

Muntasir Fayez Al-Hamad. 2022. *Signs and Gestures: Non-verbal Communication in the Qatari Culture* (translated and edited by Alreem Al-Adba). Doha: Qatar University Press. 278 pp. ISBN: 978-992-713-954-3.

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Language is the main means of communication for human beings, but it is not the only one. In fact, we communicate through our body movements and postures, through gestures; even the distance between bodies has a specific meaning, and the clothes and the accessories we wear, too. Ignoring the meaning of certain verbal and non-verbal languages can cause communication problems, because what is acceptable in a culture, might not be accepted by another culture. With this in mind, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of how non-verbal communication is just as national and cultural as verbal communication.

The book under review is *Signs and Gestures: Non-verbal Communication in the Qatari Culture* by Muntasir Al-Hamad, Associate Professor of Arabic Language at Qatar University – originally published in Arabic in 2019 under the title *al-Īma'a wa al-išāra. Al-tawāṣul ġayr al-laḫẓī fī al-ṭaqāfa al-qatariyya* – edited and translated into English by Alreem Al-Adba (2022), in order to offer an insight into this new aspect of contemporary Qatari culture to a much wider public.

The volume is introduced by a foreword by Professor George Grigore, President of AIDA (*Association Internationale de Dialectologie Arabe*), who defines this work 'unique'. It is also followed by the translator's foreword Alreem Al-Adba and a preface and introduction by Al-Hamad. In the preface (pp. xvi–xxvii), the author briefly presents the historical and linguistic context of Qatar, and then details the rigorous methodology adopted for its structure, consisting of the use 'of Grounded Theory, often adopted in Qualitative Methodology research methods' (p. xix) and the process of collecting and categorizing material. The author specifies how measuring variables (time, age, status, gender, Bedouinism and urbanisation) influence the type of dress, gestures and signs, and Al-Hamad goes on by explaining how he teamed up with specialized reviewers in linguistics and communication, Qatari advisors, focus groups, and made use of direct observations in Qatari markets, public places and TV channels. The fact of involving the common people enabled the author to review and verify the credibility of the large amount of data collected consisting of approximately 380 different gestures and signs. In the

introduction, *A General Introduction to Non-Verbal Communication* (pp. 18–25), Al-Hamad describes the path chosen for his research and points out what a challenge it has been to maintain a balance in the book between the scientific approach and the narrative style, in order to make it all easily comprehensible even to a non-specialized reader. The author then provides a brief literature review of semiotics, and scientifically presents two concepts underlying his study, namely that of communication and that of perception.

The work is divided into three chapters, the content of each being well documented by numerous images that help the reader, specialized and non-specialized, follow the author's theory in a concrete manner. The first chapter, *Clothing and Appearance* (pp. 27–100) is concerned with the Qatari identity through traditional dresses and it is divided into three sections. The first section is *Male Clothing* (pp. 29–79), and it is about all the garments and accessories worn by men, such as the *iqal*¹, the *guthra*, the *thaub*, the *bisht*, the footwear and watches. It ends with a paragraph dedicated to beard and moustache because, as Al-Hamad points out, they are associated with certain gestures and signs in the Qatari culture. The second section is *Female Clothing* (pp. 79–91), and it presents all the clothes and accessories worn by Qatari women, including the *hijab*, the *sheila*, the face covers, the *abaya*, the female *thaubs* and female footwear. What is most fascinating about both sections is the accurate description of the specific functions that each piece of clothing or accessory assumes in certain local contexts. The chapter ends with the third and short section of *Non-verbal Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (pp. 92–100), in which it is shown how - due to the restrictions imposed to prevent the virus spread - certain gestures have been adapted and 'globalized' as in the case of the elbow or foot greeting, becoming some of the most common in Qatari culture.

The second chapter, *Reception, Welcoming and Greetings* (pp. 101–148), is divided into five paragraphs (*Personal Space, Sitting Positions, Drinks and Food, Driving, and Pronouns*) and shows, in order: how to respect interpersonal distance in a social and intimate space, how to greet according to the degree of confidence and how to appropriately greet the opposite sex, the rules governing the act of kissing, the etiquette of positions to assume when in the presence of other people, e.g. in the *majlis*, as well as the etiquette in asking for, serving, eating and sharing drinks or food, and finally both the gestures that are most frequently used when driving and those related to pronouns to refer to oneself or third persons.

The most substantial chapter is undoubtedly the third, which is entitled *Gestures and Signs* (pp. 149–249). It offers an exhaustive overview and well-documented description of gestures and signs in Qatari culture, and for many gestures or signs the accompanying verbal language is also indicated - where possible - as if this chapter were a 'kinesics dictionary' for the reader. The chapter is divided into ten paragraphs that illustrate how gestures and signs are used according to their function and context, which are: *Commands and Requests, Prayers and Requests, Threats, Circumstances and Attributes, Feelings and Emotions, Bashfulness, Shock and Surprise, Impatience and Anxiety, Boredom, Affection and Endearment*.

The third chapter is followed by a short section dedicated to *The Use of e-Non-verbal Communication* (pp. 250–251), in which Al-Hamad draws the attention to the contrast

¹ The transliteration follows the one used in the book under review *Signs and Gestures: Non-verbal Communication in the Qatari Culture*.

between traditional means of communication and those used in social networks and Apps, in which the use of gestures through emojis and GIF stickers, often accompanied by phrases or words, emerges. Both this section and that about non-verbal Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic show how up-to-date Al-Hamad's research is. However, in order to realize how far it may have spread, the part about e-non-verbal communication needs to be deepened and broadened.

Finally, the author presents his conclusions (p. 252), where he summarizes the methodology applied in the research and emphasizes that the purpose of the volume is mainly to document gestures and signs that characterize part of the intangible Qatari cultural heritage. The publication contains a glossary (pp. 253-259) at the end, enclosing the main terms related to clothing, accessories and verbal expressions, especially useful to a non-specialized audience. Including a wider range of local terms in this section would have been an interesting thing to do, in order to give the reader a more complete idea about the topic.

In conclusion, the subject of the book is undoubtedly of great interest, as it opens a window on the Qatari intangible heritage and culture regarding gestures and signs by employing a scientific methodology. This is fascinating for both those who study linguistics, semiotics and intercultural communication as well as for those interested in the topic of non-verbal communication from a sociological and anthropological perspective. Moreover, it is useful as well as for those who are interested in familiarizing with the Qatari society or in learning more about the local identity.

While they browse through the book, the readers immediately understand the huge work behind it, and the pioneering innovation of Al-Hamad's study, which not only aims at the description of clothing, gestures and signs, but also has an intercultural and even teaching function. This book is currently the only one on a global scale about non-verbal communication in Qatar, that includes such a large number of visual instances – around 400 – accompanied by detailed descriptions of clothing, gestures and signs. Finally, it should not be overlooked that Al-Hamad's book is also precious for the younger generations, as many young Qataris often end up living or studying abroad: it enables them to preserve part of their cultural heritage, as a sort of “legacy” of the past.