

QUI BONO?

The Winners and Losers of Securitising Migration

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It has become commonplace to argue that migration in most host states is socially constructed primarily as a security threat, a process known as 'securitisation'. Political elites and security professionals are identified as the main agents that promote this particular framing of the issue. While securitisation is often implicitly considered as a goal-orientated process, paradoxically few studies have explored its actual consequences on policy and the securitising actors themselves. Adopting a consequentialist ethics approach, this article assesses the implications of the securitisation of migration in Greece, drawing on face-to-face interviews with security professionals, discourse analysis and other primary data. It demonstrates that securitisation harms the interests not only of migrants but also, counter-intuitively, of the state and the elites that supported it in the first place. This leaves only parties of the far right as the main winners of the security frame that has characterised Greece's stance on immigration since the early 1990s, and that continues to pose obstacles to its development of a coherent immigration policy with a long-term view.

The proliferation of movement of people and mobility in a globalised world has, in most Western states, gone hand in hand with a prevailing understanding of migration as a security issue. Migration is typically linked to a range of socio-political and economic threats to the host states, which in turn seek to curtail their development by adopting restrictive policies. The global financial and debt crises that started to unfold in 2007 further exacerbated pre-existing tensions, altering the dynamic between state, citizens and migrants. Unsurprisingly, times of economic downturn breed intolerance and reactivate nationalist reflexes, which in many cases have facilitated not only an increase in anti-immigration attitudes and support for far-right parties but also a return to the public sphere of historically loaded terms, such as 'ethnic purity' and 'racial unity'.

Nevertheless, this dominant interpretation of migration as a menace is neither unchallenged nor inevitable. It is the outcome of a social construction

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process, mediated by language and social practices, where actors with vested interests are engaged in recurring framing conflicts about the correct or standard way to define the issue.¹ In the political and social spheres, frames function as lenses that set the parameters for audiences to interpret, categorise and evaluate complex or ambiguous developments, such as people's movements.² This may be achieved through subtle differences in the presentation of an issue or more direct attempts to draw attention to a subset of potentially relevant considerations, while ignoring others.³ For instance, making the perceived threats migration poses more salient in discourse, promotes 'a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation',⁴ which has the potential to lock debates about its impact on host societies within a security logic.

This type of framing, which seeks to shift an issue from normal politics into the security realm by depicting it as a threat to key values, is known in the literature as a 'securitising move'.⁵ Since the mid-1990s, a wealth of empirical studies on a range of issues and national contexts have greatly contributed to our understanding of how securitisation processes work. Among others, these have identified political discourses,⁶ security practices,⁷ legal frameworks⁸ and visual images⁹ as central to the construction of the security frame. When this becomes the dominant way to define an issue and is accepted as such by an empowering audience, it may be used to legitimise the adoption of urgent policy responses to block its development, which otherwise might not have been possible or tolerated.

Civil society groups and critical security scholars have widely criticised the moral bankruptcy of the securitised frame for its impact on migrant rights in particular.¹⁰ Yet the implications of securitisation for the state and the elites that support it in the first place have received scarce attention. It is generally assumed that political elites and security professionals, i.e. the main securitising actors, have vested interests in depicting migration as a security issue.¹¹ After all, as Stone¹² notes, how an issue is defined is always 'strategic because groups, individuals and government agencies deliberately and consciously fashion portrayals so as to promote their favored course of action'. The ensuing questions are to what extent does the securitisation of

¹ Scheufele (1999); Lavenex (2001).

² Benford and Snow (2000).

³ Nelson et al (1997); Druckman (2001).

⁴ Entman (1993), p 52.

⁵ Buzan et al (1998).

⁶ Buzan et al (1998).

⁷ Basaran (2008).

⁸ Balzacq et al (2010).

⁹ Möller (2007).

¹⁰ For example, McSweeney (1996); Lohrmann (2000); Guild (2003).

¹¹ Bigo (2002); Boswell (2008).

¹² Stone (2002), p 133.

migration benefit the state or society and serve the interests of those who frame it in that way? Who are the winners and losers of securitising migration, and what are its unintended consequences?

To explore these questions, this article studies the implications of securitisation of migration in Greece, 20 years after it unexpectedly became host to large, mostly undocumented migrant communities. The persistence of the security logic and high anti-immigration attitudes during this period,¹³ combined with the meteoric rise of support for far-right parties following the onset of the economic crisis, makes Greece an ideal setting for exploring some of the less-visible aspects of securitisation. The article draws on discourse analysis, elite interviews with security professionals and other primary data, arguing that securitising migration is on the whole counter-productive for both the referent object and securitising agents, with unintended costs that far outweigh any short-term perceived gains.

The first section of the article engages with theoretical debates surrounding securitisation that are relevant to the security–migration nexus and its consequences. The next section provides an overview of the securitisation of migration in Greece and its predictably detrimental impact on migrants. The remainder of the article focuses on the implications of securitisation for policy and for the main securitising agents, drawing on Rita Floyd’s consequentialist ethics approach.

Elite Rationality and Securitisation

In the area of migration, there are two main frames competing for prevalence. The ‘realist policy frame’ contains a dominant interpretation of migration as a security problem. Rooted in a state-centric philosophy, the realist frame underlines the need to secure borders, restrict migration and homogenise all categories of migrants into a single policing-repression scheme. In contrast, the ‘liberal frame’ shifts the focus from the state to the individual. It is concerned primarily with the protection of migrant human rights and the reduction of barriers to labour migration, considered to be beneficial to the host economy.¹⁴ In relation to migration, it is the security frame that in most cases dominates, with securitisation theory offering the most useful framework through which to study how it is constructed.

Securitisation studies is an ever-growing and dynamic sub-field, comprising scholars from different disciplines, contested theoretical underpinnings and diverse methodological approaches, who share an interest in how security issues emerge, spread and dissolve. Securitisation occurs when actors, speaking or acting in the name of a referent object, succeed in convincing an empowering audience that the perceived seriousness of a threat, regardless of its objective significance, justifies the mobilisation of all available resources to curtail its development. While conceptual ambiguities

¹³ Triandafyllidou (2009); Karyotis (2012).

¹⁴ Lavenex (2001).

about its exact dynamics remain the subject of theoretical debate,¹⁵ for the purposes of this article, securitisation is defined as the outcome of a strategic process of interrelated discourses, practices and configuration of circumstances that result in the social construction of an issue as a threat.¹⁶

In principle, anyone could act as a securitising actor. However, because security 'is a structured field' that involves a high degree of centralisation and a low level of pluralism, certain actors are better placed to write legitimate security discourses.¹⁷ The most influential securitising actors, with the required societal currency, know-how and status, are usually political elites, such as those in government¹⁸ and 'security professionals', such as police officers, border control enforcers and in some cases members of the army.¹⁹ In the area of migration in particular, the high levels of institutionalisation and the 'relatively weak level of civil society engagement' mean that political and security elites are best placed to shape public attitudes and determine policy outcomes 'in a relatively autonomous way'.²⁰ The question is why these actors, more often than not, support the security frame. Are their discourses, practices and policies based on a cost-benefit assessment of a range of possible options? Are they perhaps driven by a genuine concern for the 'real' threats they believe migration poses?

A first reading of securitisation in relation to the under-theorised question of agents' motivations²¹ would deem it to be a purposeful, orchestrated, elite-driven process. Elites are assumed to be acting rationally in terms of both personal interests and their professional responsibility. The tangible intended consequences of successful securitisation, the theory goes, are an increased urgency to deal with the issue, the attraction of greater resources and, often, immunity and exceptional means outside the formal and established procedures of politics.²² Accordingly, a successful securitisation that is based on a rational calculation should hypothetically lead to a better handling of an issue, while promoting the vested interests of the securitising actors, which are thought to benefit from the securitisation of migration in particular.²³

However, on closer inspection, the assumption of rationality, as in the classic expected-utility model, is problematic in securitisation instances for

¹⁵ Central to these debates are questions about whether securitisation should be tied exclusively to existential threats and extraordinary measures or comprise a wider spectrum of intensification of threat images and responses. See Williams (2011); Karyotis and Judge (2013).

¹⁶ Balzacq (2011), p 23; Buzan et al (1998).

¹⁷ Buzan et al (1998), p. 31.

¹⁸ Waever (1993).

¹⁹ Bigo (1994).

²⁰ Statham and Geddes (2006), p 248.

²¹ Balzacq (2005); Karyotis (2012).

²² Buzan et al (1998).

²³ Boswell (2008); Bigo (2002).

at least four reasons. First, information overload, uncertainty and complexity ‘make it almost impossible’ for policy-makers to live up to the ideal of the rational method.²⁴ In the case of irregular migration, this is particularly relevant, since statistics about its size and impact are notoriously slippery and unreliable.²⁵ Second, psychological factors, influenced by a given cultural and social context, also limit pure rationality. These include pre-existing beliefs, emotions and ideas about their own role and the values that are deemed to be protecting (e.g. identity), which shape their ‘operational environment’.²⁶ Third, path-dependencies and historical trajectories associated with a particular national context can either facilitate or restrict policy-makers’ ability to define it in security or alternative terms.²⁷ Finally, agents cannot adequately predict the outcome of a securitising move, the success of which ultimately depends on the audience’s acceptance of it and other influences, such as competitive framing by other actors.²⁸

These suggest that securitisation is not necessarily preceded by a premeditated design,²⁹ yet do not imply that decision-makers are irrational.³⁰ Social action, as Pouliot³¹ puts it, can be ‘oriented toward a goal without being consciously informed by it’. Indeed, elites ‘want to make rational decisions, but they cannot always do so’,³² because the social fields and context within which they operate pose obstacles to the pursuit of a truly optimised solution to a policy problem. Instead, given their ‘bounded rationality’,³³ elites are more likely to accept the first outcome that approximates their preferences, rather than strive for the best option that may in their eyes appear costly, unattainable or subconsciously incompatible with their inherited habitus.³⁴ As a result, once a particular way of viewing or dealing with an issue becomes established and institutionalised, it is likely to resist change, even if the social power relations that facilitated its emergence have changed.³⁵

Assessing the implications of securitisation from a deontological ethics perspective suggests that it is always a negative development. For instance, Claudia Aradau, among others, sees securitisation as problematic because it produces divisive categorisations of ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’, and of

²⁴ Hill (2003), p 102.

²⁵ Brochmann and Hammar (1999).

²⁶ Sprout and Sprout (1969).

²⁷ Hay (2006).

²⁸ Bigo and Tsoukala (2008).

²⁹ Balzacq et al (2010).

³⁰ Gigerenzer and Selten (2002).

³¹ Pouliot (2008), p 261.

³² Jones (1999), p 298.

³³ Simon (1995).

³⁴ Hill (2003).

³⁵ Coleman (1998); Karyotis and Patrikios (2010).

‘winners’ and ‘losers’.³⁶ The securitisation of migration in particular not only has a detrimental impact on migrant human rights,³⁷ but also results in morally questionable constructions of identities through exclusion and adversity, which define ‘Us’ on the basis of hostility with a supposedly threatening and inferior ‘Them’.³⁸ From the earlier analysis, a limitation of such critiques is that elites in positions of authority would be more likely to reproduce an established security frame, rather than opt for the riskier strategy of supporting an alternative liberal one – especially when this is informed by normative considerations, which are typically sidelined in the face of ‘real’ or perceived threats.

Perhaps a more fruitful way to bring morality into this discussion is to follow the classical realist Morgenthau’s understanding of it, which only assesses the consequences, not the ethics or intentions, of political action. Morgenthau³⁹ argues that the test of political success and the only aspect of morality that matters concerns questions of power. Morality for statesmen is different from morality for the people, and is primarily about maintaining, increasing or demonstrating the power of the state and its leading elites. A more apt way to assess the implications of securitisation of migration is to explore the extent to which it is a productive strategy that advances the interests of the state and its elites.

Echoing Morgenthau’s understanding of morality, Rita Floyd champions the consequentialist ethics approach to evaluate securitisation instances.⁴⁰ According to this, securitisation is neither *a priori* positive nor negative; rather, it is issue-dependent. To assess the consequences of securitisation, Floyd suggests,⁴¹ a double evaluation is required on whether it brings benefits for the referent object it seeks to protect and/or for the elites that support it. In other words, ‘referent object benefiting securitisation’ concerns the extent to which it enables the interests of a wider, declared referent (for example, the state or society), while ‘agent benefiting securitisation’ is more narrowly concerned with its impact on the power and interests of the securitising actors. Weighing the benefits against the costs of securitisation – arguably a central aspect of any form of normative inquiry – is a prerequisite for evaluating its consequences and therefore its morality. In other words, ‘depending on who/what benefits from any given securitization, it can be either morally right or morally wrong’.⁴²

In what follows, the article applies this consequentialist ethics approach to assess the implications of securitisation of migration in Greece. While it is

³⁶ Aradau (2004).

³⁷ Lohrmann (2000); Guild (2003).

³⁸ Huysmans (1998), p 576; Behnke (2006). For a thorough critique of the deontological ethics perspective and related normative debates on securitisation, see Roe (2012).

³⁹ Morgenthau (1946).

⁴⁰ Floyd (2010, 2011); Roe (2012).

⁴¹ Floyd (2010).

⁴² Floyd (2010), p 56.

impossible to get inside elites' heads to fully explain their positioning on an issue, understanding the migration–security nexus, let alone attempting to untangle it, requires a closer investigation of their threat perceptions, and, crucially, the consequences of securitisation for both the state and its supporting elites.

The Securitisation of Migration in Greece

Greece became a reception country of mass irregular migration flows in the early 1990s. These flows consisted of people from former socialist countries in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, for whom Greece was a final destination. Irregular migrants from neighbouring Albania formed the largest group during the 1990s – about 65 per cent according to the 2001 census. On the eve of the twenty-first century, Greece also became a transit country for undocumented migrants coming mainly from Asia and Africa. Their final destination is usually Western Europe; however, due to the Dublin II regulation and the intensification of internal EU border controls, they become trapped in Greece. Estimates of the number of migrants residing in Greece vary significantly, depending on the source, but is generally assumed that it exceeds one million in a country with a population of about eleven million citizens.⁴³

The state's reaction to the influx of migrants was characterised by unpreparedness, inconsistencies and short-termism.⁴⁴ The discourse of political elites emphasised the need to fortify the borders, protect national identity and curtail the development of socio-economic threats that migrants were deemed responsible for, often despite compelling evidence to the contrary.⁴⁵ In the absence of a prior migration policy, the legal framework put in place in 1991 to deal with what was referred to as the 'Aliens'⁴⁶ was driven entirely by security considerations, and was designed to discourage flows. For instance, Law 1975/1991 excluded irregular migrants from welfare services, including health care (except in emergency cases) and education, and criminalised any form of solidarity from the private sector, such as access to housing and employment.⁴⁷ It also adopted very narrow definitions of asylum and family reunification, which were in conflict with EU Directives on these matters.⁴⁸

A new Law 3386/2005 came into effect on 1 January 2006 (amended in January 2007 with Law 3613/2007), bringing Greece closer to the EU legislation and introducing some degree of liberalisation and rationalisation, particularly in relation to reunification conditions, residence and work

⁴³ Karyotis (2012).

⁴⁴ Triandafyllidou (2009); Triandafyllidou et al (2013); Karyotis (2012).

⁴⁵ See Karyotis (2012).

⁴⁶ Law 1975/1991

⁴⁷ Karyotis (2012).

⁴⁸ Mavrodi (2010).

permits procedures, human trafficking and education.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, many of these provisions did not apply to irregular migrants, who formed the majority, thus rendering them almost meaningless.⁵⁰ Similarly, the introduction of a ‘Complete Action Plan’ for the Social Integration of Immigrants (articles 65–66 of Law 3386/2005), although a step in the right direction, remained largely on paper and was not really implemented in practice.⁵¹

In the absence of a migration policy with a long-term view, the state opted for a series of regularisation programs, granting amnesty to categories of long-term migrants. Four such programs were adopted in 1998, 2001, 2005 and a smaller one in 2007. As with other aspects of the legal framework on migration, these successive one-off programs were not only hampered by bureaucratic insufficiency and complexity,⁵² but, more importantly, could not possibly serve as a substitute for a coherent vision on how migration is to be dealt with. Accurately capturing these developments, Triandafyllidou concluded that Greece appeared to be ‘stuck for a long time with its national interests’ concerns and an over-arching view that migration is ‘an unwanted burden for the country’, indicative of the continuing dominance of the security frame that Greece, like other host states, finds hard to shake off.⁵³

The detrimental impact of securitisation for migrants in Greece is not in question. UNHCR⁵⁴ described the situation for asylum seekers and migrants in Greece as a ‘humanitarian crisis’. A recent report by the Human Rights Watch⁵⁵ is particularly critical of specific practices implemented under the ‘Xenios Zeus’ operation, which in August 2012 became the main internal migration control plan and is enforced mainly by the Hellenic Police. The report suggests that the ‘lengthy and intrusive procedure’ of ‘stop and search’ identity checks ‘amounts to arbitrary and discriminatory deprivation of liberty’,⁵⁶ and are unlawful, as they discriminate against people based on their physical characteristics and ethnic/racial profile.⁵⁷ Body pat-downs, bag searches, disrespectful treatment, rude, insulting and threatening behaviour, even physical violence are described as routine.⁵⁸ Similarly, external border-control practices, interceptions and systematic push-backs by the Hellenic Police and Coast Guard have been widely criticised for violating the

⁴⁹ Triandafyllidou et al (2009).

⁵⁰ Gropas and Triandafyllidou (2005); Antonopoulos et al (2008).

⁵¹ Triandafyllidou et al (2013), p 23.

⁵² Fakiolas (2003).

⁵³ Triandafyllidou et al (2009), p 174.

⁵⁴ UNHCR (2010).

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch (2013).

⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch (2013), p 2.

⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch (2013), pp 3, 5.

⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch (2013), p 4.

principle of non-*refoulement*.⁵⁹ Partly in response to these criticisms, and to comply with EU legislation, such operations largely stopped in 2009, although they may still be informally used along the Greek–Turkish border.⁶⁰

The detention facilities of migrants, particularly in Evros, near Greece’s northern land borders, are described as ‘grim’ and compared with ‘medieval dungeons’.⁶¹ Overcrowding, poor hygiene, sporadic violence and a lack of access to legal aid, information and translators make the facilities ‘synonymous with brutality, despair and dehumanisation’.⁶² There is also a notable absence of any provisions for vulnerable populations, such as unaccompanied minors, mentally or physically ill people and victims of torture – instead, all types of migrants and asylum seekers are blurred together into a single policing regime. For these reasons, the European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly ruled against Greece in a number of cases.⁶³

Securitisation Logics and Unintended Consequences

The analysis has so far suggested that migration has been securitised in Greece since the early 1990s, with a predictably detrimental impact on migrant human rights.⁶⁴ The remainder of the article focuses on evaluating securitisation from a consequentialist ethics perspective. The analysis draws heavily on discourse analysis of political elites’ public statements and relevant studies/reports written by security professionals during their training at the School of National Security and the Hellenic National Defence College. This is enriched by a set of 20 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with security professionals, conducted in Athens (January 2012), on the Aegean islands (March 2012) and on the northern Greek border (Orestiada and Alexandroupoli, April 2012).

The section begins by highlighting the threats Greek elites associate with migration that they believe justify its securitisation. The second part explores the extent to which securitisation has successfully curtailed the development of the perceived threats (‘referent object benefiting securitisation’). The third part of the section looks at the implications of securitisation for the power positions of securitising agents (‘agent benefiting securitisation’).

⁵⁹ See UNHCR (2009).

⁶⁰ Amnesty International (2013).

⁶¹ Hellenic League for Human Rights (2009), p 10.

⁶² Pro Asyl (2012), p 3.

⁶³ Recent cases include *SD v Greece* (53541/2007, 11 June 2009), *Tabesh v Greece* (8256/2007, 26 November 2009), *AA v Greece* (12186/2008, 22 July 2010), *RU v Greece* (2237/2008, 7 June 2011), *Rahimi v Greece* (8687/2008, 4 July 2011), *Grand Chamber MSS v Belgium and Greece* (30696/2009, 21 January 2011).

⁶⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the process of securitisation, see Karyotis (2012).

Elite Threat Perceptions

The conviction that migration poses serious threats to the Greek society and state appears to be the driving force behind its mainly restrictive policies. The analysis of political discourse and the studies security professionals produced, as well as of the elite interviews, reveal certain logics behind the securitisation of migration and asylum, which are not dissimilar to those found in other host states. Migration is perceived as a threat for reasons that cut through a range of societal, criminological and economic arguments.

First, the over-arching underlying concern is that migration is, above all, a threat to societal security. Waever⁶⁵ notes that societal security ‘concerns the ability of a society to persist in its essential character’ and maintain its ‘traditional patterns of language, culture, association, and religious and national identity and custom’. As a traditionally homogenous society, insecurities about Greece’s perceived demographic erosion due to the influx of migrants feature heavily in the discourse of its elites. For instance, Manos⁶⁶ states that the regularisation of hundreds of thousands of migrants, combined with their much higher fertility rates compared with citizens, will result in the Greeks becoming a minority in their own country. Similarly, Kokkinis voices his concern that in one decade the numbers of foreigners in Greece will increase to seven million, while Dimitriadis maintains that there are regions in Greece where migrants already constitute 25 per cent of the population.⁶⁷ Echoing these views of security professionals, Giorgos Kaminis, the mayor of Athens, argues that migration constitutes ‘the number one problem’ for the city and beyond, and is directly responsible for Greece’s ‘gradual demographic decline’.⁶⁸

The problem is not just one of numbers, according to Greek elites, but also about how these migration trends, exaggerated or not, affect the societal security of the country. Migration is seen as a threat to national identity,⁶⁹ which can negatively affect the ethnic composition of the Greek population, its cultural references, its religious homogeneity and its linguistic coherence.⁷⁰ Other security professionals adopt more dramatic tones in their discourse, with Manos arguing that ‘the erosion of the ethnological base of our country will bear painful consequences for Hellenism’ and Kokkinis worrying that, ‘In the not so distant future Hellenism will cease to exist.’⁷¹ Muslim migrants in particular are seen as unwilling to integrate into society because ‘the laws, customs and culture in general of Muslims differ substantially from the Greek, Christian Orthodox ones’.⁷² This specific

⁶⁵ Waever (1993), p 23.

⁶⁶ Manos (2011), p 32.

⁶⁷ Kokkinis (2009), pp 132–3; Dimitriadis (2005), p 17.

⁶⁸ *Enet* (2011).

⁶⁹ Koukouras (2003), p 45.

⁷⁰ Drymouisis (2012), p 41.

⁷¹ Manos (2011), p 48; Kokkinis (2009), p 159.

⁷² Drymouisis (2012), p 28.

targeting, other than its religious connotations, may have to do with the fact that it relates to more recent immigrants from Africa and Asia. Interestingly, hostility towards the Albanians who were seen as the undesirables in the 1990s but have since received regularised status has largely evaporated, as blame and attention have shifted to the ‘new Others’. By contrast, as one of the interviewed police officers suggested, ‘We have nothing in common with the new migrants. We have an utterly different culture.’⁷³

Second, a discourse related to the identitarian axis sees migration as a threat to public order and health. The ‘criminal migrant’ thesis is based on the demonisation of the Other and the creation of an artificial continuum between migration, crime, disease and prostitution. Security professionals correlate the increase in criminality with the emergence of mass uncontrolled migration to Greece in the early 1990s.⁷⁴ Moreover, ‘many of the crimes committed by foreigners are characterised by unprecedented impudence, toughness, cynicism, roughness and savagery for Greek standards’.⁷⁵ The security professionals suggest two explanations for the increase in criminality. The first is that it is directly attributed to the entry of criminals in the country, either to escape from their home countries’ authorities⁷⁶ or because they are part of their home countries’ ‘population dumping’ strategy⁷⁷ that is a government’s attempt to get rid of criminal and unwanted persons. Second, it is attributed to the grave economic conditions in which migrants live in Greece: ‘All these migrants right now in Greece constitute a threat to the public order, since they are unemployed. Illegal migration goes hand-in-hand with criminality, especially in the context of the economic crisis.’⁷⁸ Undocumented migrants are seen as particularly threatening because, as one interviewee explained, ‘We don’t know who these people are. We don’t know if they are dangerous. We don’t know their past.’⁷⁹

An additional shared concern of elites is that migration is a ‘public health bomb’.⁸⁰ According to a security professional, ‘migrants bring in the country new/unknown diseases or diseases that have disappeared from Greece a long time ago’.⁸¹ This concern, too, relates to the grave living conditions of irregular migrants, which ‘foster the emergence and transmission of contagious diseases’.⁸² The association of migrants with unmonitored prostitution networks exacerbates the perception that they

⁷³ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

⁷⁴ See Koukouras (2003), p 87; Dimitriadis (2005), p 5; Tsironis et al (2009), p 8; Drymoussis (2012), p 40.

⁷⁵ Kokkinis (2009), p 142.

⁷⁶ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 28 January 2012.

⁷⁷ Koukouras (2003), p 46.

⁷⁸ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 18 January 2012.

⁷⁹ Hellenic coast guard officer, interview recorded in Mitilene, 8 March 2012.

⁸⁰ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Orestiada, 6 April 2012.

⁸¹ Manos (2011), p 35.

⁸² Kokkinis (2009), p 151.

foster the spread of sexually transmitted diseases – particularly since, as one interviewee put it, ‘there is absolutely no chance that women of African origin do not carry a disease’.⁸³ The same message was evident in political discourse, with the Minister of Health Andreas Loverdos attempting to legitimise the government’s harder stance towards migrants prior to the 2012 parliamentary elections on public health grounds. In his view, migrants are responsible for the ‘increase in contagious diseases, such as tuberculosis and AIDS, through sexual intercourse, drug use, and their squalid living conditions’.⁸⁴

Third, economic considerations add to the prevailing insecurity towards immigrants and asylum seekers, who are seen as ‘free riders’, ‘scroungers’ or ‘bogus’, plotting to exploit the socio-economic fabric of host societies. The economic burden they pose includes increasing unemployment, ‘straining housing, education, and transportation facilities’⁸⁵ and overburdening ‘already dilapidated welfare systems’.⁸⁶ In the case of Greece, elites blame irregular migrants for their participation in the black market, for ‘using the country’s social welfare services in a disproportionate way’ and for putting a strain on the economy by contributing to the increase in unemployment and the cost of welfare and national security.⁸⁷ As before, recent migrants are particularly singled out for blame because, unlike those already settled in Greece (such as the Albanians), they send whatever money they get back to their home country, which drains the local economy, according to one interviewee.⁸⁸ The resentment generated leads to what Huysmans⁸⁹ describes as welfare chauvinism, whereby ‘immigrants and asylum-seekers are not simply rivals but illegitimate recipients of socio-economic rights’.

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the objective significance of the perceived threats migration poses, as identified in the discourse of relevant elites. A paucity of reliable data regarding the actual impact of migration on the economy, society and public health/order makes it hard to assess how seriously threatening these really are. Nevertheless, previous studies in Greece and other countries offer some clues that the real significance of the threats is exaggerated. For instance, studies assessing the economic impact of migration in Greece during the 1990s found that it mostly had a positive effect, as migrants did jobs that Greeks did not want to do and provided a dynamic flexible labour force that supported – when regularised – rather than abusing the welfare system, especially in the

⁸³ Border guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 24 January 2012.

⁸⁴ Newpost (2012).

⁸⁵ Weiner (1992), p 114.

⁸⁶ Held et al (1999), p 313.

⁸⁷ Drymoussis (2012), pp 36–7; Manos (2011), p 35.

⁸⁸ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 28 January 2012; Barlas et al (2004), p 68.

⁸⁹ Huysmans (2000), p 767.

context of Greece's ageing and declining population.⁹⁰ Similarly, the participation of migrants in serious criminality was not significant enough to justify the widespread 'Albanophobia' that ensued during that decade.⁹¹ Lohrmann summarises these debates eloquently, noting that 'the fact that receiving countries are confronted with immigrants with different cultural backgrounds does not represent a threat in itself. Rather, it is the political exploitation of these cultural differences that confers a security dimension to immigration.'⁹²

Referent Object Benefiting Securitisation

Policy-making is fundamentally about 'applied problem-solving', where constrained actors identify problems, articulate policy goals and (however imperfectly) use available policy tools in order to attain them.⁹³ While assessments of policy, as well as securitisation, success remain notoriously slippery,⁹⁴ Rita Floyd's consequentialist ethics framework provides some direction. Its first assessment of the consequences of securitisation concerns the extent to which it curtails the development of the perceived threats identified above. Does securitisation result in better management of migration while reducing associated insecurities and vulnerabilities? The analysis in this section finds little evidence in favour of this notion.

First, securitisation in response to perceived threats to the identity of the host state has the opposite effect to that desired. Typically, migration in Europe has been short term, with the majority of economic migrants eventually opting to return to their country of origin. For instance, despite increased migration movements from Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s, permanent migration declined substantially in the same period.⁹⁵ Paradoxically, it is the very restrictive policies advocated by the security frame that are more likely to lead migrants into settlement. This is because restrictionism and inflexible barriers to entry not only encourage irregular movements but also discourage migrants from investing and maintaining strong ties with their own countries in order to secure their access to work in Europe. This was the case in Germany after the oil crises in the 1970s, when the restrictive policies introduced encouraged family reunification and ultimately increased Turkish settlement.⁹⁶ As Harris explains, 'preventing people working so that they would not become citizens forced them to become citizens in order to work'.⁹⁷

⁹⁰ Lianos et al (1996); Sarris and Zografakis (1999), p 158.

⁹¹ Karydis (1996).

⁹² Lohrmann (2000), p 9.

⁹³ Howlett et al. (2009), p 4.

⁹⁴ For policy success, see McConnell (2010). For securitisation success, see Karyotis and Judge (2013).

⁹⁵ Grabbe (2001).

⁹⁶ Entzinger (1985).

⁹⁷ Harris (2002), p 31.

Second, the securitisation of migration also leads to an increased rather than a reduced possibility of physical threats to public order. The scapegoating of migrants and reproduction of the criminal-migrant discourse, amplified by misinformation given by the media and politicians, poses a major obstacle to their inclusion in host societies. In turn, as sociologist Robert Agnew explains, an increased intensity and frequency of strain experiences for migrants – for example, through discrimination and presentation of negatively valued stimuli – is likely to trigger migrant anger, aggression and criminal behaviour, not reduce them.⁹⁸ Tensions between migrants and citizens in Greece have indeed intensified in recent years, resulting in social segregation, xenophobia, vigilantism against migrants⁹⁹ and racial violence between the two communities.¹⁰⁰ For instance, the Network for the Recording of Incidents of Racist Violence identified a 20 per cent increase in incidents of racist violence in 2012, compared with 2011.¹⁰¹ In addition, migrant communities became increasingly mobilised, including through participation in protest activities, such as marches and hunger strikes, through which they demanded changes to the state's immigration policy. Overall, with 80 per cent of Greeks feeling threatened by the presence of migrants in 2012,¹⁰² it is evident that securitisation did not reduce public insecurities but instead resulted in both citizens and migrants living in perpetual fear of each other.

Third, and most importantly, securitisation in Greece failed spectacularly to reduce migrant flows or curtail irregular migration. Table 1 presents recent migration statistics, which appear relatively unaffected by policy changes.

Table 1: Overview of migration controls and asylum rates

Year	Apprehended migrants for illegal entry or residence	Deported migrants	Asylum applications (first and second instance)	Asylum Positive Decisions
2005	66,351	21,238	9,050	124
2006	95,239	17,650	12,267	193
2007	112,364	17,077	25,113	215
2008	146,337	20,555	19,884	413
2009	126,145	20,342	15,928	166
2010	132,524	17,340	10,273	165
2011	99,368	11,357	9,311	587
2012	76,878	22,117	9,577	627

Source: Hellenic Police

⁹⁸ Agnew (1992).

⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch (2012).

¹⁰⁰ Kokkinis (2009), p 23; Drymouisis (2012), p 38.

¹⁰¹ *Skai* (2013).

¹⁰² *Nooz* (2012).

The table also shows the extremely low acceptance rate of asylum applications, indicative of the securitised logic on migration. Clearly, population movements represent an important, multi-dimensional challenge for host societies. Irregular migration, in particular, is seen as a direct challenge to the legitimacy of the state, as it undermines the myth of control of its borders and many of its vital institutions, such as the army, police and the government.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, all the security professionals interviewed shared the view that ‘the control and deterrence of illegal migration is futile’.¹⁰⁴ Greece’s geostrategic location and the evolution of the *modus operandi* of smugglers render internal and external controls rather ineffective. This point requires further elaboration.

Greece is located at the crossroads between Europe, Africa and Asia, and has primarily external borders with non-EU states. Its 13,676 kilometre-long coastline is the eleventh longest in the world, comprising thousands of islands. The intensification of patrols across its sea borders does not deter smugglers from using them as one of the main routes for trafficking irregular migrants. Instead, if spotted by the authorities, they either try to land their smuggling boats to a different location or they intentionally sink them and flee, which often results in the death of unsuspecting migrants.¹⁰⁵ A prerequisite for any control measures to work, according to security professionals, would be to successfully implement coordinated patrols with neighbouring countries on both sides of the border. Although a number of such bilateral agreements have been signed, elites attribute the failure of pushing the border further away from Greek territory to the unwillingness of other countries, particularly Turkey, to implement them.¹⁰⁶

The second main entry point of irregular migrants into Greece is through its northern border with Turkey, in Evros. This border consists of 12.5 kilometres of land (with no border demarcation but a 2-kilometre buffer zone) and another 186 kilometres separated by a river, which has an average width of 25 metres and is thus easy to cross, especially in the summer months. After Greece completed the clearance of anti-personnel mines in 57 areas across the border in 2009, to comply with its legal obligations as a signatory to the ‘Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on their Destruction’, Evros became the smugglers’ preferred entry point into Greece.¹⁰⁷ In response, Greece proceeded to further militarise the region with the construction of a 10.5-kilometre fence and the deployment of more than 1800 police officers under Operation ‘Aspida’ (Shield). This had immediate results, as indicated by the fact that fewer than ten irregular migrants were detected crossing the border during the last week of October 2012, compared

¹⁰³ Anderson (1991).

¹⁰⁴ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

¹⁰⁵ Tsironis et al (2009); Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Orestiada, 6 April 2012.

¹⁰⁶ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Alexandroupoli, 18 April 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Orestiada, 6 April 2012; Schaub (2013).

with about 2000 in the first week of August 2012.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, it pushed smugglers back to the sea route, with more than 100 irregular migrants losing their lives in the Aegean Sea in the following four months.¹⁰⁹ The sense among security professionals is that because smugglers continuously adapt to changing control mechanisms, deterrence does not work but simply transfers the problem to other parts of the country.

Finally, security professionals are also sceptical about the effectiveness of internal migration controls, such as those implemented under Operation Xenios Zeus. They consider sweep operations a ‘smokescreen’, motivated only by the government’s electoral aspirations.¹¹⁰ Describing the process, one interviewee noted that the only thing police officers did was arrest and record migrants, detaining them for a few days and releasing them in a different area, thus transferring the problem elsewhere.¹¹¹ To make matters worse, some security professionals also question whether internal and external controls act as a deterrent for irregular movement.¹¹² This is because many migrants ‘want to be arrested. They are not hiding. This is their aim, because they have been informed that being arrested is part of their journey’¹¹³ and ‘because the conditions in detention centres are still better compared to the outside world’.¹¹⁴

Agent Benefiting Securitisation

The discussion so far suggests that securitisation is an excessive and ineffective response to the need for migration management that does little to alleviate perceived threats to the state and society. The second criterion for evaluating its implications, from a consequentialist ethics approach, is to assess the extent to which it serves the interests of the main securitising agents – that is, political and security elites.

Starting with political elites, a key motivation for supporting the securitisation of migration, other than any national objectives deriving from their professional responsibility, is their assumption that in doing so, they are protecting their political legitimacy and enhancing their electoral prospects. Determining who belongs in a community – commonly in an adversarial way – and controlling access to its territory are defining functions of the state that, in the final instance, are always determined by its elites. Since migration calls into question these symbolic boundaries of belonging, political elites may use securitising rhetoric in order to maintain a certain myth of control, and thus safeguard their legitimacy.¹¹⁵ A particular concern

¹⁰⁸ Frontex (2013), p 20.

¹⁰⁹ Amnesty International (2013), p 7.

¹¹⁰ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

¹¹¹ Border guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 24 January 2012.

¹¹² Manos (2011), p. 37.

¹¹³ Hellenic coast guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

¹¹⁴ Border guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 24 January 2012.

¹¹⁵ Bigo (1998).

for them would be that a soft stance on migration may prove costly in electoral terms, or ‘lead to xenophobic popular sentiments and to the rise of anti-migrant political parties that could threaten the regime’.¹¹⁶ Operating within the parameters of their bounded rationality, elites may thus sustain the security frame on migration to cement their power positions and prevent public reactions.

Nevertheless, the evidence from Greece challenges the suggestion that securitisation is beneficial to agents. As discussed, ‘the ability to control migration has shrunk as the desire to do so has increased. The reality is that borders are beyond control and little can be done to really cut down on immigration.’¹¹⁷ All securitisation then does is to create unattainable public expectations for effective ‘defence’ against the perceived threats from migration. An inability to deliver on these promises leaves both governing elites and security professionals susceptible to scrutiny and public criticism, which is exploited by anti-migrant parties and other political opponents.¹¹⁸ This in turn, makes political elites sustain the security frame, even verging in some cases on outright xenophobia, since they feel that ‘their policy proposals must compete for this political territory’.¹¹⁹

Securitisation may indeed serve the interests of political elites in the short term, by conveniently shifting blame and responsibility for some of society’s ills and their own failings.¹²⁰ This seems to be the case in relation to the severe debt crisis that Greece has been experiencing since 2010. Prior to that, the government had made some moves towards a rationalisation of its immigration policy, with the introduction of more liberal laws (at least on paper), the incorporation of EU directives, the removal of landmines in Evros and a gradual softening of political rhetoric.¹²¹ The economic crisis abruptly interrupted this hesitant liberal turn, reinvigorating the security logic, as evidenced in both discourse and practices.

Perhaps unexpectedly, immigration featured as one of the hottest issues in the campaign for the 2012 parliamentary elections. Parties of the interim governing coalition, PASOK and New Democracy, who had taken turns to govern Greece since 1974, adopted a strong stance on immigration in an attempt to shift focus and minimise electoral retribution for their austerity policies. For instance, Nikos Dendias, the Minister of Public Order and Citizen Protection, argued that: ‘Our social fabric is in danger of unravelling. The immigration problem is perhaps even bigger than the financial one.’¹²² A similar intensification of securitisation with an increase in sweep

¹¹⁶ Weiner (1992), p 114.

¹¹⁷ Bhagwati (2003), p 99.

¹¹⁸ Boswell (2008).

¹¹⁹ Statham (2003), p 167.

¹²⁰ Guiraudon (2000).

¹²¹ See Karyotis (2012).

¹²² *Ekathimerini* (2012).

operations had taken place throughout the 1990s in pre-election periods.¹²³ Still, PASOK's Michalis Chrisochoidis rejected the claims that the salience of migration in 2012 was driven by electoral calculations, wondering: 'Do diseases stop being transmitted and does criminality cease to exist prior to the elections?'¹²⁴

Whatever the intentions of PASOK and New Democracy might have been in terms of their harsher stance on migration, it did not prevent them from suffering major losses in the 2012 elections, with PASOK in particular losing more than two-thirds of its 2009 electoral share. Instead, it was the newly founded far-right Independent Greeks party and the extreme-right Golden Dawn that benefited most from this polarisation, with the latter entering parliament for the first time with an incredible 7 per cent share, up from just 0.29 in 2009. The two-decade failures of the governing parties of the centre to develop a coherent, balanced immigration policy, their miscalculation that shifting the focus on this issue would be beneficial to them and the lack of an evidenced-based assessment of the impact of migration on Greece appear to have backfired for the political elites who supported the securitisation of migration in the first place.

The securitisation of migration does not seem to be bringing the expected benefits to security professionals either. Those interviewed mainly blame successive governments for their incoherent policies and their lack of support. Their perception is that there is inadequate political will to actually crack down on irregular migrants, who are instead being rewarded with legal status through the repeated regularisation schemes.¹²⁵ Rather than feeling empowered by their central role in dealing with migration, the security professionals' predominant emotions are frustration and disillusionment. For most, the dire conditions in detention centres and any bad treatment migrants receive are not driven by hostility towards them. Instead, it is a reflection of the fact that their own training is insufficient and outdated, their understanding of the evolving legal framework incomplete and their coordination with the state and other authorities fragmented and inefficient.¹²⁶

Finally, the theoretical assumption that securitising migration would increase the security professionals' access to resources has to be rejected in this case. For instance, in 2011 financial difficulties forced the First Instance Asylum Committees of the Attica Aliens Police Directorate to postpone their operation for a significant period of time due to lack of printer toner and paper.¹²⁷ Similarly, police vehicles in Patra and Thessaloniki were immobilised for several days as the police were not able to refuel them due

¹²³ Karyotis (2012).

¹²⁴ *Ethnos* (2012).

¹²⁵ Border guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 24 January 2012; Tsironis et al (2009), p E8.

¹²⁶ Border guard officer, interview recorded in Athens, 24 January 2012; Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

¹²⁷ Dama (2011).

to financial constraints.¹²⁸ Summarising the sentiment among security professionals, one of the interviewees noted that police officers ‘work for 700–800 euros per month. They are given no incentives to do their job and are understaffed. Inevitably, any enthusiasm they might have had when they entered the profession evaporates fast – especially since they often work beyond nine to five, are not paid overtime and have to work under difficult conditions.’¹²⁹

Conclusion

Drawing on Floyd’s consequentialist ethics approach, our analysis of the Greek case suggests that the securitisation of migration appears to be an unjustified and inefficient response to the need for migration management. In lieu of the apparent inefficiency of the policies enacted to curtail the development of the perceived threats, as identified in elite discourse that migration is supposed to be posing to society and the state, securitisation appears to be a counter-productive strategy. In fact, the analysis suggests that securitisation is posing obstacles to the development of a coherent immigration policy with a long-term view, and prevents Greece from making headway towards managing its two-decade immigration crisis that only intensified during the recent economic downturn.

Securitisation also produces more losers than winners. Migrants are inevitably those who have suffered the most from the restrictive policies and practices. At the same time, and counter-intuitively, political and security elites who have supported the security frame have also failed to benefit from it in terms of either attracting resources or enhancing their electoral prospects and/or power. Instead, the construction of the security frame from the top-down fuelled public insecurities, exacerbated social tensions and increased demand for more concrete but unattainable control measures, all of which ultimately harmed the interests of securitising agents. This leaves only parties of the far right, and perhaps human traffickers, as the main winners of the security frame that has characterised Greece’s stance on immigration since the early 1990s.

How, then, should host countries like Greece manage population flows that are almost inevitable in a globalised world? The answer to this question requires a thorough review of past practices and legal frameworks and a clearer understanding of the challenges migration poses to all affected actors: the state, its elites, the citizens and the migrants. This may not automatically and in all cases result in a call for liberalisation of policies – after all, from a consequentialist ethics perspective, neither securitisation nor politicisation is by definition negative or positive.¹³⁰ However, it should be the first step towards rationalising migration management that escapes the ill-informed assumptions that securitisation is always inevitable or beneficial

¹²⁸ Newsbeast (2012); Star (2011).

¹²⁹ Hellenic police officer, interview recorded in Athens, 19 January 2012.

¹³⁰ Roe (2012); Floyd (2010).

and prevents the moral panic that often ensues from any exaggerated claims about its detrimental impact on host societies.¹³¹ Placing such debates and future research in a comparative context, with a particular focus on the intentions and consequences of securitisation, may help to untangle the security-migration nexus and allow for more efficient responses to the multifaceted challenges that relate to population movements.

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¹³¹ See Triandafyllidou (2010).

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