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## Introduction. Reinventing Love? Gender, Intimacy and Romance in the Arab World

Corinne Fortier, Aymon Kreil, Irene Maffi

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Middle East, Social and Cultural Studies

Etudes culturelles et sociales sur le Moyen-Orient

Corinne Fortier, Aymon Kreil,  
Irene Maffi (eds)

## Reinventing Love?

Gender, Intimacy and Romance in the Arab World



PETER LANG

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### Reinventing Love?

Affective and sexual intimacy are sensitive issues in the Arab World. However moments of closeness between men and women have always been possible, perhaps even more so today, thanks to the spread of mixed-gender social spaces and new communication technologies. Further, while undeniably embedded in gendered relations of power, love is a highly ambivalent field of experience that involves a good deal of negotiation between partners and with family and can stand in tense relationship to patriarchal domination. Often, however, romantic love is contrasted with love after marriage. This book precisely explores the relationship between love and marriage in the contemporary Arab world. By sketching the paths of amorous encounters in the Arab world, it introduces the reader to the conflicting configurations that shape love practices, providing new insights into a still-emerging field of inquiry. It examines notions of gender, intimacy and love through ethnographic case studies that offer an insight into current dynamics in Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

**Corinne Fortier** is Anthropologist. She is researcher at the French National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) and member of Social Anthropology Lab (LAS) (CNRS-EHESS-Collège de France-Universités PSL, Paris). She has conducted research in Mauritania, in Egypt and on Islamic scriptural sources related to gender, body, seduction, bioethics, and family law.

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## Reinventing Love?

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Corinne Fortier, Aymon Kreil, Irene Maffi (éds)

# **Reinventing Love?**

Gender, Intimacy and Romance  
in the Arab world



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CORINNE FORTIER, AYMÓN KREIL AND IRENE MAFFI

## Introduction

# Reinventing Love? Gender, Intimacy and Romance in the Arab World

**Abstract:** Until recently, scholarship on the Arab world had largely neglected love as a topic of inquiry. For instance, there is much research on male domination, female agency, and their relation to religious and social norms, but despite its importance in the performance of gender, little has been written on the complex role of love. This absence is especially striking given the fact that in both the present and the past love has been a major preoccupation in the lives of people of the region, as elsewhere, and is well-documented in poetry and prose. Anthropology seems particularly suited to the study of intimate experiences through its focus on practice and everyday discourse. The principal aim of this edited volume is to give account of the developments, tensions and dynamics involved in love and seduction in the Arab world in contemporary times.

**Keywords:** Arab world, intimacy, seduction, romantic love, marriage, sexuality, state, colonisation, history of anthropology.

Affective and sexual intimacy are sensitive issues in the Arab world, regularly igniting heated debate. Those claiming the most conservative approach promote the segregation of unrelated men and women and harsh rules of modesty. They often present their cause as rooted in national and religious authenticity and in defence of social cohesion and the role of families. Others, claiming that they are seeking to relax constraints and promote individual rights, present sexual liberation as a condition of progress. Exchanges between proponents of these conflicting conceptions of good society can be violent. Many try to define a middle way, doing their best to reconcile family with romance, religion with love, and ideals of national authenticity with ideals of progress.

However, underneath these broad debates and despite limitations, moments of closeness between men and women have always been

possible, perhaps even more so today, thanks to the spread of mixed-gender social spaces (universities, mixed-gender coffee-shops, etc.) and new communication technologies (the Internet, cell phones, etc.). These discrete dynamics shaping the experience of love deserve attention. They have a direct impact on the perception of the selves (Joseph 1999) and their possible evolution. Further, while undeniably embedded in gendered relations of power, love is a highly ambivalent field of experience that involves a good deal of negotiation between partners and with family and can stand in tense relationship to patriarchal domination.

Until recently, scholarship on Arab countries had largely neglected love as a topic of inquiry. For instance, there is much research on male domination, female agency, and their relation to religious and social norms, but despite its importance in the performance of gender (Inhorn 2012), little has been written on the complex role of love. This absence is especially striking given the fact that in both the present and the past love has been a major preoccupation in the lives of people of the region, as elsewhere, and is well-documented in poetry and prose. Anthropology seems particularly suited to the study of intimate experiences through its focus on practice and everyday discourse. The principal aim of this edited volume is to give account of the developments, tensions and dynamics involved in love and seduction in the Arab world in contemporary times.

In these introductory pages, we first sketch the evolution of the role given by anthropologists of Arab countries to love in their analyses and descriptions. For a long time, the study of kinship systems and Islamic law overshadowed interest in personal sentiment. In the 1980s, scholarly interest in emotions, personal agency and later the transnational circulation of imaginaries began to grow. We argue that this attention to subjective experiences set the conditions for the anthropology of love to take off in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After that, we sketch the main research trends on the topic, especially underscoring anthropology's heuristic value for deconstructing common-sense categories defining love, for instance love marriage and arranged marriage. Then, we briefly retrace the history of debates about love and marriage in the Arab world since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to provide a few contextual landmarks for the studies that we present in this book. Lastly, we describe the content of the book, and how some

features are common across all of the chapters: the contextual variability of the references to love, the contested meaning of homogamy, and the importance of taking into account the economic and political contexts of which love relations are part in order to understand their current shape.

## Finding a Place for Love in the Anthropology of the Arab World

As long as the study of structures and functions prevailed, individual feelings such as love had only a minor role in research. A few exceptions concern the Pacific islands, which are places that nourished Western love fantasies since the start of their exploration by Europeans in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The most prominent example in this regard is Margaret Mead's work on the Samoa Islands from the 1920s (Tcherkézoff 2001; 2004). South of the Mediterranean, until the 1980s, anthropologists were interested mainly in kinship, with a special focus on the specificities of the so called 'Arab marriage' between parallel patrilineal cousins, in many cases without taking into consideration the sentiments involved (Ayoub 1959; Barry 1998; Bonte 1994; Bourdieu 1972a; Chelhod 1965; Cuisenier 1962; Holy 1989; Khuri 1970; Lévi-Strauss 1959; Murphy and Kasdan 1959; Ottenheimer 1986; Tillion 2007). Research on kinship included also exploring vendetta systems triggered by honour and shame, especially from the 1970s onwards, through attempts to underline common cultural features in the Mediterranean area (Albera 2006; Behnke 1980; Bourdieu 1972b; Gellner 1969; Gilmore 1987; Jamous 1981; Schneider 1971; Péristiany 1974).

Another important line of inquiry into topics related to love was that of Islamic law. Orientalists started to explore Islamic law concomitantly with the emergence of the notion itself. Conceiving Sharia as a code was a result of the codification of jurisprudence into a system of positive law, a process starting concomitantly with colonization and continuing with the emergence of new nation-states (Cuno 2015; Dupret and Buskens 2012).

These scholars based their knowledge principally on textual sources, with a few exceptions. Among these exceptions, in the Francophone scholarship, for instance, authors such as René Maunier and Jacques Berque started to rely on sociological theory and ethnography when discussing matters related to legal regulations in the 1930s and 1940s (Botiveau 1990: 162). Later, in the 1960s anthropologists such as Germaine Tillion used references to Islamic law mainly where it was invoked as a mean of authority in conflicts related to kinship, or as a tool to ensure masculine domination in inheritance disputes (Tillion 1983, 2007).

Attempts to find models for the functioning of kinship relations and to formalize Islamic law were not only in line with criteria that were of scientific interest at the time to anthropology, which was favouring large schemes of explanation; they were also congruent with European projects to rule the region, by offering models of social norms making them potentially easier to manage for colonisers (see for example Burke III 2014). Readings of scholarly writings from the colonial period need to take into consideration this context of production marked by European domination and the ambivalent attitudes it sometimes provoked among researchers (Bourdieu 1976; Colonna 1976). For instance, although Tillion militated against violence and torture during the Algerian war and had an open dialogue with representatives of the National Liberation Front, her position regarding the French presence in Algeria was not devoid of ambiguities (Vidal-Naquet and Daniel 2000: 141–142). In 1957, she affirmed that the French should not leave the Algerians ‘in the middle of the bridge’ after providing them with modern medical knowledge, because women were still uneducated, and the risk was that the country would become overpopulated (Tillion 1957). Her demographic concerns and the link she established between undesired population growth and the status of women unable to control their fertility echoes a general pattern in reformist discourses in the region (El Shakry 2007), a point we examine below. Beyond this, she argued that Algerian women were doubly colonised by the French and by the male-dominated social order. Thus, she wrote, they had to work for their ‘de-colonisation’ (Tillion 2007: 187), underlining how male domination is perpetuated not only by men but also by women themselves.

Starting in the 1980s, new developments in anthropology paved the way for the integration of love into the study of the Arab world. Retracing the transformations anthropology of the last forty years is beyond the scope of this introduction. However, it is particularly important to mention three main trends in the research on Arab countries that emerged during that period, because they were instrumental in the recognition of love as a legitimate topic of inquiry.

First, anthropologists working on the Arab world became increasingly interested in Islamic law under the aegis of Lawrence Rosen's (1984) studies on Morocco. Later, in the favourable context following the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, interest grew in bioethical and reproductive health issues (Ali 2002; Fortier 2007, 2010; Inhorn 1994, 1996; Maffi 2012). Almost concomitantly with Rosen's first publication on Moroccan legal courts, the anthropology of emotions gained increased significance in the United States (Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Lutz and White 1986). Concerning the Arab world, Lila Abu-Lughod's 1986 book *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* played an important role in anchoring the topic in research. In her analysis of poetic genres among the Awlād Ali Bedouins of north-western Egypt, she shows how the discourse praising honour was used in parallel with poetry expressing desire and torment, sometimes even contradicting kinship rules (Abu-Lughod 1986). Eventually, transnational approaches focusing on the circulation of cultural norms and referents overshadowed the previous comparatist endeavors. The study of urban Middle-Eastern pop culture brought a 'mass culture' (Armbrust 1996) to the fore in which the influence of Western imaginaries was obvious, promoted by the charms of consumption (Abaza 2001; Abu-Lughod 2005; Armbrust 1996; Deeb and Harb 2013; Koning 2009).

As a result of these developments, love, situated at the crossroads of legal systems, individual emotions and the transnational circulation of imaginaries, finally found its place in the anthropology of the Arab world.



## Analytical and Descriptive Approaches to Love in Anthropology

If we consider larger trends in anthropology beyond the study of Arab countries, it is possible to broadly distinguish three main approaches to contemporary studies of love. The first, based mostly on comparative surveys of cultures and rooting its understanding of emotions in biology, emphasizes the universality of the feelings associated with romantic love. William Jankowiak is probably the most famous proponent of this approach. In a study that he coauthored, he argues for instance that the basic emotions related to love are universal, mostly due to hormonal reactions, but shows that the romantic kiss is recorded in less than half of his global sample of cultures (Jankowiak and Fischer 1992; Jankowiak, Volsche and Garcia 2015).

The second trend, among whose main proponents in anthropology is Charles Lindholm, studies romantic love as an outcome of structural features in the organisation of societies (Lindholm 1988, 2006). Similarly basing his research on a comparative survey of cultures, Lindholm argues that there are three types of society that favour love: hierarchically rigid societies with a strong kinship system, in which people see love relations as an escape from social constraints and as such, incompatible with marriage; fluid societies, in which people try to combine love with marriage; and societies in which young people are given the freedom to experiment with love until they reach a certain age, but are sooner or later pulled back into a rigid kinship system. Lindholm's notion of fluidity is reminiscent of sociological theories that consider romantic love an outcome of systemic features of European and North American capitalism (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1990; Giddens 1992; Illouz 1997).

The third trend considers romantic love in its current shape as primarily a European and North-American cultural product and studies the circulation of this model around the world. A large body of research addresses the impact of romantic love on kinship arrangements (Bochow 2007; Cole and Lynn 2009; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Lipset 2004; Padilla 2007; Pettier 2016; Stacey 2011; Zavoretti 2013). In her pioneering research on

love letters in a rural area of Nepal, Laura Ahearn contends, for instance, that romantic feelings, earlier related to shame, had become a symbol of modernity for the villagers she studied (Ahearn 2003, 2004). They started to dream of love affairs resembling those they saw in Indian and Nepali films, textbooks and magazines, and to conceive marriage as successful if based on a companionate relationship in accordance with the model promoted by development programs.

The three approaches that we analytically distinguish here have their strengths and downsides. The approach based on the universality of certain biological reactions, while acknowledging the importance of love outside Europe and North America, falls short of explaining the diversity of discourses and practices concerning attraction and desire that can be found around the world. Approaches that focus more on structural features pay attention to broader social determinants affecting local understandings of love, but also suffer from the teleologic assumptions of functionalist theories implying that things are necessarily the way they are. Theories focusing on the circulation of discourses eventually have the advantage of historicising precisely the phenomena of love, but their findings are difficult to use for elaborating a general theoretical framework. A rule described by the French epistemologist Jean-Claude Passeron seems to apply in this context: the more a theory gains in its power of abstraction and generalization, the less useful it is for accurately describing the complexity of concrete situations; and the more precise descriptions of such situated experiences get, the less they are applicable to broader analytical generalization (Passeron 2013).

## Love Marriage and Arranged Marriage Reconsidered

One of the important contributions of ethnographic research on love so far is its questioning of the notions of the love marriage and the arranged marriage as clear-cut categories. Considering marriage strategies among an upper-class family in Egypt, Robert Springborg explains that love marriage and arranged marriage constitute the two poles of a continuum, with secret

marriage against the will of kin at one end and forced marriage in which the future partners have no say at the other (Springborg 1982: 29–30). Most couples seem however to favour solutions along the continuum following the model of arranged-cum-love marriage that Pervez Mody describes in India (Mody 2002). In Egypt, even couples meeting independently of their relatives sometimes stage first encounters under the supervision of their parents in order to show their respect and ensure that they will not lose the support of their kin (Schielke 2015: 96–97). Similarly, as Julia Dombrowski notices, even in contexts that appear subject only to a few social regulations such as online dating, the objectivation of criteria for the matching of couples through computer programs resembles models of arranged marriage (Dombrowski 2011: 162). Nevertheless, in contemporary Arab countries arranged marriage (*zawāj taqlidī* or *zawāj ṣālūnāt*) and love marriage (*zawāj ḥubb*) remain important emic categories orienting marital choice. Hence in the negotiations of future spouses and their families in search of suitable partners, many include the ability to express romantic feelings among the criteria for their selection.

Ethnographic work also questions a clear-cut distinction between societies that support the expression of love and others that consider it a danger to the kinship order. For instance, Kimberley Hart describes how shy persons in a rural village in Anatolia were encouraged to express their feelings to each other, while those who appeared more self-confident were kept under scrutiny to avoid any unsupervised contact (Hart 2007).

Similarly, Islamic law, in its current understanding, codifies the rights and duties of spouses and promotes marriages in which the man is the social equal or superior of his wife (hypergamy). In many Arab countries women are passed from the guardianship of their father to that of their husband. While marriage may always be presented as a festive event, for some women it can be traumatic because it marks their separation from their family, even, in certain cases, resulting in tears during the wedding ceremony. However, ethnographic evidence complexifies this picture, emphasizing the agency of women and future wives in the negotiations preceding marriage. The Islamic notion of *kafā'a*, stating the necessity of an equivalence of status between future spouses, can have a broad scope, including most notably class, age, former marital status, physical appearance and religiosity. Balancing these

criteria for marriage is often the object of complex bargains (Fortier 2011, 2017; Hoodfar 1997; Rugh 1984).

Arranged marriage and love marriage are categories that have travelled all around the world, deeply affecting practices and imaginaries. Discourses condemning or praising love marriage abound as a result (Kreil 2012; Shalini 2009; Spronk 2002). The nuclear family has been lauded as a harbour of love by colonial reformers, missionaries, and school teachers, along with novels, songs and films showing stories with Hollywoodian 'happy endings' (Schielke 2015: 92) and sad destinies triggered by unhappy unions have anchored the idea that love and marriage should go together (Tremayne 2006). Often, however, romantic love is contrasted with love after marriage, which some consider the only real love. This book precisely explores the relationship between love and marriage in the contemporary Arab world.

The ideal of romantic love is very present today in Arab countries, although it is not always deemed a necessary component of marriage (Adely 2016; Drieskens 2008; Fortier, Kreil and Maffi 2016). Love can be thought of as a sentiment that young people can cultivate before marriage (Breteau, this volume); as a dangerous feeling that can compromise a couple's success; as an ideal to be pursued but which is difficult to experience within marriage (Maffi, this volume); or as a feeling typical of extramarital relationships (Fortier 2004). Romantic love is also linked with consumeristic practices related to the transnational capitalist economy (Kreil 2016) and the development of new communication technologies (Jyrkiäinen 2016; Kaya 2009; Menin 2018; Nevola 2016).

In this volume we understand romantic love not as the only possible form of love but as a specific mode of subjectivation which induces 'a self-conscious performance' (Hart 2007: 351) of feelings and a specific configuration of 'state policies, infrastructural improvements, new technologies, economic opportunities, and vehicles of expression' (ibid). Romantic love has the ability to reshape pre-existing family order and group boundaries. As stated above, attempts to challenge and redefine homogamy as a necessary condition for marriage are central in many of the contributions in this book (Breteau, Asaf, Cantini, Gasparotto, this volume). The politico-economic dimension of love is the topic of the last section of this introduction.

## The Governance of Love

The emergence of romantic love as it is currently conceived in many Arab societies can be traced back to the colonial period and the reform of the family initiated by postcolonial governments. Additionally, as in Europe, global economic, social and cultural transformations contributed to the emergence of romantic love. Among the changes that brought about the diffusion of romantic love are the inscription of the Arab countries in the capitalist economy, the questioning of previous economic relationships between spouses in the household and the extended family, the introduction of universal schooling, women's access to certain jobs and political rights, urbanization and changes in family law (Moghadam 1993). In short, romantic love and ideals of companionate marriage became synonymous with modernity, and in the Arab world, as in other postcolonial contexts, part of being modern is to be able to choose a partner to whom one can feel 'sexually attracted and emotionally connected' (Ahearn 2003: 109).

In Arab countries, the colonial period was characterized by a lively intellectual movement that elicited reflection on the topic of modernity among both secular modernists and religious conservatives. Faced with military, political and economic defeat and with the colonialist discourse representing Arab peoples as backward and traditional, local elites reacted, theorising social reforms aimed at modernising societies. Among the main domains to be reformed was women's condition, especially for the lower classes. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in several Arab countries, among them Egypt and Tunisia, a debate developed about the 'question of women' because European colonisers considered that Arab women's condition of subjugation was a marker of backwardness based on the assumption that there is a direct 'relationship between a civilization and the status of its women' (Abu-Lughod 1998: 19). Later Germaine Tillion stated that 'a society which crushes women condemns herself to death' (2001: 63), showing the persistence of this rhetoric, as mentioned above.

Women's education, unveiling and participation in public life became important elements of the social reforms that local modernist elites proposed in order to bring society forward. Overall, 'remaking women' (Abu-Lughod

1998) became part of a nationalist effort to reinforce the national community and create a new generation of citizens. Women had to be educated ‘because they were educators of children, companions of men, and half of the nation’ (Najmabadi 1998: 95). They were still mainly relegated to the domestic space where they had to fulfil their duties as mothers and spouses, and their role was conceived as complementary to that of men, who were in charge of the maintenance of the family and the heads of it. As Abu Lughod (1998) notes, the effect of remaking women was paradoxical because it replaced old forms of patriarchal power with new ones, and at the same time allowed the emergence of new social and political spaces for women. The reform of women’s condition was part of a project aimed at changing the family organization, according to which extended family ties and kin solidarity must be replaced by the bourgeois ideal of the nuclear family loyal to the emerging nation state. Previously-existing solidarities and alliances were to be discarded through this reform of the family and of women’s role in it, including the transformation of the relationship between spouses and between them and their children (Charrad 2001).

This project was thus to promote the *usra* as ‘a nuclear family of parents and children in an architecturally-bounded, private household’ (Hasso 2011: 26) at the expense of the ‘*ā’ila*, ‘a wider and more powerful network of people who depend on each other for “sustenance, support, food”’ (ibid). Within the modern family the relationship between spouses acquired unprecedented importance, paving the way to the ideal of companionate marriage promoted, for instance, by the British in their colonies such as India (Chakrabarty 1994).

However, as in Victorian England—that significantly contributed to the development of modern models of companionate marriage—in the colonies ‘friendship’ between spouses did not imply equality because the spousal union was characterized by a separation of the domestic (female) and the public (male) spheres, gender inequalities, and the man’s authority over his wife and children. While the woman should obey her husband and care for the children, ‘it was recommended to men to show: patience, tenderness, consideration, forbearance [...] and to take the trouble to understand the domestic cares experienced by their wives’ (Hammerton 1990: 281).

Marriage based on friendship was notably promoted by Qāsim Amīn, a main modernist figure in turn-of-the-century Egypt and the author of the two well-known books, *Tahrir al-mar'a* (*The Liberation of Women*) (1899) and *Al-Mar'a al-jadida* (*The New Woman*) (1901). His books generated debate about the need to change women's condition in order to elicit the social and cultural transformation of Egypt (Ahmed 1992). Among the aspects of women's life to be reformed, he included marriage because it was 'based not on love but on ignorance and sensuality.' He considered women responsible for 'the "lewdness" and coarse sensuality and materialism characterizing Muslim marriages' (Ahmed 1992, 157). Hence women needed education to 'enable them to fulfil their function and duty in life' (ibid: 159). The modern wife a man should wish for had to be 'a friend who adorns his house and gives pleasure to his heart and fills his time and dissolves his trouble' (quoted in Pollard 2005: 158).

This argument found its echo in other Arab countries. In Tunisia, for instance, the precursor of the judicial and social reforms to women's status promoted by Habib Bourguiba in the 1950s and 1960s was the religious scholar Ṭāhir Ḥaddād, who in 1930 published *Imra'atunā fi al-sharī'a wa al-mujtama'* (*Our Woman in Law and Society*), in which he promoted the emancipation of women to stabilize the family and create educated and modern citizens (Charrad 2001). He wanted to turn women into better wives and mothers and, like Amīn in Egypt, saw 'spouses as life companions' (Charrad 2001: 217). In post-colonial Tunisia, the reform of the family and of the spousal relationship was further theorized by representatives of the state-sponsored National Union of Tunisian Women, who promoted marriage based on 'mutual understanding and harmony' (Marzouki 1993: 180). Women were to play the major role in this modern consolidation of the spousal union through 'love, tenderness, patience, humility and self-sacrifice' (ibid). They were to become good wives, active home managers, and caring mothers devoted to their children's education.

The social and political movement for the reform of women's condition and the family that emerged in the Arab region in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and was consolidated in the next (Hasso 2011) was central to the political changes that took place in many countries during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by Valentine Moghadam (2003). Comparing the revolutions that

took place in Turkey, Algeria, South Yemen, Iran and Afghanistan, she argues that women and families are crucial objects of reform when a new model of society has to be founded. Two 'models of womanhood' have appeared in the various countries considered: the 'women's emancipation' model aimed at eradicating 'feudalism, tribalism and backwardness' and the 'woman-in-the-family' model in which local religious repertoires are used to oppose colonial representations and policies (ibid: 105). While these two models had different effects on women's conditions, they both promote the importance of marriage and the family, seen as pillars of social stability, and emphasize women's role as wives and mothers and women and men's differential roles in the household.

Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century the nuclear family thus increasingly appeared as the basic unit of society, eliciting the emergence of new forms of spousal relationship, personal expectations, intimacy, and culturally-shaped emotions. Romance and love marriage have entered the imagination of Arab societies (Adely 2012; Fortier, Kreil and Maffi 2016), among others, thanks to a new model of family and marriage promoted by the state and triggered by major cultural, political and economic transformations.

To understand the emergence of romantic love in its modern declination it is important to take into account the construction of new forms of the self. The renewed separation of the (female) domestic and the (male) public spheres (Joseph 1997), the construction of a new scientifically-managed domesticity (Najmabadi 1998), emphasis on the modern family as a factory manufacturing new citizens (Bier 2011), the construction of the nuclear family (Hasso 2011), the diffusion of literacy (Ahearn 2003), etc., all contributed to the creation of new gendered identities. The language of citizens' rights and obligations entailed in 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalist projects was also crucial in enabling the emergence of individualism in Arab societies, where the language of kin, tribal and religious solidarities had dominated (Joseph 2002).

This does not mean that these other logics have been completely subverted by individualism so much as that they co-exist with alternative forms of subjectivation oriented by the values of individualism. Individualism, personal agency, choice (of spouse) and self-reflexivity (Lipset 2004) are typical features of modern subjectivation. However, it does not always come



without tensions. For instance, how can some women's desire to take on long studies and find a fulfilling job be reconciled with their wish to find a husband with whom they share affective ties and to be married before they reach 30, an age beyond which most people in Arab countries tend to consider women 'too old' to marry? Modern forms of subjectivation, created by the forces we have mentioned above and related to romantic love as entailing specific narratives, images and personal relationships, also produce their own arenas of contestation.

## Plan of the Book

In this volume, we examine notions of gender, intimacy and love through ethnographic case studies that offer an insight into current dynamics in several Arab countries regarding love and its relation to marriage. The chapters of the book are based on ethnographic studies conducted in Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt, Palestine, the United Arab Emirates and Oman.<sup>1</sup> Its eight chapters are structured around two moments in love relations: the first encounter, later negotiations about marriage, childbirth, and possible crises resulting from these.

The volume's first part is concerned with the changing ways in which people meet and establish love relationships. Seduction is an art necessitating personal and cultural knowledge and generally abides by gender rules. Steffen Strohmenger shows how women's game of 'playing hard to get' (*tuql*) has a lasting effect on love relations in Cairo, even after such relations are

1 Marriage being a highly heteronormative institution in the Arab countries, all the stories of couples which we have collected in this volume are about men and women's relations with members of the opposite sex. This does not mean that men and women mainly attracted by people of the same sex and sometimes self-defining as gay or lesbian do not marry (Lundqvist 2013). Issues related to same-sex love and sexuality and the blurring of gender categories with a transhistorical approach is the topic of another edited volume by one of the editors of this book (Kreil, Sorbera and Tolino, forthcoming). On this topic see also the work of a second editor of this book (Fortier 2017, 2019).

settled. According to Strohmenger's interlocutors, this strategy, which aims to preserve the woman's reputation and stimulate men's desire, can make it difficult to express feelings of attraction to a partner even after marriage. Corinne Fortier argues that courtship in Mauritania has commonly been a male prerogative, with women generally supposed to manifest their desires only indirectly. This context reminding of the *amour courtois* of the medieval troubadours seems to glorify the woman, but underlines also the rivalry between men, with women appearing as assets in this struggle. Seduction is certainly more than a question of courting a woman. Notably, it is a way to perfect male qualities related to generosity and self-control, even if passionate love implies a temporary feminized position of dependency towards the beloved to conquer her heart. For both men and women, romance relies on a symbolic geography delineating safe spaces of encounter, places of danger, and partners suitable or unfit for marriage. Mariangela Gasparotto describes how in Ramallah mechanisms of segregation induced by Israel's division and occupation of the land and social inequalities resulting from uneven development impact on amorous encounters. Love relations become a setting for experiencing these divides, sometimes subverting them and sometimes reasserting their strength. In her contribution on love relations in Muscat, Marion Breteau shows how young people reshape love encounters via the Internet, exploring new forms of intimacy, for instance by sharing memes and inspirational quotes. Through these new intimacies the Internet allows the reinforcement of existing networks and the exploration of transgressive venues for love.

The second part of the volume deals with the challenge to marry in a way that is altogether socially legitimate and desirable. In her chapter about the United Arab Emirates, Laure Assaf shows that love becomes the main frame of reference when it comes to justifying matrimonial choices. The state actively promotes the model of a family built around a loving couple of Emirati citizens. Her interlocutors present the equal status of potential marriage partners as a necessary condition for love. Entangled in these imaginaries of happiness, love conveys the intimate aspirations of young people, for instance in the dream of an affectionate husband who will not interfere with his wife's study and career projects. In his contribution on romantic love among students in Amman, Daniele Cantini describes

university as a liminal space in which students get involved in the state's modernization project, experience the class divide amongst themselves, and express their aspirations to self-realization through romantic encounters. Cantini shows how the effort to reconcile self-realization with the conservative ideals of family can lead to unexpected life paths.

By contrast, Irene Maffi and Irene Capelli's chapters both deal with the open infringement of the conservative family model. Maffi, in her chapter about Tunisia, shows the questioning of traded conceptions of marriage against the background of the political upheaval following the downfall of former president Zin al-Abidin Ben Ali. However, the collapse of the previous authoritarian regime also allowed actors close to Islamist parties to contest egalitarian laws imposed in the name of modernization by the one-party rule in the 1950s. In parallel to these new challenges, Maffi shows that young women seeking an abortion at public clinics are often stigmatized by staff, showing the limits of the Tunisian legislative model. In her chapter, Capelli describes the strategies of unmarried mothers in Morocco when dealing with NGOs offering them material and social support. She encountered a profound ambivalence among the young women she met, with the NGOs wanting them to present themselves as victims trying their best to improve their fate, and sexual and love relationships in which women consider it as normal that their partner financially support them. Thus, the unmarried mothers Capelli met are caught up in a situation where the moralising rhetoric of victimhood stands in opposition with their acceptance of gaining material benefits from relationships with men.

Modern romantic love took its current shape in the Arab world as part of specific social models related to the creation of colonial and post-colonial nation states. Political reforms promoting the nuclear family and its stability on the basis of relationships of love between spouses on the one hand and parents and children on the other were crucial in local societies' reception of transnational imaginaries (Charrad 2001; Hasso 2011). The inscription of Arab countries in the globalised capitalist economy and its consequences for the organisation of work relations, family solidarity, access to education, and leisure activities must also be considered if we want to understand current forms of sociability and intimacy as well as the moral norms ruling them (Cantini, Gasparotto, this volume; Deeb and Harb 2013). By sketching the

paths of amorous encounters in the region, this book introduces the reader to the conflicting configurations that shape love practices, providing new insights into a still-emerging field of inquiry. We hope that this volume will make a significant contribution to anthropological debate on love in the Arab world and beyond with its accounts of the emotional experiences of inhabitants of a region whose coverage is too often overshadowed by a sense of permanent crisis.

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