

SUVI KESKINEN, ANNA RASTAS AND SALLA TUORI (eds). *En ole rasisti mutta... Maahanmuutosta, monikulttuurisuudesta ja kritiikistä*. Tampere: Vastapaino and Nuorisotutkimusverkosto, 2009. Pp. 169. ISBN: 978-951768-248-0 (paperback).

*En ole rasisti, mutta...* ('I am not a racist but... On immigration, multiculturalism and critique'), edited by Suvi Keskinen, Anna Rastas and Salla Touri, highlights public debates in Finland on immigration and multiculturalism, calling for a more responsible discussion of these issues. The book is a compilation of fourteen articles which represent the voices of Finnish researchers from the social sciences, journalism and law as well as of immigrants, their descendants and immigrant officials. The articles are divided under four subheadings. The first introduces the immigration debate and its consequences; the second discusses the role of the media in meaning-making; the third explores 'Finnishness', immigration and racism; and the fourth gives voice to professionals working with immigration.

The creation of the book, as explained by the editors in the introductory chapter, was triggered by a concern over a perceived sudden change in the Finnish media climate with regard to immigrants. This change followed the municipal elections of 2009, which elevated the populist party 'Perussuomalaiset' ('Basic Finns') into a serious political player. This development coincided with global economic recession and rising unemployment, and 'foreigners' were made the scapegoats to explain public ailments that had their roots elsewhere. A new concept, *maahanmuuttaja-kriittinen* (immigrant critique), soon appeared in the Finnish media, reviving an old immigration debate with racist undertones. Under the umbrella of this seemingly neutral concept, anti-foreigner sentiments could be aired without the danger of these statements being classified as illegal racism. Numerous politicians, the prime minister included, were finding this term opportune for discussing immigration, and the major political parties jumped on the bandwagon by appealing to anti-multicultural sentiments. The Finnish media responded with ample coverage.

The book provides an analysis of the mechanisms by which xenophobic politics acquire media credibility. It addresses the power of classification and labeling, and the consequences that terminology can have when co-opted uncritically by the media. It also tackles important political issues: What happens when racism becomes a politically contested concept? Into what kind of narratives do the media shape the realities of immigrant life? Whose voices are silenced and which questions remain in the shadows? What happens to journalism when blogs and other social networking formats become sources of information that the public media take seriously? All of these issues are well elaborated in the book's contributions with one absence: a definition of the discussion's core concept, racism, and its distinction from xenophobia: diverse fear factors not related to skin colour.

In her chapter on the denial of racism in the Finnish immigrant debate Anna Rastas dives into the semantic world triggered by the 2009 election and its aftermath. Why, she asks, has the question of *how* the term racist is defined received more coverage in public discussion than an actual analysis of how the people *affected* by racism are coping? Under the new euphemistic and seemingly neutral term, 'immigrant critique', sentiments formerly coined as racist could be expressed without legal consequences. Yet, as Rastas points out, there is a difference between 'critique' as used in public debates, and critique

as employed in scientific contexts: in the former, the word does not stand for openness to different aspects of reality as it does in the latter. Instead, the term legitimizes airing racist-related sentiments. Yet, as Rastas points out here, denying the existence of racism is a way of silencing its victims.

The legal definition of racism is also problematic, Rastas argues. It hinges on the notion of intent, as the law defines as racist only such action which can be proven to be deliberate. This makes it difficult to identify and tackle institutional forms of racism. Also, talk with clear racist overtones is hurtful regardless of its intention. Rastas calls for a shift of focus to the *meanings* and *consequences* of racist actions instead of definitions based on mere intent. Where do the media stand in these debates? Before 2009, regardless of formal party declarations of anti-racism, politicians avoided taking direct stands, knowing that their constituencies were divided on the matter. In his article, Pentti Raittila discusses how the media had gone along with this double play. Camilla Haavisto and Ullamaija Kivikuru point out in their chapter how immigrants were also more often spoken for than given a voice of their own. Most often they were placed in one of two diverse narrative categories: either the category of a victim, or that of a threat to the society.

This duality is the topic of Kaarina Horsti's article which discusses how the threat narrative became the dominant journalistic discourse in Finland and also generally in Europe. The dichotomization of immigrants into categories reflects the need of governments to distinguish between wanted and unwanted immigration. Horsti notes that journalistic praxis in Finland often uncritically adopts bureaucratic terminology and thereby inadvertently accepts the ideologies behind it. As a result, terms like 'ungrounded asylum seeking' and 'illegal immigrants' seep unanalyzed from bureaucratic verbiage into the media.

In the past the official discourse commonly offered tightened control as the solution to immigration problems. In 2007 this approach became increasingly challenged by massive public critique against Ulkomaalaisvirasto, the bureau dealing with migration matters. The defense by the Finnish Churches of individual asylum seekers against hasty and ungrounded expatriation became one expression of this critique. The accompanying publicity created a counterbalance in the media to the dominant official bureaucratic view on migrations. Eventually the critique resulted in a restructuring of how migration was officially handled in Finland, as Horsti notes.

How do immigrants themselves view these recent changes in the ongoing debates? These narratives are directly and indirectly captured in a number of contributions. Said Aden—a Finnish citizen who was originally a refugee from Somalia, today a key figure in Somali organizational life in Finland—describes in his chapter 'Forever Immigrant?' the reactions of the Somali community in 2009 to the new debate. At the end of the new millennium's first decade, hope had stirred in the community that its members would be recognized, after decades in the country, as citizens sharing the burden and responsibility for a future Finland. Suddenly everything gained in the last 20 years seemed to crumble, and questions arose as to whether the Somali were to be classified anew as refugees in the public's eyes, although they had for long been professionals, tax payers and parents of children born in Finland.

The book's contributions jointly demonstrate that the immigration debate is multifaceted and at times a true minefield. Consequently, as Veronica Honkasalo and

Leena Suurpää argue in their chapter, researchers have an important part in these ongoing debates. In their study on how the Finnish media discusses youth of immigrant origin, they show how researchers need to participate in an ongoing dialogue with informants on what is seen to constitute racism, and what can be done about it. The media needs to be kept at bay, as its interest in conflict and drama may spoil the trust built up between researchers and the field.

Honkasalo and Suurpää also emphasize that the motivations of the media for offering immigrant youth visibility need to be acknowledged by researchers. On the one hand, desires exist to understand the youngsters better. On the other, there are attempts to make them an easy target for control, to isolate them, to demonize them or to eroticize them. An inherent danger exists that images produced of youth by the media take on a life of their own.

It has now been a year since the book was published, and immigration continues to receive both ample media coverage and to trigger xenophobic reactions as well as counter reactions. Even if the actuality of the events that inspired this book is short-lived, its analysis holds lasting value. The book shows that researchers can make a vital contribution to public debates by sorting out myths and fantasy from reality, and by analyzing verbiage and the snowballing mechanism of media language. They can help to create workable strategies for a more civilized treatment of the multicultural members of society and of those who defend them.

For readers working in the media the book is a plea for more public responsibility; it is a caution against being caught up in bureaucratic verbiage and thus becoming a vehicle for political callousness and calculation. The book also offers numerous useful insights for anyone actively participating in practical immigrant work.

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