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## Migrant Securitization, Policies of Exclusion, and Political Agency

### The Construction of Threat in European Policy Discourses

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News that Hungarian riot police brutalized asylum seekers at their Serbian border shocked the world last September. The Hungarians fired tear gas and water cannons to drive migrants away in order to avoid the country's legal obligations towards asylum seekers.<sup>2</sup> Governments and policymakers tend to “securitize” migrants—or treat them as security threats, not human rights claimants—in order to justify policies of exclusion, oftentimes to their own detriment.<sup>3</sup> But, how have policy discourses in Europe contributed to this securitization, and how have they constructed the identities of the current migrant crisis' asylum seekers in relation to their impact on national security? I centrally claim that discourses that securitize migrants

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<sup>2</sup> BBC News, “Migrant Crisis: Clashes at Hungary-Serbia Border,” *BBC News*, September 16, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Georgios Karyotis and Dimitris Skleparis, “Qui Bono? The Winners and Losers of Securitising Migrations,” *Griffith Law Review* 22, no. 3 (2013): 683.

transcend traditional concerns over military security. Those fleeing persecution for Europe are understood as threats to military, border, economic, and cultural security. Securitizing migrants thus deprives them of political agency and justifies policies of exclusion, whereby migrants unnecessarily suffer violence.

Section 1 discusses securitization discourses in European Parliament (EP) debates beyond military security. Section 2 identifies the various nodal meanings to which securitization discourses fix migration. Section 3 briefly analyzes securitizing discourses and policies of exclusion in one case-study: Hungary. Section 4 reflects on the implications of securitizing migrants both in terms of practical policy outcomes and migrants' political agency.

## Securitization in the European Parliament

European Parliament (EP) securitization discourses construct refugees and migrants as threats to be avoided at all costs. Here I only focus on securitizing discourses, so whether security or humanitarianism represents the dominant discourse lies beyond this article's scope. Clearly, though, securitizing migrants in the EP involves more than traditional military security concerns including economic and cultural security.

Economically, refugees threaten to deprive European Union (EU) member-states of their job and welfare security, according to securitizing discourses. As Marcel de Graaff argued in October of last year,

They come here to escape the war? No, absolutely not, because displaced Syrians have been living safely for years in Turkey, Jordan, or Lebanon. The problem is free money, free care, and free housing in Germany and other EU member-states. The problem is that the EU does not close its internal and external borders.<sup>4</sup>

Some German MEPs went so far as to describe the influx of refugees and migrants as having "heavily polluted" countries like Italy, Hungary, and Greece.<sup>5</sup> Hungarian nationalist MEP Zoltán Balczó perhaps best sums up the perceived cultural threat migrants pose: "No thousands of refugees arrive in Europe, but hundreds of thousands of illegal immigrants, and if no changes are made, millions. [...] This invasion threatens European identity, culture and tranquility."<sup>6</sup> Securitizing discourses thus construct refugees and migrants as contaminants seeking to (a) mooch off the welfare state and deprive other European citizens of jobs, housing, and social benefits to which MEPs consider them entitled, and (b) convert Europe's ethno-religious composition through some supposed, proselytizing ambition.

Of course, traditional concerns over military security persist. On February 2nd of this year, Diane James lambasted Germany's response to the "migrant onslaught," by referring to the

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<sup>4</sup> Marcel de Graaf, "Situation in Syria," in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (October 7, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>5</sup> Bernd Lucke, Joachim Starbatty, and Ulrike Trebesius, "Council Decision establishing provisional measures in the area of international protection for the benefit of Italy, Greece and Hungary," in Brussels. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (September 17, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>6</sup> Zoltán Balczó, "Migration and refugees in Europe," in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (September 10, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

potential dangers posed by providing asylum to so many refugees and migrants.<sup>7</sup> James explained that the “onslaught” caused by Germany “is threatening member-states’ and citizens’ security, social cohesion and economic prosperity. Schengen and Frontex are clearly unable to withstand or cope with this enormous migrant pressure.”<sup>8</sup> Similar statements in that debate decry asylum policies’ encouragement of terrorism, suggesting that Europe “pays the highest price,” in terms of security, not refugees and migrants.<sup>9</sup> Even the day after the first reports of police brutality at the Hungarian-Serbian border, Hungarian MEP Kinga Gál criticized calls for European solidarity as “hypocritical,” and argued that some 300 refugees jeopardized Hungarian national security by “throwing stones” at police and attempting to enter the country outside the designated entry points.<sup>10</sup>

The point is not so much that Europe does not face real security threats associated with the migrant crisis, but rather that by referring to refugees and migrants as part of a collective “onslaught,” emphasizing clashes with the police, or assuming refugees’ surreptitious motives, securitizing discourses imply asylum seekers’ intentional and homogenous risk, constructing their identity less as asylum seekers and more as invasive terrorists. UKIP Leader Nigel Farage even claimed that the Islamic State used the migrant crisis to implant “5,000 of their operatives” in Europe.<sup>11</sup> Language emphasizing onslaughts, infiltration, invasion, and militant operatives go beyond framing the migrant crisis as a potential security threat and instead construct the identities of migrants themselves as threatening.

Some MEPs combat securitizing discourses and policies of exclusion. As Esteban González Pons observed, “The refugee crisis began as a humanitarian problem and now is becoming a real political problem. European institutions seem to want to stop receiving refugees and, at the same time, not involve themselves in the war that drives them.”<sup>12</sup> Alfred Sant contends:

Problems multiply when massive immigration flows raise the perception that European lifestyles will be submerged under alien cultures and that scarce jobs will be appropriated by newcomers. [...] The

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<sup>7</sup> Diane James, “Refugee emergency, external borders control and future of Schengen - Respect for the international principle of non-refoulement - Financing refugee facility for Turkey - Increased racist hatred and violence against refugees and migrants across Europe (debate),” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (February 2, 2016) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Nadine Morano, “Refugee emergency, external borders control and future of Schengen - Respect for the international principle of non-refoulement - Financing refugee facility for Turkey - Increased racist hatred and violence against refugees and migrants across Europe (debate),” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (February 2, 2016) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>10</sup> Kinga Gál, “Conclusions of the Justice and Home Affairs Council on migration (14 September 2015) (debate),” in Brussels. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (September 16, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>11</sup> Nigel Farage, “Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 17 and 18 March 2016 and outcome of the EU-Turkey summit (debate),” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (April 13, 2016) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>12</sup> Esteban González Pons, “Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 15 October 2015, in particular the financing of international funds, and of the Leaders’ meeting on the Western Balkans route of 25 October 2015, and preparation of the Valletta summit of 11 and 12 November 2015 (debate),” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (October 27, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

extremists who fan hate and xenophobia have understood this. They play on such concerns to drive people towards irrational and violent action.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, securitizing discourses raise two issues on two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, annulling the migrant crisis of its humanitarian considerations in favor of political concerns justifies exclusionary policies: “European institutions seem to want to stop receiving refugees,” constructing barbed wire fences and militarizing borders to do so. On the other hand, securitizing discourses result in marginalization for those who have already successfully immigrated to Europe: “The extremists who fan hate and xenophobia [...] play on such concerns to drive people towards irrational and violent action.” Furthermore, Josu Juaristi Abaunz notes that this so-called migrant “flood,” “invasion,” “onslaught,” etc. represents approximately 0.1% of the EU’s total population.<sup>14</sup> Though a small proportion of the continent, securitizing discourses give the picture of a migrant army that stands to overwhelm Europe.

At the same time, however, anti-immigration positions do not always rely on securitizing discourses. One common argument raised by Hungarian (and other) MEPs during debate over *European Parliament resolution on migration and refugees in Europe (2015/2833(RSP))* noted the resolution’s lack of a “clear distinction between genuine refugees and [economic migrants].”<sup>15</sup> While the merit of accepting economic and other forced migrants *in addition* to refugees can be debated *ad nauseum*, the former do not enjoy the same legal privileges as do the latter.<sup>16</sup> Such arguments avoid casting refugees and migrants as invaders, Islamifiers, or job-stealers, favoring instead distinctions within the law, not within private prejudices. So, while nonetheless opposed to the complete free movement of people, not all anti-immigration arguments rely on securitizing discourses.

## Migration and its Security Meaning(s)

Table 1 shows the various associations to the terms “refugee,” “migrant,” and “migration,” expressed most often by MEPs’ securitizing discourses. Data are based on European Parliament debate transcripts between August 1st, 2015 and November 1st, 2015—more than one month on either side of the Hungarian-Serbian border violence—and are publicly available via the European Parliament archives. Table 1 does not represent all countries in the EP, only those with the most vocal securitization rhetoric within the time period specified. Values include direct nodal references (including, for example, “The problem is free money, free care, and free housing in Germany and other EU Member States,” in the “Moochers” category) and indirect nodal references (including, for example, “throwing stones,” “ISIS operatives,” etc. in the “Aggression/Terrorism/Invasion” category). This article does not seek to map the relationship

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<sup>13</sup> Alfred Sant, “Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and hate speech in Europe (debate),” in Brussels. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (October 14, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>14</sup> Josu Juaristi Abaunz, “Humanitarian situation of refugees within the EU and neighbouring countries (debate),” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session. (October 6, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>15</sup> See, for example: András Gyürk, “Migration and refugees in Europe,” in Strasbourg. European Parliament. *Debates*. Plenary session (September 10, 2015) (Online). Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>16</sup> Andrew E. Shacknove, “Who is a Refugee?” *Ethics* 95, no. 2 (1985).

between dominant and non-dominant discourses; therefore, the many other nodal references to, for instance, “victims,” “suffering,” and “tragedy,” may represent a dominant discourse, but do not fall within the purview of securitizing discourses. Instead, we can think of the below table as a kind of litmus test—when migrants and refugees are referred to in terms of their impact on security, how often are they referred to in terms of military (aggression/terrorism/invasion), border (strong borders/flood/onslaught), economic (job loss/moochers), or cultural (Islamization) security?

**Table 1**<sup>17</sup>

	<b>Aggression/Terr orism/Invasion</b>	<b>Strong Borders/Flood/ Onslaught</b>	<b>Job Loss/Moochers</b>	<b>Islamization</b>
<b>France</b>	4	5	9	1
<b>United Kingdom</b>	3	3	4	1
<b>Germany</b>	0	5	2	3
<b>Hungary</b>	4	2	0	1
<b>Finland</b>	0	1	2	0
<b>Poland</b>	0	2	0	0
<b>Total</b>	11	18	17	6

Rough estimates of each category’s proportion of the total securitization rhetoric can be made, but no proportional estimates are needed to draw conclusions. For example, appeals to traditional military concerns comprise just over 21% of all securitization rhetoric within the specified time period, whereas border security comprises almost 35%, economic security comprises about 33%, and cultural security comprises just over 11%. These estimates would obviously shift with a more expansive dataset, but the fact that border, economic, and—to some extent—cultural security represent comparable proportions of the securitization debate lends credence to the Copenhagen School.

The Copenhagen School’s theory of migrant securitization broadens the conception of security to include military, economic, environment, societal, and political security.<sup>18</sup> Others similarly claim that “the social construction of migration as a security question” results from “reifying migration as a force which endangers the good life in west European societies.”<sup>19</sup> Claudia Aradau argues that framing migrants as security threats or victims of human rights abuses deprives them of their political agency, reducing human rights to the right to practice pity for victims and the right to refuse helping oppressed people.<sup>20</sup> The association of border, economic, and cultural security to migrant identities in EP debates supports the expansive

<sup>17</sup> Data based on European Parliament debate transcripts from August 1, 2015 – November 1, 2015. (Online) Available: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/plenary/en/debates-video.html>. [June 23, 2016].

<sup>18</sup> Barry Buzon and Ole Wæver, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998); Elisabeth Farny, “Implications of the Securitisation of Migration,” *E-International Relations* (2016).

<sup>19</sup> Jef Huysmans, “The European Union and the Securitization of Migration,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 38, no. 5 (2000): 752.

<sup>20</sup> Claudia Aradau, “The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words: Risk and Pity in the Securitisation of Human Trafficking,” *Millennium: Journal of International Relations* 33, no. 2 (2004).

definition of security advanced by Copenhagen School theorists. MEPs thusly securitize migrants in the sense that they jeopardize the current order and status quo of the EU's border system, distribution of jobs and welfare services, and cultural composition.

## Hungary and the Migrant-Security Complex

Hungary represents a kind of discursive incubation chamber, highlighting the apex of both migrant securitization and policies of exclusion. In his official statement justifying Hungary's response to the migrant crisis, Prime Minister Victor Órban stated that Syrian refugees "represent a radically different culture. Most of them are [...] Muslims."<sup>21</sup> For Órban, refugees' Muslim background is "concerning" since "European identity is rooted in Christianity," implying that refugees might damage Europe's Christian self-image.<sup>22</sup> Additionally, government billboards in Hungary read, "If you come to Hungary, you have to respect our culture," and, "If you come to Hungary, don't take the jobs of Hungarians."<sup>23</sup> The Hungarian Parliament formalized this securitizing discourse in a resolution approving of, "every necessary means" to combat the "waves of illegal immigration," stating that "[w]e have the right to defend our culture, language, and values" and that "[w]e cannot allow illegal migrants to endanger the jobs and social security of the Hungarian people."<sup>24</sup>

Securitizing migrants constitutes policies of exclusion as justifiable. If migrants represent invaders, job-stealers, and Islamifiers posing some nebulous danger to the European way of life, then constructing barbed wire fences, firing tear gas and water cannons, criminalizing illegal immigration, and deporting refugees to safe third countries do not further a cycle of cruelty to refugees, but rather attempts to preserve Hungarian integrity.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Hungary introduced these and other measures to exclude migrants and refugees. That Órban and the Hungarian Parliament formalized key elements of these securitizing discourses in their justifications for excluding refugees and migrants belies a "fraught sense of weakness" and fear that migrants stand directly, even combatively, opposed to Hungarian interests.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, because the securitization of migrants emphasizes facets of their political identities beyond their control, it deprives them of their political agency. No one fleeing Syria, Iraq, or other destabilizing human rights violations chose to be persecuted, nor to be Muslim, nor the need to find employment once they arrive in their host countries. Along Aradau's line of thinking, when "political agency exists as a potentiality," then even vulnerable and oppressed populations become risk factors threatening to disrupt the status quo, due to securitizing discourses' effect.<sup>27</sup> As much as it has to do with real or perceived threats, securitizing migrants deprives them of their political agency and justifies policies of exclusion.

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<sup>21</sup> Ian Traynor, "Migration Crisis: Hungary PM Says Europe in Grip of Madness," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2015.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, *Fenced Out: Hungary's Violations of the Rights of Refugees and Migrants* (London: Amnesty International, 2015), 6.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-6.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick Kingsley, "Hungary's Treatment of Refugees is Shocking and Unacceptable, Says UN," *The Guardian*, September 17, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> Melik Kaylan, "Spare a Thought for Hungary," *Politico*, September 15, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> Aradau, "The Perverse Politics of Four-Letter Words," 276.

## Conclusion

Migrants and refugees seeking a better life in Europe are constructed as security threats beyond traditional military concerns. Securitizing discourses therefore constitute exclusion of those posing a danger to the established order of life in Europe's militaries, economies, borders, and cultures as a legitimate and justifiable policy position. Any potential to affect change in one's life and in the status quo establishes migrants as security threats. Yet in emphasizing factors outside refugees' and migrants' control, securitizing discourses deprive them of political agency in order to nullify their potential threats to the existing way of life. This article only focused on discourses that securitize migrants, so further research should focus on other elements of the discursive landscape that construct the identities of migrants outside of their impact of security. Furthermore, this article only focused on one specific time period; future research might analyze policy discourses throughout the entire migrant crisis. Depriving migrants of political agency and excluding them from Europe further a cycle of cruelty that legitimates tear gas, water cannons, and similar acts of violence against those seeking to improve their lives.

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