

storytelling is suspenseful and often unblinking in its assessment of violence—so much so that we worry for his safety.

While the book's cover mimics the look of newspapers arrayed in a newsstand cascade—so that front-page headlines of every paper are partially covered by the paper on top of it—*The News Event* meaningfully extends Cody's previous book *The Light of Knowledge: Literacy Activism and the Politics of Writing in South India* (2013). Where the ethnography of news has traditionally relied on face-to-face interactions in the newsroom,² Cody shows us what a media ethnography could look like for the digital age, as the incursions of digital and global platforms extends one's field beyond the terrestrial bounds of a city or region and envelops the globe.

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Notes

1. See Madhava Prasad, *Cine-Politics: Film Stars and Political Existence in South India* (Orient Blackswan, 2014).

2. See, for example, Ursula Rao, *News as Culture: Journalistic Practices and the Remaking of Indian Leadership Traditions* (Berghahn Books, 2010).

The Stigma Matrix: Gender, Globalization, and the Agency of Pakistan's Frontline Women. By Fauzia Husain. Stanford University Press, 2024. 306 pp. ISBN: 9781503636057.

Fauzia Husain has written a pathbreaking volume. Here, Husain presents the findings of fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork involving 120 interviews with frontline women workers in Karachi. The frontline women she observes are policewomen, public health workers, and flight attendants. These women are interesting to her because they “violate the gendered boundaries of space and time by working in male-dominated occupations . . . or by taking on night shifts” and are thus “seen as immoral women unworthy of respect or obedience” (2). In this book she follows the trials and tribulations of frontline women many of whom are the first in their family to venture out of homes for work. Many have taken these “public-facing jobs in a desperate bid to support their families and serve communities. But their jobs require them to weather persistent assaults on their dignity” (2). Husain argues that the “gestures of violence, disobedience, insolence, and mockery that frontline women ceaselessly face are like stigmata, leaving physical, emotional and reputational scars on their victims” (2–3).

In the first chapter, she expositions the experiences of women front-facing working and their explanations for the stigmas they face as frontline workers in effort to describe the contours of her stigma matrix. Here, she describes how her stigma matrix is formed at the macro level through the interplay of persisting global forces such as colonialism, neoliberalism, securitization, and Islamization. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, colonialism fostered racialized stereotypes that justified colonial rule but also reified gendered institutions such as *purdah* and infused public space with stigmas. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, global processes reinforced these stigmas.

In the second chapter, she expositis her theory of what she calls the meso-level of the stigma matrix and orients the reader to the groups of women she studies each of which are “positioned differently in relationship to global forces and each, therefore, configures the stigma around purdah violations in different ways” (23–24). For example, policewomen of higher ranks only occasionally encounter global actors and agencies, but they are “tokens in relation to globalization. They assume that their induction into the police force is primarily symbolic” of the police force’s gender progressiveness and “deployed as tokens in exchange for transnational funds and resources” (81). Health workers, in contrast, interact with global entities in sustained and consequential ways which the women view as exploitative. They see global agencies as effectuating their own agenda without regard to the needs and requirements of the workers who implement them and the clients they serve. They believe that the “state and global allies should view them as warriors, deserving of recompense in the form of salary and honor” (81). Finally, flight attendants are themselves “mobile carriers or vectors of globalization” (82). Yet they are denigrated for their striking appearance, but at the same time “the airline they serve [Pakistan International Airlines] is also invested with the hopes, aspirations, and disappointment of a national still trying to resolve issues around its global status and its relationship with tradition vis-à-vis modernity” (82).

In chapter 3, Husain describes the agency of policewomen and their efforts to enact what she calls “veiled delicacy,” which is a set of “performances that addresses stigma by working to unsettle the classed meanings of police jobs” (24). In this chapter, she shows how stigma shapes women’s opportunities in a male-dominated profession in which women are few in number but also concentrated in the lower ranks. Here she also describes the various kinds of symbolic agency that women deploy to negotiate these varied stigmas.

In chapter 4, she narrates the efforts of female health workers to enact what she called “martial motherhood,” or a “moral performance” that seeks to sanitize their problematized identities associated with their contravention of purdah. In this chapter she shows how stigma shapes the opportunities in this woman-only force doing work that is seen as feminine and under the supervision of women. These women draw upon symbols that tend to be associated with men, such as holy war and martyrdom, and juxtapose them with the gender symbols that provide women honor, such as motherhood and modesty. In doing so, they “craft and inhabit a quixotic identity of warrior mother with healing power” (155).

In the fifth chapter, she dilates upon the stigma surrounding the work of flight attendants who draw upon the “cultural and material resources provided by their transnational travel to enact a postfeminist cosmopolitical performance” to counter the stigma they experience (24). Whereas other front-facing female workers rely upon kinship and veiling to negotiate stigma, the flight attendants rely upon “symbols of luxury” (160) such as luxurious handbags and makeup to construct a postfeminist cosmopolitan identity. By enacting “cosmopolitan consumption, airline women distinguish themselves from the ‘poorer,’ ‘less sophisticated’ clients and family members who denigrate them” (162). At the time, in doing so, they enact a “patriarchal bargain with the male colleagues” that entails “bartering small privileges in exchange for ongoing inequalities in the broader system” (162).

While chapters 3 through 5 detail women's failures in surmounting some of the impediments imposed by the stigma matrix, chapter 6 brings together various data to delineate their myriad successes. Specifically, the chapter details how women in all three fields access and deploy what Husain calls "spectacular agency, using spectacle to make abuse visible, to punish abusers and critique the status of women in society" (34).

She concludes this volume with reflections upon the theoretical significance and policy implications of her work. She argues that the framework of the stigma matrix developed in this book "provides a multifaceted, multiscalar approach that enables scholars to trace the global and historical constituents of the inequality-making mechanisms" (242). At the same time, she contends that her primary framework of the stigma matrix "works to reinvigorate the notion of stigma, an important sociological concept that is due for post-colonial reckoning" (262).

This volume brings welcome new critical feminist and sociological approaches to understanding both stigma and agency. It should be of interest to those engaged in a variety of fields, including critical feminist theory, sociology, and South Asian area studies, but also the policy and development communities that engage the spaces of her front-facing women workers.

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Modernity's Corruption: Empire and Morality in the Making of British India.

By Nicholas Hoover Wilson. Columbia University Press, 2023. 312 pp. ISBN: 9780231192194.

What is corruption? This deceptively simple question forms the starting point for this rich and stimulating book. Clearing a path through a thicket of historical and social-scientific research, Wilson argues that the modern "Universal" view of corruption long contended with a premodern "Situational" one. In the Universal view, corruption means the abuse of office under any circumstance; in the Situational view, its meaning depends on context. Wilson takes as a case for the interchange of these views the history of the East India Company in the long eighteenth century. In so doing, he illuminates the historical trajectory of the Company as well as that of the category of corruption.

Wilson plots these trajectories in tandem. After an introductory *tour d'horizon*, he begins the narrative in early modern Britain, whose society he depicts as riven between Universal and Situational moral orders. He makes the point neatly by reference to Samuel Johnson's dictionary of 1755, which defined *corruption* as bribery but also as wickedness, something judgeable only by subjective criteria. For its part, according to Wilson, the early company held to a Situational moral order: It was too insular, too independent, and too decentralized to countenance the alternative. Accusations and disputes among officials in India tended to stay there; authorities in Britain acknowledged at least tacitly their incompetence to adjudicate them.