Media securitisation of migration: constructing Bangladeshi migration to Assam as a security threat to the Assamese identity

Glebova, Ksenia

This thesis critically examines securitisation of migration from Bangladesh to the Northeast Indian state of Assam in the regional English-medium press. The study aims to establish how Bangladeshi migrants are constructed as a security threat to the Assamese identity and how the linkages between migration, security and identity are expressed. The thesis also seeks to identify frames and linguistic devices by means of which securitisation is enacted in the press and assess the possibility of desecuritising the migration discourse.

The empirical data consists of 264 articles dealing with Bangladeshi migration published in the ten selected newspapers from the Northeast India between 2005 and 2007. The linkages between migration and security are explored through the lens of the Copenhagen School of security studies and its concept of securitisation. Wodak’s discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis integrates historical background of Bangladeshi migration and Assamese identity, which is necessary to critically assess the narrow and static identity construction that characterises the discourse.

Bangladeshi migration to Assam is constructed as a security threat by means of identified discursive strategies of positive self and negative Other representation. The discriminatory utterances are expressed in explicit terms and intensified through various linguistic devices. The securitisation is successful as the grammar of security is deeply ingrained in the migration discourse that shifts the issue from the domain of 'normal' politics to legitimise extraordinary measures such as discrimination and exclusion. The implications of securitisation are tangible and severe, especially for the Bangladeshi migrants and the Assamese Muslim minority.

Securitisation acts to reduce the complexity of Bangladeshi migration to a simplified security frame and in doing so it greatly limits potential solutions. Once examined from a historical perspective, Assamese identity is a lot more complex than its construction in the process of securitisation. Desecuritisation is not feasible within the current securitisation framework that excludes other conceptualisations of Bangladeshi migration such as migrant labour and humanitarian crisis frames. The thesis devises practical guidelines for desecuritising the migration discourse in the media.

Avainsanat-Nyckelord: muutto, identiteetti, turvallisuus, Intia, Bangladesh, migration, securitisation, identity, critical discourse analysis, India, Bangladesh

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