Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin

Katherine Pratt Ewing
Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008. 282 pages.

With *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*, anthropologist Katherine Ewing has made a timely and valuable contribution to the literature on Muslims in Europe. Ewing explores the stigmatization of Muslims of Turkish origin in light of multiple societal controversies ranging from honor killings to citizenship tests meant to determine who can belong to the German nation. While the focus in both the popular media and social science literature has typically been on Muslim women in western societies, *Stolen Honor* offers a novel perspective on men, who are usually overlooked by social scientists and demonized by the media.

The author first examines how Turkish identity is depicted and framed within German society by drawing on multiple examples, ranging from lit-

erature to scholarship and film. She bases her arguments on close readings of these social texts, in addition to interviews with men and women of Turkish Muslim origin in Berlin. In subsequent chapters, she explores how Turkish men create their own forms of identity in response to these representations, and particularly how they reconcile external representations of honor (believed to be derived from Islam and village practices) with their own sense of what honor means.

In part 2, Ewing is concerned with societal controversies, such as the highly publicized murder of Hatun Sürücü by her brother. German responses to the often sensationalistic media coverage of such events demonstrate that the presence of Turkish Muslims highlights anxieties about German identity and provokes discriminatory, nationalistic representations of Germanness, including ideals of belonging that Turkish Muslims can never hope to fulfill. Her argument fits in well with the anthropological critique of human rights discourses asserting that western-based notions of universal rights and freedoms are, in fact, culturally constructed and highly specific. Embraced ideals of pluralism, Ewing concludes, are "most comfortably tolerated when the differences in question are different flavors of Western civilization."

This very well-written ethnography will be of interest not only to social scientists who analyze minority integration and Islam in Europe, but also to scholars concerned with issues of gender, Islam, and the growing body of work regarding Islamic masculinities. Ewing's nuanced analysis of German responses to an honor killing highlights how Islam, honor, and the oppression of women are believed to be central to Turkish Muslim identity, when, in fact, socioeconomic marginalization is a more likely candidate for blame. Incidents of gender-based violence involving Muslim women are almost always categorized as honor related, even when comparable violence among Germans is simply viewed as domestic violence. A desire for honor-fueled vengeance, rooted in village practices and linked with Islam, is assumed to be a virtual personality trait of all men of Turkish descent. As popular media and movies echo these themes, she argues, second-generation Turkish men and women even draw on these media scripts in presenting themselves to outsiders. Thus outsider representations partially create and constitute Muslim identities.

This book is notable not only for its interest in how Turkish or Muslim male identity is constituted and stigmatized, but also for what this stigmatization reveals about German society itself. Haunted by ghosts of the Holocaust, Ewing argues, most Germans shy away from explicitly asserting a nationalistic, ethnic identity and yet implicitly enforce the notion of a

German self and stigmatize others through practices that link Turkish Muslims with neo-Nazis and Arab terrorists. Although evidence for the participation of Turkish Muslims in Germany in al-Qaeda has been highly limited, Turkish Islamic groups were under extensive surveillance even before 9/11. Yet almost nothing was known about the actual al-Qaeda cell discovered in Hamburg, comprised mostly of Arab Muslim immigrants. The perceived linkage of Turkish Muslims with terrorism and the oppression of women led to a post-9/11 deportation of "troublesome" Turkish elements in the population as well as demands that Muslims of Turkish origin demonstrate their ability to assimilate and adhere to German constitutional principles in both word and deed. Despite German discomfort with overt displays of propaganda stigmatizing minorities, many of these cultural controversies in fact brought out "a negative sense of the threatening other," which subsequently serves as "a powerful basis for community and national fantasy" (p. 220).

Ewing also offers a nuanced take on the much discussed issue of headscarves in Europe. In her analysis, headscarves are linked to honor killings and the oppression of Turkish women by Turkish men. But the covered and concealed Muslim body is also deeply problematic to the German imaginary. In a culture that values the display of the body in sport and society as a sign of a healthy national public, those who desire concealment are considered incapable of being truly German. Under the guise of universal rights and principles of equality, the nation-state demands that the female body must be revealed. Veiling and other practices, such as requests that Muslim children be excused from gym class, are incomprehensible, evidence not only of male oppression but also of a denial of the "natural" public display of the body.

Stolen Honor draws on psychoanalytic theory while maintaining a very readable prose that will make this work accessible to multiple audiences. Ewing offers a significant contribution to our understanding of Islamic masculinities, as well as how European audiences construct representations of Muslims in a post-9/11 world.

Rachel Newcomb
Assistant Professor of Anthropology
Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida