“Fortress Europe” divided: Argumentative analysis of the coverage of border closing by European Newspapers

The ongoing intensification of global interconnections has not weakened borders but expanded bordering processes beyond physical borders to media representations, political discourses, school textbooks, and other mundane practices (Johnson et al, 2011, p. 62). While free movement has been central to the EU identity, “Europe” has been constituted by the proliferation of borders and border struggles (Mezzadra 2016) that reveal (rhetorical) tensions between goals for consolidating power and anxieties about territory. These tensions were augmented in response to the so called “refugee crisis” as various border controls were put in effect externally and within the EU and new search buddy border zones were constructed. Media discourses not only recontextualized those practices but themselves performed bordering by highlighting differences and marking those who belong and those who do not.

Discourse scholars call attention to borders as material as well as symbolic constructs. Studies show how discourses reconstruct, deconstruct, shift and enact borders in different sites and through everyday border making practices. However, less attention has been paid to the role of argumentation in media bordering discourses. We posit that argumentative discourse is central to understanding the rhetorical construction of borders, as borders – such as any aspect of policy making – need to be problematized and justified to the public that is part of and affected by this discourse.

We examine rhetorical tensions in argumentation in favor or against border control in reaction to the influx of refugees. We focus on European newspapers from the UK, Germany, Italy, and Poland. Each of these countries represents a different position to the EU project, and was differently affected by the refugee flows. We consider the period between August and November 2015 when several countries enacted border controls and/or constructed fences. Therefore, this sample allows us to collect a broad coverage of the response to the “refugee crisis” across Europe.

This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach that integrates methods of Critical Discourse Analysis and Argumentation Theory. We use argumentative models to (a) define the specific issues around which the public discussion revolves, in terms of the open questions that are problematized; (b) specify the different standpoints that are advanced on these issues; (c) classify the types of arguments and argument schemes supporting each standpoint. Besides, the reconstruction of implicit premises in argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004; Ennis 1982) will allow us to identify implicit assumptions shared between opposed positions and different countries (cf. Cisneros 2011). At the same time, it will enable the identification of potential conflicting implicit premises in the discourse about borders and migration. CDA aims to reveal discursive power relations that legitimate particular practices, constitute relations, and form inclusions and exclusions. The combination of AT and CDA helps to elucidate how arguments legitimize the EU politics of difference and containment. While discourse studies explicate how the discursive horizons make particular meanings possible, our approach makes a connection between meanings and argumentative discourse to reach a more complex understanding of ideological structures underpinning the European project at a critical time of its development.
References


