

SECURITIZATION OF AFRICAN MIGRATION TO EUROPE: IMPACT ON XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

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Abstract: In recent decades, majority of governments in Europe, especially those in European union have framed migration from Africa to Europe as a critical security matter. This study aims to analyze how securitization of migration affects the lived experiences of African migrants in Europe using evidence from media. Specifically, the study will examine the Impact of Securitization on Xenophobia and Discrimination by examining how securitization policies have affected the general outlook of host communities towards African migrants which in turn fans xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes. This study employed a qualitative research design using secondary data from both mainstream media and social media. The securitization of migration has significantly bolstered xenophobic sentiments toward African migrants in Europe. Portraying African migrants in media narratives as threats to security and using criminal laws to manage and control them results to locals taking to social media with negative stereotypes leading to hostility. As a result, migrants are now subject to higher degrees of prejudice and exclusion. The study recommends that, European governments working closely with NGOs such as UNHCR should consider launching campaigns to counter common beliefs about African migrants such as migrants being excessively dependent on welfare systems and taking their jobs. Awareness campaigns that have data evidence to clarify these false claims and demonstrate the positive implications of migrants should be done consistently.

Keywords: Securitization, Migration, Africans, Xenophobia, Discrimination.

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I. Background

Migration openly exists in the modern European Union. Approximately 37 million individuals born outside of the EU currently reside within its boundaries. One of the key features of Europe in the twenty-first century is the rise in the immigrant population, which now makes up around 7% of the overall population (Ozerim, 2014).

Following the 1973 oil and economic crises, European nations that had previously promoted migration to meet development requirements between 1950 and 1970 have begun to impose restrictions on migration. These days, practically every EU policy pertaining to migration can be shown to have a security viewpoint.

In recent decades, majority of governments in Europe, especially those in European union have framed migration from Africa to Europe as a critical security matter. Instead of looking at the migration issue as a developmental or humanitarian challenge, they have picked the angle of securitizing it. This attitude has transformed migration into a matter of national and regional security. The subject of migration has become a process being

driven by multiple players such as the politicians, the media, security officials as well as other state agencies (Bigo & Didier 2002, Huysmans, & Jef 2000, Crawley, Heaven & Skleparis, Dimitris 2018).

To begin with, Trends and analysis of migration to Europe by European Commission (2020), and African Union & IOM in 2019 indicate that, most Africans who migrate to Europe do it in a regular way. At the end of 2019, 8,467,874 Africans were in the EU with a valid residence permit (e.g., long-term stay, family, work, or education visa). By contrast, just 202,620 Africans were discovered to be in the country unlawfully (European Commission, 2020, Idemudia, & Boehnke, 2020, Tverdostup (2021). According to the IOM 2017 Data Brief, normal migration from Africa to Europe has significantly outpaced irregular arrivals and has stayed relatively constant in recent years. Less than 50,000 African migrants attempted to cross to Italy in 2019 (AUC & IOM), despite a sharp decline in irregular migratory flows since mid-2017, and after a rise in 2015. It is also good to note that, studies show, the majority of African migrants, travel to neighboring African nations rather than to Europe. While just 27% of all African emigrants

were in Europe in 2020. Nearly 21 million Africans were living in other African countries in 2019 (UN DESA 2019).

According to Bauman (1998), most undocumented migrants form a good reason behind the securitization of migration which dominate asylum and migration policies of most governments in the developed world, creating a 'hierarchy of mobility'. Özerim, G (2014) denotes that, the emergence of international migration as a national security problem for Europe mostly coincides with the post-Cold War period, as well as the events such as the 9/11 attacks and the explosions in the leading cities in Europe (Madrid on March 11, 2004, and in London on July 7, 2005), which pushed various governments in the developed world to see migration as the focus of security measures. The events put pressure on security departments of governments which brought about the so called "global war on terror". Nevertheless, several other events such as the "refugee crisis of 2015", and covid-19 pandemic have intensified the pressure (Planas Gifra, L. (2024). In the midst of all these, governments have a duty to ensure that migrants are safeguarded from xenophobic violence, racist treatments as well as forced return (Carrera, S. and M. Merlino (2009)

This study aims to analyze how securitization of migration affects the lived experiences of African migrants in Europe using evidence from media. Specifically, the study will examine the Impact of Securitization on Xenophobia and Discrimination by examining how securitization policies have affected the general outlook of host communities towards African migrants which in turn fans xenophobic and discriminatory attitudes.

II. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design using secondary data from both mainstream media and social media. Mainstream media such as the Aljazeera, Voanews, Lighthouse, and the conversation news were used to provide data. Social media content analyzed was majorly from X (former twitter). Data collected included information from news articles, editorials, individual posts and organization posts from reputable X accounts such as @MigrantVoices Campaign: various threads under this hashtag feature personal stories and insights from African migrants, and @Refugees and @IOM_news that frequently share updates and personal narratives related to migration issues. The data focused on; The Impact of Securitization on Xenophobia and Discrimination, policies that affect African migrants in Europe or those enroute to this continent. Content analysis was conducted to identify patterns. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the intersection between securitization, media portrayals, and the everyday challenges faced by African migrants in Europe.

III. Literature review and Theory

This study was guided by the securitization theory. Ole Weaver and Barry Buzan developed the securitization theory, which examines how problems evolve from common political or social concerns into alleged security risks. This change is the result of powerful people framing the problem as an existential danger rather than a feature of the problem itself. Successful securitization of a problem might serve as justification for extraordinary actions, possibly eschewing normal democratic procedures in favor of immediate action (Buzan, Wæver, & de Wilde, 1998). At the core of securitization theory is the speech act theory. Which asserts that language is an action that has the power to change realities and

perceptions (Austin, 1962). When a strong actor declares a problem to be a security concern, Weaver contends that this speech act reinterprets the problem's nature and increases its significance and immediacy. When stated by a reliable or authoritative source, the pronouncement itself has the capacity to change public perception and policy reactions. According to this theoretical paradigm, securitization does not rely solely on factual statements; rather, it employs a narrative construction that presents the problem to the public as a threat that calls for extraordinary measures. This is particularly true in media discourses where, media outlets frequently use language that implies a crisis, threat, or urgency, they are successfully engaging in a speech act. The media can increase public support for securitizing policies by, for instance, portraying migration as a "crisis" or "invasion," which heightens perceptions of threat.

Securitization on Xenophobia and Discrimination

The process of securitization of migration involves framing of migration as a security threat which leads to restrictive measures and perceptions from the society that affects migrants in various ways. This in turn has profound implications for migrant's both documented and undocumented shaping their lived experiences in the host country. Implementing stringent border controls to combat terrorism, along with those to stop illegal migration and police minorities, are common features of securitization policies. Further analysis denotes that, a variety of actors, discourses, policies, and practices enmeshed in a biased narrative of migration are involved in the spiraling trajectory of the securitization of migration (Bello, V. (2020).

The security lens with which migrants are viewed causes them to be portrayed as criminals which results to punitive measures. According to Bigo, 2004 and Melossi, 2003, this manner of criminalizing migrants has been intensified during the past two decades across the European Union. This comes in the form of increasing intersections between criminal law and migration management, as well as detaining large scale migrants using it as an instrument for controlling movements in and out of Europe (Chacon, J. 2012 & 2009)

Scholars agree that, similar to the US, the criminalization of migration has risen throughout Western Europe over the last 30 years, despite governments' long-standing preoccupation with preventing, controlling, and imprisoning the mobile (Vollmer, 2011; De Giorgio, 2010; Huysmans, 2006).

The criminalization of migration under EU law and policy has been a result of the transfer of Justice and Home Affairs authorities to the European Union during the past 20 years, which has replicated and institutionalized national approaches. This changing dynamic involves a number of actors, such as security and press officials, and calls for more investigation to determine the mechanisms underlying the criminalization of migration in Europe. The criminalization of migration under EU law and policy has been a result of the transfer of Justice and Home Affairs authorities to the European Union during the past 20 years, which has replicated and institutionalized national approaches. This changing dynamic involves a number of actors, such as security and press officials, and calls for more investigation to determine the mechanisms underlying the criminalization of migration in Europe (Bigo, D. (2002).

According to De Giorgi (2010), public discourses have become powerful catalysts for the consolidation of a punitive governance

of migrations revolving around a process of 'categorical criminalization' of immigrants, he further states that, there are concrete examples of how political and media discourse led to policies that punished and policed irregular migrants. Tsoumada (2005) examines the situations in Greece and Italy and reveals that certain rhetorical categories, increasingly articulated by politicians, officials, and the media, frame migrants as a social threat. Vollmer (2011) discovered that the danger dimension in immigration discourses varies in degree and type throughout the European Union. For example, in Austria, public discussions on irregular immigration have been more on the impact on resources and welfare than in France, where there has been a strong emphasis on crime and security. However, he discovered that all European discourses in northern, southern, and central European nations include a discursive aspect of threat and its impact on policymaking. Similarly, a study conducted by the EU "Support and Opposition to Migration" in seven European countries (Austria, Belgium, the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, and Switzerland) revealed that the most common theme in the discourse of journalists and politicians when discussing immigration was "security and crime" (Berkhout, 2012). By highlighting the hazardous aspects and employing the emergency frame, television and print media make news items more marketable. Other institutional actors are keen to take advantage of a symbolic threat and to validate, support, and direct that threat towards specific targets as the media raises the alarm. The outcome is a pattern of news coverage that frequently results in increased police activity, the enactment of administrative decrees, and the adoption of specific legislation. These cycles of attention center on crime reports involving foreigners and swiftly take on the traits of a moral panic (Maneri, 2011).

Undocumented or illegal immigrants are a convenient target for the police, the mass media, and politicians to achieve various objectives: the police can reach arrest targets, the press can boost revenue by appealing to public anxieties, and politicians may readily get support from the public by adopting a tough position on immigration. Particularly in European nations with more liberal media, this convergence of interests in criminalizing immigration produces a "complex systemic machine," where immigrants are depicted as social risks to propel policies and narratives that marginalize them (Berkhout, 2012). In order to obtain authority, influence, and more funding, security professionals such as those from the police, customs, and intelligence services have a stake in portraying some social issues as security risks. This is made possible by sophisticated monitoring technologies. This securitization of migration characterizes migrants as "new threats," a story that is given credence by the purported authority and skill of the security agencies that are pushing it (Balzacq, 2010 & Stumpf, 2007).

Schengen was founded on the common belief that opening internal borders would result in more crime and more mobile criminal organized groups. This belief has been used to support the expansion of various compensatory security measures and international collaboration in border enforcement and policing. Organizations such as Frontex who act as knowledge frontiers in terms of migration related risks are busy coming up with risks such as human smuggling, human trafficking and terrorism hence border security and irregular migrations have been termed as "urgent challenges. In EU, criminal law has been used to punish immigration related offences, currently cross comparative analysis

lacks but the use of criminal law provisions in immigration enforcement in Europe is available. They are categorized into two: First, 'crimes' that only foreigners can commit, and second, 'crimes' that are committed by those assisting irregular migrants (Balzacq, 2014). According to research on the fundamental rights of irregular migrants in irregular situations funded by the EU fundamental rights agency, anyone who crosses borders illegally is seen to have committed a crime in 17 states of the EU, which carries penalties such as detention or fining. In the Netherlands, someone who is frequently arrested for illegal immigration or any other offense will be labeled an undesirable alien and face up to six months in jail (FRA, 2011). The second category of criminal penalties are directed towards those charged for assisting irregular migrants. Criminal sanctions are aimed at either people or organizations that help irregular migrants. These fines include those for hiring undocumented workers, transporting undocumented migrants, and delivering humanitarian aid; a practice known as "humanitarian smuggling (Huysman, 2006). Even though there are obvious distinctions between human trafficking and facilitating immigration violations, the maximum sentences for both crimes have grown dramatically in nations like the UK (Bockel, 2020). A good example is the Dutch and EU laws that penalize people and organizations that assist irregular migrants, thereby enlisting members of the public and private sectors, including employers and landlords, into enforcement roles (FRA, 2011; Facilitation Directive 2002/90/EC; Employers Sanctions Directive 2009/52/EC). Criminal laws in EU member states are also influenced by EU regulations to prevent alleged abuses related to migration. For example, Belgium penalizes "marriages of convenience" after the EU's Family Reunification Directive (Foblets & Vanheule, 2006).

According to the Book of solidarity (providing assistance to undocumented migrants,) direct police enforcement tactics (such as police operations targeting undocumented migrants outside of hospitals and schools) and reporting requirements placed on service providers served as obstacles to migrants' access to fundamental social rights including housing, healthcare, and education. Consequently, irregular migrants heavily depend on social networks (migrant communities, social and political activists, NGOs, church groups, etc.) to get fundamental social rights (PICUM, 2021). Mucchielli and Nevanen's (2011) investigation on the penal treatment of foreigners in France offers a specific illustration of this procedure. The authors discovered that pressure on French police to show better performance caused them to concentrate on crimes with "higher yields" in terms of arrests. Criminalizing immigration weakens the concepts of accountability and fair warning because people frequently don't have enough notice of the law's requirements, which makes it more difficult for them to behave legally. Furthermore, immigration offenses do not match the culpability criteria typically associated with criminal misbehavior because they are frequently perceived as "victimless" and do not involve direct harm (Zedner, 2013; Aliverti, 2012). The combination of these violations calls into question the validity of criminalizing immigration offenses since they do not adhere to the core tenets of criminalization, casting doubt on their status as actual crimes (Zedner, 2013)

IV. Findings

Based on media analysis of various organizations' digital news and Twitter accounts, this section presents findings about how

migration securitization has impacted the daily realities of African migrants in Europe.

The securitization of migration has significantly bolstered xenophobic sentiments toward African migrants in Europe. This extreme irrational anxiety among the population is clearly visible from the media narratives and X accounts of numerous groups. As a result, migrants are now subject to higher degrees of prejudice and exclusion.

Findings from the X account of Info migrants, an account labeled as # infomigrants which describes itself as “@InfoMigrants, InfoMigrants offers verified news and information about asylum and migration to Europe. Available in English, Arabic, French, Dari, Pashto and Bengali, clearly reveals the hostility, discrimination, and social exclusion of individuals perceived as “foreign” or “different,” especially those coming from Africa.

Some of the information found on the X account are as follows;

@ Infomigrants, April 6th 2021

Hundreds of migrants trying to flee Libya by sea are intercepted by the Libyan coast guard each week. What happens to these people – numbering in the thousands – once they are returned to Libya? What happens to migrants intercepted at sea by the Libyan coast guard?

@InfoMigrants

Jun 22, 2023

A homeless migrant from Ghana who arrived in Italy after surviving a journey across the Mediterranean Sea over ten years ago has been beaten to death. Townspeople mourned the beloved local man's death.

@InfoMigrants

Jun 20, 2022

Thousands of migrants, refugees and their allies took to the streets in Naples, Italy, on Saturday and Friday ahead of #WorldRefugeeDay. They were protesting against discrimination and labor exploitation, and for a swift issuing of stay permits to asylum seekers.

@InfoMigrants

Jul 27, 2023

These migrants are stuck at the Tunisian-Libyan border. They were forced into the border region by Tunisian forces, and Libyan border guards reportedly won't let them cross. Now, they are living in a makeshift camp in Ras Ajdir next to the barbed-wire border fence.

@InfoMigrants

Nov 8, 2022

Protesters in Catania port hold up a banner "Stop the Attack on Refugees", calling for the release of migrants blocked on the rescue ship Geo Barents on Monday. At the weekend Italian authorities allowed 357 people to disembark while refusing entry to 215 others.

The experiences of migrants who were trapped at the Tunisian-Libyan border or intercepted by the Libyan coast guard show how xenophobic sentiments fuel an antagonistic atmosphere. These

border encounters frequently lead to forced returns, detention, or living in cruel conditions rather than providing protection, which reflects a larger institutional and regional unwillingness to assist or integrate migrants. A long-term immigrant's tragic death in Italy serves as a reminder of the deadly effects of bigotry. Even though he was a well-known and respected member of his community, he was eventually the target of violence, indicating that xenophobic emotions and underlying prejudices can endure even in seemingly accepting places. Protests in Naples, Italy, highlight the difficulties faced by migrants, such as discrimination and labor exploitation in day-to-day living. The necessity for changes to legislative protections and integration channels, such the expeditious issuing of stay permits, is highlighted by this mobilization of migrants and allies, which demonstrates opposition to xenophobic laws and attitudes. Securitized approaches that criminalize and demean migrants are reflected in situations such as that in Catania, where migrants are prevented from disembarking rescue ships. By depicting immigrants as a possible threat rather than as people in need of protection, this policy approach feeds into xenophobic sentiments.

These instances show how xenophobia, when combined with the securitization of migration, produces a vicious cycle of violence, exclusion, and structural obstacles that migrants must overcome at borders and in their new nations.

Reports from several media houses including: Washington post, Lemonde and Aljazeera through the investigation of Lighthouse reports also revealed that European funding is connected to a systematic racial profiling and expulsion of Black migrants. According to this thorough research by Lighthouse Reports, Black migrants in North African nations such as Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia are detained based on the color of their skin and then taken against their will to isolated desert regions, where they run the risk of being abducted, tortured, or killed. This inquiry demonstrates how European countries are aware of these violations but frequently shirk accountability by giving North African authorities control over migration (Lighthouse Reports, 2023). Through its podcast and reports “*Dumped in the Middle of Nowhere – Black Migrants in North Africa*”, Aljazeera also had the same information. Racial profiling of migrants and their forced relocation to isolated regions without support result in serious human rights abuses like extortion and torture. The investigation emphasizes the EU's complicity in these abuses, showcasing a troubling relationship between European funding and the mistreatment of migrants in North Africa (Al Jazeera, 2024).

From the Lighthouse reports;

One consultant who worked on projects funded by the EU Trust Fund, under which the EU has given Tunisia, Mauritania and Morocco more than €400m for migration management in recent years, said of the aims of the fund: “*You have to make migrants' lives difficult. Complicate their lives. If you leave a migrant from Guinea in the Sahara [in Morocco] twice, the third time he will ask you to voluntarily bring him back home.*”

(Lighthouse Reports, 2023)

A report in the digital news of Voanews reveals that, the UNHCR emphasizes that serious human rights abuses, such as sexual assault, torture, and extortion, are experienced by refugees and migrants while they travel to Europe. These concerns are made worse by the absence of protection services, which leaves many

people at risk when traveling through dangerous North African routes. According to reports, traffickers' false narratives cause many migrants to underestimate the risks (Voanews by Lisa Schlein June 05, 2024).

More reports of suffering due to xenophobic sentiments which culminate from the securitization of migration can be seen from the digital news of the "conversation", a news channel that analyses journalist information from an academic angle. They indicate that, Many African migrants continue to migrate despite massive information campaigns funded by the EU. The inadequacy of these programs was brought to light by the recent migration of over 10,000 migrants to Lampedusa. The underlying causes of migration are not addressed, according to critics, and prospective migrants' reality are frequently ignored (The conversation, 2024).

"Immigrants contribute to crime" can feed prejudices and anxieties about how migration will affect European society. A strong mistrust of multiculturalism and migration policy is also demonstrated by the phrase "dumping" migrants in other EU regions and the assertion that variety is not a strength, which portrays migrants as liabilities rather than assets. This kind of language frequently feeds xenophobic sentiments by painting immigrants as a monolithic, troublesome bunch rather than as unique people with a range of backgrounds and abilities.

Finally, the language on the below tweet shows the general sentiments from the host community members. They view African migrants negatively and have formed negative stereotypes about them;

@WallStreetSilv

Sep 16, 2023

Reply

See new posts

Conversation

@white_lenka

Yes, its crazy! Europe is flooded with economic refugees and this causes huge internal issues. This summer I was in French coastal town Marseille and it was a complete disaster – I have never felt so much in danger. The city was full of North African middle-aged men who were wondering during a middle of a working day. Sitting around in groups and watching (you) and not nicely. I did not feel safe to walk there and this was a center of the town at 2PM. Also, very dirty and garbage on the street...

The language depicts them as a threat simply because of their presence and their lack of employment. They are described as "wandering on a working day", and "sitting around in groups", which translates to a judgmental which suggest idleness or unproductiveness hence inherently problematic. This feeds negative stereotypes that link immigrants particularly those from low-income areas to criminality or sloth. Additionally, it is discriminatory to blame these people for the dirty streets because it suggests that their presence lowers environmental standards and public safety. The generalizations are a cause for fear and hostility towards this particular group of people coming from Africa. The mentality intensifies social divides among the minority groups. The language is discriminatory and xenophobic.

V. Discussion

The various tweets (X) from different accounts of both organizations and individuals who live in Europe as locals, there seems to be a resistance towards migrants especially from Africa. These seems to be generated from the securitization of migration. The policies in Europe that connect African migrants to insecurity have caused the locals to have this perspective hence the xenophobic sentiments. Portraying African migrants in media narratives as threats to security and using criminal laws to manage and control them results to locals taking to social media with negative stereotypes leading to hostility. The securized approaches seeps through government policies the same way it does to the local communities where migrants from Africa are perceived as burdensome rather than contributors to society.

Investigative reports from major media houses around the world such as the Aljazeera, Lighthouse, Voanews and the conversation among others reveal that securitization of African migrants is an issue encouraged by funding from European nations. Most often funding from this powerful continent is often used to support discriminatory exercises such as forced return of African migrants as well as racial profiling. The migrants are exposed to hazardous and dangerous situations which often times lead to death. These activities demonstrate a policy strategy that prioritizes exclusion and detentions ahead of protection and integration. Additionally, as evidenced by the tragic murder of a Ghanaian immigrant in Italy and the Catania march for migrants' rights, discrimination against African migrants can have serious and even fatal consequences, even in communities that appear to be welcoming.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the securitization of migration leads to a response in which African migrants encounter more difficulties both in their host nations and at the borders. Restrictive regulations and exclusionary practices are fueled by xenophobia, which is furthered by negative and unhelpful perceptions. Serious human rights abuses and a growing social divide are the outcomes of this cycle, emphasizing the pressing need for legislative reform that prioritizes integration, protection, and the elimination of xenophobic beliefs.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation

In summary, it's clear that xenophobic sentiments displayed on social media platforms such as X and mainstream media is causing a lot of difficulties for African migrants in Europe. Therefore, it is imperative for European governments and NGOs to be vigilant about such attitudes. It is their duty to foster and promote inclusivity of African migrants into their host communities. This can be done through sustained public awareness dispelling prejudices formed against African migrants. They can use the same media platforms to do this.

The European governments working closely with NGOs such as UNHCR should consider launching campaigns to counter common beliefs about African migrants such as migrants being excessively dependent on welfare systems and taking their jobs. Awareness campaigns that have data evidence to clarify these false claims and demonstrate the positive implications of migrants should be done consistently.

Secondly social media should be used in a big way to enhance efforts from NGOs and governments that dispel false allegations about African migrants. It should also be used to monitor false

information about migrants and regulate hate speech that are direct towards these migrants. There should be proactive moderation and clear guidelines particularly in cases of discrimination and xenophobia content. This will aid in limiting the negative stereotypes directed towards migrants and protect them from online harassments.

Finally, public institutions such as schools and colleges should come up with curriculums and workshops that speak about migration and multiculturalism. The curriculum should encompass social and economic perspectives, as well as historical facts about migration. This will aid in fostering empathy among generations that are young to reduce biases that lead to exclusion.

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MEDIA LINKS

<https://www.infomigrants.net/en/>
<https://x.com/infomigrants?lang=en>
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