

# Cosmopolitan Conceptions: IVF Sojourns in Global Dubai

## by Marcia C. Inhorn.

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Throughout her trail-blazing career, Marcia Inhorn has called on interdisciplinary readers to consider seriously the complexities of women's and men's experiences with infertility and their search for treatment. She points to disparities in access to reproductive technologies and adequate care; injustices are particularly egregious due to the failures of basic preventive medicine (untreated sexually transmitted infections cause infertility) and the lack of regulation of infertility clinics. Since 1998, when she began her dissertation research, Inhorn's evocative, in-depth ethnographies have been set in the Middle East, where her cultural and linguistic expertise provided her with access to IVF (in vitro fertilization) clinics in Egypt, Lebanon, and, for this book, the United Arab Emirates.

In the introduction of *Cosmopolitan Conceptions*, Inhorn outlines a distinctive "reprolexicon" for key concepts she develops in each chapter, engaging with scholars on globalization, bioethics, public health, medical anthropology, and the anthropology of reproduction. With incisive self-reflection, she charts the rise of *reproductive tourism* as a scholarly, media, and IVF clinic marketing term. She analyzes her participants' strong criticism of it based on their experience, ultimately advocating for discarding the concept. This is particularly remarkable because Inhorn's own Dubai research was framed as a study of reproductive tourism. She opts instead for the term "reprotravelers."

The prologue features the riveting global reproductive journey of one woman, and each chapter ends with a series of reprotravel stories. These stories capture the medical, social, and financial risks of infertility treatment as well as the physical and psychological pain that individuals endure. Chapters are organized clearly around four main constraints on the fulfillment of reproductive desires: sociocultural issues, resource shortages, religious and legal restrictions, and quality and safety concerns. An extensive glossary of medical terms assists those unfamiliar with reproductive diagnoses, technologies, and procedures.

Inhorn focuses on the largest private IVF clinic in Emirates, optimistically named Conceive, where she conducted 200 interviews over six months in 2007 and returned for additional research in 2012 and 2013. The majority of interviews were with couples (heterosexual

due to legal restrictions), and she collected 125 reprotravel stories from participants with 50 countries of origin, mainly from the Middle East and Africa. Inhorn argues that "stories are perhaps the best window into the world of infertility—a world that is replete with pain, fear, frustration, and longing for a desired child" (p. 29).

Inhorn showcases compassionate ethnography and is present in long excerpts of conversations with couples in interviews that often began only after she vowed secrecy. Her powerful connection with participants is signaled by how many thanked her for allowing them to unburden themselves about their stigmatized identity and, as one termed it, "invisible disability." With sharp critical analysis, she responds powerfully to stories that include medical malpractice, domestic violence, gendered social stigma, racism, and classism.

The clinic served as an exceptionally ideal setting due to its "transcontinental reputation for delivering a wide spectrum of high-quality and effective IVF services within a multicultural clinic environment" (p. 32). Inhorn discusses feeling welcomed by the "Conceive family" and shares with her study participants the assessment that Conceive's physician director, born in India and trained in India, the US, and the UK, is superior due to his diagnostic acumen, global professional connections to excellent doctors, and direct but caring communication style with patients. Taken by Inhorn's daughter, photos of the clinic, staff, Dr. Pankaj, and Dubai scenes enhance the vibrant context and personalities that Inhorn encountered.

Listening carefully to reprotravel stories, Inhorn dissects the citizenship, legal, cultural, and religious mandates that make it necessary for couples to travel and spend large sums for infertility care. Although its patient-centered and culturally diverse care stands out compared to other infertility clinics in Emirates and around the world, even Conceive cannot meet all patients' needs. Muslim and Emirates laws ban donor egg or sperm, surrogacy, and abortion to reduce the number of fetuses. Inhorn argues that infertility care is a reproductive justice issue and that "reprotravel is about politics—about what states are willing to do for their citizens to ensure their reproductive rights" (p. 301).

*Cosmopolitan Conceptions* concludes with a compelling three-part call to activism to prevent the need for costly reprotravel among the world's infertile citizens" (p. 302): (1) infertility prevention, including reproductive tract and sexually transmitted disease treatment; (2) increased efforts

to destigmatize the experiences of infertile women and men by providing support groups in the global South, “new routes to social parenthood” such as fostering and adoption, and new paths to adulthood that are not tied to child raising; and (3) advocacy for the low-cost IVF movement, aimed “to

make safe, affordable, effective IVF accessible to everyone who needs it, but primarily to people in the global South” (p. 303). This outstanding and readable book is equally valuable for interdisciplinary scholars, global reproductive justice advocates, and infertility caregivers.

## Coercive Concern: Nationalism, Liberalism, and the Schooling of Muslim Youth by Reva Jaffe-Walter.

Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016. 232 pp.

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Reva Jaffe-Walter’s *Coercive Concern: Nationalism, Liberalism, and the Schooling of Muslim Youth* is part of a growing anthropological literature (Bowen 2008; Fernando 2014; Jacobsen 2011) exploring the strained relations between European majority societies and Muslim minorities. *Coercive Concern* takes as its ethnographic focus the experience of Muslim pupils at a comprehensive school in Copenhagen, Denmark. Jaffe-Walter’s observations at the school, together with interviews with pupils, teachers, and administrators, form the vantage point for her more general comments on the often-hostile scrutiny Danish Muslim youths encounter in Danish society. Like most of the anthropological literature on the Muslim minority in Europe, *Coercive Concern* is sharply critical of the way established European societies have come to relate to their Muslim citizens. In an eloquent couple of introductory chapters, Jaffe-Walter marshals critics of “liberal society” from Étienne Balibar (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991) and Talal Asad (2003, 2006) to Thea Renda Abu El-Haj (2010, 2015) to sketch the background of her own study of the “hypocritical liberal obfuscation” that, in her view, characterizes the discourses and practices of integration today (p. 13). Following Dorothy Holland and colleagues (1998), Jaffe-Walter identifies the “figured world of integration” as the discursive space that determines the fraught relationships between her young Muslim interlocutors and Danish majority society.

Indeed, the book’s chapters present plenty of evidence both for the ways in which these “figurations” shape the interactions between school staff and pupils and animate the hostile concern that Jaffe-Walter’s Muslim interlocutors face, both in school and by society at large. Unsurprisingly, the Muslim youths we meet in the book are angry and frustrated and, for the most part, deeply alienated from established society. The author, in fact, seems to agree with one of her interlocutors whom she quotes as telling her that, in today’s Denmark, being Danish and being Muslim are mutually exclusive.

Drawing on my own experiences with Danish pedagogical institutions and Muslim youths in Denmark, I find most of this fairly convincing. Although many Muslim “New Danes” have found more or less comfortable homes in Danish society, many share the anger and frustration of Jaffe-Walter’s interlocutors. Often, in their narratives of and interactions with Danish Muslim youths, pedagogues, administrators, welfare officials, pundits, and experts alike display just that kind of hostile concern that Jaffe-Walter diagnoses as a particular form of narcissism. As Jaffe-Walter’s account shows, the professed agenda to emancipate Muslim youths easily collapses into the cultural preferences of teachers and administrators. Thus, the evocation of emancipatory concern becomes a smoke screen for heavy-handed discipline and bad-tempered abandonment.

Yet there is more to say about the often-difficult relationship of established Danish society and its Muslim minority. In fact, there is more in the author’s interviews with the pupils and teachers, and following up on some of the more subtle cues in her conversations might have contributed to a more complex account. For instance, while her interlocutors indeed express sharply critical opinions of Danish society, we also read that some of them build rich and satisfying lives within it—as indeed many Danish Muslims do. Is the diagnosis of “narcissism” really sufficient to explain the teachers’ difficulty in extending empathy to their pupils? The teachers and administrators we meet in Jaffe-Walter’s account are clearly deeply embedded in a national pedagogical tradition, and they think of themselves as tolerant and wedded to emancipatory pedagogy in fairly specific terms. A more finely grained engagement with this tradition might have added more texture to the well-rehearsed critique of liberal (in)tolerance.

At the end of her conclusion, Jaffe-Walter writes about her hope that the future of Danish-Muslim relations could be different: that coercive concern might give way to less hostile forms of interaction and that established Danish society may yet harbor the potential to more fully recognize the identities and ambitions of Muslim youths. One may hope so, indeed. But this turn comes as a surprise to the reader. It seems to militate against the ethnography the author presents, which gives little occasion to suspect any such opening, nor does