Bringing Political Culture into the Study of Flexicuritization of Migration: A Reflective Research Commentary on the Greek Case
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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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A Reflective Research Commentary on the Greek Case

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Abstract

Keywords:

1. Introduction

That migration in Greece is securitized, is not something new. Several studies have confirmed that in the Greek case, threat narratives as regards migrants prevail among political discussions when the issue of migration comes up, along with practices and every day activities of security professionals (Dimari, 2020, 2021a; Karyotis, 2012; Stivas, 2021, Dimari et al, 2020; Lazaridis & Skleparis, 2016). This tendency can be observed ever since the 1990s, when Greece, a traditionally sending country up to that point, started receiving massive migration flows, mainly from Albania (Karyotis, 2012) resulting, in Greece having to manage, both economically and socially as well educationally and politically the issue of the influx of a huge mass migration flow. And this was so, because, until then, the migration policy in Greece concerned almost

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exclusively Greeks who emigrated abroad. As a result, there was no coherent migration policy capable of responding to the aforementioned new conditions (Lazaridis, 1996).

Regarding the evolution of the immigration policy of Greece and its securitization components, according to Papadakis (2009, pp. 31-37) the modern Greek migration policy can be divided into three distinct periods. The first concerns the migration wave that arrived in Greece in the early 1990s and that became securitized (Karyotis, 2012). Until then, Greece had no legal framework for controlling and managing immigrant inflows, and as such threat narratives became part of Greek politicians 'attempts to not to lose the symbolic control of their borders (Messina, 2014). The second phase of modern Greek immigration concerns an increasingly multicultural Greece in the period 1991-2001 (Papadakis, 2009, pp. 31-37), a period during which there was a recession - but not disappearance - of securitization processes, and during which integration policies started to emerge (Kalantzi, 2017). The third phase of modern Greek immigration concerns the period when the Greek state followed the general framework of the harmonization of the National Integration Policies of the EU with the main point of reference being the Common Basic Principles of 2004, with the voting of Law 3886/2005 for the entry , residence and social integration of third country nationals in the Greek Territory and the subsequent institutional and political developments (Papadakis, 2009, pp. 31-37).This period was also securitized (Kalantzi, 2017), but the density of securitizing discourse and practices had little similarity with the threat narratives that prevailed during the 1990s and that were centered on the issue of criminality and religious otherness (Karyotis, 2012).

As such, it seems that in the first years of the effort to design and implement migration policy in Greece resulted in the creation of a policy with both integration and securitization components. As Linos (2003) states, what is characteristic in the Greek case concerning migration policies, is the discrepancy between some anti-migration tendencies at the public level and the pursuit of relatively liberal legitimacy policies.

In recent years, in fact, the challenge the Greek state was called to tackle, namely the control of its northern land and eastern and southeastern maritime borders, which escalated from 2015 until today (2022) due to the unprecedented migration and refugee crisis (Archick, 2016), highlighted in an indisputable way the inherent and constituent weaknesses of Greece's migration policy, inaugurating a new era of securitizing practices. During this period, the anti-migrant rhetoric of the political elites climaxed, leading not only to the re-securitization of migrants, but also to the securitization of refugees (Dimari, 2020), creating a new trend in the making of security politics of Greece as regards migration. This situation was severely exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to the 'emergence of a new security apparatus' in Greece (Dimari, 2021b). A security apparatus characterized by neo-statism elements and by management practices as regards migrants that do not fit into the kaleidoscope of a genuinely democratic state.

Seen from both a state-centered and a humanitarian perspective, securitization in the Greek case – as well as in all cases - is a negative development in a twofold way. First, it has impacted greatly the 'democraticness' of Greece. Indeed, the Greek state has adopted such severe policies to tackle - not to manage – migration (Dimari, 2020), that has almost distorted its democratic political *habitus*. From closed camps (Dimari, 2020) to alleged push backs, from the suspension of asylum applications during the Evros February crisis in 2020 to the adoption of the Agnodiki Plan and the commencement of Covid-19 vaccinations to migrants residing in closed camps one year and a half later (Dimari, 2021b) than the Greek population, it has become obvious that divisive elements prevail among policies adopted as far as the over-securitized migration is concerned. Second, migrants are deprived of fundamental and basic human rights in many –

Georgia Dimari: *Bringing Political Culture into the Study of Flexicuritization of Migration.*
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EQPAM Volume 10 No.3 July 2021
ISSN 2285 – 4916
ISSN-L 2285 - 4916

reported – instances (Greek Council for Refugees, 2019). The securitized stance of the polity along with negative perceptions of the Greek people against them, have placed them in a precarious position as far as access to housing, education, health and overall welfare provisions are concerned (Papadakis & Dimari, 2021). Indeed, Greece has been accused of repeated pushbacks (Frank, 2022) and of maltreatment of migrants residing in camps (Greek Council for Refugees, 2019). What is notable, is that Greece, through the Joint Ministerial Decision 42799/2021 published in Government Gazette 2425 / B / 7-6-2021, included Turkey in the National List of Safe Third Countries for applicants originating from Syria, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Somalia, arguing that *"designating Turkey as a safe third country is an important step in tackling illegal immigration flows and the criminal activity of smuggling networks"*, (e-nomothesia.gr, 2021) and prompting a strict response from the UNHCR to re-assess its methodology in the analysis that led to this designation of a safe third country as required by Greek law and EU law (UNHCR, 2021).

These alarming Greek policies, point to the necessity to address the migration issue in more humane terms. More specifically, to reverse this process, a desecuritization strategy is in need that will be based on empirical data and rigorous research. This is so because desecuritization is deemed to be the optimal solution or in other words the cure to securitization (Buzan et al, 1998).

In the Greek case, flexicuritization has been proposed as a strategy to tackle the securitization of migration. Flexicuritization is an approach driven by the rationale that security is a substantial right of both the host state and migrants/refugees. As such, it draws from realism, liberalism and constructivism to propose a set of fifteen actions to address the securitization of migration in Greece that entail elements of pragmatism and utilitarianism so as to achieve a flexible and positive form of (de)security (Dimari, 2021a). This strategy is a first step towards the contestation of security politics of migration in the Greek case. It needs further elaboration, and a crucial aspect is context.

The departing point for the afore mentioned observation has been a research conducted by the Centre for Human Rights (KEADIK) of the Department of Political Science of the University of Crete in 2018, entitled "Identification and categorization of refugees in the Greek productive system with case studies the regions of Crete and Mytilene (MIS 5006494)", co-funded by the European Social Fund and national funds, as part of the project "Supporting researchers with emphasis on young researchers", "Human Resource Development, Education and Lifelong Learning" EDBM34 (IDA 6BNB4653C7-A1B). A first reading of these results shows that the political culture of Greece has shaped securitization patterns that draw from societal concerns that pertain to othering processes - targeted mainly towards Muslim populations - and revolve around the societal disruption of the Greek demography (Kotroyannos et al, 2020). These findings suggest that the political culture of Greece should be a driver on the study of desecuritization and in our case, in the flexicuritization of migration.

Yet, despite securitization both at a theoretical as well as at a practical level has been studied extensively, context or as used here, political culture, does not feature empirically in the international (de)securitization literature neither in flexicuritization. This is deemed important though, as context, is considered to be one of the facilitators of securitization. According to Šulović (2010), facilitation conditions, as defined by the Copenhagen School, are the factors that explain why some securitization attempts are more likely to be accepted by the public than others. These facilitating conditions are considered to either aid or hinder securitization, but are not considered components of speech acts.

Balzack (2005) has limited their number by arguing, in essence, that the conditions governing the realization of securitization fall into at least three sets of factors - audience, context, and securitizing actor. The first factor has three components - (i) the audience's frame of reference, (ii) its readiness to be convinced of something, which depends on whether it perceives the securitizing actor as an expert on the subject and as credible, and iii his ability to grant or refuse a formal mandate to civil servants. The second set of factors concerns the contextual effects on the audience's response to the securitizing actor's arguments. The third factor involves the ability of the securitizing actor to use appropriate words and related frames of reference in a given context in order to gain the support of the target audience for political purposes.

But how can flexicuritization be informed from the study of the Greek political culture? The focus here would be the third action proposed in the strategy of flexicuritization which calls for the design of *"a public opinion 'map' for the investigation and construction of conditions for the acceptance of the 'other'* (Dimari, 2021: p. 10). More specifically the political culture of the host state, and in our case Greece, should be investigated as what is seen in the Greek case of the securitization of migration, is that securitizing actors, in their quest to make security claims, tend to draw from political culture, focusing mainly on identity narratives and religious components that revolve around the otherness of Muslim populations that enter the Greek territory (Triantafyllidou, 1998; Dimari, 2020; Karyotis, 2012).

This could be realized through a two-step process. The first step would be to unpack the way securitizing actors use political culture in their narratives to make security claims and to win the audience they address the security claims to. It would be interesting to use both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate this issue, so as to obtain a more complete sight of this process. The second step would be to explore how securitizing actors understand desecuritization and what would be the preconditions for the reversal of securitization. This could be combined with population surveys to detect what it would take for host societies to alter their prefixed perceptions on others, and especially Muslim ones. Desecuritizing actors could also be brought into the research, to see what kind of language and frames they use – if they use – when they act as counter-securitization or anti-securitization actors.

In conclusion, there is huge domain of possibilities as regards the study of flexicuritization. The study of context or political culture as used here, poses a great challenge to scholars of security politics that zoom in Greece, where migration is securitized.

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