Editorial

Everyday Life in the Middle East

Ever since the 1970s, when I attended a conference of the American Anthropological Association for the first time, a question had been with me: Why do anthropologists of the Middle East not have a common forum in the form of a journal or an anthropology association? Now, as *Anthropology of the Middle East* makes its debut, my belief in the need for such a publication has become even stronger.

The past turbulent years have posed more burning questions for me, above all the following one: Has the anthropology of the Middle East played its due role as a social science dedicated to writing, describing, explaining and analysing the everyday life of people in the Middle East? As recent political events have shown, there remains an alarming lack of awareness in most countries of life in the Middle East. Anthropologists, now more than ever, could play an important role in making social and cultural developments in the Middle East more comprehensible to a wider world.

Understanding local discourses and social actions and interpreting them in the light of specific socio-political and historical contexts are crucial processes in anthropological research and are especially urgent in times of war and social unrest. This holds particularly true if, in the long run, we aim for sustainable peace and justice. In doing so, we cannot focus exclusively on institutional power and infrastructure and ignore the actual lived experiences and voices of the people who have been suffering from oppression, marginalisation and poverty. Due to our academic training and personal experiences as anthropologists working on or originating from Middle Eastern countries ourselves, we are able and willing to take up this challenge.

Anthropology of the Middle East will provide a forum for scholarly exchange between anthropologists and other social scientists working in and on the Middle East. Besides intellectual exchange, which is fundamental to academic advancement, we aim to provide information on Middle Eastern societies to readers outside the geographic area and, thus, hope to raise some awareness about past and present conditions and people's lives under different circumstances. Reaching out to people on all continents is our ultimate aim, as we believe that a greater understanding of our many and diverse lived realities will enable us to

go beyond politics, domination and manipulation. We admit that our endeavour could be only a small step, but, nevertheless, we hope that it will eventually lead towards a greater appreciation of Middle Eastern cultures and their contribution to a culturally diverse world.

Issues of *Anthropology of the Middle East* will primarily be themed and in many cases will be guest edited. Within each issue, scholars will present and discuss issues related to specific research projects and their results, as well as other topics relevant to the region and the discipline. We also intend to expand into a general articles section and encourage submissions for this part. In particular, we welcome the participation of young anthropologists and hope for a more wide-ranging geographical distribution of articles in the future. Each issue will also include a section entitled 'Notes from the Field' to make available data collected from research in progress. For future issues, we explicitly wish to encourage submissions for this 'open' section. Detailed book reviews and shorter reports on books, films and conferences will also be an important function of the journal in disseminating information on otherwise often overlooked opportunities for scholars of the Middle East to come together and present their work.

Given that war is a lived reality in the Middle East and reflects the theme of our premier issue ('Everyday Life in the Middle East'), I thought it fitting, in closing, to consider some of the challenges to anthropology in many regions of the world where war and conflict is part of everyday life. Is the methodology at our disposal suitable for engaging in research in disastrous situations? Can we objectively record hazardous, destructive or shocking situations no matter what our standpoint is or what our basic fields of interests are? I strongly believe we should use the opportunity of a common journal of anthropology to question and prepare ourselves methodologically, to take some distance from everyday life, in order to write effectively about it.

— Soheila Shahshahani