
Books Forum Introduction

Pig hearts and god's organs

Nicolas Langlitz

Department of Anthropology, The New School for Social Research, New York, USA.

E-mail: LanglitN@newschool.edu

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If gifts integrate societies, as Marcel Mauss believed, do “gifts of life” integrate biosocieties? Not quite. Fortunately, few people need organ transplants. Unfortunately, even fewer receive them – and not always as gifts. But, as is often the case with biotechnologies, a closer look at relatively marginal medical practices can shed light on a whole range of relationships and much bigger complexes of meaning central to how a society understands itself. In the anthropological and sociological literature organ transplants have served as a lens on understandings of personhood, culturally contingent and historically changing conceptions of death, or economic inequalities between recipients and donors forced to commodify their own body parts. This Books Forum discusses four new publications examining the social life of organs.

Focusing on the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia and Great Britain, Lesley Sharp's third book on the subject matter titled *The Transplant Imaginary* focuses on two responses to what is widely perceived as a shortage of organs: so-called xenotransplantation of animal parts and biomechanical engineering of artificial hearts. In her review, Megan Crowley-Matoka reads Sharp's treatment of the moral imagination intrinsic to these scientific practices, the anxieties over life with a pig heart or with a fluid-dynamically

optimized pump that no longer beats like a heart, as contemporary work on a figure from Greek mythology – the chimera.

In her own review of Sherine Hamdy's *Our Bodies Belong to God* and Aslihan Sanal's *New Organs Within Us*, Lesley Sharp shows how far the social scientific investigation of organ transplants has moved since its inception in the mid-twentieth century. It has become one of the most global literatures in medical anthropology with case studies from North America and Europe to India and Japan. The two ethnographies discussed by Sharp now also attend to Muslim contexts. This ethnological breadth provincializes universalist bioethics made in Euro-America. Sharp presents Hamdy's book on Egypt as a careful social scientific study of a moral economy of organ transplants where the body does not belong to autonomous individuals, but to God. By contrast, Sanal's account of Turkey appears as “part experimental ethnography and, perhaps, part fantasy”, a sad and shocking book, which – like a good novel – would not tolerate if the reviewer gave away too much of its contents.

In his review of Marie-Andrée Jacob's *Matching Organs with Donors*, Lawrence Cohen praises this anthropology of Israeli and US transplant bureaucracy, which examines the narrative crafting of relationships between biologically unrelated donors and recipients in the regulatory process. The book leaves him wondering whether Jacob's account “bespeaks a particularly Israeli mode of governance, of care, and of racialized exclusion”.

As anthropological case studies on organ transplants like the ones discussed in this Books Forum become increasingly international in scope, they are beginning to provide opportunities for broader cultural comparisons and global perspectives. This well developed field of literature might provide an opportunity for a future anthropology of medicine to invent new forms beyond the ethnographic.

Nicolas Langlitz is Assistant Professor at The New School for Social Research in New York. He is the author of *Neuropsychodelia: The Revival of Hallucinogen Research since the Decade of the Brain* and currently studies the epistemic culture of neurophilosophy and the culture controversy in primatology.