

BOOK REVIEW: TURKISH IDENTITY IN GERMANY - RELIGION AND INTEGRATION



The book reviewed: Erkan Perşembe, Turkish Identity in Germany- Religion and Integration (Original title: Almanya'da Türk Kimliği- Din ve Entegrasyon), Ankara, Turkey: Araştırma Yayıncılık, 2005.

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The book was published in 2005 in Turkish language and was written by Professor Dr. Erkan Perşembe who is currently working at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun, Turkey, at Faculty of Divinity, Department of Sociology of Religion. He was born in Ordu, Turkey in 1958. His research interests are religion and social change, multiculturalism, modernity, post-modernity and religion, and migration in general. He has been to Germany for doing some research and this book can be said to have been a concrete work of this research period.

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Structure

The main focus point of the book is the diasporic life experiences of the Turks trying to gain a ground in the multicultural structure of Federal Republic of Germany. To clarify this process, the writer attempted to demonstrate the impact of this multiculturalism from the perspectives of religion and integration, embedded each other in a diasporic manner. The book consists of three chapters named “Identity, Religion and Integration; The Relations between Germany and Turkey and The Period of the Migration of the Turks; Civil and Religious Organizations within the Period of Identity Seeking and Integration”.

Content

The first chapter of the book, “Identity, Religion and Integration”, constitutes a theoretical background for the following chapters. The writer makes the definition of identity, integration and religion, together with the inter and intra relationship between these terms and the main theme of the book, multiculturalism. He defines identity as the conscious perception of a person or a group according to their own features, values, status, etc. Here, he makes a reference to the constitution of identity as identifying with the roles assigned to them by the society in socialization process such as migration, change of occupation and expatriation. When a person experiences identity confusion within the processes exemplified above, s/he would face with a problem between her/his own values and the values of the new society.

The writer also puts the theories on identity into parenthesis. He underlines that there are many theories ranging from psychoanalytic evaluations to sociology of knowledge and makes a passage to national identity-Turkish identity (carrying the passport of the Republic of Turkey and/or the citizens just as the expression in the Constitution of Turkey) to show that both psychological factors and the ideological manners of nation states play a role in the formation of national identities. In doing so, he emphasizes that Islam is a crucial part of Turkish national identity and this point will not be neglected during the research. In other words, within this diasporic frame, the Turks who migrated to Germany prioritize their religious Islamic identity with that of Turkish on condition that they get anxious about their new generation’s identification and/or some other reasons.

Another key term of the book, integration is defined as the participation of a group to the functions of a new, multicultural society while also protecting their own features. These features could be religious or cultural. When the integration of the Turks who settled to Germany is taken into consideration, religion seems to be an important factor in the multicultural structure of many modern societies as it has a socializing and unifying function and can play an important role in the integration of societies and groups. The Turks, with all their religious and other

identities, may face with some problems during their integration to German culture; as Turks will carry all their traditions and customs with them to Germany and have been perpetuating these values in the new country. All this information in this chapter shows that the integration of Turks is not an easy phenomenon when the condition of cultures and groups, migration and cultural differences and similarities are taken for.

“The Relations between Germany and Turkey and The Period of the Migration of the Turks”, that is, the second chapter of the book, summarizes the history of the current diaspora. When the Turkish labor migration to Germany started in 1961, these skilled labors were regarded as ‘guest workers’ and were working in industrial and service sectors in urban areas. However, in time, the situation changed and the rate of the skilled immigrants decreased and they moved to rural areas. In 1970, Germany, together with the other European countries, has understood that these ‘alien labors’ were not temporary. So, in 1980s, the German government started to take some precautions for this “alien issue”, which means that 80s were important for the existence of Turkish immigrants within the diaspora.

Within years, the Turkish population has started to increase. Some of the Turks gained citizenship, some of them used their entrepreneurial skills and gained an important sphere in business sector. Today, the 2.5 billion of the 3 billion heterogenous Muslims living in Germany are the Muslim Turks. The writer draws attention to a paradoxical case that the Turks could not show the same adaptation in socio-cultural aspects as they have done in the new market conditions.

The writer, with his last chapter “Civil and Religious Organizations within the Period of Identity Seeking and Integration”, tries to give a general overview on the construction of Islamic organizations by remarking how the integration experiences of the Turkish immigrants are regarded as ‘problematic’. The writer lists the factors affecting the problematic integration experiences of the Turkish immigrants such as cultural differences, ethnocentrism, education system, lack of Islamic education, unemployment and a tendency to crime. As the Turkish immigrants are branded as ‘alien groups with a non-European culture’, these immigrants have been going through a dilemma between their own culture and new culture at a marginal limit.

Audience

The integration process and identity did not seem as problematic to the first generation as those of the second and third generation, because their main aim was economic and some of them planned to go back to Turkey. However, the situation was not the same with the second and third generation, as they were exposed to the influence of two cultures and they faced with a two-dimensional identification process.

Living generally in ghettos, with same language, same culture, traditions, values and religion, the Turkish immigrants, especially the younger ones remain in between acceptance and exclusion. The writer evaluates that there seems to be two trends between these youngsters: Some of them alienated to their own society and get lost within the new culture. The others preserve their own values and identities and struggle with this change.

As a result of the psychology of being minority in such a multicultural environment, especially after 80s, the Turks began to come together to conserve their religious and national identities. They met at mosques, associations and other institutions. These organizations were established for economic, educational, social, civil societal, political and religious reasons, most of which can be more than fifty. The writer finishes this chapter with a brief data on Euro-Islam.

Future

In order to overcome these problematic life practices and determine the future of these, both German and Turkish groups have mutual responsibilities. The responsibilities of German society and government are; they should have brought some official attitudes, regulations and precautions into force, they should enhance the social life standards of the immigrants, they should not exclude the Turkish immigrants in the past and now and they should free themselves from prejudices dating back to history.

The Turkish immigrants should start to gain their Turkish and Islamic identity with education. They tended to live in ghettos and isolate themselves from the Germans and they participated some politization movements which they should give up.

To conclude, it can be inferred from the book that the multicultural Germany has put the Turkish immigrants into a negative place in terms of their integration experiences, which has had some results, one of which is the increase in the number of religious organizations. The Turkish identity has a fractional structure between a standard and marginal state in the diasporic atmosphere. The Turks have always got tension with a Turkish and Islamic identity in a multicultural Christian country.

Multicultural education is a new kind of thought which has the potential to be a successful alternative to mainstream education. In mainstream education, only geo-cultural heritage, values, traditions and practices are taught and emphasized.