

Editorial

This issue of *Anthropology of the Middle East* is open-themed. However, reading the articles included in this issue, Symbolic Anthropology of the Middle East could become the common thread of these articles and notes from the field.

The first article is written within the field of political anthropology. While it shows the weakness of the Lebanese state and its incapacity to engage in justice, which is a paramount instrument of the modern state, it focuses in a creative way on the making of a saint out of a martyr. Are Knudsen's study of the Lebanese state and its ethnic groups and various religions shows how, using urban and city planning measures, respecting geometrical, ornamental and symbolic aspects, the tomb of a martyr becomes a commemorative space, a national symbol to be respected every year by international and national visitors. The author places Rafiq Hariri's tomb along other such monuments to measure its importance, and he does not overlook the ways in which on a day-to-day basis posters and video clips of theatrical performances on national television are also used to make a shrine for a political leader who was assassinated. As the justice system was unable to pronounce a final verdict on the case, the unity of the country could only be kept through making the victim a saint and the tomb becoming a shrine.

In the next article by Rehenuma Asmi, we see the connections between the very small, rich, modern state and women in Qatar. Modernisation measures of higher education and work in a mixed environment, what the author calls the cultural capital, are creating a challenge to women's everyday life. The author shows how all the problems which this new situation has created for women are being discussed and tackled through the use of a traditional space, the *majlis* of women, or what Asmi calls the kinship capital. This rational space, which is also emotionally charged, has been helping women to discuss their daily worries. They definitely want to keep their acceptability within society's standards of honour and good behaviour and male support, while their education and changed capacities propels them to join the educated working women of the world. So what they are actually experiencing is using their cultural capital as an enhancement of their role within their families and country as a whole. They have thus decided to keep the *hejab*, not to challenge



it, in order to be able to continue their active lives as members of their emerging modern state. According to Rehenuma Asmi it is the *majlis*, this space for discussion among relatives, which has allowed for rational choices of women.

Having seen Qatari society being family centric as opposed to individualistic, we can then move to the third article, which concerns pregnancy. It is very positive that finally the good aspects of pregnancy are explored. Beyond the state prerogatives to have an increasing population and the high status attributed to motherhood by the state, this article reflects the care and love women receive during this period of their lives. The female body, with its weaknesses and sensitivities during pregnancy, receives great attention and care to be protected from unwanted odours, food and intruders of any kind, including evil eyes. Why should women overlook this way of gaining higher status and everlasting care from future children when they feel they are princesses and all their whims are responded to? Susie Kilshaw and her team of researchers are aware of the fact that marriages are occurring later, the number of children each woman is having has declined and there is an increasing divorce rate. They search beyond their primary concern, namely miscarriages, to find what is positive for pregnant women. All the honour, protection and love that pregnant women receive during this period from their kin on both sides of the family become a guarantee for their future life, while the state manages to offer medical care on a regular basis.

Modernity and medical practice have made the human body a centre of attention, but on specific issues problems are such that the approval of tradition becomes crucial. This is definitely the case with the transplantation of body organs. Emerging from a tribal system with Islamic ethics, many issues are raised around who may offer body organs to a person in need. It is a problem of life and death, a problem of political and social relations which may allow for such an offer and reception, and thus religious ethics and socio-political practice can decide who could give and who could receive from whom. Saudi medical doctors, Al Sayyari and his team, have gathered data to show the ethical side of the problem, as well as the practical side of it. They provide statistics on who has offered to whom on a kinship, gender or age basis, and they show very clearly not only the importance of the medical profession, but also that of health care professionals who are in contact with persons in perilous situations. In this article emotions are mentioned too, and the difficulties patients and the medical staff are confronting daily are not overlooked.

Finally, we have three contributions to the section 'Notes from the Field' offered by non-anthropologists, in this case from the fields of literature and political science. The first text addresses issues concerning cyberspace and how websites created by the diaspora can open up space for telling life histories, thus engaging in discussions even over taboo topics for women within the country, and empowering women. These websites are trying to overcome distances and create international connectivity. The second text analyses a novel by an Iranian novelist whose works have been translated into many different

languages. The novel under discussion concerns three women, symbolising the generational problems existing within the country between these age groups. The author looks for symbols used by the novelist to show the distance created among the different generations. The final article is sophisticated and tries to tackle many issues: the main concern is imitation of a literary genre, serial story writing in newspapers and then novels in Persian, using popular language as opposed to the difficult literary Persian language. This came at a time where social change was in view, so use of language reflected change in social classes, which involved political critique and hope for a future with more justice.

All the contributors to this issue are sensitive to symbols and emotions. The Anthropology of Emotions in the Middle East is definitely a neglected topic, and we should welcome it in the spirit of deepening this angle to understand many aspects of economy and politics in the area. All articles mention symbols and show their importance to convey meaning, perhaps more important in a geographical area where the rational space to discuss important matters is highly in demand. *Majlis* in Qatar is a very good example of a rational space which is used to come to sensible decisions. It remains to be seen if other such spaces, be they real or in the cyberspace, could eventually help to open the arena for self-expression of different genders, ethnic groups, people of different ages and credence.

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