Book review

Selvarajah, Senthan, Kenar, Nesrin, Seaga Shaw, Ibrahim, and Dhakal, Pradeep (eds.), 2024

Xenophobia in the Media: Critical Global Perspectives

Xenophobia represents a pervasive attitudinal orientation characterized by negative perceptions and discriminatory practices against non-citizen groups, rooted primarily in their foreignness. This form of discrimination encompasses cultural, racial, ethnic, and class-based aspects, often resulting in hostile attitudes toward migrant populations. In extreme cases, skewed perceptions can escalate into violence and aggression, revealing the dangerous implications of xenophobia. The complexities surrounding immigration, alongside its mixed outcomes for host populations, render xenophobia a particularly sensitive and challenging subject. As migration increasingly intersects with development, it exposes the vulnerabilities faced by migrant populations, especially regarding exploitation and violations of rights.

Despite the evident tensions xenophobia generates, it has not been subjected to the rigorous scrutiny it deserves, especially in developing countries that host significant migrant populations. Empirical studies and anecdotal evidence indicate high levels of discrimination and hostility directed toward these groups, who are often unjustly scapegoated for broader societal issues. Integrating the issue of xenophobia into migration discourse is essential for policymakers seeking to harness the positive impacts of international migration on human development. Xenophobic attitudes exacerbate the exploitation of migrants and perpetuate long-term inequalities between migrant and non-migrant communities, fundamentally undermining principles of human equality, social justice, and societal cohesion.

Moreover, research illustrates that negative media coverage significantly shapes societal attitudes toward migrants, often heightening xenophobic sentiments and anti-immigrant feelings, particularly concerning nationals from specific countries. As a primary source of information, the media profoundly influences public perception. However, its portrayal of migrants can often be biased, perpetuating xenophobic attitudes. Studies consistently reveal a correlation between exposure to anti-immigrant media representations and increased prejudice toward immigrant

populations. This context is vital for exploring the themes presented in this book, which delves into the complex landscape of xenophobia and its implications for migration and societal dynamics.

While an increasing body of literature addresses the media's impact on xenophobic attitudes in migrant-receiving countries, significant gaps remain in understanding these impacts on anti-immigrant sentiments. This gap underscores the relevance of the newly edited book by Senthan Selvarajah, Nesrin Kenar, Ibrahim Seaga Shaw, and Pradeep Dhakal. *Xenophobia in the Media* provides fresh insights into the lives of international migrants across various countries. Employing an interdisciplinary approach, this book situates research within an international context, offering theoretical, policy, and empirical analyses. The authors argue that the greater threat stems not from immigration itself but from immigration control – defined not merely as restricting movement across borders but as regulating what migrants can do within society, including their ability to work, reside, study, establish businesses, and engage socially.

The book presents a collection of research essays that articulate the myriad challenges faced by international migrants across various countries while simultaneously illustrating how these individuals can exert agency within prevailing status constraints. This perspective underscores the necessity for continual research and the potential for informing policy and practice effectively. A crucial aspect of the volume is its comprehensive examination of xenophobia as portrayed in media narratives, integrating global insights with critical theoretical frameworks to provide readers with valuable perspectives and practical tools. Using qualitative data sourced from personal interviews with local South Africans, political speeches, and print media articles, the authors investigate the influence of public discourse on the perception of foreigners and the recurring violence against African migrants. They conceptualize xenophobia as a sociopolitical struggle predicated on the notion that foreigners pose a threat to the rights of native citizens, highlighting how discourse perpetuates this ideology.

The authors critically analyze the role of public rhetoric in stigmatizing and vilifying migrant groups, framing them as scapegoats for societal issues. This investigation acknowledges the interconnectedness of media representation, political discourse, activist initiatives, and academic research, all of which contribute to the reinforcement of xenophobic attitudes. The volume advocates for a critical engagement with these narratives to cultivate positive societal change. Notably, while much existing research focuses on the media's function in disseminating xenophobic portrayals of immigrants and refugees, this collection uniquely examines the media's own representation of xenophobia. The analysis spans various manifestations of xenophobia across diverse socioeconomic and political contexts, reflecting on its implications for both immigrant and host communities.

In the introductory chapter, Senthan Selvarajah et al. address the portrayal of immigrants and refugees within the framework of threat narratives. By adopting a

global perspective, the authors propose innovative strategies grounded in the concept of "journalism of tolerance." They explore multiple forms of xenophobia, including Islamophobia, Afrophobia, and anti-Semitism, offering a nuanced understanding of their specific impacts on immigrant and refugee populations. Employing systematic methodologies, the authors anchor their analysis within theoretical frameworks and empirical research, thereby enriching the reader's comprehension of the complex factors that contribute to xenophobic attitudes and practices in countries such as South Africa, Syria, and India. As xenophobic rhetoric has proliferated in global media – particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic – the book critically evaluates how mainstream media often perpetuates negative stereotypes that frame immigrants as threats to national economic stability, thereby influencing societal attitudes and intergroup relations across various contexts. The presence of foreign migrants is frequently depicted as an invasion, leading to their demonization for a range of societal ailments.

Part 1 of the book comprises three chapters that focus on journalism principles and practices that prioritize tolerance. This section specifically examines the interplay between misinformation, disinformation, and widespread misconceptions regarding Syrian refugees in Turkey. These misconceptions frequently paint refugees as criminals and exploiters of resources. In Chapter 2, authors Ibrahim Seaga Shaw and Nesrin Kenar contrast prevailing myths with the realities that shape media representations of Syrian refugees. They contend that human rights journalism (HRJ) plays a vital role in contesting xenophobic narratives and fostering an environment of tolerance and acceptance among diverse national groups. HRJ is presented as both a journalistic methodology and an ethical framework aimed at mitigating the harmful effects of xenophobia in media portrayals. In Chapter 3, Senthan Selvarajah and Tabeenah Anjum explore the ethical considerations and best practices that journalists must adopt to ensure responsible reporting, thereby upholding the dignity of marginalized groups, including migrants. They assert that ethical journalism is essential not merely as a professional obligation but also as a societal necessity for fostering inclusive narratives that recognize the inherent humanity of all individuals. Chapter 4, authored by Maheen Farhat Raza and Muhammad Ali Raza, applies neoclassical realist theory to assess Turkish media discourse regarding Syrian refugees. This chapter demonstrates how media framing often unjustly portrays Afghan and Ukrainian refugees as criminal elements, thereby exacerbating societal tensions and xenophobic attitudes. This analysis enhances our understanding of the structural dynamics that shape these discriminatory narratives in relation to broader sociopolitical and economic contexts.

Part 2 of the book shifts its focus to the intricate media stereotyping of marginalized communities, particularly minorities and women. It comprises four chapters that critically examine the interconnections between media representation, gender dynamics, and xenophobia across diverse cultural and regional contexts. Collectively, these chapters underscore the media's significant, yet frequently

underestimated role in shaping societal perceptions and identities of marginalized groups. In Chapter 5, Rahime Özgün Kehya conducts a nuanced analysis of the discourses surrounding migration and misogyny in Turkish media. This examination illuminates the historical and geographical intersections that inform these narratives, revealing how xenophobia often intersects with misogynistic attitudes directed toward migrant women. By providing a critical lens on prevailing societal narratives, Kehya's work underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding of these intertwined discourses.

Fidan Cheikosman, in Chapter 6, critiques the media's role in perpetuating xenophobia through its representations of Syrian female refugees in Turkey. Using content analysis, Cheikosman identifies the linguistic choices that contribute to negative public perceptions and further entrench xenophobic attitudes. Her findings advocate for enhanced media literacy and ethical journalism practices as essential measures to combat these pervasive challenges. Chapter 7, authored by Devanjan Khuntia, explores the experiences of the Paroja ethnic group in Assam, India, emphasizing their social exclusion and the influence of media narratives on the discourse surrounding citizenship. Through qualitative research with displaced individuals, Khuntia illustrates the media's significant role in shaping identity, marginalization, and the complex realities of belonging within varied sociopolitical landscapes. In Chapter 8, Venencia Paidamoyo Nyambuya examines the lived experiences of African migrant women in Durban, South Africa, highlighting the interconnectedness of xenophobia and gender-based violence (GBV). Nyambuya's analysis critiques the mainstream media's portrayal of GBV and migration, advocating for more extensive research into the sociocultural factors that perpetuate these intertwined phenomena. Together, these chapters contribute to a deeper understanding of how media representations perpetuate stereotypes and shape societal attitudes toward marginalized groups. They emphasize the urgent need for ethical and responsible journalism that can counteract these harmful narratives and promote social equity.

The three chapters in Part 3 of this work provide a critical examination of the complex relationship between media narratives and the emergence of xenophobia. In Chapter 9, Sergio Luiz Cruz Aguilar conducts a thorough analysis of media representations of Venezuelan migrants in neighboring South American countries, specifically Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. Through methodical content and discourse analysis, Aguilar identifies significant variations in how immigrants are framed in these nations, revealing a troubling trend of negative portrayals that significantly influence public perceptions of Venezuelan migrants. Chapter 10 features Bhekinkosi Jakobe Ncube's exploration of the impact of media headlines on societal attitudes toward migrants in South Africa. Ncube's discourse analysis of selected headlines from the years 2008 and 2015 demonstrates that these headlines act as dual instruments – they function as emotional triggers while simultaneously shaping and reinforcing prevailing societal attitudes regarding migration. This examination

underscores the media's crucial role in molding public sentiment and highlights the dynamics through which media narratives contribute to societal perceptions of migrants. In Chapter 11, Dele Ogunmola investigates the prevalence of hate media in Côte d'Ivoire and South Africa, elucidating its significant role in exacerbating xenophobia and promoting hate speech. Using qualitative methodologies, Ogunmola critically unpacks the intricate relationship between media representations and xenophobic sentiments while also addressing pertinent legal frameworks that seek to mitigate the effects of hate speech. These three chapters collectively underscore the substantial influence of media narratives in shaping xenophobic attitudes and the portrayal of marginalized groups, illustrating the media's critical role in the social construction of migration and the subsequent impact on societal attitudes.

Part 4 examines the intricate relationship between social media and xenophobia across four chapters. Chapter 12 by Hasan Ali Yilmaz focuses on the perceptions faced by Syrian migrants in Turkey, emphasizing the underexplored influence of religious identity on social exclusion. Yilmaz's research reveals that religious affiliations significantly intensify negative sentiments against this demographic, highlighting critical gaps in the existing migration discourse. In Chapter 13, Kingsley L. Ngange, Brain Binebunwi, and Stephen N. Ndode analyze the role of Facebook activists in propelling hate speech in Cameroon. Through qualitative content analysis and survey methodologies, the authors demonstrate how these activists exploit the platform to circulate prejudicial narratives, resulting in societal rifts. They advocate for collaborative measures between governmental entities and Internet service providers to develop monitoring systems to curtail online hate speech. Lungisani Moyo and Oluyinka Osunkunle, in Chapter 14, contextualize the rise of xenophobic violence in South Africa, particularly during Operations Dudula and Fiela, through the lens of social media's influence. Their thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews reveals key factors exacerbating xenophobia, including unemployment, exploitation, and political motivations. They urge regional leadership to promote collaborative initiatives to prevent violence and scapegoating. Finally, Chapter 15 by Arta Xhelili and Nita Beluli Luma extends the discussion to migration narratives in the digital age, analyzing how social media influences public perceptions of migrants. Their analytical framework unpacks the complexities within digital discourse, illustrating its significant impact on societal attitudes toward migration. These chapters highlight the necessity for a nuanced understanding of social media's role in fostering xenophobia and the potential pathways to fostering societal solidarity.

To conclude, this book addresses significant gaps in the existing literature by examining the dynamics of xenophobia within media discourse and its socioeconomic and political implications. It draws on empirical evidence gathered through fieldwork involving refugees and asylum seekers to provide perspectives on how media narratives perpetuate negative stereotypes of migrants and refugees, shape public perceptions, and influence xenophobic policymaking. By adopting an interdisciplinary approach, it situates its research findings within an international

context while at the same time providing valuable theoretical, policy, and empirical insights. Also, by weaving together personal narratives, governmental reports, statistics, and academic literature, the authors carefully depict the experiences of migrants navigating precarity in the study countries. While the book critically evaluates the media's role in fueling xenophobic sentiments, it, however, has some shortcomings. For example, the lack of justification for selecting study countries may leave readers wondering about their significance as case study sites. Additionally, the book could have further explored the implications of xenophobia on transnational migration and the integration of immigrants in those countries. However, despite these limitations, the book fills a critical research gap. It provides valuable empirical insights beneficial for various stakeholders, including policymakers, journalists, and activists involved in discussions about human rights, immigration, and refugee issues. Also, with its valuable ethnographic studies of migrants and refugees, the book is essential for researchers interested in social policy and migration studies.

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