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THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN GREECE: Mapping the evolution of securitizing discourses between 1991-2021

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THE SECURITIZATION OF MIGRATION IN GREECE:

Mapping the evolution of securitizing discourses between 1991-2021

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ABSTRACT

International migration has come to be perceived as a matter of national and international security. Stemming from global inequalities, instability or conflict, population movements are often constructed as a security threat. Concerningly, this process often coincides with the rise of right-wing populism, which frequently centers around anti-immigrant rhetoric.

This study sets out to map the evolution of securitizing discourses applied to migration in Greece between 1991 and 2021, as the country was faced with two distinct 'waves' of incoming migration. By concurrently analyzing parliamentary debates, opinion and statistical data, this study finds that changes in contextual factors affect the chosen discourses of securitization. It traces how the elite discourse in Greece evolved in parallel with shifting socioeconomic circumstances, and changes in the origin and scale of migration flows.

The present study also adds to existing literature on securitization theory by taking a longitudinal approach, and viewing securitization as a long-term process of creating meaning – rather than a single speech act. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of securitization as a dynamic process. Finally, it adds to existing studies of migration in Greece by considering the entire 30-year period, and identifying points of continuity and change.

KEYWORDS

Securitization, migration, immigrants, Greece, discourse analysis

Introduction

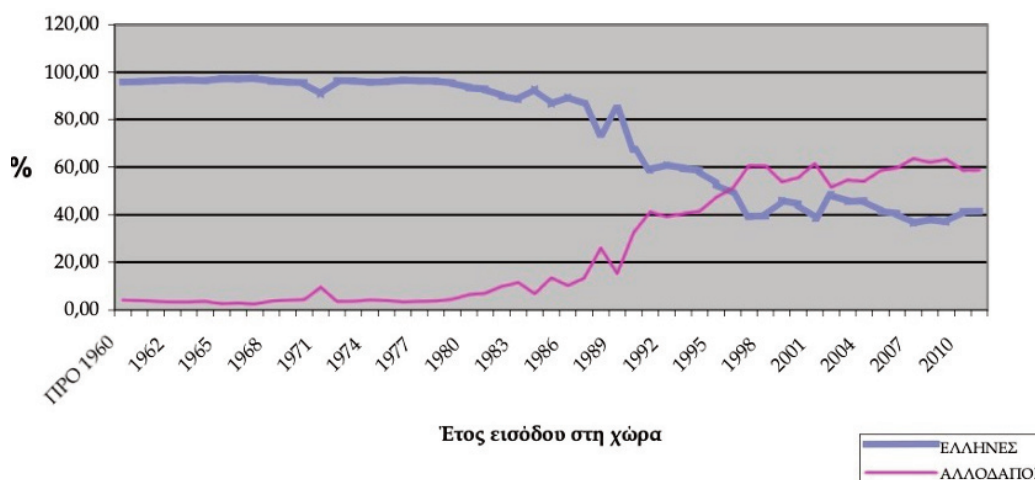
Over the past several decades, a broadening of the so-called security agenda has occurred due to shifting security landscapes and unprecedented challenges. One of the areas which now falls under the scope of international security is international migration. Historically, migrants¹ perceived conflicting loyalties and, more recently, the threat of international terrorism have placed migration at the top of countries' security agendas. Securitization theory, meaning the study of how an issue acquires existential threat status, is frequently applied to migration.

In keeping with this trend, this study sets out to map the elite discourses that have constructed migration as a threat in Greece over the past 30 years, as the country faced two distinct waves of incoming migration – in the 1990s and 2010s. The aim is to discover whether, and how, securitizing discourses evolved over time as the socioeconomic context shifted. The analysis follows a top-down approach, examining parliamentary debates from the period of interest. Simultaneously, public opinion and statistical data is considered to provide necessary context on the socioeconomic landscape, audience and facilitating conditions at each point in time. By considering the entire 30-year period, this work aims to study securitization as a dynamic process, allowing for a preliminary assessment of the influence of contextual factors.

Context

Discourse is historically and culturally situated, and, as such, one cannot study it in a vacuum. To understand the case of Greece, some background information is necessary. Greece was historically an emigration country. Greeks emigrated en masse around the world, but the country had little experience with incoming migration – with the exception of returning Greeks (παλινοστούντες). As shown in Figure 1, returning Greeks made up the majority of incoming migration for decades, a trend that would only be reversed in 1996.

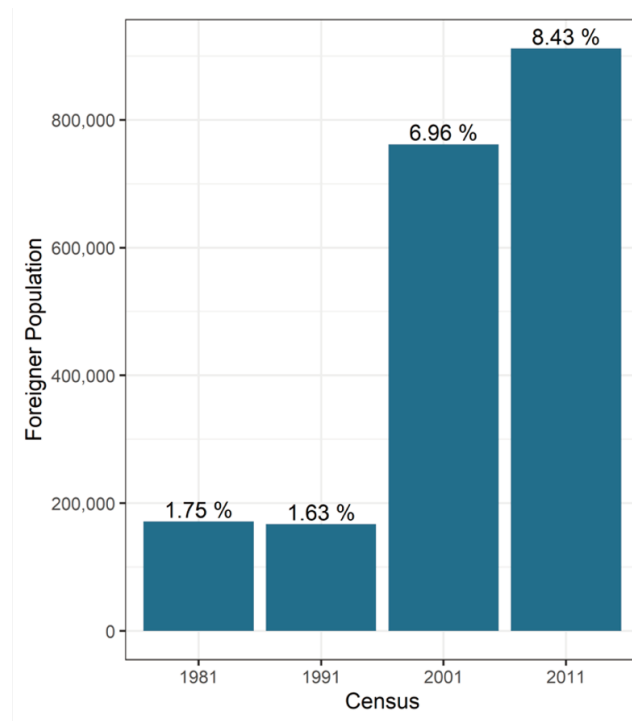
Figure 1. Returning Greeks (blue) and foreigners (pink) as a percentage of total incoming migration



Source: " πογραφή Πληθυσμού-Κατοικιών 2011: ΜΕΤΑΝΑΣΤΕΥΣΗ" (Census of Population-Homes 2011: MIGRATION) by the National Statistical Service of Greece, 2014 (<https://bit.ly/3BfJz8X>).

In the 1990s, the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Balkans gave rise to the first major wave of foreign migration to Greece (Karamanidou, 2016). As seen in Figure 2, the number of foreigners settling in the country increased through the 2000s. The second major wave occurred following the outbreak of the Syrian Civil War and the ensuing 'migrant crisis'. This is not represented in the chart, as the Greek census happens every ten years and the November 2021 census had not been completed at the time of writing.

Figure 2. Foreigner population in Greece in absolute numbers and percentages, by census year



Source: Author's compilation of census data from the Statistical Yearbook of Greece (1992-1993, 2002, 2021) by the National Statistical Service of Greece.

It is important to note that the modern Greek state was formed as an ethnically, culturally and religiously homogenous nation-state. The country's foundation involved population exchanges with Turkey² to ensure a homogenous state that would not be at risk of fragmentation due to minority ethnic or religious groups. This is relevant because societies built around such notions, once faced with sudden influxes of migrants could "find their national self-perceptions under threat" (Swarts & Karakatsanis, 2012, p. 33).

Methodology

Drawing from securitization theory as well as Brubaker and Skey's theories of nationalism and identity construction, the chosen method for this study is discourse analysis. To

² Under the Lausanne Convention of 1923 signed by Greece and Turkey in the aftermath of the Greco-Turkish War, an exchange of Greek Orthodox and Muslim populations took place.

determine the corpus of texts, upon deciding to focus on the elite level, a list of all Greek governments between 1991 and 2021 was compiled. Following this, transcripts of parliamentary discussions concerning migration were chosen, by searching select keywords on the Hellenic Parliament Transcript database. A minimum of one debate per parliamentary composition was chosen, with periods preceding major legislation naturally being more represented.

The analytical process went as follows. First, to uncover dominant and alternative representations of migrants (Neumann, 2008), all references to migration were isolated, and keywords associated with it were noted. Then, representations of migrants and migration were categorized into negative/securing and positive/desecuring. Points of continuity or deviation, and complementary or conflicting representations were also identified. In parallel with this, statistical data as well as opinion data from Eurobarometer surveys were consulted, to provide context on societal factors and public opinion.

Following the qualitative analysis, a quantitative analysis was carried out using the online tool Sketch Engine. The onset of the economic crisis (late 2000s) was chosen as a cut-off point, being a pivotal event that affected the socioeconomic context greatly and coinciding with the increase of migratory flows from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region following the onset of the Arab Spring. The resulting sub-corpora (pre-2010 and post-2010) were each run through Sketch Engine and produced graphs of collocations and word combinations, which are presented alongside the qualitative analysis.

Discourses of securitization

The overarching theme noted in the discourse is a duality, with migrants being seen as both a threat and victims of their situation. On the first front, four dominant representations of migrants as a threat have been identified, corresponding to four distinct referent objects – public order, the economy, territorial integrity, and ethnic and cultural homogeneity. On the second front, two main themes are detected. First, a distinction between economic migrants and refugees and, second, a contrast between incoming migrants and Greek émigrés.

The criminal migrant

Criminality is often rhetorically associated with migrants, creating the view that immigration is “synonymous with insecurity” (Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002, p. 25). Karamanidou (2016), Karyotis (2012), Kyriazi (2016) and Lazaridis & Skleparis (2015) have all found that to be true in the case of Greece. However, reliance on the criminal-migrant trope has not been steady. This study finds that the pervasiveness of this discourse has ebbed and flowed depending on the socioeconomic context.

During the first wave of migration from Eastern Europe, concerns over increased criminality dominated parliamentary discourse. Fears that the presence of migrants would give rise to insecurity were voiced consistently, particularly by MPs representing border districts or districts experiencing mass settlement.

“[...] in the countryside of the border prefectures there is no single farmhouse or hut that has not been broken into.”³

In a 1994 discussion of a proposed criminal justice bill, many MPs pointed to a spike in the prisoner population of Greece, and rhetorically linked this to the ‘influx’ of migrants. As such, they directly equated the presence of migrants with an increase in crime.

“[...] if in 1988 and 1990 there were 3,000 or 4,000 in prisons and now there are some 7,000 prisoners, that jump of 40% can be noted and the necessary conclusions can be drawn [...] This means there is a link with the explosion of the presence of migrants, specifically those who entered our country illegally and who have contributed dramatically to the increase of crime rates.”⁴

Interestingly, a distinction is made between Greek crime – seen as a fact of life – and immigrant crime, which is portrayed as a qualitatively and quantitatively different threat.

“We have our own ‘bad apples’ [...] but when migrants make up 10% of the population and 50% of prisoners, that means something.”⁵

Considering this discourse in parallel with incarceration data from the Ministry of Justice, a noteworthy observation arises. The ratio of foreigner (αλλοδαποί) to Greek convicts – around 50% foreigners, as highlighted by MPs throughout the 1990s and 2000s – remains relatively steady. In fact, when the criminal migrant discourse was at its peak in the early 2000s, foreigners made up 42-46% of the incarcerated population, while in 2012-2014 they accounted for 60-63%.⁶ Yet, in the early 2010s, immigrant crime was a markedly less prevalent securitizing discourse, as the focus had shifted onto economic concerns. This highlights the importance of contextual factors. The advent of a larger problem, in this case the economic crisis, moved securitizing actors to discourses more likely to resonate with the audience under the new circumstances.

Greece did experience a spike in crime, mainly against property, in the mid-1990s (Mitropoulos, 2001), but crime reverted to its 1990-1991 levels by the dawn of the century. Despite this, the association between migrants and increased insecurity carried on into the 2000s. This does appear in line with public opinion at the time – the 2000 Eurobarometer found that Greece was the only country in which more than 50% of people reported being afraid to walk outside after dark (European Commission, 2001). During this time, the focus of some (mainly right-wing) MPs continued to be on the qualitative difference between ‘Greek crime’ and ‘immigrant crime’.

³ Filippos Petsalnikos, PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement – since renamed KINAL), 15/10/1991, p. 61.

⁴ Grigoris Niotis, PASOK, 05/04/1994, p. 92.

⁵ Kyriakos Velopoulos, LAOS – People’s Orthodox Alarm until 2012, President of Greek Solution since 2016, 13/10/2008, p. 409.

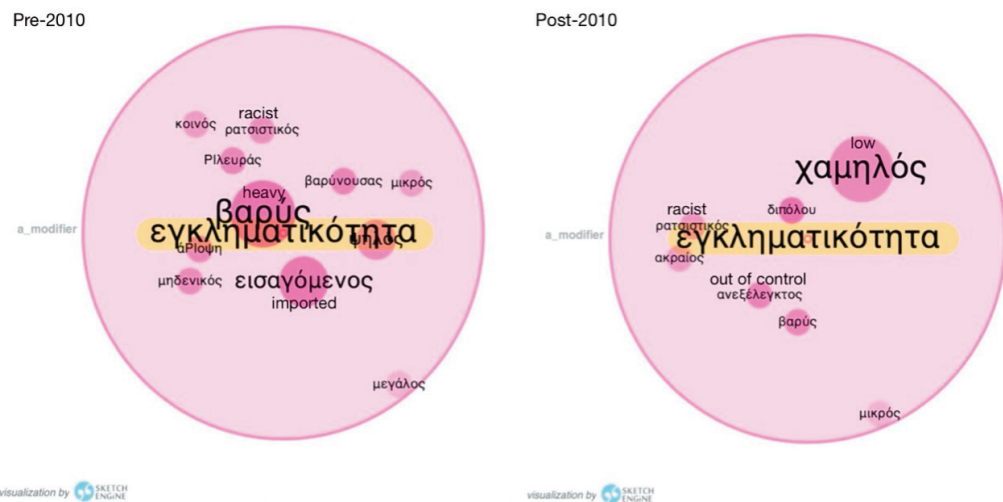
⁶ Author’s calculation of averages based on “General Statistical Table of Prisoners – Convictions on the 1st January of each year (2003-2019)”. Available from the Ministry of Justice at: <http://www.justice.gr/site/el/ΩΦΡΟΝΙΣΤΙΚΟΣΥΣΤΗΜΑ/Στατιστικάστοιχείακρατουμένων.aspx>

"This is not the sort of crime we are used to."⁷

"We have experienced organized crime [...] crimes with particular characteristics, which are unprecedented for Greek society."⁸

Figure 3. Modifiers most frequently associated with 'migrant'

Keyword: εγκληματικότητα (criminality)



Source: author's analysis of text sub-corpora in Sketch Engine.

Note: circle size denotes frequency, circle distance from the keyword denotes typicality.

This focus on 'imported' crime is illustrated by the above graph, which showcases modifiers used along with the word 'criminality'. While 'imported' (εισαγόμενος) is the second most frequently used word in the pre-2010 texts, it does not appear in the post-2010 top seven modifiers. In addition, though crimes against property spiked after the onset of the economic crisis,⁹ the most commonly used modifier post-2010 is 'low'. This, ostensibly, reflects a shift in both elite and public priorities towards the unfolding economic crisis.

From this analysis it follows that the criminal-migrant discourse waned in popularity following the onset of the economic crisis. The post-2010 discourse is dominated by concerns over the economy, unemployment and cultural homogeneity; crime is only discussed in the context of large migrant 'camps' causing localized spikes. Importantly, those spikes are seen as a direct result of squalid living conditions and not the nature of the migrants themselves. As such, the issue becomes the size of the influx and the country's (in)ability to deal with it, rather than migrants being inherently criminal elements.

⁷ Athanasios Plevris, LAOS until 2012, joined New Democracy in 2012, 13/10/2008, p. 19.

⁸ Ioannis Karakostas, DI.K.KI – Democratic Social Movement, 04/06/1998, p. 40.

⁹ During the mid-90s spike, annual burglaries reached 60-67,000 before dropping down to 40-45,000 in the early 2000s. Since 2008, they number over 65,000 annually – reaching 81,000 in the year 2019. Annual statistical data by the Hellenic Police, available from: http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=&perform=view&id=93707Itemid=2425&lang=

The economy and social services

Kalogeraki (2013) finds that, in times of economic hardship, threat perceptions tend to be based on economic considerations, whereas in times of prosperity, on sociocultural concerns. The present analysis finds that while economic concerns are present throughout the decades studied, their relative 'popularity' and specifics depend on the economic context at each point in time.

The 1990s and early-mid 2000s were a particularly prosperous time for Greece. The 'Greek economic miracle' was a major driving force for migration to Greece (Karyotis, 2012, p. 394). As such, in the early 1990s the primary economic concern was the impact on the job market and social services. Migrants, who worked mainly in seasonal agriculture jobs (Triandafyllidou & Gemi, 2015), were seen as "disturbing the job market and social structures."¹⁰

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, however, there was a brief but pronounced shift in the discourse towards desecuritization – particularly from center-left and left-wing MPs. Migrants came to be seen as a "needed albeit temporary and dispensable workforce" (Triandafyllidou, 2009, p. 166).

"We can no longer consider second-class citizens those who raise our kids [...] build our homes [...] serve our tourism. Those people are now a big part of Greek productivity."¹¹

Migration was even seen as a solution to demographic problems emerging from internal migration. With Greeks moving to urban centers, many villages and small towns shrank.

"In those villages [that welcomed migrants] there is economic development [...] schools are full of kids again, houses are being built, squares and roads are full of life and jobs give rise to more jobs."¹²

Even those in right-wing spaces recognized the potential for migrants to respond to existing job demand, albeit under strict guidelines.

"There need to be provisions to attract those specialties we need for the development of our country."¹³

Nevertheless, these notable desecuritization attempts did not last. By the late 2000s, Greece was descending into a deep economic recession which, expectedly, brought issues of unemployment and public spending to the top of the agenda. In the spring 2011 Eurobarometer, 99% of Greeks characterized the economic situation as bad – compared to

¹⁰ Theodoros Pangalos, PASOK, 15/10/1991, p. 55.

¹¹ Georgios Papandreou, PASOK (President), 02/08/2005, p. 662.

¹² Panagiotis Sgouridis, PASOK until joining Independent Greeks in 2014, 02/08/2005, p. 658.

¹³ Eugenios Chaitidis, New Democracy, 02/08/2005, p. 661.

an EU-wide 68%. The economic situation and unemployment ranked first (64%) and second (53%) as the most crucial issues facing the country. This study finds that, unsurprisingly, concerns over the 'cost' of migration promptly regained their spot as a primary securitizing discourse.

The majority of post-2010 discourse linking migration to the dire economic situation focuses either on the literal 'cost' of migration, in terms of public spending and social services provided, or the perceived negative impact on the job market.

"An extra 500 million is spent by the bankrupt Greek state for the free healthcare [of migrants] in public hospitals [...] 250,000 citizens of Albania, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the like pocket unemployment benefits."¹⁴

Migrants and the welfare services provided to them are routinely contrasted with those available to struggling Greeks – particularly by (far) right-wing MPs. In the context of a crumbling social welfare system, migrants are constructed as an additional burden, undeserving of services that are insufficient and lacking even for 'our own', more deserving, population.

"We house them [...] dress them, feed them – [...] in contrast to what is happening with simple Greek citizens who face enormous problems [guaranteeing] food, healthcare, education for their children."¹⁵

A comparable us-versus-them mentality is applied to issues of unemployment, where 'deserving' unemployed Greeks are contrasted to 'undeserving' immigrants who 'steal' jobs.

"Illegal invaders are provided with jobs [...] Greeks face unemployment of over 20%. Illegal invaders have tax immunity. Greeks pay up."¹⁶

As was hypothesized, the dramatic economic downturn of the 2010s resulted in migration being increasingly framed as a genuine, tangible threat to the struggling economy. While some economic concerns existed in the 1990s, with the onset of the crisis discourses framed around the economy became central to the securitization of migration. This is, presumably, due to the assumption that such discourses were more likely to resonate with struggling Greeks, while simultaneously redirecting public outrage towards the migrant 'other'.

Border security and territorial integrity

Perhaps the most obvious way to elevate an issue into the realm of international security is by rhetorically linking it to a country's territorial integrity. This is exceptionally easy in the case of migration, as it is inextricably tied to border security. This study finds that national sovereignty and territorial integrity has been a consistent referent object presented as being under threat by the 'violation' of Greek borders. This holds true for the entire time period

¹⁴ Konstantinos Aivaliotis, LAOS, 10/10/2011, p. 182.

¹⁵ Ioannis Lagos, Golden Dawn, 01/04/2016, p. 7510.

¹⁶ Kyriakos Velopoulos, Greek Solution (President), 31/10/2019, p. 4032.

examined, though the differences in context – namely, the countries of origin and scale of flows – account for differences in the specifics of the discourse (for example, whether the focus is on the land or sea border).

Especially telling of Greece's inexperience with incoming migration, at the start of the first wave in the 1990s, the country's migration laws dated back to 1929 (Karyotis, 2012, p.395). When the "Law of Aliens" of 1991 (Law 1975/1991) came to the parliament floor, the government sponsor speaking in favor of the bill used the word 'problem' 28 times (Ibid., Karyotis & Patrikios 2010 p. 46). During those first years, many MPs argued that Greece faced an even bigger challenge compared to other European Community members, due to the nature of its borders and geographical location.

"We have very lengthy sea borders and 1,300 miles of land border. [...] guarding those borders is tremendously difficult."¹⁷

"We are the only country in the Community, in the Western political order that is facing an immediate, acute threat to national security."¹⁸

Through the years, different solutions were offered for the perceived lack of border security. Perhaps, the most blatantly securitizing rhetoric was the suggestion that border crossings ought to be managed by the Armed Forces. Often paired with vocabulary that invokes wartime connotations ('invasion', 'invaders'), this discourse aimed to elevate migratory flows into a matter of national security – necessitating an urgent response outside the scope of 'normal' politics.

"[...] border protection must be incorporated into [the duties of] the Armed Forces."¹⁹

The rhetorical linkage between migration and national security intensified post-2010, once the majority of migration began to flow through Turkey. While some voiced concerns over an Albanian minority in the 1990s, this sort of rhetoric became significantly more prominent in the post-2010 landscape. Due to the volatile nature of Greco-Turkish relations, many feared a 'weaponization' of migrants; specifically, that flows may be used to apply pressure to Greece or the EU,²⁰ and that the presence of large Muslim minorities could invite claims from the Turkish side.

"Turkey uses the issue [migrant crisis] as a bargaining chip, increasing and decreasing the rate and volume of migrant and refugee flows arriving at our shores at will."²¹

¹⁷ Dimitrios Stamatis, *New Democracy*, 10/10/1991 p. 0035.

¹⁸ Stylianos-Aggelos Papathemelis, *PASOK* (Minister of Public Order in 1994-1995) 13/07/1993, p. 0695.

¹⁹ Ioannis Varvitsiotis, *New Democracy* (Minister of National Defense 1989 and 1990-1993, Minister of Justice 1992), 04/06/1998, p. 151.

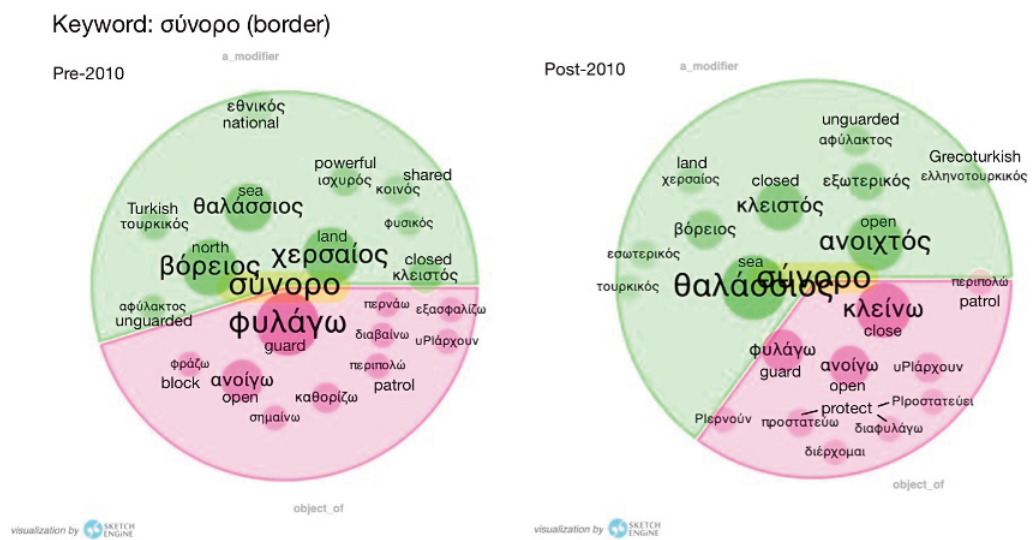
²⁰ Instances of this have already occurred as a means to pressure the EU: <https://apnews.com/article/greece-europe-ap-top-news-turkey-riots-7c923595928d964439588264393757c0>; <https://thehill.com/opinion/international/486291-turkey-weaponizes-refugees-against-europe>; <https://www.ekathimerini.com/opinion/251025/turkey-s-track-record-of-weaponising-refugees/>

²¹ Georgios Kaminis, *PASOK* (Mayor of Athens 2010-2019), 31/10/2019, p. 4008.

Border protection is inherently a national security issue, naturally lending itself to warlike metaphors of invasion. Framing migration as a border security issue is the most straightforward way to elevate the matter to 'existential threat' status. As such, it is hardly surprising that this discourse has been consistently prevalent in parliamentary discussions of migration. An MP arguing the inherent difficulties in safeguarding Greek borders would fit into any migration-related discussion over the past 30 years, making this discourse the most consistent and continuous – if with minor fluctuations in intensity, depending on the intensity of migratory flows.

The following graph illustrates the level of continuity in this discourse is which depicts the words most frequently associated with the word 'border'. Verbs like 'guard', 'protect', 'close', and 'patrol' are the most frequently used both pre- and post-2010. It is worth noting that the frequency of 'open' (both as a verb and an adjective) is attributed to opposition MPs accusing the government of having weak border policies.

Figure 4. Verbs and modifiers commonly associated with 'border'



Source: author's analysis of text sub-corpora on Sketch Engine.

Ethnic and cultural homogeneity

Greece was a fairly homogenous country prior to large-scale migration – both in terms of ethnicity and religion. A mixture of “glorification of ideas traceable back to antiquity” (Tsoukalas, 1999, p.10), Christian Orthodox customs and the struggle for freedom form the foundation of Greek national identity. Greeks also outpace other nations in viewing their culture as inimitable and superior; in 2018 Pew found that 89% of Greeks considered their culture superior (Pew Research Center, 2018). It follows, then, that the ‘dilution’ of Greek culture by ‘others’ would be negatively perceived – making for a promising referent object.

A 2005 study of the 2003 Eurobarometer and European Social Survey data found that Greeks were the most resistant to multiculturalism and diversity (European Monitoring Center

on Racism and Xenophobia, 2005, p. 29 and 35). This research finds that the securitizing discourses employed tend to reflect such an aversion to diversity. Specifically, that throughout the period examined, differences in culture (real or perceived) are highlighted to showcase that migration poses a twofold threat. First, that the demographic makeup of the country would be irreversibly altered, which gives rise to concerns over 'replacement'. This rhetoric aims to frame migration as an existential threat to the very survival of the Greek state and people.

"[...] there are more Albanians than locals."²²

"[...] an army of invaders, a siege [...] that seeks to alter the demography of Greece."²³

"[...] thousands of people are being pushed by our neighbor [Turkey] [...] arrive on our islands, which are sensitive and environmentally, demographically, socially, ethnically vulnerable."²⁴

To ensure homogeneity, some went as far as suggesting a tier system prioritizing Christian Orthodox migrants, followed by other Christian denominations, and finally – if spots remained – “the rest”.²⁵

The second perceived threat is that Greek Culture will be ‘diluted’ by foreign elements inherently irreconcilable with it. Importantly, this appears much more pronounced in the post-2010 discourse. The reason for this can be traced to the ethnic and religious characteristics of incoming migrants in each period. While Eastern Europeans are looked down upon as economically inferior (Karamanidou, 2016, p. 3), Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian migrants are seen as espousing values incompatible with Greek (and Western) culture. This notable difference could be attributed to increased visibility – as Skey (2011, p. 30) notes, visible minorities are more likely to be seen as problematic – or due to deeply-rooted orientalist biases.

"Many migrants arriving today come from cultures that have showcased their difficulty integrating."²⁶

Interestingly, Albanian migrants – once vilified – come to be used as an example of a minority that successfully integrated, contrasted to the post-2010 migrants.

"Various peoples have settled into our country, many of which from Albania. Why [did they have no issues integrating]? Because they have no issues with our way of life [...] our culture, our values, our laws."²⁷

²² Evangelos Staikos, PASOK, 04/06/1998, p. 138.

²³ Ilias Polatidis, LAOS, 13/10/2008, p. 41.

²⁴ Michail Chrysochoidis, Minister of Public Order (2019-2021), New Democracy (previously in PASOK 1989-2019), 31/10/2019, p. 4029

²⁵ Spyridon-Adonis Georgiadis, LAOS until joining New Democracy in 2012 (former Minister of Health (2013-2014) and current Minister of Development and Investments), 31/10/2011, p. 1071.

²⁶ Manousos-Konstantinos Voloudakis, New Democracy, 31/10/2019, p. 3087.

²⁷ Ioannis-Michail Loverdos, New Democracy, 31/10/2019, p. 4081.

In constructing post-2010 migration as a threat, many MPs resort to highlighting migrants' Muslim identity as incompatible with Greek Orthodox values. This type of categorization and 'they are not like us' rhetoric serves to create a boundary between those who belong and "embody the desired values and traits of the idealized nation" (Skey, 2011, p. 46) and those who do not.

"Greece is a country of Christian tradition and liberal democracy [...] not a country for fans of Islamic law."²⁸

"We cannot be mixed together with burqas [...] those who marry two or three wives [...] this [immigration] law is a crime against the nation."²⁹

Finally, in the post-2010 landscape, Muslim migrants are rhetorically associated with terrorism in an effort to frame migration as an acute threat.³⁰ This discourse is hardly unprecedented in the post-9/11 stage, and IS or IS-inspired attacks in Europe only served to strengthen perceptions of Islam as linked to violence. Knowing this is a referent object likely to resonate with the public, MPs recalled terrorist attacks in Europe to argue that Muslim migrants pose an immediate danger. This linkage instantly elevates the 'migrant question' into one of national security.

"The problem is violence, terrorism coming from Islamists [...] we saw in France and Belgium not too long ago."³¹

"You will have filled Greece with all these people, not even knowing who they are. They may be terrorists [...]"³²

Based on the above, it appears that the relative centrality of discourses framed around societal security and homogeneity is highly dependent on the context. The scale and source of migration flows plays a determining role in the 'popularity' of cultural-threat discourses. This is, arguably, due to the expected resonance of such frames – given that only 31% of Greeks say they would accept Muslims into their family, and 76% identify religion as a key component of national identity (Pew Research Center, 2018). Thus, it is unsurprising that an ethnic/religious identity-based discourse would prevail in the post-Syria era. From this, one can conclude that the source of migratory flows and the ethnic and religious identity of migrants can play a crucial role in shaping securitizing discourses.

Migrant identity construction

In the texts analyzed, migrant identity construction is characterized by a duality. The prevalent theme is a need to distinguish those migrants who are 'worthy' of help, and those who are not, through countless debates about semantics and legal definitions of 'migrant' and 'refugee'. Qualifiers are also added to the word 'migrant'; some, like 'illegal', evoke negative feelings and predispositions, while others, like 'economic', carry some sympathetic connotations.

²⁸ Konstantinos Bogdanos, New Democracy, 31/10/2019, p. 4077.

²⁹ Kyriakos Velopoulos, Greek Solution (President), 31/10/2019, p. 4032.

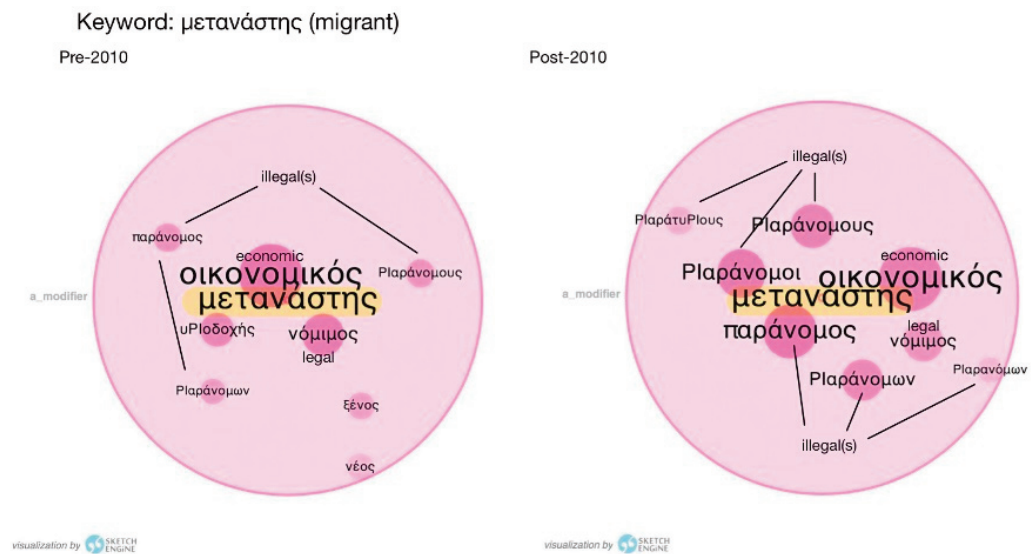
³⁰ This is not analyzed under the criminal migrant trope because this rhetorical association is deemed a product of or pandering to Orientalist biases, and as such relevant to culture/ethnicity discourses.

³¹ Ioannis Lagos, Golden Dawn, 01/04/2016, p. 7510.

³² Kyriakos Velopoulos, Greek Solution (President), 31/10/2019, p. 4033.

People fleeing war or prosecution are awarded the most sympathy, while for those seeking a better economic future, sympathy is largely dependent on the economic context. In times of prosperity, namely the early 2000s, economic migrants are awarded significantly more sympathy than during the economic crisis. In the post-2010 discourse, variations of 'illegal' figure very prominently due to the perception that masses of economic migrants were taking advantage of the Syrian refugee crisis. Thus, debates over who is a 'real' refugee were exceedingly common.

Figure 5. Modifiers most frequently associated with 'migrant'



Source: author's analysis of text sub-corpora on Sketch Engine.

Note: different variations of the word 'illegal' appear individually due to Greek language complexities.

Another noteworthy recurring feature of migrant identity construction is the tendency to contrast incoming migrants with Greek émigrés. While the latter are viewed as model minorities, incoming migrants are presented as destabilizing and unwilling to integrate. The messaging is simple; Greeks would be empathetic, if only these migrants acted like the Greeks did in their shoes. This creates a further us-versus-them dichotomy, in which the modern Greek émigré is qualitatively different to the threatening out-group. This rhetoric is seemingly used to justify why representatives of a country that 'exported' immigrants en masse are not awarding the same sympathy to people similarly seeking a better life.

Conclusions

This work set out to map the discourses that securitized migration in Greece between 1991 and 2021, to determine if, how and to what degree evolving circumstances led to changes in the chosen discourse. To do this, a longitudinal study of parliamentary discourse was carried out in parallel with an examination of contextual factors, through public and opinion data.

A few conclusions can be drawn from this study. Indeed, migration has been securitized rather consistently – with a brief window of attempted desecuritization in the early 2000s.

Significant continuity is noted in some of the discourses employed. Specifically, migration is consistently articulated as a threat to the territorial integrity and border security of the country. The dual construct of migrants as both victims and problematic also holds true throughout the 30-year period. Other discourses – namely, the criminal-migrant – are present throughout, though with significant fluctuations in prevalence.

Most interesting is the case of discourses built around the economy and cultural homogeneity as the referent object under threat. As hypothesized, the dramatic economic downturn of the late 2000s was followed by a recalibration of the discourse on migration towards economy-based arguments. Similarly, the unprecedented scale of the post-Syria wave was followed by a marked increase in ‘culture war’ frames. From this, two valuable conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, changing socioeconomic circumstances can – and do – lead to changes in securitizing discourses. Secondly, Wæver’s (1993) argument that competing, mutually exclusive identities are seen as particularly threatening to societal security appears true for the Greek case. This means that the origin and ethnic or religious identity of migrants can be a key factor in determining the rhetoric used to securitize the issue.

It is crucial to acknowledge some of the shortcomings of this analysis. While opinion data was used to determine whether a discourse was in alignment with public opinion, this poses an inherent chicken-or-egg dilemma. A discursive construction could be based on estimations of public opinion, or it could be guiding that opinion. Additionally, a parallel study of other sources of discourse, namely the media, could provide insight into the role of facilitating actors. Lastly, a simultaneous study of institutionalized discourse (laws) and practice would further complete the picture.

To conclude, this research highlighted the importance of studying securitization as a long-term process and adds to a growing literature of longitudinal studies of securitization. It addressed a notable gap in the literature concerning Greece, by considering the entire 30-year period. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, it showed that the discourse employed to (de)securitize migration is largely context-dependent, and evolving circumstances can and do lead to marked variations in the chosen language and relative popularity of different frames.

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