REVIEWS

Catherine A. Lutz, *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988. Pp. 280, illus. US$35.00 cloth. US$13.95 paper.

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To understand the emotional lives of people of a different culture, to sense "how it feels", to be a coral islander or Melanesian highlander, is what motivates many anthropologists to embark on the adventure of research in faraway places, Catherine Lutz's interest in the relationship between culture and emotion, particularly within a society of egalitarian gender relations, led her to Ifaluk, a small coral atoll in the western Caroline Islands. *Unnatural Emotions* is a description of "everyday life on Ifaluk, whose people speak about emotions in ways that reflect their values, their power struggles, and their unique environment" (p. 3).

Lutz's approach to understanding emotions is primarily through language; the problem becomes one of "translation of emotional lives across cultures" (p. 8). In this venture the author is informed by recent writings in cognitive anthropology and ethnopsychology in which natural language is the basic data, Contrasted to this methodology is an earlier school of psychology-oriented anthropologists whose fieldwork armamentarium included a number of projective tests and eliciting tools, as well as underlying assumptions about personhood and emotions.

Lutz made naturalistic observations of emotions as they occurred in everyday life and used several methods to gain understanding of indigenous conceptualizations of the emotions. She collected definitions of fifty-eight emotion-related terms and used card-sorting tasks requiring people to rank by intensity situations that they had already described as emotion related. She also interviewed adults and children on recent emotional experiences. She used two versions of the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) to prompt stories replete with emotional themes and language. Like all strangers and ethnographers, Lutz also learned about Ifaluk emotions by the painful incidents of her own misunderstandings of cultural differences. But most important was her "daily listening to people as they described present and past events to each other and made emotional sense of them" (p. 46).

The core of this book (chapters 5–7) is a discussion of three Ifaluk emotional concepts. One concept, *fago,* the author translates as "compassion/love/sadness"; another, *song,* as "justifiable anger"; and the third, *rus,* as "panic/fright/surprise." Lutz has a gift for sensitive description and she writes beautifully, in places poetically. Many passages are worth quoting at length, but one where Lutz introduces the emotional concept *fago* will give the reader the flavor of this book:

> In their use of that word [*fago*] the people of Ifaluk communicate a central part of their view of human relationships; they impart their sense of the place of suffering in their lives, of the naturalness of interpersonal kindness in the face of that pain, and of their feeling that maturity consists, above all, in the ability to nurture others. *Fago* speaks to the sense that life is fragile, that connections to others both are precious and may be severed through death or travel, that love may equal loss. *Fago* is uttered in recognition of the suffering that is everywhere and in the spirit of a vigorous optimism that human effort, most especially in the form of caring for others, can control its ravages. (P. 119)

Situating this term within the context of everyday life on Ifaluk, Lutz describes different forms that need and nurturance take: in illness, in death, and in circumstances where one is without kin. Her argument here goes beyond that of a linguistic definition of the word per se. The Ifaluk term is central to the islanders' moral ideology "that a durable and automatic link exists between the suffering of one person and the nurturing of others" (p. 121). In this sense the term marks particular

kinds of relationships, as between the sick and the healthy, or between the dying person and his or her survivors. The term also establishes a moral ideal of the nurturer as an individual of maturity and, implicitly, of power. "Gods, chiefs, parents, and elders all maintain the position and respect they command through the exercise of this emotion" (p. 140).

The central place of "compassion" *(fago)* in the emotional and moral world of the Ifaluk, Lutz argues, is related to the precarious reality of life on a small, bounded, and environmentally vulnerable atoll. This emotional concept is adaptive in various ways--"by articulating a notion of collective responsibility, by motivating the food sharing and the kind treatment of visitors which allow for post-typhoon survival, and by legitimizing the chiefs as individuals whose *fago* for commoners helps to ensure the well-being of the island" (p. 150).

In a similar manner Lutz discusses the underlying assumptions and nuanced meanings of *song* and *rus.* She describes a number of small scenarios by which children (and ethnographers) come to understand the meaning and moral force of these emotional concepts. She also compares these Ifaluk terms with their English translations, for example, *song* with the American-English emotion concept of anger, and relates these differences to the differences between the two social systems. As in any good ethnographic writing, Lutz provides a window onto the experience of another cultural group. In this book, additionally, that window is slightly glazed, so that its mirrored surface offers in shifting juxtaposition a contrast between two cultural conceptions of emotional experience.

In reading this book, one gains a sense of a people who are emotionally fine-tuned to avoid interpersonal offense and affront and to perceive others' needs and desires The most valued demeanor is one of "calmness"; "everyone loves those who are [calm]" (p. 139), and the calm person is seen as "compassionate" because he does not alarm or frighten others. "Justifiable anger" is seen as a socially corrective rather than disruptive emotion, because it serves to "identify instances of behavior that threaten the moral order" (p. l57), such as the failure to share food *or* other resources, the failure to show respect towards a person of higher status, and other moral lapses. Fearfulness is frequently extolled, especially fearfulness of others, for it results in gentle and appropriate behavior. Socialization practices in Ifaluk families focus on this explicit linkage; Lutz describes how parents instill fear in their children by impersonating a child-devouring spirit and by continual reference to the dangers of spirits and other malevolent beings.

Lutz's discussion of Ifaluk ethnopsychology and emotional concepts is framed within a theoretical argument for the cultural construction of emotions. In chapter 3, she explores the concept of emotion as a "master cultural category in the West" that establishes an opposition between emotion and thought. The Western view, according to Lutz, is that emotion is antithetical to reason, that its occurrence is involuntary and uncontrollable, that emotions are linked to the physical side of the mind/body dichotomy, and thus that emotions are more natural and less cultural than thought. Lutz sees the "culturally constructed 'naturalness' of emotion" (p. 69) as an assumption of both everyday and academic Western discourse about emotions, grounded in a tradition of positivism that splits the world into matters of fact and matters of value. Challenging this assumption, Lutz's book attempts to demonstrate that emotional experience is not natural (in the sense of being precultural), but rather that "emotional experience is fundamentally structured by particular cultural systems and particular social and material environments" (p. 5). Hence the unfortunate title and subtitle of this work, which for the uninitiated reader appear, respectively, demeaning and grandiose.

Although Lutz does not deny the biological basis of emotional experience (see p. 210), her introduction in chapter 1 left this reader somewhat perturbed. Is she focusing on emotions or on talk about emotions? Lutz uses phrases such as "discourse about emotion" (p. 4) and "emotion words" (p. 10) alongside statements like "emotion [is] the focus of this study" (p. 4). She appears to be proposing that an anthropology of the emotions can access only "a *way of talking* about the intensely meaningful as that is culturally defined, socially enacted, and personally articulated" (p. 5; emphasis added). What then of all the emotional experiences that actors cannot well articulate, that are culturally ill-defined, that are articulated in nonverbal ways, or that are enacted privately?

Lutz's ethnographic observations consider some of these questions, and through her descriptions one gets a sense of the lived emotional experience of individual actors working as best they can with the emotional "scripts" they have learned. My only objection to this marvelous book is that I would have preferred more attention to the author's naturalistic observations of individual experience and everyday scenarios of emotions. For the Ifaluk, *talk* about emotional experience serves important rhetorical purposes by establishing moral evaluations and interpretations of events and actors, A compelling ethos of compassion, sharing, and anxious sensitivity to others is thereby invoked. Lutz depicts with

great skill the cultural ideals for emotional experience on Ifaluk, but shows less clearly how individuals continually operate within and around these cultural ideals.