



Planning the Family in Egypt: New Bodies, New Selves (Modern Middle East (Paperback))

Kamran Asdar Ali

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In this ethnographic study, the author examines the policies and practices of family planning programs in Egypt to see how an elitist, Western-informed state attempts to create obliging citizens. The state sees voluntary compliance with the law for the common good as the cornerstone of modernity. Family planning programs are a training ground for the construction of self-disciplined individuals, and thus a rewarding area of study for the fate of social programs in developing countries.

Through a careful examination of state-endorsed family planning practices in urban and rural contexts, the author shows us the pervasive, high-pressure persuasion of women, who are encouraged to think as individual decision makers of their immediate families and their national interests. But what of the other forces at work in these women's lives, binding them to their extended families and to their religious identities? And what of the laws that allow for polygamy and discriminate against women in marriage, inheritance, and as part of the workforce?

These forces operate against the received wisdom of the state. Is the Muslim community thought to end at the borders of Egypt? What about local constructions of masculinity when the state appeals to wives to decide for themselves? How does widespread labor migration to foreign countries affect attitudes toward family planning? How is female contraception viewed by the Islamic Brotherhood and other modern Muslim groups?

This book questions much that we have taken for granted and gives us grounds for reexamining our assumptions about family planning and the individual and state in developing countries such as Egypt.

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