

Retoryka lokalności

Rhetoric of Locality

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RECENZJA/REVIEW

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Recenzja/Review: Clarke Rountree and Jouni Tilli (eds.), *National Rhetorics in the Syrian Immigration Crisis: Victims, Frauds, and Floods*, East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2019

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The volume concerns itself with how rhetors – mainly national leaders in Europe, Japan and the US – construct the refugee crisis and the refugees themselves in specific cultural, social and political circumstances generated by the collapse of ISIS and the subsequent turmoil in Syria.

After providing the readers with a political context of the Syrian crisis and an overview of migration regulations in various regions, the editors give examples of historical patterns of societal reactions to refugee flows in the USA and Europe. Then they focus on the European “refugee crisis,” which has spawned many counter-reactions, including xenophobic political and social campaigns and media-generated moral panics related to the proclaimed incompatibility between liberal Europeans and conservative refugee and migrant minorities, particularly Muslims.

Out of many possible discourses related to refugee issues, ranging from official policy papers to political campaigns or media debates, the volume is focused on national leaders as exponents of dominant rhetorical strategies of constructing refugees. This is justified because leader-rhetoric is particularly attuned to specific rhetorical situations (understood broadly in terms of each nation’s economy, heritage or demographics). The objective throughout the volume is to trace any patterns, similarities (common *topoi*) and specifics in these official discourses. In fact, the results indicate a few common characteristics: labelling of refugees and metaphorizing their influx, identification and dis-identification (othering) techniques through selected “terministic screens,” as well as scapegoating maneuvers to harvest political support.

İnan Özdemir Taştan and Hatice Çoban Keneş have authored the first chapter on “Immigration Rhetoric of Political Leaders in Turkey: From Guest Metaphor to Emphasis on National Interest.” Their study traces the history of Turkish state to explain why Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and his ruling AK Party government,

accepted all Syrians following the 2011 military conflict with an “open-door” refugee policy. In his discourse, Syrian asylum seekers were welcomed as guests, yet the guest metaphor did not refer to domestic guest-host relationship, but rather to a relationship based on religious brotherhood that is characteristic of the Islamic tradition. The implications of the guest metaphor contravened solutions to practical problems of a large number of supposedly transient migrants and made them dependent on Turkish hospitality and EU aid. The initial openness of Turkish authorities to grant citizenship to Syrians was questioned by the opposition as a ploy to underpin Erdoğan’s power, as the issue of immigration has been seen as a political trap and a threat to national interests by 2016.

A similar trajectory of public discourses is discovered by Ivana Cvetković Miller in “Serbian Migration Rhetoric: They Are Only Passing Through.” The author investigates Serbian political speeches and documents from 2013 to 2015 to reveal how immigrants have been positioned vis-à-vis Serbia’s claim to Europeanness and its national identity. Given the complex historical background of Balkan wars and economic displacements in the last decades, the author points to Serbia’s self-branding as a transit country that enables free movement and mobility for diverse ethnic groups, including Bosnians, Kosovars, Chinese, Russians, Libyans, and, recently Syrians. The current political context has spawned prominent nationalistic and radical voices that blame migrants for anything from a decline in the number of tourists, the lack of public safety, the destruction of crops, and the disruption of social order. These attacks are countered by the government’s narrative that “they are just passing through,” which diminishes migrants’ impact (while reinforcing Serbia’s inferior status), but at the same time allows to control public resentments and imputes Serbians’ “tolerance,” an acceptable European value and EU standard.

“Political Rhetoric in the Refugee Crisis in Greece” by Yiannis Karayiannis and Anthoula Malkopoulou discusses the oppositional rhetorics of two dominant parties with regard to the refugee crisis being “a crisis within the crisis,” since it hit Greece during a prolonged financial and economic depression and entrapped thousands of undocumented migrants on Greek islands and mainland. The authors study discourse metaphors favored by anti-immigrant New Democracy Party led by Antonis Samaras and by the ruling left-wing SYRIZA led by prime minister Alexis Tsipras. According to Samaras, the national economy suffers from “smuggled immigration,” with undocumented migrants involved in the “black economy” and “black trade,” which “kills” the legal trade and eats into prosperity. NDP discourses construct Greece as a “container” with restricted space and little air left inside. Meanwhile, SYRIZA’s rhetoric constructs the identity of newcomers as refugees whose lives are at risk. A new term – “refugee flows” – neutralizes the refugees’ perceived impact on the economy and society, painting them as

involved in temporary and/or natural mobility. The metaphors used by both parties reflect broader cultural notions of European and humanitarian values and political worldviews.

Heino Nyyssönen's "Viktor Orbán's Anti-Brussels Rhetoric in Hungary: Barely Able to Keep Europe Christian?" and Jarosław Jańczak's "Why Do Poles Oppose Immigrants? The Polish Political Elite's (Anti-)Immigration Rhetoric" share a common thread of exposing how the "refugee crisis" has been exploited by power elites on multiple celebratory and deliberative occasions to attack "Brussels" and mobilize the society to vote for populist political solutions. Both Hungarian and Polish elites claim to protect the nation against the "invasion" or "flood" of "othered" Muslim refugees who are presented as threatening because they supposedly bring crime and terrorism and are an economic burden. In both countries prominent politicians have harked back on the glorified national history and Christian tradition to concoct the sense of national pride that would justify standing up to European institutions to fight the legislation on quotas for redistributing of refugees across member states.

"Flüchtlingsrepublik Deutschland: Divided Again" by Julia Khrebtan-Hörhager and Elisa I. Hörhager discusses a recent national attempt to create a positive image of Germany, a state that is still coping with the past while confronting a challenge of the refugee exodus from the Middle East. The national political rhetoric is embroiled with constructing the status of Germany as one of the leaders of the EU within an ongoing process of re-articulation of relations "between the German self and the non-German Other." It seems that although for decades Germans have not objected to "gastarbeiters," the rise of xenophobic attacks and anti-immigrant sentiments testifies to an ambivalent attitude towards asylum seekers and foreigners who are not part of the labor force. This is mirrored by the rise in popularity of right-wing parties that advocate a much more cohesion-driven version of German domestic policies. The divisions the authors explore refer not only to internal regional politics (East/West Germany), but also to the different levels of acceptance of "the culture of welcome" (in the context of media panics on sexual assaults on German women), and the disparate expectations with regard to how much the new refugees will be obliged to integrate and help fuel the "German engine" rather than stall it.

Clarke Rountree, Kathleen Kirkland, and Ashlyn Edde link the Syrian immigration crisis and Brexit in their study on "The United Kingdom's Rhetoric of Immigration Management." However, instead of focusing on the affect-laden discourses of pro- or anti-immigration factions, they explore the "boring" bureaucratic rhetoric of managing the refugee influx by the government of Theresa May (as well as some rhetorical maneuvers by David Cameron and Boris Johnson).

Such rhetoric made the crisis appear less pressing than it was without denying it. Arguably, it also deflected accusations of UK policies being racist, and helped reorient public attention towards the notions of border control and fighting crime. This facilitated the public's dissociation with the Syrian refugee problem. By focusing on legal standards, safety measures and economic merits, the "neutral" British discourse of Syrian refugees placed them beyond the immediate sphere of government policy and responsibility at a time when it was to manage more pressing post-Brexit challenges.

In "Finnish Discourses on Immigration, 2015–2016: Descendants of Ishmael, Welfare Surfers, and Economic Assets" Jouni Tilli turns to rhetorical constructions of immigration as instantiated by elite speakers. Finnish leaders have imputed numerous kinds of motives to immigrants, whose arrival was described as anything between a blessing and a curse. Given the sharp increase in the number of asylum seekers around 2015 and the fact that power was transferred to a conservative government, migration became a highly politicized issue. Within an "economic discourse," immigrants are lumped together as either potential workforce or benefit receivers. Within the "discourse of threat," immigrants are represented as a danger to the values and social cohesion of the country. Meanwhile, in the "humanist" perspective, an appeal is made to reduce the plight and alienation of the newcomers. All three constructions tend to merge in public deliberation, which indicates that rhetors in Finland are likely to highlight immigration in terms of potentiality or risk, which is also the case in other Western neoliberal states.

Two last chapters illuminate perspectives from outside of Europe. Kaori Miyawaki explains the rhetorical nuances of "Japan's Prime Minister Abe on the Syrian Refugee Crisis: A Discourse of Sending but Not Accepting." While willing to donate money and resources, Japanese ruling elites implicitly acknowledge that the country does not accept refugees outside of established programs that are oriented towards sustaining Japan's economy and competitiveness. Avoiding discussions of the plight of refugees and invoking specific cultural and historical circumstances helps Abe to legitimize this stance and keep his party popular with the voters. Similar paradoxes can be noted while tracing conflicting statements by American presidents and elite conservative and democratic politicians, as explored by Ellen Gorsevski, Clarke Rountree and Andrée E. Reeves in "The United States' Immigration Rhetoric amid the Syrian Refugee Crisis: Presidents, Precedents, and Portents." For example, the effective melding of substantial Latino immigration with "Muslim terrorist threat" allowed President Trump to tackle resentments of white conservatives and to rekindle fears of another economic threat that the shrinking middle-class in the US was about to confront. Scapegoating and other rhetorical manoeuvres aimed at creating identification through division are pointed out

by authors as testaments to the gradual loss of America's "greatness" as a world leader and a magnet for talent.

This volume is a broad-ranging, yet focused, discussion on the historical and current perspectives on immigration at a time of a humanitarian crisis. The discussion is obviously inflected with regard to different circumstances of national public spheres. Each chapter has a predictable structure that encompasses a country's historical background and the legal contexts of immigration, sometimes completed with the demographic layout of the society and the recent media controversies. Sometimes cultural and religious elements or particular political circumstances are explored as well. Against this backdrop, selected rhetorical frameworks are put to practice to analyze prominent topoi, metaphors, antitheses, argumentative fallacies, mythologies, discursive strategies and maneuvers employed by elite speakers. The book can be recommended to both novice and experienced scholars within the humanities and social sciences.