

Review of Marcia Claire Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012, ix + 403 pp., ISBN 978-0-691-14889-2

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Something unusual happens in the book *the New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East*. Discourse on gender and religion in the Middle East is often associated with women and Islam. Yale University anthropologist Marcia Claire Inhorn nuances the intersection of religion and gender in an alternative, yet crucial conversation about 'the new Arab man', specifically emergent masculinities in Muslim majority countries within the Middle East and North Africa. Her research also includes a discussion of masculinities among Arab men from the Dearborn, Michigan, United States, who are from or whose families are from Muslim majority countries in the Middle East and or North Africa. Through ethnographic research, Inhorn argues that men's reproductive health, or lack there of, and their encounter with new reproductive technologies are producing novel constructions of masculinity. Inhorn reveals the 'new Arab man', a term she coins in the book. She writes, the 'New Arab men are rejecting the assumptions of their Arab forefathers', including what she calls 'the four notorious Ps – patriarchy, patrilineality, patrilocality, and polygyny' (2012: 302). According to Inhorn, the four Ps are becoming a thing of the past.

Inhorn's 'new Arab man' is not the stereotypical violent aggressor reinforced by the Western media, but a flesh and blood human coping with disruptive issues of reproduction and consequential emotions involved in that process. She points out that there is a reproductive epidemic across the globe, and it is especially changing the way in which men in the Middle East are perceived. Inhorn explores the question of why so many Middle Eastern men are infertile (2012: 302). She refers to a 1992 study by Cynthia R. Daniels, which reported that global sperm counts have dropped more than 40% in the last 50 years – 'the big drop theory' – which caused moral panic across the globe. According to the men in

Inhorn's study, the epidemic may be attributed to obesity, change in diet, smoking, drinking, drug use, sedentary work, and even use of hard bicycle seats and the advent of feminism. These theories remain largely unproven. Inhorn cites that most men think their fertility issues are largely due to their own behaviours, but are especially due to 'the war'. They speak about the psychological effects of living in areas that have often come in contact with conflict. Inhorn notes that war may be to blame in part for men's infertility, but does not think this is the chief cause. Instead, she suggests that reproductive issues are largely genetic, including the result of generations of cousin marriages that are prevalent in Muslim majority countries (2012: 307).

Inhorn sets out that men are not simply involved in conception; rather they are involved and invested in most aspects of the reproductive process, from impregnation to procreation to rearing children. The new Arab man embodies emergent masculinities that entail love, tenderness and affection 'as well as untold sacrifice and suffering' (2012: 317). The author argues that Middle Eastern men are changing their socio-political world through defying convention stereotypes, challenging moral authorities in light of cultural and religious values, and employing emergent technologies to change their everyday lives.

Over the last two decades, Inhorn has conducted continuous research on reproductive health in the Middle East. She researched 'Embryo and Gamete Donation' in light of Sunni Muslim values in Egypt and Shia perspectives in Iran and Lebanon. In the United Arab Emirates, she has focused on reproductive tourism regarding Islamic ideals on adoption and gamete donation (sperm and egg). She conducted detailed ethnographic research with over 330 men in Egypt, Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, as well as in Michigan, the United States (2012: 17). These men came from all social classes and religious backgrounds (though the majority were Muslim). The ethnographic accounts capture men's behaviour in the context of their everyday lives, and complicate the reproductive experience of Arab men. Inhorn artfully employs ideas from the fields of anthropology, gender studies, Middle Eastern studies and reproductive and medical research to uncover the reproductive struggles of Arab men.

While the first half of the book focuses on emergent masculinities in the Middle East, the second half of her book carefully unwinds in particular Islamic masculinities – both in relation to issues of reproduction. Inhorn's 'aim has been to reveal the role of men – clerics, physicians, and patients – in shaping this local moral world' (2012: 316). Inhorn explores questions regarding Islamic *fatwas* (legal updates to and interpretations of past religious dictums) on gamete donation, donor technologies, and political implications of sperm donation. She ventures, for example, into conversation on future notions of cloning and shifting applications of Muslim values. Provokingly she writes, 'Given that cloning bypasses the need for third-party reproductive assistance, the Middle East may be one of the first regions of the world to eagerly embrace human reproductive cloning' (2012: 315). She suggests that new technologies may reshape cultural and religious customs of family life. DNA testing, for example, might replace and make the current custom of 'licking a red-hot iron or other fiery substance to settle paternity disputes' irrelevant. At the same time, Inhorn demonstrates that Islamic attitudes are disconcerting and divided towards masturbation, IVF and donation of gametes.

Inhorn reveals the definition of what it means to be a 'good' Muslim man shifts based on locally grounded and morally imbued interpretations of Islamic

tradition in relation to current issues of reproduction (2012: 225). Local religious clerics play an important role in determining local norms and traditions, and are involved in producing novel types of 'emergent Islamic masculinity' by reassigning new roles to men. Clerics can accomplish change, for example, through proclaiming *fatwas* about assisted reproduction. Sperm donation is one of the most stigmatising reproductive technologies within predominately Muslim countries, yet, Inhorn demonstrates, its perceptions vary in different communities. In the Sunni world, for example, donation of gametes is prohibited according to many *fatwas* (in Egypt, for instance). Often, Sunni society equivocates such donations to *zina* or adultery. On the other hand, globalisation of reproductive technologies in the Shia Muslim world are socially recognised and their use is religiously accepted. In Lebanon, Shia Muslim clerics have issued *fatwas* that have allowed the donation of gametes (especially eggs) from third parties. Various Shia groups see assisted reproduction and gamete donation as a way to save marriages between infertile couples. Consequently, sperm donation is now offered in Iran and Lebanon (2012: 261). In the Shia Muslim world, men are since recently able to reproduce with medical assistance, exposing their male physical bodies and constructing families in locally uncharted ways. In the case of gamete donation, masculinity seems not attached to biological fatherhood through blood relationship, but is rather based on men's social commitment to fatherhood. Here, manhood is not (only) about protecting the (blood-related) family, but about nurturing, protecting and caring for a child both within wedlock, with or without blood relation. These emergent masculinities take on more emotional, 'feminine' roles without demasculinising men. It seems that particular groups of Arab men embrace the opportunity of fatherhood through reproductive assistance and take on new roles and expand possibilities for constructing family life in Middle Eastern societies.

While I understand the author's use of the phrase the 'new Arab man', the term could be mistaken as an Orientalist phrase, insofar as it limits the experience of men in the Middle East to a singular entity. I think the book could have done without the coining of this term. On the other hand, Inhorn offers various insights into processes of change in men's self-perception, processes that are by no means homogeneous, though they may show similar trends. I believe Inhorn's purpose was not to reduce different groups of men into this ethnic umbrella term, and suggest to read the term 'new Arab man' as a signifier of change in constructions of masculinity among the larger Middle Eastern population. Inhorn moreover nuances and complicates the concepts used in her research, including the concept of reproduction as predominantly defined in a Eurocentric manner and understood in relation to individuals who are assumed to have reproductive choice. However, the agency of men in the Middle East is often constructed differently compared to the Western ideal of individual autonomy, as the choice to produce children is subsumed by extended families.

The book provides convincing evidence that emergent masculinities across religious traditions defy conventional gender stereotypes in the Middle East and oppose prevailing moral authorities through the use of new techno-scientific innovations. The book is revolutionary in its challenge of assumptions about Arab men and their reproductive lives, demanding reevaluation of relationships between the two. Inhorn's study complicates and enriches what it means to be an Arab man in the global imagination, and what the various meanings of the category of masculinity could be in the Middle East.