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How Does the Issue of Migration Remain Securitised in the Central Mediterranean?

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Abstract:

This thesis aims to look at how the issue of migration remains securitised in the Mediterranean. More specifically I look at the role search and rescue NGOs operating in the Central Mediterranean play. By analysing the practices of, and the discourse emanating from, both the European Union and Italy it is shown that humanitarian actions carried out by NGOs are feeding into these two forms of securitisation. In this scenario, and from the point of view of the NGOs, the two prominent schools of securitisation theory merge into one.

1.- Introduction:

How does the issue of migration in the Central Mediterranean remain securitised? For those unfamiliar with the term, the act of securitisation can be seen as the process through which politicised and non-politicised issues are elevated to security issues that need to be dealt with urgently and with the bypassing of public debate and democratic procedures (van Munster, 2012). There are two prominent schools of thought when it comes to securitisation. The Copenhagen School focuses on how *speech acts* are used to securitise an issue and the Paris School of securitisation studies places more of an emphasis on *who* carries out the speech act and how *practices* are used. This thesis will look at what role humanitarian actors, in this case NGOs, play in the securitisation process. It does so by asking if humanitarian *practices* are feeding into both securitising *speech acts* and securitising *practices*, thereby showing that there is little distinction between these two schools of thought in the realm of migration in the Central Mediterranean.

At the height of the migration crisis in 2015, over one million migrants managed to reach Europe. Geography meant that most of the entered the EU from the South and South-East, with the majority entering via Italy, Greece and the Balkans. The response to the crisis across the EU was divided. Hungary sought to keep out the migrants by building a fence on their border and issuing border guards with tear gas. Germany and Sweden on the other hand welcomed migrants and offered them protection. For those travelling via the Mediterranean Sea the death toll was large and numbered over 3,700 people in 2015. In 2016 arrivals by sea decreased substantially but the number of casualties grew dramatically to over 5,000. This made 2016 one of deadliest ever years for migration to Europe. Most of these deaths occurred on the central route to Italy (data2.unhcr.org). The number of people trying to make the crossing to Europe has

decreased since the high points of 2015 but there are still many who are undertaking the journey and many who drown trying to do so.

Until recently humanitarian NGOs played a big part in search and rescue (SAR) operations which had saved many thousands of people that tried to make their way to Europe from the Libyan shoreline in north Africa. These NGOs gained a lot of attention during the migrant crisis as they were seen as picking up the slack left by the European Union when it came to search and rescue work. Since that time the NGOs have become denigrated by Frontex (The European Border and Coastguard Agency), Italian authorities, and anti-immigration far right groups (one of which chartered a vessel to try and stop the NGOs from operating). They have been accused of being a pull factor for migration in the region though this has shown to be untrue (Gruijters & Steinhilper, 2018). The proponents of the 'pull factor' argument claim that the NGOs operate as a safety net for migrant vessels should they get into difficulty, thereby making it likely that more migrants will attempt the journey knowing that they can be saved. NGOs have even been accused by Italian authorities of working with smugglers to bring migrants onto European shores (Cusumano, 2019). In carrying out their SAR operations the NGOs have acted in a humanitarian capacity but these acts have also been regarded as political by some because a number of NGOs are vocal critics of what they view as an inhumane border control policy.

Frontex has put resources into tackling this type of irregular migration but predominantly does more to disrupt the business of the smugglers and human traffickers. They carry out search and rescue operations as required by the international laws governing the sea but it is not their main focus. This has had predictable results (Cuttitta, 2018). On a democratic level securitisation is a problem because it is a failure of normal

politics. This failure prevents more open engagement and dialogue between political actors. This in turn can undermine democracy itself (Buzan et al, 1998). Accordingly, it is important to understand how securitisation occurs and consequently, in the future, how de-securitisation can occur.

In order to look at how the issue of migration in the central Mediterranean has remained securitised I carried out a discourse analysis of official statements, speeches and external links emanating from multiple Twitter accounts. I analysed accounts pertaining to the EU Commission and its Commissioners and also looked at the account of the Italian Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini. I also scrutinised practices connected to the EU and Italy. Italy, alongside the EU, was analysed because it is the usual destination on the Central Route and has therefore had much contact with both NGOs and irregular migrants. The analysis allowed me to detect whether humanitarian SAR operations carried out by NGOs had a securitised response from one of these actors, thereby showing that humanitarian practices has fed into securitising speech acts and securitising practices.

2.- Theoretical Framework:

The concept of securitisation was originally developed at what is known as the Copenhagen School by researchers such as Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan as a constructivist approach to the study of security. It is premised on the idea that as the world and the security threats in it are all socially constructed, it is impossible to ever fully assess whether these threats are 'real' or not (Buzan *et al*, 1998). The Copenhagen School's framework looks at five different sectors (the economic, societal, environmental, political and military sectors) rather than the traditionalist method that restricted the study of security to one sector, the military sector. This was an important development in the post Cold War period as it was realised that security was becoming more than just an issue dealt with by the military.

Their theory contends that the act of securitisation happens through discourse and what they call 'speech acts'. An issue is presented as a security threat to an 'object' (a state, a culture, an economy) through these speech acts which allows the actor carrying out the securitising speech act to claim that the issue at hand requires special attention and special measures must be used to tackle it. They argue that there are two parts to this process as the audience that the speech act is aimed at must accept what the securitising actor says in order for securitisation to take place (Buzan *et al*, 1998). The original framework does touch on the role that NGOs can play in the securitisation process but limits their contributions to the environmental security sector. They therefore focus more on NGOs such as Green Peace and the World Wildlife Foundation (Buzan *et al*, 1998). MacDonald (2008) lays out some problems with the framework put forward by the Copenhagen School. First of all, the act of construction is defined too narrowly and too much attention is given to the speech act over bureaucratic practices and physical actions. Second, there is only a focus on the moment of conception. The potential of

security to be constructed incrementally and why particular issues resonate more with some audiences than with others is under-theorised.

Issues become security issues at a particular moment in time. When this moment actually occurs can be interpreted in various ways. McDonald (2008) notes that according to how one interprets the Copenhagen School's framework there can be three different occasions. He says that it may occur (1) at the point when an issue is defined as a security issue, (2) at the point when the target audience concurs with that view or (3) at the point when the extraordinary measure is taken to engage with the issue that has become securitised (MacDonald, 2008).

The Copenhagen School's approach to securitisation and its application can be seen as a negative one for the reasons outlined in the introduction: it is a failure of politics. Therefore, they propose that the desired outcome is for issues to be de-securitised. De-securitisation occurs when issues are returned to the normal sphere, removed from a state of emergency and governed by normal politics again (Buzan et al, 1998).

In order to address some of the shortcomings and advance the theory further, another school of thought emerged. Inspired by the French philosopher Michel Foucault, scholars at the Paris School of securitising studies claim that actions speak louder than words and it is not discourse and speech acts that play the biggest role in securitising an issue but it is in fact practices and who is implementing them (see Bigo, 2000, Huysmans, 2006). This more sociological understanding focuses on the role of power relations, bureaucratic structures and institutional interests in determining who or what becomes securitised by the actor. Bigo notes that one of the better approaches is to analyse

security as a 'device' used by the government. He notes that security does not emerge from everywhere but is connected with special 'agents' and with 'professionals' like military agencies, secret services, and police forces (Bigo, 2000). This school questions the sectoral securitisation approach developed by the Copenhagen School as 'too simple to capture what actually happens empirically, and too narrow to encompass the full politics of securitisation' (Huysmans, 2006, x).

Expanding on the Paris School of security studies, two types of securitising practices are put forward by Léonard (2010). One practice involves the use of measures typically used to tackle issues like drug trafficking, terrorism or foreign invasion. The other is an 'extraordinary practice' which can be understood more broadly as an 'out of the ordinary' action in order for the analytical framework to be able to capture the fact that not all securitising practices necessarily involve emergency, exceptionalism or illegality. These actions convey the idea to those who observe them, directly or indirectly, that the issue being tackled is a security threat (Léonard, 2010).

The Parisian School's approach to securitisation shares with the Copenhagen School an understanding of securitising discourse and securitising practices as harmful because they create or reinforce the divisions between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' (Hammerstadt, 2014). One difference between these two theories is that where the Copenhagen School's framework is based on a relatively precise definition of the 'speech act' which carries out the securitising action, the Paris School's approach does not have a fixed definition of a securitising practice. Léonard (2010) asserts that the securitising speech act is the unit of analysis in the Copenhagen School's analytical framework, whilst they leave open the question of who can be a securitising actor. In contrast, what is analysed by the Parisian approach is the security professionals, whose

practices are studied without seeking to precisely define what these securitising practices are and by which criteria they can be identified.

Security is not the only justification that may be used to legitimise the implementation of special measures. The concept of humanitarianism can also be used. After the end of the Cold War there was an expansion in humanitarianism and humanitarian organisations. According to Gabiam (2016) their increased prominence has been matched by the growing connection between humanitarian concerns and the issue of security. Watson (2011) argues that humanitarianism can be seen as lacking any rigid conceptual boundaries which facilitates ambiguous and manipulated uses. This is very similar to securitisation theory and Watson approaches humanitarianism as a distinct sector of security to be discussed alongside the sectors put forward in the Copenhagen School's framework. He notes that 'while state and societal security discourses also concern human life, they serve to prioritise the state or society as the means of protecting human life and dignity, whereas the discourse of humanitarian security attempts to prioritise human life over the interests of states and/or societies' (Watson, 2011, 5).

This growing link between humanitarianism and securitisation has had particular consequences in the Mediterranean Sea for what Cusumano (2018) describes as a humanitarian space in which NGOs should be able to operate according to humanitarian principles. The concept of a humanitarian space is not merely used to determine any physical area where large-scale suffering occurs, but also identifies a symbolic space separated from politics where aid workers can operate in compliance with their principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence (Cusumano, 2018). Other studies by Cuttita (2018), Cusumano (2017 & 2019) and Gruijters & Steinhilper (2018) also highlight

the growing tension between securitising actors in the Mediterranean Sea and NGOs who try and strike a balance between humanitarian and political actions.

The inclusion of migrants and refugees in security studies is a relatively recent phenomenon that has gradually happened since the end of the Cold War and became especially prominent after 9/11 and the global financial crash of 2008 (Hammerstadt, 2014). After a number of successful and foiled terrorist attacks in France and Belgium the issue took on even more urgency for the EU as one of the terrorist leaders was alleged to have travelled to Europe during the peak of the migrant crisis (Henley & Traynor, 2015).

3.- Methodology:

This research paper is looking to determine how the issue of migration remains securitised. The region I have chosen to focus on is the EU's southern border in the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean Sea border was chosen as it is where the most migrant deaths occurred and where the most NGO SAR operations take place. This area shows the very real and very tragic repercussions of a securitised border. Through the Mediterranean Sea there are three preeminent crossings into Europe. The eastern crossing involves travelling from Turkish shores to Greece. This route was at one point the more popular route but an agreement between the EU and Turkey proposed that migrants landing in Greece would be returned to Turkey in return for various benefits. This deal, while controversial, essentially closed that passage (Kingsley, 2016). Migrants using the route in the west landed on the Iberian peninsula. The longest and the most dangerous of the routes is the central route which, as mentioned, involves migrants leaving from the Libyan shoreline to try and get to Europe (Gruijters & Steinhilper, 2018). The central route is where NGOs predominantly operate and is therefore where this thesis will focus.

Cusumano (2017) notes that in 2016 there were at least nine different non-governmental organisations that carried out search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean. These were: Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), *Médecins sans Frontières* (MSF), Sea Watch, Sea-Eye, Pro Activa Open Arms, *SOS Méditerranée*, Jugend Rettet, The Boat Refugee Foundation and Save the Children. Apart from The Boat Refugee Foundation which focuses on the Eastern Mediterranean route all of these NGOs have carried out at least some work in the Central Mediterranean route. This study therefore regards them all.

This is a case study analysis of a phenomenon that has occurred in the real world. If well constructed, case studies allow one to 'peer into the box of causality to the intermediate causes lying between some cause and its purported effect. (Gerring, 2004, 348). Gerring (2004) also notes that a case study is best designed as an in-depth study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a broader set of units. A unit can be defined as a spatially bounded phenomenon (a nation-state, revolution, election, etc.) observed at a single period in time or an established period of time. In this study I define a unit as a search and rescue operation carried out by an NGO that was met with discourse by a securitising actor. Further to that, when analysing the securitising practices of the EU and Italy, the unit being analysed is the Central Route in the Mediterranean Sea during an established period of time during which these practices were enacted.

This kind of case study is well suited to the use of qualitative methods because I am attempting to examine a particular issue and potential nexus between securitisation and NGOs. Qualitative methods often emphasise depth rather than breadth and 'many scholars use such research not necessarily to test hypotheses, but to generate new hypotheses, refine theory in complex arenas, consider complicated interactions between variables, and otherwise elucidate causal mechanisms' (Barasko, Sabet and Schaffner, 2014, 188). This thesis will hope to clarify further the theory of securitisation and how it relates to migration and humanitarianism.

For this thesis I carried out a discourse analysis, conducted an interview with a Frontex spokesperson and analysed practices of the EU and Italy at their southern border. A discourse analysis makes sense when analysing how speech acts are used to securitise an issue and a close analysis of EU and Italian practices coupled with the interview

allowed me to determine how practices are used to securitise an issue and how humanitarian practices have fed into this.

Discourse analysis focuses on the role of language and takes the position that language itself is the focus of interest and not just a medium of communication. Discourses are conceived of as 'drawing on and influencing other discourses and it is also a process where meaning is created' (Bryman, 2016, 540). According to Grant *et al* (2004), the analysis of a discourse event should be carried out according to a certain framework. The first part involves the examination of the actual content, structure and meaning of the text. Next is the examination of the form of the discursive interaction, the way it was communicated. Finally is the consideration of the context in which the discursive event is happening.

I carried out a discourse analysis of statements, speeches and any other relevant materials emanating from multiple official EU sources and from the account of the Italian Minister of the Interior. Twitter was chosen as a medium as it is increasingly used by many, including politicians and journalists, throughout the world as a reliable news source and way of spreading information (Van Leuven *et al*, 2018). Thanks to the evolution of social media, hashtags can be used as an efficient means to spread political messages and entire political campaigns can be followed on Twitter or other social media platforms.

There are many Twitter accounts connected with the European Union but I focused on accounts related the European Commission. The Commission is steered by a group of 28 commissioners, one from every member state. It is the EU's executive arm and makes decisions on the EU's political and strategic future. I analysed Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker's account (@JunckerEU) and the account of Natasha Bertaud

(@NatashaBertaud) who is Juncker's coordinating spokesperson. I also considered the account of Dimitris Avramopoulos (@Avramopoulos). Since 2014 he has been the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship. Among other responsibilities this department aims to improve border controls and Frontex's efficiency; deals with irregular migration and focuses on the fight against human trafficking (European Commission, n.d.).

In addition to discourse emanating from the EU I analysed tweets from the Italian Minister of the Interior, Matteo Salvini (@matteosalvinimi). This position is one of the most important in the Italian government and he is responsible for issues regarding security and migration. He is also the Deputy Prime Minister which further highlights his importance in Italian politics. He also has over 1.1 million Twitter followers which is more followers than the other Deputy Prime Minister, Luigi Di Maio (537,000 followers), and Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte (233,000 followers), combined. Italy was not randomly chosen for analysis but because it is the intended destination for migrants using the central route. Nearly 650,000 migrants made their way to Italy through the Mediterranean Sea between 2014 and 2018 (data2.unhcr.org).

Having laid out what accounts were analysed I will now explain what I was looking for and during what time period. Firstly, I was looking for tweets or hashtags that included one of two things: Either the names of any of the NGOs mentioned previously or the names of any of the vessels that the NGOs use to carry out their SAR operations. Occasionally even the abbreviation 'NGO' was sufficient enough to find tweets relevant to the study. Once a tweet was found pertaining to any of those words I then looked at whether the tweet contained a word or hashtag associated with what could be termed securitising discourse. For example, words or hashtags such as: Security, terrorism,

irregular, migration, EUprotects, migrationEU and others in English or in Italian when considering Salvini's tweets. Because tweets can only be of a limited character number it was not hard to determine whether the tweets were using securitising discourse or not. The spring of 2014 was when the migration crisis in the central route really escalated (Gruijters & Steinhilper, 2018). Accordingly I began my analysis of the EU in that year. Salvini came to office in 2018 but was an active Twitter user before that so will I be analysing tweets from before this date but predominantly after. As NGOs still operate in the central route I will be analysing events and tweets right up to the spring of 2019.

For the analysis of potential securitising practices I considered the same time frame as for the analysis of securitising discourse. In line with Léonard (2010) I consider a securitising practice as a measure typically used to tackle issues like drug trafficking, terrorism or foreign invasion. Also considered is what she terms 'extraordinary practice' which is understood more broadly as an 'out of the ordinary' action, not necessarily involving emergency, exceptionalism or illegality.

As mentioned, an Interview was also conducted to supplement the analysis of practices. The interview with a Frontex spokesperson was conducted via telephone. The purpose of this interview was to ask questions relating to Frontex and NGOs. I asked questions such as: What effect, if any, does Frontex believe NGOs have in the context of migration in the central Mediterranean? Does Frontex think SAR operations by NGOs are morally correct? I also enquired as to whether Frontex agreed with the critical view often espoused by EU member states: that the SAR operations that are carried out are a threat to security. Additionally, I wanted to know whether the NGOs operating so close to the Libyan coastline compromised the integrity of the EU's southern border. An advantage of conducting research this way is that it allowed me to directly ask about the nexus

between NGOs and Frontex. Nonetheless, because questions are asked it does not mean that an answer will be given, especially if the issue being probed is a sensitive one. This was the case when interviewing the Frontex official who could not be too forthcoming about the issue of migration and borders.

When an NGO rescues or disembarks refugees it is carrying out a humanitarian action. By analysing the discourse and practices outlined above I was able to detect whether a humanitarian practice by an NGO had a securitising response from either the EU or from Italy, the would be securitising actors. The humanitarian practice carried out by an NGO can then be seen as feeding into the process of securitisation by both 'speech act' and practice and thereby showing that the distinction between the schools of thought is not that strong in the context of the central Mediterranean migratory route.

The thesis will be laid out in as chronological an order as possible. In the next section I will look at the securitising practices of the EU and Italy. Following this, I analyse several SAR incidents and the discourse emanating from the EU and from Salvini in response to these incidents. I will then discuss these findings.

4.- Practices:

In this section I look at the practices of the European Union and the Italian government in order to ascertain whether the practices were of a securitising nature and then whether humanitarian actions fed into these practices. When looking at the EU's practices we can determine that at the height of the crisis they profoundly strengthened their border control agency. I will discuss Italian practices and note that despite carrying out commendable SAR efforts in 2014 their practices have also become more securitised. This section will hopefully establish that both the EU and Italy have both used securitising practices with the migration issue and that humanitarian actions by NGOs have fed into the justification of these practices and actions.

4.1.- EU Practices:

Frontex:

While the discourse emanating from the EU was broadly humanitarian in nature, as we shall see in the next section, their practices were not. The EU's practices show a securitisation process gaining in strength. The Border and Coast Guard Agency's (Frontex) enlargement is a good example of this. Frontex is responsible for helping Member States with controlling the EU's external borders. This involves all external borders, both land and sea, and therefore means that it provides technical and logistical support for Member States whose border is the Mediterranean Sea. It was formally established on 26th October 2004, by the European Council, under Council Regulation (EC) 2007/2004. Before the creation of Frontex there were ad-hoc national centres on border control which were originally set up to oversee projects relating to border management operations. Thus, Frontex was created to improve procedures and working methods relating to these operations (frontex.europa.eu, n.d.). It has border management roles that include: Monitoring migration flows, risk analysis, deploying teams of border

guards and coast guards, providing technical assistance and equipment and also helping to coordinate and organise operations at sea.

One of these operations was Operation Triton which was launched in the Central Mediterranean at the behest of an Italian government that was struggling to cope with the crisis and maintain its own costly operation, Mare Nostrum, which will be discussed in more detail below. Operation Triton has a crucial security component which reflects the evolving nature of the smuggling networks. It was replaced in 2018 with Operation Themis which also has a security component in addition to SAR capabilities (frontex.europa.eu, n.d.).

Frontex was reformed and restructured in 2016, at the peak of the refugee crisis. It was rebranded, given new powers and a much larger budget. In its first year the agency's staff had grown by a third, to nearly 500 people. It planned to more than double again, with a goal of 1000 staff by 2020. This resulted in the Agency having a massively increased presence at sea which it uses to try and stop irregular migration (Frontex, 2017). The director of Frontex, Fabrice Leggeri, affirmed that the extended mandate of the Agency and its increased resources are a 'clear and strong political response not only to the migration but also the security crisis faced by the EU at its external borders in 2015 and 2016' (*Ibid*). This highlights its obvious role in securitisation.

Operation Sophia:

EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia is another element of the EU's comprehensive response to the migration issue. It is a military mission named after a baby born aboard one of the task force's frigates to a Somali migrant. The mission seeks to tackle not only the physical component of the migration issue (the smuggler networks) but also its root

causes, including conflict, poverty, climate change and persecution. The mission's core mandate is to 'undertake systematic efforts to identify, capture and dispose of vessels and enabling assets used or suspected of being used by migrant smugglers or traffickers' (Operation Sophia, n.d.). The belief is that to disrupt the business model of the human smuggling and trafficking networks is to save lives at sea. Key to the end of the mission is a capable and well-resourced Libyan Coastguard that is able to protect its own shoreline and prevent smugglers (read migrants) from leaving (EEAS Document, 2016).

The Reaction to NGOs:

The practices outlined above did not come about as a *direct* response to the humanitarian actions of NGO's in the Mediterranean, naturally the increased flow of irregular migrants using the Central Route was key to this. According to the EU, however, the humanitarian actions of NGOs fed into the securitisation of the migration issue. Evidence of this comes from an internal report on the above mentioned Operation Sophia which stated that 'smugglers are relying on an increasing number of NGO rescue vessels that are operating close to, and sometimes within, Libyan territorial waters' (EEAS Document, 2016, 21). According to this report the EU believed that human traffickers rely on NGO vessels.

This is something also confirmed by a Frontex representative who explained that between 2014 and 2016 there was a change in the *modus operandi* of the smugglers operating in Libya. Instead of using fishing boats and strong rubber boats to carry out smuggling operations the smugglers began to use smaller, and flimsier rubber boats that were imported from China. Additionally, the quantity of fuel and drinking water onboard decreased over the same time, it became just enough to get the boats to the edge of

Libyan territorial waters. The smugglers wanted to maximise their profits and were taking advantage of the increased rescue capability provided by NGOs (Frontex Official, 2019).

4.2.- Italian Practices:

Mare Nostrum:

In 2013-2014 SAR operations were carried out by the Italian government. They put in place the Mare Nostrum operation to control the border and as a response to the tragic drowning of over 360 migrants near the island of Lampedusa in 2013. It was a humanitarian response to the unfolding crisis in the Mediterranean (Marina.Difesa.IT, n.d.). As mentioned previously, it quickly requested additional help and support from the European Union. It is from this request that Operation Triton was launched and was originally intended to run alongside the Mare Nostrum operation. Nonetheless, the latter was quickly ended as it was a politically sensitive issue as well as an expensive operation for only one country to mount. The Italian operation was lauded by the IOM which recognised the heroic work of an Italian Navy that had rescued thousands of migrants in distress (International Organization for Migration, 2014).

Codice Condotta (Code of Conduct):

In 2017 and under the supervision of the EU, the Italian government introduced a code of conduct for NGOs. The code stipulates, among other things, that NGOs are not allowed into Libyan waters, that they are obliged to accept the deployment of Italian vessels with armed police on board to investigate alleged people trafficking in Libyan waters and that they are not permitted to transfer migrants who have been rescued to other vessels while at sea, which means that SAR vessels must return to a port to disembark migrants after each successful rescue (euronews, 2017).

According to some NGOs this will hamper their work, with Jugend Rettet claiming that the code aims to criminalise SAR operations and force them out of the Mediterranean completely (Jugend Rettet Iuventa, 2017). Cusumano (2019) argues that the code further encroaches upon the principles of neutrality, impartiality and independence that humanitarian action is based on. He states that the code is either redundant or problematic despite it claiming to achieve greater rescue effectiveness. The code of conduct contains articles which are redundant because NGOs already adhere to them under other maritime laws and articles which may lead to the loss of lives by reducing effectiveness and violating humanitarian neutrality. Cusumano argues that the code is part of the larger Italian and EU strategy to export its border management of the south to Libya.

Closing of the Ports:

Salvini tweeted his disgust at the Mare Nostrum operation in 2014, attacking the then Prime Minister, Matteo Renzi, and comparing the migrants entering Italy to terrorists (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2014). This tweet is a good example of how Salvini felt about the immigration situation in Italy not long before the crisis reached its peak and is an early indicator of how he would go on to discuss the migration crisis in the Mediterranean. Salvini's Lega (League) is an anti-immigration party and his views, as leader, on immigration are no secret. There was an abundance of anti-immigration rhetoric in the election campaign and a hashtag similar to Donald Trump's 'America First' slogan: #PrimaGliItaliani [Italians First]. Leading up to the 2018 election Salvini promised to close the Italian ports to NGO vessels wishing to disembark migrants, tweeting: "If the Italians give the victory to the League, we pass from words to deeds: expulsion of illegal immigrants and STOP INVASION!" (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018). The populist Lega Party performed well in the election, gaining nearly 18% of the vote and performing nearly 14

points better than they had done in the previous election (Henley, Voce and Clarke, 2018). Salvini gained the Interior Ministry and duly did what the people of Italy gave him a mandate to and closed the ports of Italy to NGOs wishing to disembark migrants.

4.3.- Conclusion:

By examining the practices of the EU we can see that they became more securitised in nature due to the migration crisis. To some extent the humanitarian actions of NGOs fed into this. Italy was commended for its SAR operations in 2014 but later looked to place more restrictive measures on NGOs carrying out SAR operations with a 'code of conduct'. This was after the peak of the crisis but before the 2018 elections which resulted in an emboldened Matteo Salvini becoming the Interior Minister. He swiftly closed the ports to NGOs wishing to disembark rescued migrants. Something which is discussed in greater detail in the following section.

5.- Search and Rescue Operations:

In this section I will look at several SAR operations that received much attention from both the EU and from Matteo Salvini in his capacity as the Minister of the Interior. First of all I will look at an incident in the summer of 2018 where a vessel belonging to *SOS Méditerranée* was refused entry into Italian ports and after an EU brokered deal eventually made its way to Spain. The same vessel was targeted again nearer the end of the year. I will then examine another two incidents involving the NGO Sea-Eye that occurred in the winter of 2018 and in the spring of 2019. By looking at these incidents I am hoping to determine whether securitising discourse was used by either actor (the European Union or the Italian Minister of the Interior) in response to a humanitarian operation. This would determine that humanitarian actions fed into securitising speech acts, helping to maintain the securitised issue of immigration in the Mediterranean Sea.

5.1.- SOS Méditerranée:

In June 2018, the *Aquarius* M.V., an SAR vessel chartered by *SOS Méditerranée*, rescued 629 off the coast of Libya. After this rescue was carried out the ship was instructed by the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) to sail towards a safe harbour. It made its way north. Shortly afterwards, however, it was reported that the Italian ports would be closed to the ship, leaving it stranded between Italy and Malta. After more than 36 hours the *Aquarius* was officially instructed to make its way towards Valencia, 760 nautical miles from its current position, despite being only 27 nautical miles away from Malta and 35 nautical miles away from Sicily (*SOS Méditerranée*, 2018). In November and while docked at Marseille, the vessel was targeted by Italian prosecutors. The authorities ordered the seizure of the *Aquarius* claiming that discarded clothing worn by migrants was contaminated and should have been labelled as 'toxic waste' rather than 'special waste' as they had mistakenly done (Tondo, 2018).

EU Discourse:

When it was agreed that the Aquarius was to make its way to the less ideal port of Valencia it was the result of an ad hoc solution reached between the EU and some member states. Shortly afterwards the EU Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship tweeted:

Welcome the decision of the Spanish Government to let the Aquarius disembark in Valencia for humanitarian reasons. This is real solidarity put in practice, towards both these desperate and vulnerable people and towards fellow EU Member States. #migrationEU. (@Avramopoulos, 2018).

There was also humanitarian language from the Commission president with a spokesperson tweeting:

There is 1st & foremost a humanitarian imperative. We are talking about people. Over 600 people. Priority of both Italian & Maltese should be getting them care. @EU Commission calls on all involved to find swift resolution so people on board #Aquarius can be safely disembarked asap (@NatashaBertaud, 2018).

The humanitarian discourse espoused by leading figures in the Commission is clear to see. They mention that the issue is firstly a humanitarian one and that the people onboard are desperate, vulnerable and in need of help.

Salvini's Speech Acts:

Salvini's response to the incident was different: He announced the closure of Italian ports to all NGOs. On the day that the vessel began sailing to Rome at the behest of the MRCC he tweeted '#chiudiamoporti' [we close the ports] (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018). This was the beginning of the stand-off with the Aquarius which ended with him declaring victory a few days later as the vessel made its way to Spain. He declared it to be his first

victory over the humanitarian NGOs and the SAR operations that are carried out in the Mediterranean (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018).

It was the beginning of new a hashtag used by Salvini referencing the policy that Italian ports would no longer accept NGO vessels. At the end of many of his tweets regarding SAR NGOs. he began using the hashtag #portichiusi [closed ports]. Salvini initially argued that this policy was humanitarian in nature rather than securitising and that ‘reducing departures and landings means reducing the dead, and reducing the income of those who speculate on illegal immigration... #portichiusi [#closedports] is #cuoriaperti [#openhearts]’ (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018). He also stated that his goal was to guarantee a peaceful life for the children in Africa, the victims of the ‘people smuggling’ operations being carried out in the central route (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018).

As mentioned, the Aquarius was targeted by Salvini and Italian authorities a few months after the vessel was forced to sail to Spain. When referring to the discarded clothing onboard Salvini tweeted that ‘there are over 5 thousand cases of infectious risk for HIV, syphilis, meningitis, tuberculosis and scabies, special undeclared waste, blood-soaked gauze’ (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2018). It was a way for Salvini to equate migrants with a health risk to Italian citizens. This argument was attacked by aids campaigners who noted that migrants and people seeking asylum have historically always been attacked with such myths about HIV and infectious conditions (Tondo, 2018). It is further evidence of securitised discourse when discussing NGOs which carry out SAR operations.

5.2.- Sea-Eye:

In December 2018 the ‘Professor Albrecht Penck’ which belonged to Sea-Eye and another vessel belonging to Sea-Watch, rescued a total of 49 migrants in distress. The

NGOs issued a joint press statement on New Year's Eve stating how important it was to find a speedy solution to the deadlock that had stopped the vessels disembarking (Sea-Watch e.V., 2018). Despite the plea it took over a week longer for a solution to be found during which time human rights groups warned of growing physical and psychological distress for those migrants on board. The disembarkation eventually happened in Malta after more than two weeks in total at sea (Reuters, 2019).

Another standoff involving Sea-Eye occurred in April 2019. The EU again had to act as a mediator. The vessel 'Alan Kurdi', named after the Syrian toddler who drowned in 2015 while his family were trying to cross the Mediterranean, rescued over 60 people off the Libyan coast. They made their way to the nearest safe port of Lampedusa in Italy but were denied access to the port and Italian waters (Sea-Eye.Org, 2019). Malta also initially refused the ship entry but another EU brokered deal was reached to distribute the 64 migrants among Germany, France, Portugal and Luxembourg, ending yet another situation during which the conditions for migrants onboard deteriorated (AP News, 2019).

EU Discourse:

In the case of the winter incident, the end of the stalemate and disembarkation of the two vessels in Malta was again the result of an EU negotiated deal. A speech given by Avramopoulos regarding the disembarkation of these NGO vessels displays humanitarian discourse and solidarity with the plight of the migrants which is similar in content to the 'Aquarius' incident. He stressed that the way that the situation was first handled was 'not what the European Union stands for. The European Union is about human values and solidarity. And if human values and solidarity are not upheld it is not Europe' (@Avramopoulos, 2019). Regarding a solution being found to the situation surrounding the 'Alan Kurdi' vessel in the spring of 2019, a coordinating spokesperson for

Jean-Claude Juncker tweeted that they were grateful a solution had finally been found for the people onboard and praised the cooperation and diplomacy of those involved (@NatashaBertaud, 2019).

Salvini's Speech Acts:

Again, the discourse emanating from Salvini stands in stark contrast to the EU and is more securitised in nature. In response to the incident over the winter period of 2018/2019 he tweeted that:

I am the Minister of the Interior, I deal with SECURITY, fight against the Mafia, immigration and I like to be informed about what we do. It is not necessary to Surrender to the blackmail of the NGOs that make politics, or of the EU that lets Malta do what it wants. (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2019).

The capitalisation of the word security leaves no doubt in the mind that Salvini considers the issue of immigration to be an issue of security and a fight that he feels is being engaged in against NGOs. Also important is that he places the issue of immigration alongside the 'fight against the mafia', an organisation with a potent history in Italy. Regarding the incident with the 'Alan Kurdi' in the spring of 2019, Salvini tweeted that, as promised, no immigrant from the German NGO would arrive in Italy and called the NGOs a danger as well as human traffickers (@MatteoSalvinimi, 2019).

5.3.- Conclusion:

By looking at the discourse surrounding these incidents we can determine that the EU used humanitarian discourse and was critical of the way the incidents were handled by Italy and sometimes other member states. This is not the case when we look at the tweets of Matteo Salvini. He used securitising discourse to justify the closing of Italian ports to NGOs who had carried out humanitarian SAR operations and were looking to

disembark migrants, something that had been the norm for years under the responsibility of the MRCC based in Rome.

6. - Discussions:

Discussion on Practice:

In section four I discuss the practices of both the European Union and the Italian government in the context of the migration crisis. When we consider the EU's practices we can see that they are in fact securitised. This securitisation comes in the form of Frontex and its operations, as well as the military focused EUNAVFOR MED Operation Sophia, which strengthen the EU's Mediterranean border. The securitising practices carried out by the EU are not directly linked to NGOs but to the migration crisis. Nonetheless, Frontex and the EEAS do claim that the increased presence of NGO SAR vessels off the coast of Libya has allowed the smuggling networks to change the way that they operate. They claim it has allowed the smugglers to put the onus of transit onto the NGOs, thus further reinforcing the need to securitise the border in the first place. Whether this is empirically true or not is another matter. The securitising actor uses it to justify its securitisation practices. This is therefore an example of the humanitarian practices of NGOs feeding into the securitising practices of the EU.

Italy was initially commended for its SAR operations in 2014 but later placed more restrictive measures on NGOs carrying out SAR operations with a Code of Conduct. According to NGOs this measure looked to criminalise their work and can be seen as an example of a securitising practice as, according to Léonard (2010), it was an out of the ordinary measure used to tackle a security issue. When an emboldened Matteo Salvini became the Interior Minister in 2018 he swiftly closed the ports to NGOs wishing to disembark rescued migrants. This is also a securitising practice that resulted from humanitarian practices carried out SAR NGOs.

Discussion on Discourse:

In section five I analysed several SAR incidents that had been reacted to by both the EU Commission and by Matteo Salvini in his position of Minister of the Interior. We can see that the discourse emanating from the Commission was humanitarian in nature when referring to the migration crisis in general and the role NGOs have played more specifically. There is a discrepancy between the discourse emanating from the EU and their practices but the humanitarian discourse can at least be explained by the humanitarian principles that the EU stands for as laid out in their Charter of Fundamental Rights (European Communities, 2000). In each of the incidents analysed the Commission was also keen to try and facilitate solidarity between member states, something that is severely lacking when it comes to immigration.

When we analyse the discourse emanating from Matteo Salvini we can see that the discourse linked to NGOs carrying out SAR operations has been of a securitised nature. Salvini constantly seeks to try and highlight a nexus between NGOs and people smugglers as well as the migrants that enter Italy with either crime or disease. On occasions he has tried to justify his measures with humanitarian language but placed in the context of his other tweets it is clear that this is a façade to justify the securitising action of closing the ports.

6.1.- Unfairly Remonstrated?:

This thesis has shown that the Italian government, as a securitising actor, has played a role in keeping the issue of migration in the Mediterranean securitised. Migration to the EU is a contentious issue and the incidents I have analysed show that the EU has often had to act as a mediator between the states in order to try and find an *ad hoc* solution. Italy, due to geographical reasons, was the first country of contact for hundreds

of thousands of migrants during the crisis. Because of the Dublin Regulation these migrants were to be registered in Italy (Migration and Home Affairs - European Commission, n.d.). It could be argued that this mechanism placed an unfair burden on Italy and that there is an unreasonable focus on Italy's responses when it comes to securitisation, especially from northern member states which did not face the same migration realities (three of the NGOs analysed were founded in Germany and none in Italy). Furthermore, while the Code of Conduct has been criticised by many outside of Italy (Cusumano, 2019) it was sponsored by the EU Commission who have been able to largely avoid the same level of public criticism.

6.2.- Combining the Schools:

The table below shows that in the context of migration through the central Mediterranean route, NGOs are the target of both securitising speech acts emanating from Italy and securitising practices carried out by both the European Union and Italy. One could argue that humanitarian SAR operations feed into the overall process of securitisation that is carried out by these two securitising actors. Furthermore, this thesis empirically shows that from the point of view of the NGO carrying out SAR operations, there is not much of a distinction between the Paris School of securitising studies and the Copenhagen School of securitising studies because NGOs carrying out these operations have been adversely affected by both forms of securitisation.

Table 1.

Actor	Securitising Speech	Securitising Practice
The European Union	No	Yes
Italy	Yes	Yes

In the theoretical section MacDonald's (2008) interpretation of the Copenhagen School's framework explained that there are three occasions when the moment of securitisation takes place. Léonard, in developing the Paris School of securitisation studies determines what a securitising practice looks like. By concisely applying these two interpretations to the Italian government's actions in section four we can ascertain that there is a fuzzy area that exists between the two schools which NGOs find themselves, as highlighted in figure 1.

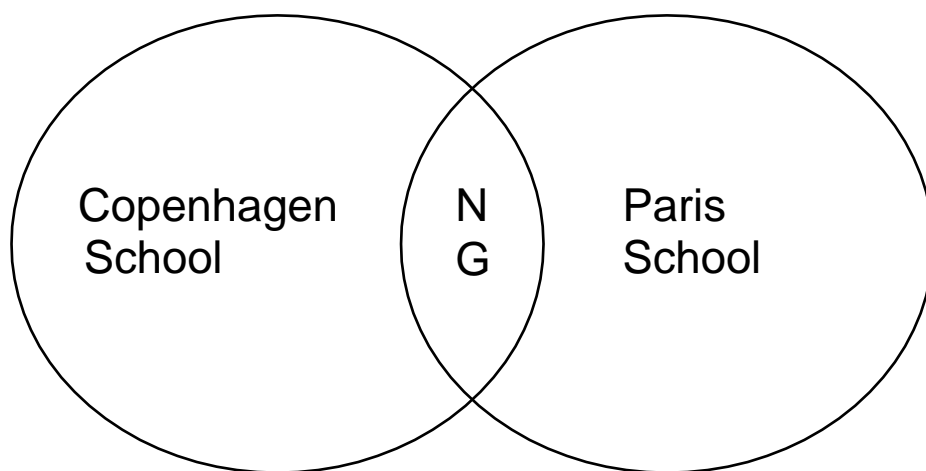


Figure 1.

One could contend that when Salvini was tweeting about what he believed to be a terrorist threat being imported into Italy with the help of Operation Mare Nostrum he was labelling the issue. This is what MacDonald interpreted as occasion one out of the three. It could also be argued that the moment securitisation occurred was when Salvini and the Lega Party performed well in the elections. In this interpretation the target audience (the electorate) concurred with the party's view that irregular immigration was a problem for the country. This would be occasion two.

The additional actions discussed, the Code of Conduct and the moment the ports were closed, could plausibly occur in both frameworks. Both actions could be considered

the point when an extraordinary measure was taken to engage with the issue that has become securitised (MacDonald, 2008). Equally, one practice involves the use of measures typically used to tackle issues like drug trafficking, terrorism or foreign invasion. The other is an 'extraordinary practice'. Both types of practice are put forward by Léonard. We can see here through this example there is a definite overlap in the two schools.

6.3.- Limitations:

There are some methodological limitations with this thesis. While I have shown in the tweets analysed that Salvini has used securitising discourse, a larger variety of posts would have been available if I had analysed multiple social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.). A deeper analysis could have involved an analytical study of Twitter which may have shown how far and wide the posts were shared and discussed. This would show how many Italian citizens Salvini's message had reached. Additionally, a quantitative method of analysis could have been combined with the qualitative approach used here to present a more rounded study. This would have involved considering every single SAR operation that has happened in the central Mediterranean and all of the responses to it, official securitising actor and public alike, rather than the few incidents selected here. Time and space, however, prevented these methodological additions.

6.4.- Conclusion:

This thesis aimed to look at how the issue of immigration has remained securitised in the Mediterranean. By analysing practices and the discourse emanating from both the European Union and Italy I determined that the humanitarian practices of NGOs fed into securitising practices and discourse. In the case of the Central Mediterranean, and from

the point of view of the NGOs, the two prominent schools of securitisation theory merge into one.

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8.- Appendix

Interview Transcript:

Interviewer - Hi.

Frontex Spokesperson - Hello.

I - Hi, it's me again.

F - Hi. Yes, yes, that's much better. How can I help you?

I - So yes, I'm writing a thesis on non-governmental organisations and the search and rescue operations that they carry out in the central Mediterranean...

F - [interjects] Okay.

I - ...and have a few questions about trying to understand better the relationship between Frontex and these NGOs that operate in the area.

F - Sure.

I - So I was going to ask: What effect, if any, does Frontex believe NGOs have in the context of migration?

F - Could you repeat your, hold on let me close the window. It's a bit hard to hear. Just a second.

I - Sure.

F - What effect?

I - What effect does Frontex believe that NGOs have in the context of migration in the central Mediterranean?

F - Are you talking about the NGOs which are operating at sea or in the hot-spots?

I - At sea.

F - At sea. Well it's not for us to make this assessment, eh, I mean there [are a] lot of search and rescue and international obligations for whoever is out in the sea. It's not up for Frontex to make this assessment, you know, our role is to provide technical support to the member states that have an... that are facing challenges at their external borders. We

do not have a direct cooperation with the NGOs on an institutional level. However we do with some of them which are part of our Consultative Forums, such as Save the Children, for example.

I - Okay.

F - So they're part of our Consultative Forum. Having said that if there is a... especially in 2015 when the migratory flows were very very high as you know, we did have several situations which we would have search and rescue, in which more vessels would be involved so it could be a Frontex vessel, a state deployed, a military one or a private one, such as the ones belonging to NGO's so on several occasions we kinda boarded [inaudible] migrants who were rescued by NGOs onboard of our vessels then take them to shore.

I - That's great, thank you. I would then ask: The search and rescue actions by these NGOs that operate at sea are quite often criticised by EU member states such as Italy, Malta has sometimes criticised them too, as being a threat to security. Is this something Frontex agrees

F - [interjects] Look, I can, I cannot, no Frontex does not, I mean we can not. You know, it's not for us to make this decision, you know, I mean, moral assessments are not part of our mandate. We have a very clear mandate and that's an operational one, to provide additional technical assistance by deploying vessels. Also for search and rescue purposes, helicopters, aircraft, border and coastguard officers. Our primary task is border control and border surveillance but as I said before it's a question of international law of the sea, whoever is out in the sea has the legal obligation to rescue lives. Search and rescue is a legal obligation...

I - Yeah.

F - For all those who are at sea. We cannot make an assessment about moral implications. We can say what is legal, what is not legal. That is certainly beyond our mandate.

I - Okay. So my final question, it's just a short few questions I have. I was going to ask if Frontex would view NGOs operating as they do close to the Libyan shoreline as perhaps a hinderance when it comes to maintaining border integrity. At the EU's southern border. F

- Well, there's freedom of movement on international waters. What we have, eh, what we have noted since 2014, between 2014 - 2016 was an, was a change in *modus operandi* of the smugglers operating in Libya. So while in 2014 the migrant would be put, the smugglers would put migrants on board of sturdier vessels that were made of, there was two rubber boats, some of them were fishing boats. But the rubber boat was made of thicker, there would be less people travelling on board. I can't remember off the top of my head but if you want I can check the details. There would be maybe 50 to 60 people travelling in 2014 and in 2015 and 16 this number on average would, I mean we would see as many as sometimes 150 or even 170 people travelling onboard of 10-12 metre long dinghies, making them extremely, you know, even 60 was a lot or 90 was a lot. I think it was between 60 and 90 in 2014. in 2015-16 we would see as many as 150 or 170 on board. in 2015 and 16 the smuggling operations have become much more organised because they are more profitable. You know the boats, the dinghies would be imported from China. they would be much thinner, made of thinner rubber. they would be made of one chamber as opposed to the construction of the previous, the boats, the dinghies we would see in 2014 which were consisting of several chambers so if one of them deflates or gets punctured the boat doesn't sink immediately. Later on it was just the cheapest version in order for the smuggling networks, the criminal networks to optimise their income and their profits. The quantity of fuel changed. In 2014 it would be, or before 2014 it would be sufficient basically to get the boat all the way out the Libyan territorial waters.

In 2015 it was just enough to get these boats to the end of Libyan territorial waters. The same thing for the quantity of water, drinking water on board.

I - Okay, yeah.

F - So what I am saying is certainly the smugglers, can you hang on a second, sorry?

[answers another phone call].

I - Yeah, sure.

F - Sorry, eh... so you know, it has become clear that the smugglers were taking advantage of the increased rescue capability. But we have to be really careful. This is all I can say at this time, yeah, I mean at this point, you know it's... the assessment you're asking me to make, you know, is, is nothing we can make, yeah?

I - Yeah.

F - Yeah. It's certainly not for us to make any kind of assessment of this type. We can, you know, we have, we are analysing trends and a variety of push and pull factors and we did notice the changed *modus operandi* of the smuggling networks in 2014,15 and 16...

I - Okay.

F - But that's, you know, that smuggling networks are looking for profit and they, you know, if there is an offer there will be a demand of course. We have noted that change in those years in terms of *modus operandi* of the smuggling networks.

I - Okay. That's great. I think that was everything that I was wanting to ask you. It was just a few questions.

F - Sure.

I - Yeah I think that's everything. Thank you for your help.

F - Alright, no problem.

I - Thank you, bye bye.

F - Okay, bye.

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