

## BOOK REVIEW ▪ ---

### **Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin**

Katherine Pratt Ewing. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008

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Katherine Pratt Ewing's *Stolen Honor. Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin* is an important book as it is one of the rare Western sources that express the dilemmas and contradictions that start to embed themselves within the reforming social fabric of post-World War II German society. Its rarity, which leads to its significance, comes from the fact that it is told through the eyes of Turkish migrants, whose place in this fabric is that of an anomaly due to the fact that their culture and identity has formed outside of Western norms. This work analyzes the manner in which the stigmatized masculinity of Muslim Turkish immigrants living in Germany is fictionalized; it also analyzes the place of this in the national imaginary. The author focusses on how 'the other' becomes a stereotype from a social gender perspective and on how these stereotypes reproduce national identity on a personal level and Western norms on a broader level. In order to clarify this framework into a motto, I would like to draw emphasis to one of the author's own assertions in regard to her own work: Ewing states, "I would like to uncover the fact that minorities are stigmatized." Even at this stage of the review, I would like to point out that through her usage of a broad-based data set and the ethnographical approach, the author has managed to do this in a significant way.

While reading this book and taking notes, I had the opportunity to reassess the difficulties that I frequently experienced in the interviews I conducted, in the early 2000s, during my research of the areas of cultural expression and cultural productions and activities of the Turkish diaspora in Berlin. Thus, I would like to describe this book as a theoretical and anthropological pattern of the negative vibes that reflect both the stigmatizer and the stigmatized. During a trip in 2005, I experienced firsthand how the stigmatization explained in this book in fact works. I had left my flat in Kreuzberg in the morning and had walked along the river toward Hermannplatz. There, I sat down in a cafe for my morning coffee and started to read my book. Sitting diagonally across from me was a man lost in a what I think was a political satire magazine. At one point he looked up and smiled at me and pointed to a sketch and made a comment in German. I smiled back at him but expressed to him that I did not understand what he was saying. He politely apologized to me and we continued the conversation in English. It was election time in Germany and I remember talking about politics and the candidates. After a while, the man decided to ask me where I was from and I replied that I was Turkish. For a while he looked at me without uttering a word and then with all the courage he could muster, he said he didn't believe me and

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that he was very surprised. To tell the truth, I was not very surprised by his reaction, in fact, I had got used to such reactions. It was behavior that I had come across frequently in casual conversations with the average German and I had guessed beforehand that he would be surprised. It was obvious that these Germans (not all of them of course) could not imagine a world in which a person who spoke to them in quite fluent English and who through their speech and mannerisms gave the impression of being Western could possibly be Turkish. In my own country too, an Armenian who lived like a Turk and thought and acted like a Turk would come across a similar reaction. Whenever I came across this type of situation, my researcher instinct would make me ask the same question again and again; 'Why do you have a hard time believing I'm Turkish?' In response to this question all the stereotypes and the components of how a Turk was construed in a German's head would emerge: Uneducated, reluctant to learn German, blindly attached to their own cultural molds, does not care about women, aggressive, not willing to fit in... This list could go on and on. This list is actually no different from the depictions that all national societies imagine when stigmatizing foreigners among and outside of themselves. Thus, what makes this book so important is that it draws attention to the national identity on a universal scale and to the construction of this identity.

It is useful to point out that the concept of national imagination forms the focal point of the conceptual set that shapes the theoretical base of this work. According to the author, a national identity that is defined around belonging creates a natural dialogical discourse: those who are one of us and those who are not. In this equation, which maintains the national imaginary, the 'other' represents that which cannot be lived with, that which is a threat to national identity and the expulsion of which from society is legitimized. Erwing at this stage references Foucault's governmentalism in the formation of national imagination. According to Foucault, governmentalism is shaped during a set of practices of a population ruled by a modern nation-state. The structures that shape these practices range from certain institutions (school, police etc.) to discourses, norms and even personal self-regulation activities. These reproduce the state and its place in the global order at the same time and place individuals within this order as subjects. Most of our common social fantasies grow and thrive in this setup. Furthermore, gender and social hierarchies are the fundamental states of our identity and experience and they generally provide useful material for social fantasies. Thus, social gender roles and the tensions between them play an important role in the shaping of national imagination. At times, even if a minority possesses all the legal rights, these collective fantasies could become a source of struggles against the possibility of cultural citizenship being taken over on all levels; especially if that community is a stigmatized community and its expulsion is wanted.

By underlining the marginalization of women in the West and the accompanying women's rights struggle, the author widens the area of gender tensions. In this area, it can be observed that a new front has been opened in which men too are stigmatized during their struggle with strong normative heterosexual masculinity. According to the author, in this process, the term 'macho' has become a useful instrument in the institutionalization of the discrimination toward male 'others'. The generalizations made about black men in America or the stereotypes produced regarding Hispanic minorities are examples of this. The same is true for Muslim men in Europe and according to the author, through women's rights, this stigmatization has become an indispensable component of Western discourse. Though it emerges around different phenomena, masculinity generally plays an important role in the shaping of the national subject. For example, in Nazi Germany pure German masculinity was identified with physical discipline, and the masculinity of the Jewish other was identified as being effeminate. After the war, things changed

in the fantasy of national identity; the democratic subject of the new Germany was focused on separating German masculinity from militaristic and hierarchical connotations. According to the author, the stigmatization of Muslim men gains significance in the construction of this new national identity.

So how has the book been put together and how do the contents flow? Let's have a look at this: Part 1 of the book is comprised of four chapters and is titled: 'Mythologizing the traditional man'. The first chapter of this part scrutinizes the historic and cultural context of Turkish Muslim men becoming others in Germany. Thus, background research ranging from an anthropological analysis of country life in Turkey to the various aspects of Turkish modernization can be seen. The author also draws attention to the roles of pop-culture and the media in the spread of stigmatization and stereotypes. We can see that the film sector plays an important role in the stereotyping of Turkish Muslim men. The film industry not only portrays traditional man and woman relationships on a patriarchal platform but also spreads convincing ideas that Turks will never fit into German society. The author shows an extra special care on this topic. In the second chapter where the author scrutinizes the role pop-culture plays in the spread of bias, a detailed analysis is made of the discourse by the alliance formed by governmental practices, scholarly apparatus, film, and other media.

In the third chapter of the book, we see the author's interpretation of the field work and an analysis of the gathered data from the perspective of identity conflict. Various perspectives of male subjects' struggle with being 'other' come to the forefront in this chapter. In the interviews carried out by the author, the chapter 4 focuses on the concept of honor. The meaning of this concept for certain film producers and men with Turkish roots was analyzed and the importance of honor in terms of the status and self-respect in traditional societies was scrutinized. This analysis is important in terms of shedding light on the tension between the threat of being stigmatized and the role of being a traditional Turkish male.

The book's second chapter titled 'Stigmatized masculinity and the German national imaginary' focuses on the social panic that surrounds the Muslim Turkish migrants in Germany and on the conflict and dilemmas that cause this environment of fear. In order to keep the national imaginary and its respected identities alive, one of the most important public instruments are moments of crises. The author, who references Cohen's concept of moral panics in this chapter, traces how situations, events, people or groups that are believed to be a threat to social rules and interests are represented. The author associates the panic caused by the unrest, which itself has been shaped by years of such representations to the emotional aspect of national imaginary. One of the biggest turning points in German history that fed this sentimentality was the union of West and East Germany. During that period, emotional ideas such as Germanness, rediscovering the homeland and the strengthening of nationhood appeared. Even though this situation brought up the concept of *Leitkultur* again, it only did so tacitly because these emotional narratives were reminiscent of the Nazi past that was trying to be expunged from the national imaginary. In this chapter, the emotional symptoms of this concept and the controversial position of Germanness and the concept of *leitkultur* are considered.

In the post-war history of Germany, which forms a part of the scope of study of this book, Turkish migrants hold an important position. The existence of Turks in Germany was an anomaly in Germany's effort to rebuild itself and redefine itself within the Western civilization. While the number of Muslim Turks in Germany continued to increase, and their permanent stay became clearer, the frustration of the community in which they lived also increased. During this period, on the one hand, Germany was in search of building a pluralistic democracy and on the

other hand, while the Turks were dealing with their own identity problems, they were rather battered through their own vague existence in the host society. During that period, on the one hand, Germany was trying to establish a pluralist democracy but on the other was wondering how to achieve national unity, which was peculiar to modern Western state.

In my point of view, one of the most interesting things about the book is that it mentions the history of Turkish labor migration and integration issues. Thus, the author analyzes the guest workforce in a way that helps us understand the stigmatization issue of Turkish migrants and allows room for the integration arguments that flared up after Germany accepted that the Turkish workers would be permanent. Thus, it was after this stage (the permanency of the migration) that the cultural struggle increased and that Turkish workers and their families started to be talked about negatively through negative symbols in German society. In the migrant society, the place of the young Turkish woman especially forms the output of this symbolic construction and this narrative is used frequently when emphasizing cultural and religious differences. This young woman is transformed into a subject that has to wear a headscarf, has to drop out of school and generally has to marry a Turkish male relative.

Actually, the popular and symbolic narratives that feed the discussions keeping the public busy, follow a parallel path to the Islamophobia that stemmed from the 9/11 attacks and other events. The labor migration that started in the 60s has evolved into an unsolvable ethnical and cultural challenge. The general perception in the West is that foreigners are incapable of fitting in with society. In order to highlight the failure of integration, public and political discourses especially focus on 'culture'. Through this point of view, from the headscarf to other religious rituals and to the cultural productions that are transmitted via satellite from Turkey; all things that are considered to maintain the migrants' identity and lifestyle are also viewed as factors that prevent integration. In this respect, the main instruments of alienation and marginalization of minorities turn out to be identity and lifestyle.

This perception entraps the German society or political actors in an integrationist cell that swings between assimilation and multiculturalism. Instead of solving the parallel lives equation, this situation causes more complex repercussions that only increase tensions. When we take a look at the results of the Eurobarometer (a wide scope public opinion research carried out by the EU) of the last few years, we can see that we are going through a stage in which the amount of acceptance towards different cultures and ethnicities in German society is decreasing. This could cause marginalized parts of society to embrace the reasons for marginalization and stigmatization and become more open to radical tendencies. However, is this situation only about the discovery of culture and in relation to this, the ignition of cultural struggles?

This book is valuable in terms of how it places the establishment of marginalization via the factors that construct the national imaginary on an ethnographical framework. A refreshing discussion on the formation of discourse hierarchy and on the domination of prevalent discourses is held in this text. At the end of the day, we understand that our relationship with the 'other' is more about how we define ourselves rather than how we perceive the different; it is about what we believe regarding 'us'. Thus, instead of just underlining identities, cultural differences or ethnical disintegrations, the author is able to discuss the power and ideological dominance of the symbolic authority that has been created by narratives that have quickly spread and have been accepted without question. I believe this work, which broadens our horizons, and which has been taken into account from a holistic perspective, makes an important contribution to the literature in the field.