Framework**

**Paper presented at the SGIR Sixth Pan-European
International Relations Conference,
12-15 September 2007, Turin (Italy)**

***Section 9: Security, Politics, Critique
Panel 9-14: 'Securitization and the Other: Theorising Immigration
and Asylum Policies'***

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Migration has become one of the most contentious political issues in Europe.¹ It has been associated with various problems, including terrorism, criminality, and social unrest. As a consequence, migration and asylum issues have become important topics of contemporary security politics, both in the 'real world' of practices and in the scholarly literature on the subject. Drawing explicitly or implicitly upon the securitization theory of the so-called 'Copenhagen School'², a large number of scholars have claimed that migration and asylum issues have become 'securitized', *i.e.* socially constructed as security issues, in the European Union. However, such claims have not been supported by any detailed empirical study.

Therefore, this paper aims to begin to address this problem by examining the extent and the modalities of the securitization of asylum and migration in the European Union (EU) using one case study: the migration crisis on the Canary Islands in 2006. As the purpose of the paper is to unpack the dynamics of securitization, this case has been chosen for its likelihood to exhibit securitization characteristics because of its 'crisis' nature. The empirical study will be guided by the securitization framework of the Copenhagen School given that it has become a reference point in the literature on this subject, as will be shown later.

Thus, the paper is structured as follows. Firstly, it discusses the increasing linkages between migration and security, both in 'real life' practices and in the academic literature. Then, it presents the securitization framework of the Copenhagen School, which will guide the empirical analysis. The paper then moves onto discussing some limitations and criticisms of the Copenhagen School's framework. Finally, it analyses the case study of the migration crisis in the Canary Islands. This shows that, in contrast to the claims of the literature, asylum and migration have only been partially securitized in the EU and in ways different to what has been described by

¹ Here, migration is used in its broadest and non-technical sense as meaning all categories of human movement, including migration and forced migration, *i.e.* asylum.

² This label designates a group of scholars who were affiliated with the now defunct Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI). Its key scholars are Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver.

most scholars. The next section briefly examines how one can explain this outcome, before some conclusions are drawn.

1. Migration and security

The issue of migration has increasingly given rise to intense political debates after the official ban on labour migration decided by the majority of European countries in the 1970s. It has been linked to a wide array of socio-economic or political problems such as criminality, breaches of law and order, unemployment, abuse of social benefits, epidemics, cultural and religious threats, social unrest, and political instability. Some political leaders and media outlets have even described it as a security threat.

For example, in the United Kingdom (UK), in the build-up to the 2005 general elections, the then Conservative leader Michael Howard linked migrants and asylum seekers to terrorism when he declared that

[w]e face a real terrorist threat in Britain today - a threat to our safety, to our way of life, and to our liberties. But we have absolutely no idea who is coming into or leaving our country. There are a quarter of a million failed asylum seekers living in our country today. No one knows who they are or where they are. To defeat the terrorist threat we need action not talk - action to secure our borders (*Guardian*, 30.03.2005).

The importance of the issue of migration has not been confined to heated electoral debates and rhetoric. It has also become one of the main items on the policy-making agenda in several EU Member States. Their governments have engaged in substantial and sometimes ongoing reforms of their asylum and migration policies, in both their substantial (e.g. France, UK, Spain, Denmark, Germany) and institutional dimensions (e.g. Denmark, Netherlands). With some modest exceptions such as the migration quota systems implemented by a few countries, the overwhelming majority of policy initiatives have aimed to reduce migration flows into the EU, including the numbers of asylum-seekers. As noted by Gibney (2005, p. 3) with specific regard to the issue of asylum,

[f]ew people could be unaware of the way willingness to implement tough measures on asylum has become a touchstone for Western governments of all hues recently. Buoyed by rising numbers of asylum seekers since the early 1980s, as well as widespread public concern over illegal migration, governments in countries as different as Germany and Australia, the US and Ireland, and Italy and the UK, have implemented a raft of measures designed to make life very uncomfortable for those applying for asylum.

In order to prevent or dissuade people from migrating, states have taken a wide array of legislative measures to reduce access to their territory, such as visa policies and carrier sanctions. They have also reduced the entitlements of the migrants and asylum-seekers who stay on their territories, with regards to conditions for family reunification, access to the labour market, and access to social benefits for example.

Moreover, such legislative changes have been accompanied by an increase in the budgets devoted to migration controls in several Member States. They have invested vast amounts of money into sophisticated technologies in order to increase their control of migration. One example is the electronic tagging of asylum-seekers in the UK aimed to prevent people from absconding during the processing of their asylum claim. This equipment upgrade has often been accompanied by an increase in the number of staff in charge of border surveillance. For example, in Spain and Italy, the growing importance of migration issues has led to an expansion of the main military and semi-military bodies in charge of border controls, respectively the *Guardia Civil* and the *Guardia di Finanza* (Lutterbeck, 2006).

It is in this context that EU Member States have gradually increased their co-operation on asylum and migration. The Treaty of Maastricht (1993) gave the EU some limited competence on 'justice and home affairs'. This new policy area included asylum, migration and external borders matters, alongside traditional international security problems like drugs, international fraud, civil and criminal judicial cooperation, customs

cooperation and police cooperation (Peers, 2000, p. 16).³ With the Treaty of Amsterdam, which entered into force in 1999, Member States identified justice and home affairs as one of the Union's priority policies. They adopted an ambitious five-year action plan (1999-2004) – the so-called 'Tampere Programme' – which included the development of a common policy on asylum and migration. A wide range of measures were subsequently adopted, notably several directives setting minimum standards with respect to various aspects of asylum systems. Another area marked by substantial progress was that of operational cooperation between Member States to strengthen border controls and combat illegal immigration.

Since then, asylum and migration issues have remained at the top of the political agenda of the EU, as a new five-year work programme (the 'Hague programme') has laid out an ambitious series of measures to be adopted during the period 2005-2010. In April 2006, at a conference on 'Media, Migration and Asylum' held during the Austrian presidency of the EU, the late Federal Austrian Minister of the Interior Liese Prokop declared that 'besides the threat from organized crime and terrorism, dealing with migration movements is today one of the main challenges facing us [Austria and the EU] in terms of security' (EU Presidency, 2006).

Such developments have prompted numerous observers (including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), journalists and scholars) to claim that migration flows have increasingly been seen as a security threat in Europe and that this interpretation has influenced the development of both the EU and domestic policies on asylum and migration.⁴ This strong link between migration and security has sometimes been called the 'migration-security' nexus (Faist, 2004; Karyotis, 2003; Miller, 2001; Tirman, 2004). However, the vast majority of observers have rather, implicitly or explicitly, drawn upon the Copenhagen School's securitization theory and spoken of the 'securitization of asylum and migration in the European Union': that is, their

³ At that time, some issues such as external border controls were being dealt with in another institutional setting, namely the Schengen Group. This will be explained in detail later.

⁴ 'At the EU level' refers to the policy and negotiation settings of the EU institutions (European Commission, European Council, European Parliament).

social construction as security issues. Indeed, the idea that migration issues have been securitized in the EU – at both the domestic and EU levels - has become ubiquitous in the recent academic literature on the subject. This is illustrated by the following selection of recent papers and journal articles: 'The European Union and the Securitization of Migration' (Huysmans, 2000), 'The Securitization of Migration in Western Societies' (Ceyhan and Tsoukala, 2002), 'The Securitization of Migration: A Racial Discourse' (Ibrahim, 2005), 'Transnational Migration – A National Security Risk? Securitization of Migration Policies in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom' or 'Securitization or Securing Rights? Exploring the Conceptual Foundations of Policies Towards Minorities and Migrants in Europe' (Fauser, 2006), 'The Negative Effects of Securitizing Immigration: The Case of Bulgarian Migrants to the EU' (Simeonova, no date) to name but a few examples (see also Bigo, 1998b; Kostakopoulou, 2000).

Moreover, general accounts of the EU asylum and migration policy increasingly often mention – almost in passing – that migration has become securitized in the EU. For example, Ette and Faist (2007, p. 24), in an introductory chapter to a book on the 'Europeanisation of National Policies and Politics of Immigration' note that, in the EU,

[the] tightness of the migration–security nexus, the continuing securitization of immigration and the mingling of external and internal security issues with immigration have strengthened the grasp of the executive in this policy area.

In a study of the europeanisation of the Polish asylum and migration policy, Kicingier, Weinar and Górnny (2007, p. 191), after explaining the restrictive evolution of this policy, comment that '[t]he fears of the policy-makers obviously echo the EU-level securitization of immigration policy'.

The fact that the idea of 'securitization of migration' has become increasingly widespread and has made its way into general accounts of the EU asylum and migration policy indicates that it has become a commonly held view in the literature. Even the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has claimed that migration and

asylum issues have been securitized in the EU. For example, the UNHCR claimed in its recent publication *The State of the World's Refugees* (UNHCR, 2006, p. 5) that

the emergence of new security concerns for states, particularly since the events of 11 September 2001, has led to the 'securitization' of asylum practices. Increasingly refugees and asylum seekers are perceived as harbingers of insecurity, rather than victims of it.

Therefore, given the prominence of the concept of 'securitization' in the literature on migration and security, it is now necessary to examine the securitization theory in greater detail.

2. The securitization theory of the Copenhagen School

As the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School is now rather well-known following some intense academic debates (see below), it is sufficient here to outline its main points. In line with the linguistic turn in international relations theory, the main idea behind the securitization theory is that security is a 'speech act'. In other words, according to the Copenhagen School, there are no security issues in themselves, but only issues which are constructed as such by certain actors - called 'securitizing actors' - through speech acts. As Wæver, who coined this concept, puts it,

In this usage, security is not of interest as a sign that refers to something more real; the utterance *itself* is the act. By saying it, something is done (as in betting, giving a promise, naming a ship) (Wæver, 1995, p. 55).

This does not mean, however, that 'securitization' is a subjective process. It is actually, in the Copenhagen School's view, an inter-subjective process given the role of the 'audience' of the speech act. For Buzan and Wæver, an issue is only securitized when the audience accepts it as such (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 25). This is more likely if the speech act fulfils internal and external conditions. The internal conditions are linguistic-grammatical: the speech act must follow the grammar of security, *i.e.* it must contain a plot with an existential threat, a point of no return, etc. The external conditions

are contextual and social. Firstly, the securitizing actor must be in a position of authority, *i.e.* possess social capital in a Bourdieusian sense. Secondly, and this is only a facilitating condition, the persuasive power of the enunciator increases if (s)he can refer to certain 'objects' generally considered threatening, such as tanks or polluted waters. If the securitizing actor is effective in mobilizing support around the security reference, then (s)he can legitimately operate in another mode that (s)he would have otherwise.

Moreover, Buzan and Wæver retain a traditional understanding of security by arguing that security is about survival. It follows from that definition of security that an attempt to securitize an issue is to present it as posing an *existential* threat to what the Copenhagen School calls a 'referent object' for security. For example, an attempt to securitize state B in state A would be to present state B as posing a security threat to the very survival of state A.

Furthermore, the Copenhagen School argues that, by 'uttering security', the securitizing actor 'moves a particular development into a specific area, and thereby claims a special right to use whatever means are necessary to block it' (Wæver, 1995, p. 55). Thus, 'securitization' is defined as

the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus, by labelling it as *security*, an agent claims a need for and a right to treat it by extraordinary means (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 26).

This idea is further clarified by the introduction of the concept of 'politicization', which stands in contrast to that of securitization:

"Security" is the move that takes politics beyond the established rules of the game and frames the issue either as a special kind of politics or as above politics. Securitization can thus be seen as a more extreme version of politicization. In theory, any public issue can be located on the spectrum ranging from nonpoliticized (meaning the state does not deal with it and it is not in any other way made an issue of public debate and decision) through

politicized (meaning the issue is part of public policy, requiring government decision and resource allocations or, more rarely, some other form of communal governance) to securitized (meaning the issue is presented as an existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure) (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, pp. 24-25).

Consequently, according to Buzan and Wæver, what scholars can do when studying security is *not* to assess the existence of real threats, but rather to study the processes whereby an issue becomes socially constructed and recognised as a security threat. In their view,

[e]ven if one wanted to take a more objectivist approach, it is unclear how this could be done except in cases in which the threat is unambiguous and immediate. (...) It is not easy to judge the securitization of an issue against some measure of whether that issue is "really" a threat; doing so would demand an objective measure of security that no security theory has yet provided (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 30).

Therefore, the securitization framework focuses on understanding which actors can speak security successfully, how they are accepted as legitimate actors in that role, and what consequences these 'speech acts' have.

To conclude this section, the Copenhagen School's securitization framework is based on the idea that there are no security issues in themselves, but only issues constructed as such through securitizing moves. In a securitizing move, an actor casts an issue as representing an existential threat to the survival of a specific referent object. By doing so, (s)he claims the right to use extraordinary measures to deal with this threat.

3. Limitations and criticisms of the securitization framework

The securitization theory of the Copenhagen School has acquired a prominent place in security studies and has given rise to important theoretical debates. However, for a few years, most of the contributions were mainly concerned with theoretical and normative questions. Amongst them, one can note articles and monographs on the intellectual roots of

securitization theory (Williams, 2003; Taureck, 2006; Balzacq, 2005), the absence of gender in the securitization framework (Hansen, 2000), the responsibilities of security analysts as potential securitizing actors themselves (Behnke, 2000; Eriksson, 1999a; Eriksson, 1999b; Goldmann, 1999; Huysmans, 2002; Waever, 1999; Williams, 1999), securitization and modern techniques of government (Huysmans, 2006), the possible negative consequences of securitizing an issue (Huysmans, 1995; 2002) and the desirability of 'de-securitizing' issues and bringing them into the realm of 'normal politics' (Aradau, 2001; Aradau, 2004; Roe, 2004; Taureck, 2006).

In contrast, it is only recently that there have been more attempts to apply the securitization framework empirically. The point here is *not* that the debates on securitization have been completely disconnected from 'real life' empirical issues. The scholars mentioned earlier have generally used concrete examples to illustrate their theoretical points or normative stance. By the same token, many scholars writing on security and migration refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, even though this is often in only a vague or cursory way. Rather, the argument here is that it is only recently that a small number of scholars have sought to develop a sustained engagement between securitization theory and concrete cases to which the theory could apply (Abrahamsen, 2005; Caballero-Anthony *et al.*, 2006; Collins, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Wilkinson, 2007). This is regrettable because the findings generated by these empirical studies could be used to further develop and refine securitization theory. The adequacy and usefulness of the theory for future empirical studies would then be increased.

Nevertheless, given that such a 'virtuous dynamic' has not significantly developed yet, the current state of affairs is that, 'despite the School's prominence in the security studies literature, the dynamics of securitization (...) remain insufficiently understood empirically' (Emmers, 2007, p. 116). Thus, what Eriksson was writing in 2001 – that, because of a 'lack of systematic empirical analysis', 'the few things we know about securitization

are basically theoretical suppositions' – still remains correct to a large extent.

This has important consequences for the application of the securitization framework to empirical cases. As the securitization theory has not received many empirical validations and has actually been criticised for its inadequacy by the few scholars who have attempted to apply it, it is important not to let it 'straight-jacket' the empirical analysis carried out later. Based on a close examination of the securitization theory itself as well as some existing literature, the following section of this paper will demonstrate how the criticisms especially hold for two aspects of the securitization framework. Those, it will be argued, are ill- or under-developed in the current framework, which makes them unable to capture the complexity of 'real world' processes of securitization, including the securitization of migration. Therefore, it is proposed to amend or further develop these two aspects of the framework. The purpose of this move is to increase the adequacy of the framework for empirical analysis in general, and the study of the securitization of asylum and migration in the EU in particular. These two aspects are (1) the conceptualisation of security and (2) the focus on security 'speech acts' at the expense of other non-discursive security practices.

3.1 Beyond the Copenhagen School: Two aspects of the securitization framework to re-visit

3.1.1 The conceptualisation of security

The Copenhagen School's framework is based on a rather narrow and extreme understanding of security. In line with its 'traditional military-political understanding' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 21), security is assimilated and limited to survival. The choice of such a narrow definition aimed to prevent an endless expansion of the concept of security, which might ultimately render it meaningless and jeopardise the coherence of the discipline of security studies. Even though this is a legitimate concern, such

a narrow approach to security is at the same time problematic in several respects.

First of all, merely extending the logic at work in the military sectors to all the other sectors runs the risk of 'straight-jacketing' the analysis of security dynamics in those sectors. As Doty (1998/99, pp. 79-80) argues,

Wæver wants to rethink the concept of security 'in a way that is true to the classical discussion'. The problem with this is that it implicitly assumes that the logic captured by the classical security field regarding state security is (...) the only logic worth consideration if one is to contribute to existing conversations on security. This precludes consideration of the possibility that important and relevant logics that cannot be placed entirely within the classical security logic may be operative.

In other words, given the different nature of the sectors and referent objects concerned (e.g. state, environment, society, etc.), one should not necessarily assume that all sectors are governed by security dynamics which can be reduced to those characterising the military sector.⁵ As a consequence, it is advisable not to follow too closely the traditional and narrow definition of security as advocated by the Copenhagen School as it may hamper the understanding of 'real life' security dynamics in other security sectors than the military.

Another problem with the securitization framework is that it leaves those who want to apply it with an artificial sharp dichotomy between 'normal', everyday politics on the one hand and the realm of security characterised by emergency and extraordinary measures on the other hand. In the Copenhagen School's model, there is a clear line of demarcation between both that can only be crossed by a successful act of securitization at a certain point in time. This fails to theorise adequately the processes by which an issue can move from one category to another - even though it is precisely these *processes* that the securitization framework claims to

⁵ In fact, one might also question whether such a definition of security can even adequately capture the security dynamics characteristic of the military sector. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.

reveal. Indeed, in reality, an issue is not transformed into a security issue by a single specific act of securitization. Rather, certain matters are subjected to a process of intensification, which increases their 'security-ness', but might fall short of an actual act of securitization (Williams, 2003, p. 521).

Therefore, instead of confining security to the extreme situation of 'existential threats' and 'survival', it is argued here that a broader and more open-ended definition of the concept should be adopted. In this perspective, security issues are seen as '[moving] on a continuum from normalcy to worrisome/troublesome to risk and existential threat – and conversely, from threat to risk and back to normalcy' (Abrahamsen, 2005, p. 59). Thus, the ideas of 'existential threat' and 'survival' are not abandoned, but are interpreted as being located at the end of a continuum, on which security issues can also be located at a lower level of intensity.

The advantage of such a re-conceptualisation is that it captures the nuances of real security practices and discourses more accurately than the Copenhagen School's securitization framework can. The latter is useful in that it provides two poles or points of reference (normality and emergency/extraordinary measures), but it actually fails to adequately conceptualise securitization as a *process*.

3.1.2 The focus on security 'speech acts' at the expense of other non-discursive security practices

For the Copenhagen School, there are no security issues in themselves, but only issues which have been 'securitized', *i.e.* constructed as such through securitization 'speech acts'. As indicated by this concept, the securitization framework is first and foremost linguistic in nature. The Copenhagen School often summarises it as having one 'distinguishing feature', which is 'a specific rhetorical structure (survival, priority of action (...))' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 26).

However, such a narrow approach to security and securitization processes is not without its limitations. First of all, as Buzan and Wæver note

themselves, there are cases where a logic of security is at play, even though there is no securitizing discourse uttered in the public sphere to justify it (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 28). An obvious case in point is the vast majority of the actions pursued by the secret services of a state. Moreover, and this point is also made by the Copenhagen School (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, pp. 27-28), in cases where there is a persistent or recurrent security threat, a new drama establishing securitization is no longer necessary as securitization has become institutionalised over time. Such instances of institutionalised securitization cannot be identified if the analysis focuses solely on security discourses.

But while Buzan and Wæver acknowledge these points, they do not seem to draw all the necessary conclusions from them. Indeed, if there are several instances in which 'security practices are not legitimized in public by security discourse' (Buzan *et al.*, 1998, p. 28), then it must logically follow that a comprehensive framework for understanding securitization processes cannot only focus on security discourses. It is necessary to extend it to non-discursive practices, that is, non-discursive acts such as the creation and functioning of bureaucracies, the development of public policies, or the implementation of procedures. Indeed, a specific meaning (in this case 'security threat') can be attributed to an object not only by a speech act, but also by other types of acts.

As Bigo (2000, p. 194) argues,

[i]t is possible to securitise certain problems without speech or discourse and the military and the police have known that for a long time. The practical work, discipline and expertise are as important as all forms of discourse.

In other words, the acts of the bureaucratic structures or networks linked to security practices may play a more active role in a securitization process than security speech acts. Bigo has also made this point precisely with reference to the issue of migration, as he claims that

[t]he securitization of immigration (...) emerges from the correlation between some successful speech acts of political leaders, the mobilization they create for and against some groups of people, and the specific field of security professionals (...). It comes also from a range of administrative practices such as population profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation, category creation, proactive preparation, and what may be termed a specific *habitus* of the "security professional" with its ethos of secrecy and concern for the management of fear or unease (Bigo, 2002, pp. 65-66).

From a methodological point of view, he therefore advocates examining the everyday practices of the professionals in the security field at the micro-level rather than focusing exclusively on political discourses at the macro-level. Such an approach, Bigo argues, can also reveal interesting deviations from official discourses and policies (Bigo, 1998a; Bigo, 2001). Applied to the issue of migration, such an approach would require including in the analysis the non-discursive practices of the actors dealing with immigration, rather than focusing exclusively on their discourse on immigration. For example, with regards to illegal migration and border controls, an analysis based on Bigo's approach would not be limited to discourses on illegal migration and borders, but would examine how the policy on illegal migration and border controls are implemented in practice. Who is carrying out border controls (e.g. the police or military forces)? What type of equipment do they use to control the borders (e.g. rescue or navy vessels for operations at sea, weapons with live ammunition or rubber bullets, technological devices at the border site, etc.)? This could reveal interesting differences between official discourses on illegal migration and border controls and the way they are being dealt with in practice.

Drawing upon Bigo's work, Huysmans makes a similar argument about the importance of security practices, with a particular emphasis on technology. Inspired by a Foucaultian interpretation of the modern modalities of government, he claims that securitization discourses are embedded in technology, more precisely 'particular technological devices and the knowledge and skills required for their use' (Huysmans, 2004). This emphasis on technology stems from the fact that, as he argues,

technological devices are not merely the instruments used to implement policy decisions, but also shape the policy options available to decision-makers.

This point is highly relevant to the case of migration, in particular migration controls. Over the last decade, Western states have increasingly invested in expensive and sophisticated technological devices in order to enhance border surveillance. Amongst them, one can mention satellites, radars, infra-red cameras, and sensors. Those had generally been developed for other purposes, such as counter-terrorism actions, but their very existence and availability on the security market has led to their adoption and use for border controls. Another example is the large databases that have been created in the European Union to store information relating to migrants and asylum-seekers, such as SIS (Schengen Information System), VIS (Visa Information System), and Eurodac. As the discussions on the development of SIS II in particular have shown, political objectives are not always defined before technical solutions are devised in order to fulfil them. In some instances, decisions seem to be taken not so much because there is a precise objective to attain, but rather because it is technologically feasible to do so. For this reason, it is imperative to also consider technological issues in any analysis of the securitization processes of migration.

In conclusion, this section has argued that an analytical framework to understand the securitization of asylum and migration should comprise both the discursive and non-discursive practices of the securitizing actors, including the role played by technologies in the development of their practices. As demonstrated earlier, the actual practices of professional are potentially vital in the process of 'securitizing' asylum and migration, or indeed any issues.

Having examined the securitization framework and its limitations, the paper will now draw upon it to shed light on one case study relating to migration in the EU, namely the migration crisis on the Canary Islands in 2006. The purpose of the next section is to analyse the extent to and the ways in

which migration flows have been securitized in the EU, if at all, in this specific case.

4. The migration crisis on the Canary Islands (2006): A case of securitization?

4.1 The migration crisis on the Canary Islands (2006)

The Canary Islands have been drawing boatloads of illegal migrants from Africa for years. However, in 2006, especially from March onwards when the weather conditions improved, the number of illegal migrants arriving on the Canary Islands grew to reach unprecedented levels – 8,200 by the end of May, a figure which was five times higher than that in May 2005 (*Reuters*, 23.05.2006). The vast majority of these illegal migrants were from sub-Saharan Africa, many from Senegal and Mali. Most travelled hundreds of miles in small wooden fishing boats called 'cayucos' from the Western coast of Africa all the way to the Canary Islands. For some, the journey took eight to ten days (*New York Times*, 25.05.2006), whereas, for hundreds or maybe thousands of would-be migrants, the journey ended in a tragedy when they drowned (*Telegraph*, 27.05.2006).⁶

This increase in the flows of illegal migrants to the Canary Islands was mainly a knock-on effect of increased migration controls in other areas, which disrupted the routes traditionally preferred by smugglers and would-be migrants. These included the shorter maritime route across the Strait of Gibraltar and the land route across the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla (*International Herald Tribune*, 16.05.2006; *Telegraph*, 19.05.2006).

Very rapidly, the local authorities reported that they did not have the adequate reception facilities to deal with such a sudden and large influx of migrants. 'We have never seen anything like it' said government prefect Jose Segura, who spoke of an 'emergency situation' (*Telegraph*, 19.05.2006). The Canary Islands' spokesman on employment and social

⁶ Evidently, the number of migrants who perish at sea is not known. According to Red Cross officials, about one in five migrants risking the voyage from Mauritania or Senegal drowns, but this number could be higher (*EITB24*, 19.05.2006).

affairs, Marisa, Zamora, declared: 'At present we do not have the space or the resources to cope with such an influx' (*Telegraph*, 19.05.2006). Jose Miguel Ruano, an executive member of the Canary Islands government stated that '[t]he situation [was] out of control' (*Times*, 19.05.2006), while Carlos Gonzalez Segura, the head of the Canary Islands regional government, qualified the situation of 'madness' (*Times*, 20.05.2006).

As the number of illegal migrants arriving on the Canary Islands showed no sign of abating, some troubles erupted on the Islands. The local inhabitants became increasingly concerned with the impact of these migration flows on the tourist industry, which is the basis of the local economy. In the town of Arona in Tenerife, some residents attacked a reception centres for migrants with petrol bombs after rumours had spread that some migrants were infected with yellow fever (*Times*, 20.05.2006). Antonio Morales, the head of the tourist unit of the local police, declared: 'In six months people have gone from feeling sympathetic towards them to being angry' (*Times*, 20.05.2006).

The Canary Islands regional parliament called on the central government to 'set the protection of the coasts as the immediate priority of the Spanish navy' (*Spain Herald*, 23.05.2005). They asked for the deployment of patrolling missions which would 'rescue, provide humanitarian aid, and then return the [illegal migrants] to their port of departure' (*Spain Herald*, 23.05.2006). The regional parliament criticised the central government for not reacting quickly and efficiently enough. It also emphasised the EU's so-called 'lack of sensitivity' towards the Canary Islands' migration problems and called for greater solidarity on this issue amongst EU Member States (*Spain Herald*, 23.05.2006). In the view of the members of parliament, this should take the form of an emergency fund to help the Canary Islands deal with the 'humanitarian crisis' derived from the sudden mass arrivals of migrants (*Spain Herald*, 23.05.2006).

Thus, this section has outlined the development of the migration crisis on the Canary Islands in 2006, which was due to the arrival of an unprecedented large number of asylum-seekers and illegal migrants. The

time has now come to examine the interpretation of and response to these events by the EU. Given their rather extreme nature, it seems that the EU, which is seen as securitizing asylum and migration by a large share of the literature on the subject, is likely to securitize them, that is, to construct them as a security threat. This is what the next section aims to verify by using the securitization framework developed by the Copenhagen School.

4.2 Analysing the migration crisis in the Canary Islands I: A case of 'securitization' of asylum and migration according to the Copenhagen School?

As explained earlier, the Copenhagen School argues that an issue is securitized when it is presented as an existential threat by a securitizing actor through a speech act and accepted as such by the audience of the speech act. When analysing the statements made by the various EU institutions (the European Commission, the Council of Ministers, and the European Parliament) on the subject of illegal migration onto the Canary Islands in 2006, one does not find any instance of securitization according to the Copenhagen School's definition.

The European Commission framed the event as a 'humanitarian crisis' and emphasised the importance to '[save] lives at sea, as well as reducing illegal immigration and combating trafficking in human beings, a crime from which only traffickers benefit' (European Commission, 2006). The Council of Ministers used very neutral and careful language (e.g. 'the recent events in the Canary Islands and the Mediterranean Sea') at times and stronger language at other times. For example, However, a press release following the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 15 May 2006 read:

[f]ollowing a presentation by Spain of the dramatic situation in the Canary Islands, several delegations underlined the emergency of addressing illegal immigration, a trend that was not only local or national but that concerned all of Europe.

Although a reference was made to the emergency of the situation, this depiction of the migration flows still fell short of a securitizing move, as there was no representation of an existential threat. As for the European Parliament, a report from its Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs published in July 2006 noted that it had been 'a particularly difficult period for the Canary Islands, due to the mass influx of migrants coming from the African coasts' (European Parliament, 2006, p. 1).

Thus, this section has shown that the EU institutions did not socially construct the flows of illegal immigrants reaching the Canary Islands as an existential threat. Therefore, this case does not constitute a case of securitization according to the Copenhagen School. However, as argued earlier, this does not completely rule out the presence of securitization dynamics in this case. There might have been securitization dynamics that the Copenhagen School's framework is unable to capture because of its conceptual narrowness, but that can be revealed by analysing this case using the amended version of the framework developed earlier. This is the aim of the next section.

4.3 Analysing the migration crisis in the Canary Islands II: A case of securitization of asylum and migration beyond the Copenhagen School?

As shown in the previous section, according to the Copenhagen School's definition, the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament did not securitize the illegal migration flows into the Canary Islands. However, the Copenhagen School's framework is based on a narrow definition of security which has some limitations. Therefore, it is necessary to examine whether one reaches the same conclusion when using the broader definition of security presented earlier.

4.3.1 The migration crisis on the Canary Islands: A case of securitization according to a broader definition of security?

When analysing the statements of the EU institutions in the light of a broader definition of security, one can discern some degree of 'security-ness', mainly under the guise of an emphasis on 'urgency' or 'emergency'. However, this discourse is competing with others, most notably a humanitarian discourse emphasising the 'dramatic' character of the situation.

In the case of the European Commission, its public statements emphasised that the events relating to migration to the Canary Islands had been 'tragic'. It also emphasised that such a serious situation called for 'urgent action'. Thus, the European Commission used the vocabulary of urgency in order to attempt to foster European integration. By doing so, it presented illegal migration to some extent as a risk or a danger (in contrast to an existential threat) that should be tackled rapidly.

With regards to the Council, as explained before, it refrained from qualifying what it only designated as 'the situation in the Canary Islands'. In only two instances did the Council use a more political language. Its documents mentioned a 'dramatic situation in the Canary Islands' and a 'growing humanitarian crisis in the Mediterranean'. Finally, as far as the European Parliament is concerned, it also used very neutral terms to qualify the migration situation in the Canary Islands.

In conclusion, this section has shown that, when one broadens the definition of security, an analysis of the statements of the EU institutions on the migration crisis on the Canary Islands reveals that they have created some linkages between migration and emergency/urgency. This might indicate the perception of a danger or risk that ought to be tackled rapidly. Following that interpretation of the references to 'emergency', these statements have arguably framed migration issues as having some degree of 'security-ness', but only to a limited extent. This is especially the case because, in contrast, other statements made at the same time cast the

migration flows as a 'humanitarian' and 'dramatic' crisis (but a 'crisis' nonetheless).

Earlier in this paper, it was argued that issues can be securitized not only through speech acts, but also through practices. Therefore, on these theoretical grounds, it is now necessary to examine how the EU has constructed the illegal immigration flows through its practices. In other words, what policy response has the EU developed in order to tackle the situation on the Canary Islands?

4.3.2 The migration crisis on the Canary Islands: social practices of securitization?

This section aims to analyse whether the EU practices relating to the migration situation on the Canary Islands have constructed asylum-seekers and illegal migrants as security issues. For example, military practices would indicate such a case of securitization by practice, since military solutions have traditionally been used to address security problems.

Moreover, it is also necessary to examine the practices at the borders on empirical grounds. As has been demonstrated earlier, the EU institutions deplored the 'tragic events' relating to migration flows in the Mediterranean and depicted the massive flows of asylum-seekers into the Canary Islands as a 'humanitarian crisis'. However, it is evident that the tragic events and the crises have been closely related to the ways in which the migration flows have been dealt with, *i.e.* the border practices.

The measures adopted by the EU to address the migration crisis on the Canary Islands

In Spring 2006, both the regional government of the Canary Islands and the Spanish central government called for help from the EU to deal with the arrival of the illegal migrants and asylum-seekers on the Canary Islands. In May 2006, Spain's Deputy Prime Minister, Teresa Fernandez de la Vega, declared that the Spanish government and the regional authorities on the Canary Islands could no longer cope with the arrival of so many migrants

and asked for emergency help (*New York Times*, 25.05.2006). She made a plea for assistance from the EU, including notably the deployment of EU migration experts to advise borders guards on how to deal with the influx of migrants (*Reuters*, 23.05.2006a; *BBC News*, 24.05.2006) and additional surveillance means to track the migrants heading for the Canary Islands. She asked for five patrol boats, five helicopters, and a surveillance plane (*BBC News*, 30.05.2006).

At the end of May 2006, in a joint press conference by Fernandez de la Vega and Franco Frattini, EU Justice and Home Affairs Commissioner Franco Frattini said that the EU would provide the Spanish government with operational assistance as fully as possible in order to deal with what he qualified 'an urgent and difficult situation' (*Guardian*, 24.05.2006). This assistance was implemented through a joint operation coordinated by FRONTEX (the newly created European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States), with a total budget of 3.5 million euros, 2.8 million of which were co-financed by FRONTEX. This operation was made of two 'modules': HERA I and HERA II.

HERA I, implemented in July 2006, involved the deployment of national experts from other EU Member States (France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, the Netherlands, the UK, as well as Norway) to support their Spanish colleagues in the identification of the migrants who had arrived on the islands and the establishment of their country of origin (*Le Monde*, 24.05.2002a; *Le Monde*, 24.05.2002b). According to a press release from FRONTEX, the country of origin of the migrants was established in 100% of cases, which greatly helped the Spanish government in its efforts to return migrants to their country of origin. Thus, HERA I was a technical operation of limited scope. In contrast, HERA II was a more complex joint operation at sea.

HERA II

After the Spanish request for help, it was reported that several EU Member States indicated at the end of May their willingness to contribute staff and

equipment for a surveillance mission off the Canary Islands. However, there was some uncertainty regarding the number and the identity of the states concerned. Some media outlets reported that they were eight states which had pledged to help the Spanish government (*Guardian*, 24.05.2006; *International Herald Tribune*, 24.05.2006), but that the European Commission was reluctant to name them (*International Herald Tribune*, 25.05.2006b).

At the meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council in Luxembourg on 1st-2nd June 2006, several Member States again pledged material support to help Spain with illegal migration flows to the Canary Islands. The Spanish government had asked for five patrol boats, five helicopters and an aircraft in order to carry out surveillance missions off the Canary Islands. It was reported that Germany, Greece, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Portugal, Finland and the UK had indicated their willingness to participate in the surveillance operation which was to be coordinated by FRONTEX (*Migration News Sheet (MNS)*, July 2006, p. 5).

The HERA II operation officially began on 11 August 2006 for nine weeks. Its main aim was to facilitate the sharing of equipment and staff in order to strengthen border controls in the zone between the Western African coast and the Canary Islands. HERA II was seen by EU officials as having important deterrent effects, by dissuading illegal immigrants to set off from the African coast in unseaworthy boats. However, it was not its only function as it also intercepted boats transporting illegal immigrants and, in certain circumstances, turned them back to their country of origin.

The operation was hailed by EU Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs Frattini as a 'truly historic moment in the history of the EU immigration policies and a very tangible expression of EU solidarity amongst Member States' (*MNS*, September 2006, p. 4). He also emphasised the 'humanitarian character' of the operation as it aimed 'at saving lives at sea, as well as reducing illegal immigration and combating trafficking in human beings, a crime from which only traffickers benefit' (*MNS*, September 2006, p. 4).

However, in practice, the HERA II operation was not as successful as suggested by this slightly hyperbolic statement of the European Commission. First of all, the operation was considerably delayed. It had initially been announced that the surveillance planes and vessels would be deployed in June. The delay was partly due to budgetary problems. However, there were other problems. First of all, the Spanish government wanted the Mauritanian and Senegalese authorities to be integrated into the operation. The necessary negotiations delayed the launch of the operation. Moreover, there was a distinct lack of political will in some Member States which did not feel concerned by the problems of illegal migration into Southern Europe.

This lack of enthusiasm was apparent in the modest scope of HERA II. Whereas several EU Member States had announced their intention to participate in the operation at the end of May, only three finally offered their assets for the joint sea operation. Portugal contributed a corvette, Italy accepted to send a plane and a coast guard patrol boat, and Finland sent a plane (FRONTEX, 19.12.2006). However, even these modest means were delayed. Two weeks after the official beginning of the operation, only the Portuguese corvette was actually taking part in surveillance operations, as the Finnish plane and the Italian vessel and plane were still not in place.

This led the Premier of the regional government of the Canary Islands, Adan Martin, to claim that 'the means of FRONTEX [were] insufficient and arrived much too late' (quoted in *MNS*, October 2006, p. 7). He also criticised the Spanish central government for 'not acting with sufficient priority or efficiency' in a situation of 'emergency'.

Spanish Deputy Prime Minister Fernandez de la Vega also described the offers of solidarity of the other EU Member States as disappointing and 'clearly insufficient' and to appeal for more technical and financial assistance from the EU. However, the response of the European Commission at the end of August 2006 was that the budget for those matters had been spent for the year and that no other EU Member State

had offered material assistance to Spain. The only positive outcome for the Spanish government was that the European Commission accepted to extend the operation until the end of December, since it still had not fully begun at the end of August (*MNS*, September 2006, p. 5).

At the informal meeting of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 21 September 2006, the Spanish government asked again for EU assistance for dealing with its illegal migration problem. This request was rejected by several EU Member States. Some, including Germany, Austria, France, the Netherlands, and Belgium, indicated that they considered the Spanish government partly responsible for its current problems because of the massive amnesty of illegal immigrants that it had organised in Spring 2005. At a press conference, German Interior Minister Schäuble also emphasised that the events in the Canary Islands were first and foremost a Spanish problem. He recalled how Germany had not benefited from any solidarity of its partners when it received record numbers of asylum-seekers from the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. The Bavarian Minister of Interior, Günter Beckstein, made the same point to put the Spanish situation into perspective. He claimed that 20,000 migrants would not 'sink' Spain (*MNS*, October 2006, p. 4).

At the same time, as these debates were taking place, all the vessels and aircrafts promised to the Spanish government finally joined the surveillance means that were already in place. They all patrolled the coastal areas of Senegal, Mauritania, Cape Verde and the Canary Islands. On the basis of a bilateral agreement with the Spanish government, the Senegalese and Mauritanian authorities were involved with their own staff and equipment. According to the final press release regarding the operation, FRONTEX highlighted that

[t]he main aim of this joint effort was to detect vessels setting off towards the Canary Islands and to divert them back to their point of departure thus reducing the number of lives lost at sea. During the course of the operation more than 3,500 migrants were stopped from this dangerous endeavour close to African coast.

Operation Hera II finally finished in December 2006 as its funding had run out.⁷ How can this operation be interpreted with reference to the securitization of migration?

Operations HERA I and HERA II: securitizing practices?

To some extent, the EU response can be interpreted as securitizing the migration flows to the Canary Islands. It mainly consisted of a joint surveillance and interception operation, drawing upon semi-military staff and equipment. This would indicate that the migration flows were interpreted as representing a risk or danger, which had to be brought under control in order to protect the Canary Islands and the rest of the EU.

This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that the EU attempted to react rapidly to the Spanish calls for assistance. As emphasised by Carrera (2007, p. 13),

'[the] fact that the two first joint operations were launched without it being completely clear what was really needed there shows how at that time it was more important to find a 'rapid solution' to the political pressures, than dealt with the actual situation taking place on the Canary Islands.'

However, in practice, the operation turned out to be delayed and more low-key than what was initially announced. This clearly indicates that the extent

⁷ In February 2007, Frontex launched the operation Hera at the request of the Spanish government. This followed risk analysis by Frontex which identified four main illegal migration routes into the EU: via the external sea borders to the south, the land borders to the east, via the Balkans and via major international airport (press conference at Frankfurt airport on 22 February 2007 by Frontex's director Ilkka Laitinen – on ECRE list). Like the first two Hera operations, Operation Hera III has two dimensions. The first is providing assistance to the Spanish authorities with regards to interviewing the illegal migrants who have reached the Canary Islands. Experts from Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and Portugal will help them in this task, which aims to establish the identity and country of origin of the migrants, as well as gather intelligence/information on their journey in order to dismantle smuggling networks. The second dimension of the operation is the conduct of joint patrols by naval and aerial means along the coast of West Africa in order to stop migrants from leaving the shores. Spain, Italy, Luxembourg and France take part in the operation, which is being carried out in cooperation with the Senegalese authorities (Frontex, news release, 15.02.2007, 'A sequel of operation Hera just starting'). The operation is said to last several weeks, depending on the needs of the Spanish government and risk analysis by Frontex.

to which one can interpret the EU response as securitizing migration is rather limited. A small and delayed operation has evidently far less securitizing effects than a large and rapid operation.

It is also interesting to note that the institution which was the most in favour of an EU operation was the European Commission, in stark contrast to some Member States. To support its position, it emphasised the 'emergency' of the situation. This does not necessarily mean that the European Commission sees migration as a security issue that should be contained by surveillance and patrol missions. As scholars of European integration have often noted, this might be a strategic move to incite Member States to increase their cooperation on a policy issue and to foster European integration in general.

Thus, this section has demonstrated that the flows of illegal migrants to the Canary Islands have been partially securitized by the EU operation set up to control them. These findings challenge the commonly held view that asylum and migration have been fully securitized in the EU, by showing that this has been the case only to a limited extent. Also, this case study has shown the importance of considering securitizing practices, which tend to be neglected in both securitization theory and most of its applications to asylum and migration. It is crucial to analyse practices because they can securitize an issue in themselves, but also because they can qualify securitizing speech acts. For example, in the case of the Canary Islands, the analysis of the implementation of the operation showed that some Member States did not consider the situation in the Canary Islands as a priority. Has they all seen it as an emergency or a serious source of danger, they would have acted differently in practice.

In sum, this case study has made a particularly interesting contribution to the literature on the securitization of asylum and migration because it has highlighted two important points which do not conform to the securitization framework and to most literature on the securitization of asylum and migration in the EU. They are the almost complete absence of securitization speech acts by the EU institutions and governments of the Member States

even though they were facing a major migration crisis and the partial securitization of asylum and migration through the implementation of the surveillance and interception mission of the EU. Thus, in a case where one would have expected strong securitization dynamics because of the seriousness of the migration situation, one has observed only a partial securitization of migration and, furthermore, in a way different to that described by the Copenhagen School, as it was the result of securitizing social practices more than discourses. This strongly indicates that the securitization of asylum and migration in the EU may not be as widespread as claimed by most of the literature. The next important question, then, is: how can one explain that the securitization of asylum and migration has been so limited in the EU?

5. Explaining the limited securitization of asylum and migration in the EU

There are several reasons accounting for the limited extent to which asylum and migration have been securitized in the EU over recent years. Some are linked to the very nature of the EU, whereas others relate to the nature of asylum and immigration politics in liberal states.

First of all, the EU is to a large extent a technocratic body which makes decisions in a widely depoliticised environment. Consequently, securitizing issues does not appear to be an 'obvious' or 'normal' way of dealing with policy problems in the EU.

As the idea of 'securitization' becomes increasingly widespread and is applied to various issues such as migration, terrorism or the environment, it appears that most of this literature rests on the following assumption: many political actors aim to 'securitize' issues because it is in their interest, generally understood as the capacity to use extraordinary measures to tackle the securitized issue. Nowhere is this line of argumentation clearer than in all the debates on the 'War on Terror' and its potential encroachment upon civil liberties. Nevertheless, it is also discernible when it comes to the securitization of other issues.

However, as noted by Buzan and Wæver themselves, securitizing an issue is only an option amongst others for a political actor. In the case of the EU, this does not seem to be the most 'natural' way of dealing with a policy issue. Indeed, scholars often present the organisation as a whole and the European Commission in particular as the archetypal embodiments of technocracy (Harcourt and Radaelli, 1999; Radaelli, 1999a, pp. 1-7). Technocracy can be defined as the belief that decision-making should be left to depoliticized experts (or 'technocrats') rather than politicians. This is because, in this view, experts make technical decisions based on knowledge and rationality, which are better than those of politicians who are influenced by pressure groups and mass movements (Radaelli, p. 1999, pp. 6-7 & 24-25). If one agrees with the claim that the EU mainly operates in a technical and depoliticized fashion⁸, then it seems very unlikely that it would develop policies through processes of securitization, which make issues highly politicized.

The idea of the EU securitizing migration also seems at odds with the trend towards the 'judicialization' and consolidation of migrant rights in liberal-democratic states that has been described by several scholars (Freeman (1994), Joppke (1998) and Gibney (2001)). They have argued that several factors constrain the policies of liberal-democratic states on asylum and migration. In particular, governments are limited in what they can do to control and restrict immigration and the granting of asylum by several factors, including the influence of interest groups (e.g. employers' associations, pro-asylum groups) and the importance of human rights law, liberal values, and traditions of refugee protection. Therefore, it is very unlikely that they would be able to use the 'extraordinary measures' which accompany the securitization of an issue according to the Copenhagen School, as there are several impediments to the implementation of such measures in practice. In other words, the fact that the EU is a 'club' of

⁸ To be precise, the EU exhibits technocratic characteristics in some policy areas more than others. It is important to note that, until 2004, asylum and migration was a less technocratic policy area than the policies linked to the common market, which are the most technocratic of all. Nevertheless, since then, the institutional arrangements have changed and have made this area more technocratic as the powers of the European Commission have been reinforced.

liberal-democratic states, where the rights of asylum-seekers and migrants have been gradually consolidated, means that it is substantially limited in the actions it can take against migrants (including 'securitizing' discourses and practices).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the EU securitizes asylum and migration through speech acts and practices, *but only to a very limited extent*. This can be explained by the technocratic nature of the EU and the general trend towards the increasing consolidation of migrants' rights in liberal-democratic states. This claim stands in contrast to most of the literature on the EU asylum and migration policy, which claims that asylum and migration have been securitized in the EU by securitizing speech acts.

More precisely, this paper has demonstrated that the EU institutions have not securitized the illegal migration flows into the Canary Islands in the Copenhagen School's sense of securitization. They have not cast them as an existential threat. Even when one uses a broader definition of security, one still concludes that the flows of illegal migrants were hardly securitized in this case. Some statements emphasised the importance of tackling them urgently, but this was not accompanied by an explicit representation of illegal migration as a source of danger.

Consequently, this paper has demonstrated the complexity of the securitization dynamics affecting migration issues. There is no evidence of securitization of asylum and migration issues by the EU when one follows the definition of 'securitization' of the Copenhagen School. It is only when one draws upon a more nuanced and complex understanding of 'securitization' that one identifies that asylum and migration have been securitized in the EU, albeit only to a limited extent and in ways different to what the literature generally claims.

This finding also means that the paper makes a contribution to the Copenhagen School's securitization framework. It has shown that its

traditional and extremely narrow definition of security, combined with its exclusive focus on discourses, considerably restrict its applicability to concrete cases. This is because these features make the framework unable to capture some 'real-life' political dynamics, although they are characterised by a certain degree of 'security-ness'.

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