

Knowledgeshare

Book review

The New Arab Man: emergent masculinities, technologies, and Islam in the Middle East

Marcia C Inhorn

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Middle Eastern men as responsible reproductive partners, in love with wives whom they wish to please, is, perhaps, the abiding theme of this volume.

So says the author (p. 11) in this latest of four books that Marcia Inhorn has published on social aspects of infertility and assisted reproductive technologies (ARTs) in the Middle East. Studies of 'new masculinities' have been predominantly conducted in the USA and Western Europe, mostly among white middle-class men. This book takes us to geographical locations where the 'new masculinities' scholars have rarely ventured. In a further novel turn, the book addresses 'emergent masculinities' through a discussion of men and reproduction or, more specifically, assisted reproduction, an area of scholarship in which men have most definitely been 'the second sex.' Inhorn's earlier pioneering work on infertility experienced by Egyptian women living in poverty examines in detail the ways in which patriarchy is 'lived', and the often extreme suffering of childless women who are stigmatised, threatened with divorce and socially ostracised in a highly pronatalist society. More recently, Inhorn has had the opportunity to explore the lives of infertile Middle Eastern couples, and infertile men, in a society where the rates of male infertility appear to be particularly high. This collection of men's 'reproductive life histories' encompasses not only experiences of infertility and reproductive technologies such as *in-vitro* fertilisation (IVF) and intra-cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), but also more general 'local moral worlds' and embodied subjectivities. The book is primarily based on fieldwork undertaken with 220 Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian men living in or visiting Lebanon, of whom 70% were Muslim (both Sunni and Shia) and 30% were Christian. In total, 120 of these men had diagnosed male factor infertility, and the remainder were husbands of infertile women seeking IVF.

Not only does this work contribute some excellent empirical material to contemporary debates about new masculinities, but also it is theoretically well informed, drawing on Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinities and the concept of 'emergence' in the work of Raymond Williams to explore Middle Eastern masculinities as complex, fluid and changing cultural identities. The book documents how Middle Eastern men, in contrast to the dominant stereotypes of hegemonic masculinity performed as violent irrationality fuelled by extremist religion, are appropriating diverse forms of masculinity, some of which are resisting patriarchy and unseating the received wisdom of religion.

The book disrupts the automatically assumed and media-generated essentialist discourses of Arab men as terrorists, patriarchal oppressors of women, and thus somewhat ominous reproductive actors. Although not everyone will accept the analysis presented in the book, it nevertheless constitutes a really engaging read and an interesting counter to the consistently deployed perceptions of Middle Eastern masculinity, which we have further encountered in the recent accounts of the revolutionary movements in Tunisia, Libya and Syria.

The book is thus a timely intellectual contribution to the theorisation of new masculinities, especially in relation to embodiment and ARTs, and will be of interest to many in the field of reproductive health and medical sociology/anthropology more generally, as well as to those interested in the 'lived experience' of religion.

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Resources from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC has produced a series of reading lists on equality themes, including sex discrimination, age, disability, the Equality Act 2010, equal pay, gender diversity, human rights, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. These reading lists are available on the