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Final Paper on Contemporary International Security

**"The media as a securitizing agent -
Approaches to the refugee crisis in Europe"**

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SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

The history of human social evolution is marked by movement. Whether by great navigation or by the strength of the legs, human beings move, human beings migrate. However, the way in which this movement is perceived and received by society largely depends on the approach that the media, as an intermediary agent, chooses to give to the news, and as journalism is incapable of evading partiality, the fact becomes distorted as it passes. through the media lens, and may be the target of pity, aversion, or even securitization.

This dissertation aims to understand the importance of discourse formation of the media as a possible securitizing agent, that is, as responsible for the dramatization and extreme politicization of a social fact. The empirical case of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015 will be used as an example of analysis, in addition to images from media coverage at the time focusing on three events: the civil war in Syria, the death of Alan Kurdi, and the terrorist attacks in Paris .

Through the securitization theory of the Copenhagen School and the multiple approaches taken by journalistic coverage, we seek to answer the question: what was the media's role in relation to the 2015 refugee crisis in Europe, whether such conduct characterizes it as an agent securitization, and how this relates to securitization theory when analyzing a contemporary international security topic.

1. THEORETICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION

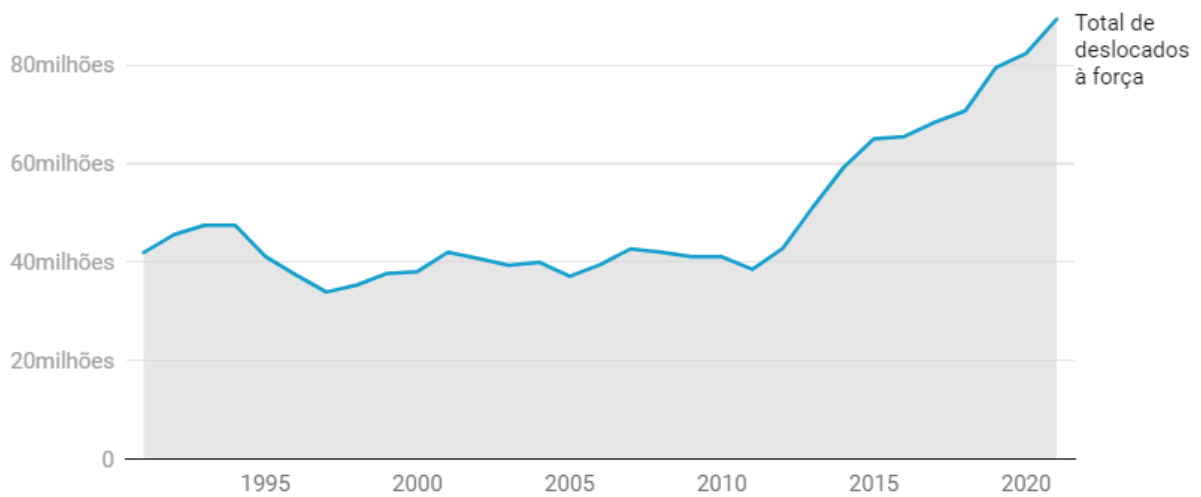### 1.1. From contemporary immigration to the refugee crisis

While population movement, whether exiting, entering, or moving within the same territory, is called migration, contemporary immigration is the act of entry of an individual into a given State in the 20th and 21st centuries. The motivations for immigration can be economic, cultural, social, political, or even natural, but it is possible to divide them into two groups: immigration due to opportunity and forced immigration.

The first is intrinsically linked to economic motivations and represents the largest portion of immigrants in the world, with migratory masses directed to more developed countries. An example of this type of immigration is the so-called "brain drain", when qualified professionals seek better employment and income opportunities outside their country of origin. When thinking about political, social, cultural and natural causes (linked to environmental disasters, for example), the resulting immigration is characterized as forced, since there was no intention to migrate. Political crises, conflicts, and violence are some cases that result in this type of movement.

It is common to think that forced immigration is synonymous with the refugee crisis, however, the two denominations may find themselves in a common denomination area or simply have similarities. For a person or group to receive refugee status, there must be *persecution* systematic against such an individual, defined by the 1951 United Nations Convention and its 1967 Additional Protocol Article 2 as: "[persons who] fearing being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, social group or political opinion, if is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to this fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, if he does not have a nationality and is outside the country in which he had his habitual residence as a result of such events, cannot or, due to said fear, does not want to return to them." According to the 2021 biannual report by the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), at the end of 2020 there were 89.3 million people who had been forcibly displaced, 69% of these coming from just five countries: Syria (27%), Venezuela (18%), Afghanistan (11%), South Sudan (9%), and Myanmar (5%). Of this number, almost 27.1 million qualify for refugee status.
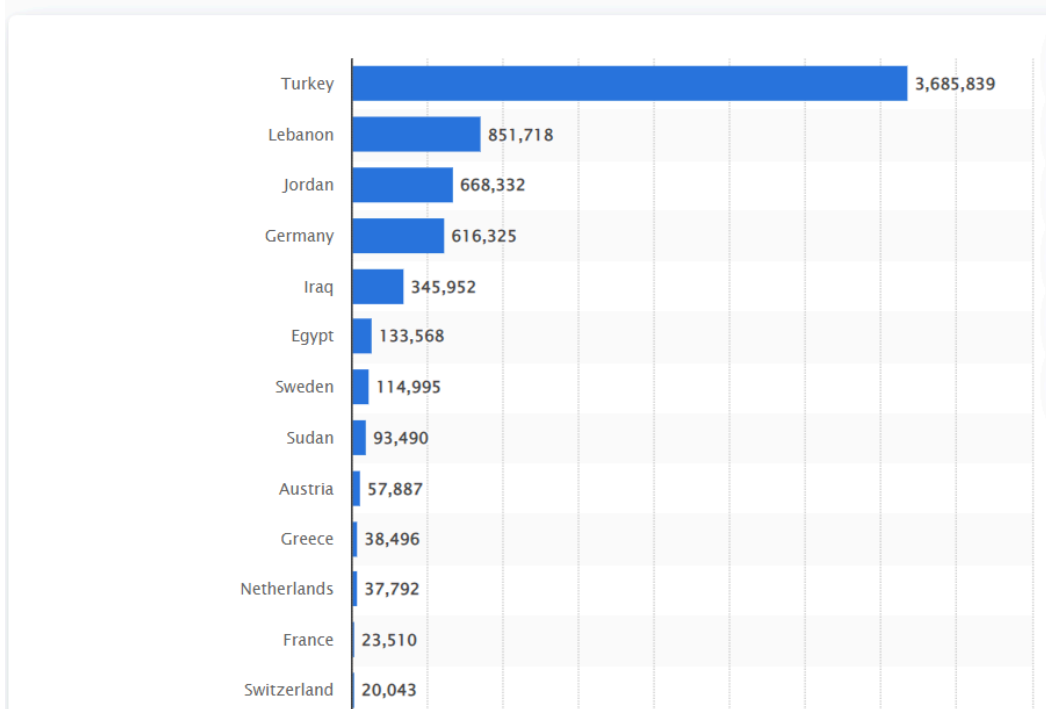
It can be seen from the data that the largest mass of refugees comes from Syria, which has been at war since 2011. Whether due to geographic proximity, permanence policies and

treaties, or the simple belief in better opportunities when moving to In more economically developed countries, a large part of this refugee population goes to European countries, with Germany, Sweden and Austria within the group of the ten largest host countries.

Ranking of the largest Syrian refugee-hosting countries in 2020

Country	Refugees
Turkey	3,685,839
Lebanon	851,718
Jordan	668,332
Germany	616,325
Iraq	345,952
Egypt	133,568
Sweden	114,995
Sudan	93,490
Austria	57,887
Greece	38,496
Netherlands	37,792
France	23,510
Switzerland	20,043

Source: Statista and UNHCR

1.2. The Copenhagen School and the Securitization Theory in the media approach

From the concepts coined by the Copenhagen School, the theory of securitization emerges, where this would be an extreme version of politicization. A certain topic is placed above the ordinary practices of political life and gains priority and urgency in its approach, and the withdrawal of political means demonstrates their failure to resolve this issue. In this interpretation, some points are essential for its functioning, namely: i) the existence of a threat to a referent object; ii) the presence of at least one securitizing actor that has social capital (which gives it competence in the act of securitizing an issue); and iii) the existence of a hearing.

Through the process ["security declaration" > "dramatization" > "extraordinary means"], a security problem is presented as *discursive act* (speech act), and the dramatization of this problem is stated to an audience. The idea of social capital is extremely important, since these are the mechanisms that legitimize the speech of the securitizing agent, and in most cases of securitization this actor is a State, with the presence of functional actors in the process as agents that influence the dynamics of a given sector.

It is interesting to note in the securitization chaining stages the presence of elements that already resemble the media sphere, such as "discursive act", "dramatization process" or "existence of an audience". The question that remains is: would the media be capable of securitizing a referent object? Would she have enough social capital to do this or is she just a functional actor in the process, supporting an agent with more power and influence?

2. THE CREATION OF A MEDIA DISCOURSE

2.1. Theoretical lines

Taking into account the theories developed by the Copenhagen School (CSS) and data on contemporary migration and the refugee crisis, the focus will now be on how the discursive act of the securitization process is biased and shapes the creation of a media discourse. Given that something becomes a threat to security precisely through discursive policies, it is necessary to note that the simple enunciation of facts, whether in political or journalistic circles, is much more *performative* than declarative. The utterance of a topic does not describe reality, but constructs it, making impartiality impossible.

Still on the CSS theory, while a threat is still only politicized, it is seen as manageable and left as the responsibility of the State. By defining securitization as an extreme version of politicization, an issue is presented as an existential threat and requires equally extreme measures to deal with. Buzan et al. (1998) emphasizes the discursive act in this process since it is only achieved if an audience accepts it as such. When defining the threat to a referent object, the promotion of an issue from the political sphere to the public sphere depends largely on the chosen media approach; for example, whether an audience understands migration as something manageable or as an existential threat to their way of life.

In relation to the media's approaches to the migrant/refugee crisis in Europe, two stand out: the humanitarian and the militaristic approach. The first focuses on measures to help refugees, such as providing shelter, financial donations, opening borders, help with registration and lobbying for political solutions. The second has as its essence measures to protect countries and/or Europe, emphasizing the idea of sending refugees to their place of origin, closing borders, creating obstacles to receiving migrants, and military reinforcement. The theory of securitization fits perfectly with the militarist approach, since the media, by framing refugees as threats and relating "crisis" to "illegality", "criminality" and "inability to integrate", creates a discursive act around the issue of political refuge and takes the topic out of the "politically manageable" sphere and places it in an alarming and threatening guise.

Below, in images 3, 4 and 5, examples of media coverage of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015 respectively in its humanitarian and militaristic approaches.

Europe and the Refugee Crisis: A Challenge to Our Civilization

2.2. The narrative around migrants and refugees

In 2015, the word "migrant" prevailed before the crisis in Europe reached its peak. As it is a broad term, migrant could be a businessman who moves around the world, but other terms are often used for opportunity immigration, such as "expat", "cosmopolitans", "citizens of the world". The allegations surrounding the word migrant gradually, through media framing, took on a contour linked to power, be it economic or political power.

By defining the migratory movement towards Europe as a "refugee crisis", not only does it establish the existence of something extraordinary in the sense of being outside the ordinary, but it also establishes the border between "us" and "them". From then on, the migrant is no longer the traveling neighbor, but the "other", someone who comes to threaten a way of life. The stereotyping of refugees by journalistic coverage reinforces this imaginary: migrants as illegal, without papers, crossing borders under barbed wire or fleeing from the police, in addition to the words that strengthen this vision.

Image 6: the change in word choice

Image 7: Serbia Image 8: Poland

Image 9: Greece Image 10: Hungary

3. EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: THE THREE PERIODS OF THE 2015 CRISIS

Using as a basis a report commissioned by the Council of Europe, academic articles and examples of media coverage from the period in question, the objective of this section is to analyze how the performative discourse elaborated by the media had the capacity to shape the way in which the migration crisis in Europe in 2015 was received by its audience, making it, or not, a referent object of securitization.

3.1. A cautious tolerance

The first period is characterized as "cautious tolerance", where the Council of Europe granted refugee allocation procedures in Greece and Italy, as well as in other member states. At the same time, the Hungarian government declared a project to build a barrier along the Serbian border, later completely closing its borders with that country and Croatia, which affected the flow of refugees to neighboring countries. This period was marked by a mix of securitization and humanitarianism, both in the political sphere and in journalistic coverage; while some governments, such as Hungary, adopted security measures, there was coverage of personal stories of migrants by the media, stories that, due to their personal tone, caused a certain commotion and identification on the part of the public.

Images 11 and 12: journalistic coverage and the wall on the Hungarian border

3.2. Ecstatic humanitarianism

The second period is marked by an image that not only circulated the world but also influenced the way the crisis was received by the public and handled by the state: the death of a three-year-old Syrian boy, Alan Kurdi, whose body was found on the banks of a beach in Turkey. The commotion generated by photography led to a more human representation of the refugee crisis and the war in Syria: images of illegal boats crossing the Mediterranean, photos of women and children instead of men, portraits of individuals instead of masses. Support began on social media and was extended to international institutions such as the Red Cross, several performances and protests by humanitarian activists took place across the continent, and the humanitarian approach was much more present in media coverage.

Images 13, 14 and 15: the death of Alan Kurdi and his representation in the media.

The third period is marked by an abrupt change in the perception of migrants due to the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, when a series of bombings and shootings occurred by terrorists linked to ISIS. The problematic point of the issue was the relationship that was established between migrant-refugee-terrorist, especially those of Arab origin. Refugees went from victims to potential terrorists, viewed with suspicion and fear, creating the setting for a discursive act that securitized the whole of Europe as a target of existential threats. Media coverage has changed its focus, and the stereotyping of refugees as savages who would be threatening "white European purity" is evident, for example, when analyzing the cover of the Polish far-right magazine "wSieci", which under the title "The Islamic Rape of Europe" depicts a disturbing scene of a white woman wearing the European Union flag and being attacked by black arms.
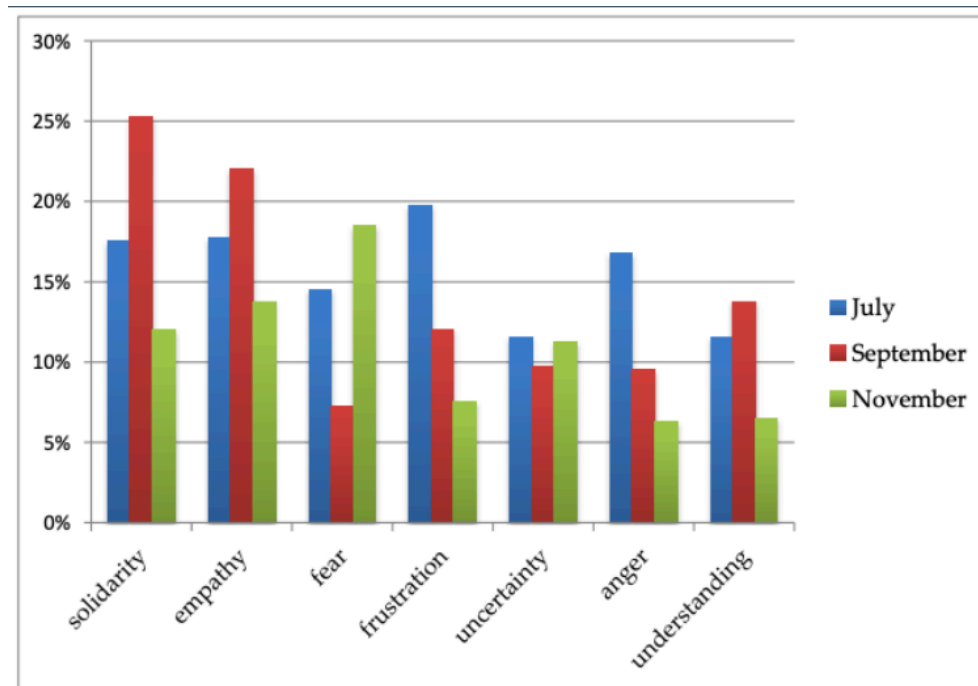
Image 16: Most frequent emotions attributed to refugees by European citizens in the three periods, marked by the phases in July (blue), September (red) and November - terrorist attacks - green.

Source: Chouliaraki & Zaborowski, 2017

After the Paris attacks there was almost a silence on the refugee crisis in the media, in addition to less commotion on the part of the public and the exchange of feelings of empathy and solidarity for anger, fear and frustration, which can be analyzed by the graph in image 16 .

CONCLUSION

Through the case study of the media portrayal of the refugee crisis in Europe in 2015, it can be noted that the image of Alan Kurdi and the Paris Attacks impacted journalistic discourse in different ways, leading to some conclusions. Overall, during 2015, around two-thirds of the consequences mentioned were negative, and in 59% of articles no positive consequences of refugees arriving in Europe were mentioned. The positive consequences mentioned were mainly portrayed in moral terms out of empathy or solidarity, while the negative ones were mainly geopolitical, economic or cultural. Although refugees were very frequently discussed in the media, they were rarely given the opportunity to express their own concerns, and were rarely portrayed as individuals who had names, professions or genders - which led to an anonymous depiction of a group without any useful skills. for European countries. Such dehumanization led to suspicion and fear, and the perpetuated image of the "threatening other" was almost always defined antagonistically toward Europeans. The brief moment of ecstatic humanitarianism, stimulated by the image of Alan Kurdi, brought a small example of individualism to the portrait of refugees, but was quickly drowned out by the fear imposed by the Paris attacks, which made the media's portrayal of the issue focused on the securitization of threat coming from beyond borders.

By outlining an analytical framework under the theory of the Copenhagen School, it can be said that the media plays the role of securitizing actor over the referent object of the whole of Europe in relation to the refugee crisis since it carries out a performative discursive act that shapes your audience's view on the subject. It is capable of removing the issue from the political sphere and taking it to the extremes of the social sphere, generating positive and negative consequences, such as manifestations of humanitarian support or xenophobia. Perhaps the only question that remains open is whether the media has its own social capital to securitize an issue or whether it serves as a mechanism for other agents, who use their lenses to shape public reception. Whether as the main or secondary actor in this show, she at least guarantees a skillful performance.

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