CONVERGENCE IN CRISIS; SECURITISATION OF MIGRATION AND THE ROLE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN SECURITISING MIGRATION

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Abstract:

The COVID-19 global pandemic made countries, humanitarian and health organizations to evoke the concept of global crisis embedded in existential threats as control measures to it (COVID-19). The application of securitisation through crisification as control measure to the COVID-19 pandemic made the entire global system to perceive an imminent danger of a global health catastrophe. The perceived imminent global health catastrophe led to the convergence of migration restrictions amongst the comity of nations to close their borders to migrants, detain migrants, isolate and quarantine migrants as well as instituting mandatory COVID-19 test and vaccinations for the global populace as well as migrants. The convergence in global migration restrictions and controls stemmed from the fact that, the COVID-19 virus spread across the globe through migrants and migration related activities from the epicentre (Wuhan-China). The convergence in migration restrictions made global south countries to also accept some of the control measures imposed on migrants and migration related activities by countries of the global north. The convergence in the securitisation of migration during the COVID-19 pandemic set a bad precedence for global south countries, which are the main sources of documented and undocumented migrants to the global north. The global convergence in the securitisation of migration as control measures to the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to make global south countries which have porous borders to toe the line of the global north countries in restricting migration and migrants. The lessons from the global border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic must be an eye opener to global south countries which are the major receivers of global remittances. These lessons must force governments in the global south to create avenues of employment for the teeming youth not to rely on international migration as a means of survival and last resort in terms of livelihood strategies.

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1. Introduction

The movement of people across international borders has, in all generations and eras, been seen as a major security threat against the host community (Jaskulowski, 2019). Migrants have mostly been perceived as security threats by host communities as criminals, menace and a whole lot of bad connotations on the social, political, economic, environmental and etcetera structures that exist in the host community (Bello, 2020; 2022a; 2022b; Bigo, 2008). The movement of people across borders in no time in human history has been perceived as the greatest security threat to nation-states than the post-9/11 era (Adamson, 2006; Browning, 2017; Squire, 2015).

In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States of America and the follow up terrorist attacks which occurred in Madrid and London, securitisation of migration has become an integral feature of the 21st-century migration policies of the entire global system, especially in the global north (Browning, 2017; Gifra, 2024). The post-9/11 era led to a clarion call on the war against terrorism, which was waged by countries in the global north, especially in North America, Western Europe, Australia and Israel. The War on terrorism led to the enactment of many entry restrictions and laws against migrants from the global south, especially those coming from countries in Asia and Africa, as well as notable Islamic countries (Schain, 2008, Hlouchova, 2020).

In these restrictions, people from Islamic countries and adherents of Islam were also highly affected as Islam was highly associated with terrorism, leading to Islamophobia in the global north, especially in Western Europe and North America (Lazardis and Khursheed, 2015). Before the 9/11 terrorist attacks, discrimination and restrictions against migrants and migration though existed but were on a minimal scale when compared to the post-9/11 era (Davitti & Fries, 2017). Prior to the 21st century and the 9/11 terrorist attack, global north countries such as the United States and those in Western Europe had political and pragmatic discourses in stemming the tides on immigration and migrants (Bilgic, 2006; Omand, 2010). The earlier control measures on migration and migrants in the Western world were in the form of restrictions on visa acquisition and selective migration policies coupled with the use of deportations and detention of migrants as part of border control measures (Aslan, 2022).

Beside the mentioned border control measures, nation-states in Western countries such as the United States of America and those in Western Europe took further steps to stem the tides on migration through the building of fences and walls (European Commission 2017; 2018; Kaunert & Léonard, 2021). For instance, the United States of America decided to build a wall to control the illegal flow of migrants from Mexico and other Central and Southern American countries. Europe also, in controlling illegal migration from Africa and Asia, built electric fences and walls, leading to the concept of FOTRES EUROPE. In viewing migrants and the migration process as a security threat,

countries in the global north employed more officials in their border control and patrol process as well as advanced surveillance procedures, including the use of drones, radars, sensors, cameras and other sophisticated surveillance logistics (Dijstelbloem and Meijer, 2011; Gerstein *et al.*, 2018; Hartung, 2021). For instance, in the case of Europe, the European Union formed FRONTEX and EUNAVFOR to patrol the Mediterranean region and the Balkans to ensure that there is no influx of undocumented migrants into Europe, especially from Africa or Asia through the use of the sea or land or both (Cusumano, 2019; Léonard, 2010; Neal, 2009).

Besides the formation of patrol units or organisations in controlling migration by the European Union (EU) against Africans and Asians, the European Union has also signed agreements and treaties with African countries to ensure that African states cooperate with them in ensuring that illegal border crossing is controlled and governments in Africa can also create the enabling environment for the teeming youth. Such agreements signed between African countries and the European Union include agreements with countries such as Morocco, Chad, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Senegal and others. African sub-regions such as the Maghreb, West Africa, Central Africa and East Africa, especially the Lake Chad Region and the Horn of Africa have many agreements with the European Union in the area of migration control (Aslan, 2022; Molnar *et al.*, 2022). These bilateral and multi-lateral agreements were part of the broader Valletta Agreement and Action Plan between the EU and African Union (AU) members.

In terms of controlling migration, the European Union is more than prepared to partner Africa because the continent of Africa produces a chunk of migrants who illegally access the EU soil. Migrants from Africa sometimes use illegal sea and boat crossing through the Maghreb Region, with countries such as Mauritania, Morocco, Libya and Tunisia as transit routes to the EU (Bigo, 2008; Bello, 2017). The numerous restrictive mechanisms established by the global north countries in controlling migrants and the process of migration do not mean that, the global north countries are the only ones faced with the challenges of migration. Global south countries have also had their fair share of migration as a challenge to their national sovereignty. For instance, in the past, Ghana enacted the Aliens Compliance Order in 1969 that deported many foreigners, especially Nigerians. Nigeria also retaliated by deporting other foreign nationals, especially Ghanaians. On the African continent, intra-national migration has led to many attacks on other African migrant population, leading to death, destruction of properties and many ill-treatments against such migrants. For example, there have been xenophobic and other forms of attacks against other African nationals in Libya and South Africa in the past. In the face of migration and its related challenges, African countries have not openly pursued policies of securitising migrants or signed agreements that seem to securitise migration and mobility related activities within the continent.

2. The concept of securitisation of migration and its global manifestations

Securitisation of migration is as old as the concept of migration itself. Securitisation of migration started many years ago when receiving communities started to experience and feel the effects of guests or migrants in their communities. Globally, migrants have been securitised in so many ways. Sometimes migrants are even securitised in their own countries of origin by agents of the receiving countries at their foreign missions or embassies through the visa application and acquisition process. The concept of securitisation of migration was introduced by the Copenhagen School in the aftermath of the Cold War (Angelescu, 2008; Buzan *et al.*, 1998; Buzan *et al.*, 2007; Waever, 1995). According to the Copenhagen School, in the aftermath of the Cold War, countries face new threats to their security, and these new threats (existential threats) are not from the armed race or defence security where the military or the armed forces are needed.

According to the Copenhagen School, securitisation is when there is a perceived existential threat to a situation. In this existential threat, speech acts are activated to make them look real and to ensure that emergency solutions are sought for these threats (Collins, 2012; Warner *et al.*, 2022). Once an action is perceived as an existential threat, even libertarians or liberalists who believe in democracy circumvent their democratic principles in the name of collective security to do the unthinkable (Léonard & Kaunert, 2020; Wohlfeld, 2014; Panebianco, 2020). For instance, in terms of the war on terrorism, the Anglo-American allies and some of their NATO members unleashed dire security actions on Iraq and Libya leading to the overthrow of the governments of Saddam Hussein of Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya. This same level of security actions was also unleashed on the Taliban government of Afghanistan by the Anglo-American allies and their friends who are all NATO members. In all these dire security actions, human lives and properties were destroyed hence negatively affecting the dignity and plights of the citizens of these countries. In spite of all the security actions unleashed against the citizens and governments of the aforementioned countries, these Anglo-American allies and the majority of their NATO members or friends are noted to practice the best form of democracy that respect human rights and human dignity.

Due to the special attention states attach to existential threat(s) to their sovereignty, the concept of securitisation has been widely used in so many instances when migrants or migration is seen as a significant risk to the security of nations and their citizens. Securitisation of migration is usually perceived and activated when nation-states feel that opening their borders make them susceptible to external threats and risks (Serres, 2019). In terms of the securitisation processes, sometimes nation-states control or restrict immigration when there is a perceived existential threat against their race, perceived terrorist threats or attacks, trafficking (human and drugs trafficking), influx of undocumented migrants, unemployment of their nationals, threats to their political systems and etcetera (Gifra, 2024).

The concept of securitisation of migrants and migration is seemingly perceived in almost every sovereign state, but that of the West or the global north is highly

institutionalized. For instance, amongst the global south and developing countries where the economies are weak and political and institutional structures sometimes do not exist or are not effective, nationals detest migrants, but the securitisation of migration does not materialize or manifest as a top priority for governments. In this respect, migration is a top priority for global north governments, thereby leading to excessive control of who comes in and goes out of their nation states most especially who comes in (Geddes, 2016; Spiegel, 2015).

Securitisation of migration amongst countries of the global north has become a top priority such that even refugees, women and children who are protected by international law at the point of entry in times of crisis are sometimes returned to countries where their lives are in danger. The reactions and practices of global north countries towards migration and migrants differ from their practice of the democratic tenets they profess and preach to other less advanced countries to imbibe when it comes to migration management, restrictions and control (Fauser, 2006).

Securitisation policies promulgated and implemented by global north countries, such as arbitrary detentions, deportations, migrant profiling, etc., are detrimental to the human plight and dignity of migrants, hence negatively impacting on their fundamental human rights. The institutionalization of migration and migrants as security threats by global north countries has been presented in many academic discourses and researches (Huysmans, 2006; 2011; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002), then in the Global South.

3. The role of the COVID-19 pandemic in the securitisation of migration

The COVID-19 pandemic, which struck the entire global system in the late second decade of the 21st century, led to a global securitisation of migration. The COVID-19, also known as the coronavirus, is said to be the greatest of all pandemics to hit the global system due to its nature and modes of spread, its effects on nations and the attention it received in the entire global system. The COVID-19 pandemic era is said to be the first time when the entire global system was heading towards imminent danger of a security threat outside military confrontations in the post-Cold War era. The COVID-19 pandemic, after its discovery in Wuhan, China (Broone, 2020), spread to all the corners of the global system within the shortest possible time in an instantaneous manner (Ofori, 2024). The instantaneous and wild spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the entire global system, like a blazing fire, was due to the improvement in global transport and communication systems, especially air and sea transport (Li, 2020). The mode of spread of the COVID-19 pandemic was from person to person through infected individuals. The COVID-19 virus used human bodies usually migrants as the conduit of further transmissions and infestations (Ofori, 2024). The mode of spread of the COVID-19 pandemic made the body of migrants to be profiled as viral hosts to the corona virus (Pacciardi, 2023; WHO, 2020). The identification and acceptance of entry points such as seaports, harbours and airports as the points of entry of the COVID-19 virus led to the securitisation of entry points in respective countries as a means of controlling the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the

COVID-19 pandemic through migrants and migration. Control measures such as lockdowns and border closures were used as some of the means of controlling the COVID-19 global pandemic from spreading further to other countries (IMF, 2020). The control measures which were accepted, prescribed and recommended as means of controlling the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and virus include; quarantines, detentions, isolations, social distancing, mandatory vaccinations and lockdowns, which were synonymous with securitisation of migration (Byaruhanga, 2020). The use of the mentioned control measures was a means of restricting human movements and controlling some of their rights and liberties.

During the global stress and crisis in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, democratic and technologically advanced countries of the global north were even at the forefront of implementing these non-liberal but rather totalitarian control measures (Ofori, 2024). Control measures accepted by global bodies including the United Nations Organization and its global agencies such as the World Health Organization, including detentions, arbitrary arrests and closure of entry points or national borders, were not different from the already existing control measures used by global north countries in Western Europe and the United States of America as their means of controlling undocumented migration through the securitisation of migrants (Hardy, 2020). COVID-19 control measures, which include lockdowns and border closure (Ofori, 2024), were similar to the planned wall by a section of American politicians to be constructed on their border with Mexico, hence also reinforcing the EU patrols on the Mediterranean Sea between Southern Europe and North Africa by FRONTEX and EURONAV (COPM, 2018; Frontex, 2017).

The border control measures and lockdown, which were introduced by global health experts and organizations, internalized and reinforced these already securitising measures against migrants during the COVID-19 pandemic era in the global north. By doing so, the COVID-19 pandemic gave the green light to countries which did not even have laws on securitising migrants to also pass executive and legislative instruments, orders or decrees to ensure that migrants are treated as existential threats to the security of destination countries on arriving on/at their border (Cheng *et al.*, 2020). The adoption and acceptance of border control measures, including lockdowns, also led to the exhibition of new surveillance technology on border controls and patrols against migrants. Also, as part of the COVID-19 control measures, there was increased presence of military and non-military officials at entry and exit points such as borders, seaports and airports to control the inward and outward movements of migrants.

The control of the inward and outward movements of migrants due to the COVID-19 pandemic led to curtailing some of the fundamental human rights of migrants through unnecessary surveillance and migrant profiling. Also, border control measures at entry and exit points led to extortionist practices against migrants in countries where mandatory COVID-19 tests were implemented with migrants as the cost bearers. These extortionist measures were used as leeway in countries where accountability and transparency are not part of their core political principles, especially in the global south.

Global south countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Brazil, India, Egypt, Pakistan, Algeria, etc., implemented and enforced mandatory COVID-19 tests at entry points such as airports, seaports and on borders where the cost was borne by migrants. In the mandatory COVID-19 test amongst global south countries, countries such as Nigeria, Togo, Ghana, etcetera, at the time of writing have not been able to disclose the actual money made from the mandatory COVID-19 test and where they have, there has been some levels of financial irregularities hence becoming a subject of discussion by opposition political parties and civil society organizations.

The use of detention and isolation centres as part of the COVID-19 control measures around the globe, were basically not new to destination countries in the global north. Global north countries, as part of stemming the tides and controlling undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and refugees, have isolation centres and detention camps, which are used to contain the afore mentioned categories of migrants. For instance, countries such as Canada, the United States of America, Italy, Spain, France, Greece, Germany, Australia and a few others have detention camps and isolation centres for migrants (asylees, refugees and undocumented foreigners) (Aslan, 2022). Although detention camps and isolation centres are used for controlling migrants in the global north, a few countries in the global south that have agreements with global north countries in controlling migration flows also have detention camps and isolation centres as part of their controls and restrictions on undocumented migration.

Detention and isolation centres in controlling migrants as part of the securitisation process are uncommon in the global south since the global south countries are the main source of migrants to the global north. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and the use of detention camps and Isolation centres as effective means of controlling the COVID-19 pandemic, countries which did not have detention and isolation centres also built these centres in haste, whereas the global north, where the practice of using detention camps and Isolation centres to control migration and migrants also passed legislative and executive instruments to construct more of these facilities. From the successes of using detention camps and isolation centres in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic in the global south, countries which did not have these facilities prior to the COVID-19 pandemic will resort to using them in the future to control migration flows into their territories. This process of using detention camps and isolation centres amongst global south countries in controlling migrants during the COVID-19 era will lead to entrenching the securitisation practice which is already institutionalized in the global north.

4. The concept of convergence in crisis

Convergence in crisis is the researcher's idea about how the narratives about the COVID-19 pandemic changed the migration policies of global south countries to align with the securitisation of migration pursued by global north countries. With the convergence is crisis, the researcher's idea basically denotes where countries, entities, institutions or organisations which previously had different or parallel operational policies decide to

converge or align towards a common policy due to a perceived and common existential threat they face, especially in times of crisis. In terms of convergence in crisis, in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, both global south and north countries converged in securitising migration which was not a normal practice amongst most global south countries. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the two global regions (global north and south) converged to pursue common securitisation of migration policies through border closures, detention of migrants, the establishment of isolation centres, mandatory vaccination of migrants and the inspection of COVID-19 vaccine cards. The convergence in these migration and mobility policies materialized through the global appeal to the COVID-19 pandemic as an existential threat to the global comity of nations. Media images from the global north centres and their global communication or media giants such as ABC, BBC, CNN, DWTV, France-24, CBS and many others showed disturbing images of the COVID-19 virus and the COVID-19 pandemic on their screens which were easily used to convince global south countries of the severity of the Covid-19 pandemic (Desmond, 2023; Hart, Chinn, and Soroka, 2020; Hansen, 2011; Williams, 2003; Woods *et al.*, 2020). The images shown by the global communication or media giants mentioned convinced global south countries to toe the lines of the global north countries in using the same control measures against the COVID-19 pandemic. These control measures against the COVID-19 pandemic were embedded with securitisation of migration and migrants which were in practice in the global north before the occurrence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The convergence in migration policies made global south countries also to close their borders, profiled migrants through COVID-19 tests and checking of COVID-19 vaccine cards, establish isolation and quarantine centres, erect detention camps and etcetera (French and Torin, 2020). These COVID-19 control measures implemented by global south countries were initially implemented by global north countries whiles certain elements were already in place in the global north in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (Gifra, 2024; Squire, 2015; 2022b; Bigo, 2008). In the securitisation of migration literature, global south countries do not visibly and pragmatically implement securitisation policies against migrants since global south countries are the origins of most migrants to the global north. In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, global south countries which do not have isolation centres and detention camps as means of controlling migration through securitisation emulated these inhumane and libertarian unfriendly policies towards migrants.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, countries around the globe appealed to the COVID-19 pandemic as a global crisis in making extra decisions which would not have been considered during normal times; hence, the COVID-19 period and its immediate aftermath was called the "New Normal Era" (Ofori, 2024). The use of the concept of crisification (Narby, 2010; Paglia, 2018; Rhinard, 2019; Squire *et al.*, 2021), has been resorted to by the European Union on many occasions to embark on policy implementations in the migration - security nexus that is non-human rights friendly but based on crisis methodology (Kaunert *et al.*, 2021). According to Renhard (2019), when

the crisis of security threats are evoked, it easily helps nation-states which are considered to be the adherents and propagates of liberal ideas as well as human rights and freedoms such as those in North America (Canada and the United States of America) and members of the European Union to apply or employ radical border control measures leading to the securitisation of migration. The threats posed by the COVID-19 pandemic made global north countries to hide behind the crisification of the COVID-19 pandemic to influence global south countries to toe their lines of securitising migrants and the migration process.

Though the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic knew no bounds, the effects on the global south in terms of infestations were different but global south countries were forced to adopt the same control measures which were been used in the global north. The acceptance of the COVID-19 pandemic control measures which were not practiced by global south countries were due to the fact that global north countries forced them to do so as global south countries are the origins of most of the migrants found in the global north. Global power play was also showcased in making global south countries to toe the line of border control measures meant to control the COVID-19 pandemic which was already been used by the global north countries before the COVID-19 pandemic. Global research, media, communication, health and multilateral institutions financed and manned by global north countries were at the forefront of making global south countries to accept the same control measures adopted by global north countries against the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the global north and south countries accepted the same COVID-19 pandemic control measures due to crisification (Narby, 2010 and Paglia, 2018) of the pandemic as an existential global threat. The crisification of the COVID-19 pandemic made global north and south countries to converge in securitising migration for the first-time in world history, though the global north and south have different migration policies.

4. Conclusions of the study

To conclude, the COVID- 19 pandemic led the entire global system to be engulfed with imminent global health catastrophe that made both the global north and south that pursued different migration policies to converge on common migration practices such as border closure, detention and isolation of migrants, checking of COVID-19 vaccination cards, mandatory COVID-19 tests and etcetera. Global south countries, which practice different migration policies from that of the global north for the first time collectively employed the same migration restrictions or control measures used by the global north countries. The common migration restrictions and control measures used during the COVID- 19 pandemic stereotyped and stigmatized the bodies of migrants as hosts to the COVID-19 virus, leading to the arbitrary detention of migrants, isolation of migrants at camps and centres, profiling of migrants and even in certain instances migrants been forced to take doses or jabs of mandatory vaccinations at immigration entry and exit points. In other instances, transit countries, in trying to also ensure compliance, ensured

that migrants in transit possessed the required health documents, such as COVID-19 pandemic vaccination cards, before they were allowed to use their countries or access their countries before getting to their final destinations.

Countries in the global south toed the line of securitising migrants and the process of migration because during the COVID-19 pandemic, borders of the global north, which are the destinations of an appreciable number of global south emigrants, were closed. Also, some global south countries converged in the securitisation of migrants and migration with the global north in getting the needed financial assistance to put up COVID-19 testing centres at their airports and other points of entry and exit. The convergence in global migration restrictions and controls during the COVID-19 global crisis led to the deployment of unfriendly human rights treatments at entry and exit points in the global south. These unfriendly human rights treatments were inimical to the principles of human liberty and fundamental freedoms. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, military officials were used by certain global north and south countries to manage porous borders to prevent the infiltration of migrants through unapproved roots. The use of these military officials to manage and patrol these porous borders during the COVID-19 crisis is not different from the Military, FBI and CIA and other intelligence agents who are sometimes deployed to manage, control, monitor and provide surveillance on the American border with Mexico or the operations of FRONTEX and EURONAV which also patrols the Mediterranean Sea to control the movement of undocumented migrants from Africa to the EU (Aslan, 2022).

The convergence in global migration restrictions and controls in the COVID-19 era is an imminent danger for the future of global south migrants. This stems from the fact that transit countries in the global south which directly link global north destinations, especially the United States of America and the European Union, could be used by global north countries through bilateral and multi-lateral agreements to detain migrants due to the presence and availability of COVID-19 detentions structures. During the convergence in the global migration restrictions and controls in the COVID-19 era, certain transit destinations to the global north in the global south, were technologically equipped by global north countries in the areas of border control and surveillance. Initially, these border control and surveillance gadgets were given freely to these global south transit countries to secure their borders against the COVID-19 pandemic, but in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, these border control technology and surveillance gadgets could now be used by these transit countries to the benefit of global north partners in controlling migrant flows.

With respect to the convergence in migration policies during the COVID-19 pandemic, security threats in the future, just like or more than the COVID-19 crisis, could force the entire global system to embark on more radical measures to control migration. Global shutdown on migration such as collective border and entry points closure by both global north and south countries against migrants such as refugees, asylees, women and children are likely to end the global humanitarian regime. Radical global security migration controls measures will negatively affect many households in the global south

where remittances from migrants are the lifelines to their survival. In this instance, global south governments should adopt good governance structures to ensure that avenues of employment are created for the teeming youth not to rely on international migration as their last resort of livelihood or `survival strategy.

Finally, the convergence in migration restrictions and controls during the COVID-19 pandemic should be an eye-opener to global south countries as existential threats to the global system can take any form. For this matter, the porous borders in global south countries make them prone to future securitisation of migration and migrants through border closures as well as detentions. Already, global north nationals see migrants from the global south as threats to their social, political and economic environment; hence, migration is taking the frontline in terms of their political campaigns. With migration taking the front stage in the politics of the global north before the COVID-19 pandemic, post COVID-19 era will see more securitisation policies pursued by global north countries in addition to the securitised measures established in the post 9/11 terrorist attacks against migrants.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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