

FEAR AND ANTHROPOLOGY: A VIEW FROM 1995

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In broad terms the agenda of this paper is set by its title: by linking anthropology with fear, a concept with assumed general applicability, we are inevitably posing questions about the nature of cross-cultural categories. We have to confront the danger of imposing a Western concept on data from other societies. Any anthropological consideration of the human emotions must be concerned with the question of universality; with the relationship between the biological inheritance of humans and the autonomy of culture.

Keywords: Fear, anthropology, cross-cultural categories, universalism, culture

Note from the editors

The following text is an edited version of the introduction for a special edition of the journal *Social Analysis* (to have been edited by R. H. Barnes, Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy) prepared in late 1995 that never went further. It was prepared after a seminar series in Oxford where drafts of many of the papers intended for the special issue were presented. It has been rescued from the unpublished drafts found on the hard drive of the late Marcus Banks.

In editing it for publication in 2022 we have tried as much as possible to keep the tone of the original. However, in recognition of the almost thirty years that have passed since it was first drafted, and to make it clearer to subsequent readers, we have changed words such as 'recent' and 'present' and added a sub-title. We have also edited references to the 'contributions' to make clear that they do not actually follow this piece. Finally, we also note that we have not attempted to update the references overall, although where they were incomplete in the draft we have added some more up-to-date sources, as well as citations to published work by the intended contributors (although we have not attempted to find revised versions of the quotations from what were, in effect, early drafts). A large amount on fear and anthropology has been published since this was drafted, under headings such as the 'anthropology of fear' and more generally within the anthropology of the emotions.

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A cross-cultural focus on fear

In broad terms the agenda of this paper is set by its title: by linking anthropology with fear, a concept with assumed general applicability, we are inevitably posing questions about the nature of cross-cultural categories. We have to confront the danger of imposing a Western concept on data from other societies. Any anthropological consideration of the human emotions must be concerned with the question of universality; with the relationship between the biological inheritance of humans and the autonomy of culture.

In British anthropology at least, the problematic which links social construction and psychology remained submerged for the middle part of the twentieth century, partly in reaction to earlier evolutionist and diffusionist concerns with general theories of the development of human beings as cultural animals, in which history and psychology were interwoven (for a development of this perspective see Kuklick 1991:119ff.). In 1934 Hocart concluded that 'future generations will have to explain why the first quarter of the twentieth century was so fascinated by fear, why that emotion was made to account for everything from weddings, for funerals, for religion itself' (1934: 475). While Hocart may have exaggerated somewhat there is no doubt that Radcliffe-Brown's functionalism moved the central concerns of anthropology away from the psychological aspects of human beings and human culture towards a social determination of action. Kuklick (1991: 120) writes that 'functionalists postulated that individuals' modes of thinking and feeling were "collective representations," imposed on them by their society. And collective representations were rational by relative rather than absolute standards — appropriate insofar as they served to motivate individuals to play their proper social roles.'

In the years before 1995 there was a movement towards a more phenomenological form of relativism, to a framework in which individual agency has been accorded a significant place and in which the emotions are acknowledged once again to play a motivating role in social action; social action is frequently directed at the emotions and often implies cognisance of psychological states. However, there still remains a tension between relativism and perspectives which allow more general characteristics of human beings to have a role in the development and transformation of human cultural systems. We will argue that in many respects that opposition is false. Fear is often generated in the context of action which is not bounded by social group, culture, ethnicity, or nationhood but involves the crossing of boundaries. While not all actions will be interpreted or felt in similar ways across cultures, fear is part of a global discourse which has concerned the relations between groups — relations of domination and subordination and sometimes the use of terror — as well as reflecting widely shared human concerns about death and grief.

At first glance fear appears to be a self-evident universal category that is part of every human being's experience of the world and a possible instrument of human action; fear is integral to colonial experience and to the process of domination of one group by another; fear is a means of control and part of the experience of those whose lives are threatened by coercive power. Fear is associated with certain neurophysiological responses to a stimulus or a situation which result in sweating and increased heart rate. It is predominantly a negative

emotion associated with anxiety, stress and a desire to escape. Although people may fear different things and the kind of things feared may vary from culture to culture fear would appear to be one of those emotions most easily conveyed in cross-cultural discourse. We can apparently construct a number of examples from our experience to elicit feelings that correspond to our idea of fear. We can imagine that the feelings of the average human, when confronted by the idea of walking a tightrope or of falling off a cliff, of facing the executioner, of perishing from thirst, are likely to be similar across cultures. And it is this reaction, which we imagine to be shared, that forms the core of our universal category.

Following Wittgenstein, for example, Needham (1972: 141) comments that, 'it is not hard to make a preliminary and partial register of psychic states that have bodily concomitants. We can say, for instance, that a man looks hurt, fearful, worried, angry, surprised, intent, suspicious, disgusted, happy and so on.' He continues to say that, 'Some states of mind, then, have bodily concomitants which conduce to overt natural resemblances among men, and these states can be mutually recognized independently of their social and linguistic forms.' Nevertheless, 'Emotions, however they may be defined and classified, are not coterminous with all states of mind; and it is evident also that there is no direct connection between physiological conditions and the discriminations that are made by any society' (Needham 1972: 143).

A moment's reflection will show exceptions to our assumptions of the universality of the effect of particular situations on the emotional state of individuals. The tight-rope walker may feel relaxed about her situation since experience tells her she is not going to fall off or that if she does she will come to no harm as she bounces on the safety net. The rock climber may find that the burst of adrenalin as he hangs suspended over the precipice fills him with an overwhelming sense of the majesty of the universe, and he may experience joy rather than fear. And the thought of heavenly salvation may banish all feelings or evidence of fear from the mind and body of the martyr facing his demise.

One of our objectives was to deconstruct the concept of fear through cultural analysis, by showing the particular characteristics of a related set of emotions in the context of particular cultures. Through emphasising difference the apparent self-evident universality of the category might gradually disappear until it could be argued that fear is not an emotion that is experienced cross-culturally. In that case, if we have concluded as a result of cross-cultural analysis that fear, the subject of the analysis, is a different phenomenon in each case, we will have eliminated it as a concept useful for cross-cultural analysis.

However, the fact that different people react differently to different situations does not in itself invalidate a proposition of universality. Fear may be a general emotion that is manifested in very different contexts in different cultures. Moreover, the non-appearance of fear in contexts where we would have predicted it from our own cultural position may not be sufficient evidence for the absence of fear as a relevant factor. The non-appearance of fear may result from cultural processes which have effectively masked its appearance (see in particular the work of Cannell and James): for example, religious belief or fatalism makes martyrdom something to be welcomed rather than feared. It is probably the case that an intermediate view comes closest to the truth: there are elements of universality both in the emotional experience that we label 'fear' and in the contexts of occurrence of fear cross-

culturally. But at the same time the emotion of fear itself, or the emotional cluster of which fear is a part, will be shaped by the overall cultural background of the person experiencing it, and the range of contexts may vary in each case.

Fear of anthropology

The very objectivity of anthropology in this context could be said to produce fear: it can break down people's culturally constructed emotional defences by challenging their religious precepts or sociologizing them away. By revealing people's underlying fears anthropology can be seen to act on the beliefs of a group in the way that psychiatry acts on the individual.

In an appendix to *The Social Reality of Religion* Peter Berger states: 'Within the argument of this book ... I have felt it necessary in a few places to state that any statements made there strictly bracket the ultimate status of religious definitions of reality. I have done this particularly where I sensed the danger that the "methodological atheism" of this type of theorizing could be misinterpreted as atheism tout court.' (1969: 180). A few pages later he notes that works on the sociology of religion frequently set out by reassuring the theologian qua theologian that they should not 'worry unduly over anything the sociologist may have to say over religion' (ibid.: 182). 'Danger'? 'worry'? Although he does not use the word 'fear', Berger is clearly concerned that the theologian and believers more generally might well have something to fear (rightly or wrongly) from the sociologist seeking to understand and perhaps thereby explain away their belief. Elsewhere, in his *Invitation to Sociology* (1966), Berger describes the existential shock that sociological awareness brings, the realization that the world is not as we thought it was. This shock is liberating, for it brings us the freedom to understand and control our own actions, but as he says, 'People who like to avoid shocking discoveries...should stay away from sociology' (ibid.: 35). And, we might add, sociologists.

Like sociology, anthropology is a supremely corrosive discipline. What people always thought was true about themselves and the world they live in - that the evil eye of others brought sickness, or that rivers were anacondas - has been reconstructed by anthropologists and shown to be something else entirely. This was most clearly the case during the heyday of structural-functionalism and then of structuralism. Since the 1960s of course, interpretative anthropology has sought to come to a much deeper understanding of indigenous perceptions, but since the purpose of much anthropology is to render indigenous understandings and experiences in terms comprehensible to Euro-American readers, clearly some sort of gap remains. Again, in the earlier days of anthropology this perhaps did not matter so much. Those lives laid bare in the classic monographs were lived by people who had little or no opportunity to see their flayed social skins on the page. Today, however, with a greater call on anthropologists to be accountable, to make at least some effort to return the products of their research to the people they have worked with, there is every chance of innocent bystanders being caught in the cross-fire of academic debate. Increasingly, the subjects of anthropological investigation face the risk of seeing the threads of their lives exposed and woven in strange and alien patterns. If they want to avoid 'shocking discoveries' they should perhaps fear anthropologists.

Perhaps this is less of a problem when the anthropologist is deconstructing indigenous understandings of land tenure or dowry negotiations, but - as Berger notes above - it is clearly to the fore where matters of belief are concerned. Within the context of this text, we would add that it is also to the fore where matters of emotion are concerned. In neither case can anthropologists be sure that they perceive matters in a way that even approximates to the indigenous understanding; or rather, the anthropologist may succumb to a radical misunderstanding by assuming a universal experience of belief or emotion. Deconstruction invalidates belief by striking at its claims to unquestionable truth and is thus threatening; it is something to be feared; it invalidates emotion for the same reason, denying to individuals that which they perceive as most personally endogenous by seeking either universalism or cultural construction.

Indeed, in denying that belief is an experience, such as one can comfortably attribute to individuals across cultures, Needham (1972: 192-193) recommended that while the word 'belief' need not be abandoned in making belief statements within our own tradition, it should be abandoned in ethnographic reports and comparative epistemology. Following Waismann he deems, 'the first task of social anthropology [to be] precisely this: the undermining of categories throughout the entire range of cultural varieties in the conception of human experience' (Needham 1972: 203). Nevertheless, while some categories, such as belief, may disintegrate under this kind of corrosive analysis, others, 'will turn out to be far more resistant, and the result of attempts to undermine them by comparative analysis will prove instead to be a firmer delineation of their foundations and a substantiated estimation of their real sources of strength' (Needham 1972: 204). Needham appears to regard fear to be of this latter type, although he also takes the cautionary general position that, 'the search for primary factors or fundamental constituents of human experience must be absolute in intention but can be only relative in expectation' (1972: 223-224).

There would seem to be other parallels between belief and emotion, not least in their apparently 'black box' nature. No matter how much anthropologists explore and elucidate the social context of their manifestation, and hint at their social-constructedness and hence relativity, both are the subject of truth claims arising from personal experience. As a discipline, psychology would seem to offer some way into the black box, and some of the psychological literature is discussed below, but there is an initial difficulty to be raised at this point: an appeal to individual psychology does — at least to some extent — endorse the value of truth claims based on personal experience. To construct an anthropology of fear, or of the emotions in general, we need perhaps to move more towards a notion of Mauss's 'total man' {sic}, the triple perspective on humanity that draws upon the psychological, the biological and the sociological (Mauss 1979a: 101; see also Mauss 1979b: 27-29).

Anthropology and emotion

For many years British social anthropology suffered from Radcliffe-Brown's reading of Durkheim, which eliminated all psychological considerations and thus ignored the study of the emotions (Lynch 1990: 6). While psychology and anthropology remained in contact in the

United States (indeed White and Lutz claim psychological anthropology as one of the largest sub-disciplines (1992: 1)), the approach taken towards the emotions was an essentially Freudian and universalistic one which assumed a common base and considered only the interpretations of emotion (Lynch 1990: 6).

However, the last years of the twentieth century saw a remarkable growth in the anthropology of the emotions, deriving initially from psychological work on Euro-American culture and attempts to transcend some limiting paradigms of this approach. To summarise this literature is increasingly becoming a daunting task, and we would instead direct the reader to certain key readings, particularly the work of Catherine Lutz (1986a, 1986b, 1988). Lutz and White provide an overview of the literature to the mid-1980s (Lutz and White 1986), while Owen Lynch and Karl Heider each introduce their edited or authored works with an overview (Lynch 1990; Heider 1992: Chapter 1). Much work in psychological anthropology provides additional background readings and references (see, for example, Heelas and Lock 1981; Schwartz, White and Lutz 1992).

While some anthropologists still give at least cursory attention to neuro-physiological approaches to the study of emotion (e.g. Heider 1992: 15), most now appear to see cognition as the more profitable area; that is, privileging the cognitive evaluation component over the psychological arousal component of Schachter's two-factor theory of emotion (cited in Smith 1981). This, however, is not without problems. One difficulty, cited by several authors, is the suspicious overlap between Euro-American theories of the emotions and Euro-American folk wisdom or 'common-sense' concerning the emotions. Much of this theorizing centres on the emotions as essentially internal to the individual, as part of a private language of the self, as spontaneous, irrational, natural and associated with women. Euro-American emotions seize the individual, and can thus excuse behaviour (seen, most notoriously, in the French concept of the *crime passionnel*). Owen Lynch calls this the 'myth of the passions' (1990: 10). Related to this difficulty is the problem of universality versus cultural specificity. Until c. 1995, anthropologists generally assumed a universality of human emotional experience, not least for the psychological reassurance it provided the fieldworker. To quote Lynch again: 'In a world of strange customs, odd practices, different logics, and alien moralities, it was comforting to assume that others were familiarly "human" when they laughed, cried, loved, and raged. Especially was this so when loneliness threatened the expatriate field-worker.' (ibid.: 7). While there is probably a general truth in what Lynch says, certain earlier anthropological writings recognized the complexity of cross-cultural emotional interpretation: Laura Bohannon's 1954 anthropological novel, *Return to Laughter* remains a milestone in the exploration of this territory (Smith Bowen 1954).

Karl Heider, following the psychologist Paul Ekman, proposes a neat coming together of universalist and culture specific positions, by focusing on the interplay between the two (both of which he seems to regard as present and unproblematically separable), such that, for example, a neutral antecedent event (such as a death) is culturally defined, produces an inner state, which then has an expression (such as weeping) that is itself subject to culturally specific 'display rules' (Heider 1992: 6-8). For our purposes, the significant factor is that he enlarges on Ekman's notion of 'display rules' and talks instead of 'reaction rules'. Heider alerts us to the fact that emotions are expressed in cultural contexts and are directed towards cultural

others. Emotions are not merely manifest (through facial expression, for example), they are communicated.

Heider, following a well-trodden psychologists' path, explores the communication of emotion states by exploring the language of emotion. He does this, not by way of looking at natural language use following the procedures of conversation analysis, but by administering questionnaires and word check-lists, and by use of what other social scientists might term focus group discussion. The result is three 'cognitive maps of the landscape of emotion' for the language Minangkabau, Indonesian as spoken by bilingual Minangkabau, and Indonesian as spoken by bilingual Javanese. The maps show the clustering of terms associated with emotion, and follow on from work on American English conducted by psychologists such as Joel Davitz (1969). We will mention below Heider's and Davitz's particular findings with regard to 'fear' and its cognates; for the moment, let us note that work such as this, while meticulous and highly detailed (particularly Heider's), is also highly limited, inasmuch as it refers to language categories rather than language use. In this it resembles, as Heider notes, earlier work by anthropologists on kin terms and colour terms, but as he also notes 'emotions...are not constructed on an obvious, concrete biological or physical base such as age and gender, or hue and brightness' (1992: 6). If by this statement he is referring to the inadequacy of neuro-physiological research on emotion, then we concur, but there are other ways in which the 'biological or physical base' may be relevant.

For example, Davitz, who compiled a check-list of 556 'descriptive statements' for his 50 North American subjects to match against 50 'emotion terms', claims that cultural differences within his subject group must have been insignificant on the grounds that 'The experience of "my heart pounding"...is probably different from everyone else's experience of a "pounding heart". But...one can at least distinguish between the experience of "my heart pounding" and "my head aching"; and it does not seem so unreasonable to assume that..."my heart pounding" is similar to "your heart pounding".' (1969: 139). And perhaps, on paper, that is true of the statements Davitz used. But we have no sense of the possible variation in which the pounding of the heart is experienced. As Owen Lynch (who does not refer to Davitz) states: 'much difficulty comes from eliding the feeling of emotions with feelings of sensations as though they were the same. Yet most everyone will agree that feeling the hurt of an insult is not the same as feeling the hurt of a cigarette burn' (1990: 11).

There is no necessary contradiction between the two statements, but Lynch raises a point that may be more apparent to an anthropologist than to a psychologist, for he prefaces his remark with a comment that while English constructs emotions as sensations through the use of the verb 'feel', other languages do not. Specifically, he claims, in the languages of north and south India verbs indicating feeling are not associated with emotion terms (Lynch 1990:11). Certainly, in Gujarati, a language that one of us is familiar with, verbs of 'feeling' such as *lagvun* are associated with sensations such as hunger or thirst, or else have a sense of 'happening' or 'seeming', while 'love' is something that is 'done', not 'felt'. 'Love' is conceptualized in Gujarat as an interior 'voice' that 'speaks' and which is listened to or ignored by the self, heard or not heard by others (Banks 1996).

This raises a further point: the Western tradition is by no means the only one to have explicitly conceptualized emotion. A recurrent problem that anthropologists of non-European

complex societies face is that many of their anthropological colleagues persist in treating Euro-America as the only source of 'real' theories, while the rest of the world must make do with 'folk' theories alone, discoverable through methodological enquiries such as ethnosociology. Yet the great civilizations of China, India, Japan and the Arabic world have literate scholarly traditions that have wrestled with many of the same problems as those encountered by the West. So for example, in India, the Sanskrit aesthetic tradition gave rise to the theory of *rasa* (juice, essence) as a means of accounting for an audience's emotional reaction to a performance. *Rasa* theory understands the emotions to be inherent and dormant within the body, awaiting arousal. The audience members should work on their emotions, cultivating them as universal aesthetic experience and thus as a taste of the divine. So, while emotions may be experienced individually, it is the individual's aesthetic and even moral duty to seek out their universal form (Lynch 1990: 17-19).

By contrast, the far more materialist Jain system of knowledge, at least in the early period, understood *rasa* merely as 'taste' (sweet or bitter for example) and thus as a material property of things. The 'passions' (*kasayas*) by contrast were thought to be generated by *karma* (matter that occludes the soul). The passion-arousing *karmas* do not cause emotions; these are inherent within the soul and the particular *karmas* act as catalysts for them (Jaini 1979: 115-21); indeed, the common meaning of the term *kasaya* is 'stickiness' or 'resin': the passions are what cause *karmas* to stick to the soul (Dundas 1992: 84). It should be added, perhaps, that in contrast to the cultivation of emotion that *rasa* theory enjoins, the Jain position is that the *karmas* should be stripped away in order to achieve enlightenment by quelling or calming the associated passions or emotions. It must be added, however, that later Jain writers came to endorse *rasa* theory and indeed were among its main proponents.

Interestingly the anthropological perspective that emotions are culturally or socially constructed can be applied as a meta-theory to both Sanskrit and early Jain practice to show how individuals are socialised into different ways of interpreting and producing emotional responses. However, as a class of theory in its own right the anthropological theory is arguably more similar to the Sanskrit theory than to the early Jain one, since it sees the manifestation of the emotions as subject to human control and modified by cultural context. Highly developed theories of the emotions exist also in the Chinese, Japanese and Arabic traditions. Several of the articles that were presented at the seminars in Oxford in 1994-1995 (Barnes, Cannell, Howell, James and Telban) discussed indigenous theories of fear through analysing the cultural categories used and, in particular in the case of Howell, linking them to the nature of personhood. The *Uduk*, for example, are shown by James to have two distinct concepts of fear which again can be mapped on to the difference between Jain and Sanskrit theories in that one refers to an internal source and the other to external stimuli.

Anthropology and fear

Let us consider first a number of previous approaches to the study of fear. The general explorations into the emotions mentioned above all (of course?) discuss fear, though only within the context of other emotions, and rarely if ever within a broader social context, a

point to which we shall return below. Most studies seek to impose some sort of classification or categorization upon the range of emotion terms or states considered.

Heider, for example, found the Indonesian and Minangkabau equivalents of 'fear' to be among eight emotions which fit well with 'pan-cultural expectations', but whereas sadness, anger, happiness and surprise posed few problems in matching such expectations, fear, like love, disgust and contempt, was situated toward the end of stronger cultural specificity. In mapping the synonyms of emotion words suggested by his subjects, Heider found fear to be closely linked by Minangkabau to indecision and by Javanese speakers of Indonesian to confusion. In nearly one third of suggested associations, fear was related to contexts which in English would evoke the ideas of shame or guilt. Fear has a secondary antecedent of 'doing wrong', where the wrong doing is unknown to others, a feature which seems absent in tests of speakers of English. He also found the key word for fear, *takut*, to be a hinge between two forms of fear, the one associated with indecision and having to do with anticipated misfortune and sickness and the other with direct threats. The one he denotes as 'fear-anxiety' and the other 'fear-terror'. As for shame, he says: 'there seems to be evidence from several parts of the western Pacific region for a close association of "fear" and "shame" that is not immediately familiar from English and, indeed, is somewhat counterintuitive for English speakers' (though see below). Despite these differences, he concludes that Malay and American antecedents for *takut* /fear are nearly identical, arguing that some earlier work on American English has missed the connection for methodological reasons (Heider 1991: 77-8, 203-14). Early on in his book Heider warns against the 'rigid equation of one word = one emotion' (ibid.: 5, emphasis in original) and stresses the importance of cluster rather than one word analysis. Thus he speaks of the 'fear cluster' (ibid.: 203-14) which contains five or six terms for the three language maps. This fear cluster is linked to other clusters, such as indecision, confusion or anger.

Similarly, Davitz, by a less ethnographically-grounded methodology, associates US-English 'fear' strongly with 'anger' and 'panic' in one of his three 'primary clusters': 'Negative: Type 2 Emotions' (less closely related, but within the same cluster, are 'contempt', 'hate' and a further nine terms - including 'anxiety', but not 'shame') (1969: 125). In the original formulation of the Indian *rasa* theory mentioned above (some 200 years on either side of the start of the common era) fear was considered one of the eight primary emotions along with anger and disgust, and thus more fundamental than a further 33 'transient emotions' (Lynch 1990: 18). By contrast, the early Jain writers saw fear (*bhaya*) as one of nine kinds of subsidiary passion or sentiment, along with sorrow, disgust and sexual craving. The main passions, by contrast, were anger, pride, deceit and greed. But all these passions and sentiments were considered within a much broader category of destructive (*ghatiya*) *karmas* which affected things such as perception more generally (Jaini 1979: 131-2). That is, for the Jains, an understanding of the emotions was tied intimately into an extraordinarily complex and detailed set of ideas concerning the soul and its liberation. In turn, this should lead us to question whether we should take Heider's warning against the easy association of one word=one emotion a step further, and ask whether it makes sense to consider even a set or cluster of emotion terms. In the Jain system of knowledge, the links between emotion term clusters that Heider identifies for Minangkabau and Indonesian, are or would be meaningful only if we also allowed links to areas (linguistic or epistemological) that lie far outside the

Euro-American conception of ‘the emotions’. Heider himself, drawing on Eleanor Rosch’s prototype theory (Heider 1991: 29-30; 41-3), is concerned to explore the boundaries of emotion terminology, and remarks on the ‘dissolve into neighbouring terminological realms, especially the realm of *sifat* (“characteristics”)’ (ibid.: 43).

The grounds for cross-cultural agreement upon the place of ‘fear’ within the range of other emotions thus look increasingly insecure, as indeed does the notion of a discrete realm of ‘the emotions’. When we turn away from purely language-based analysis to consider the wider social and experiential context of the emotions — and as anthropologists we must — further qualification seems inevitable. Jean Smith, drawing on historical evidence, writes that the Māori of New Zealand understood fear as a punishment from the gods, angered by the violation of a *tapu* rule. The person thus afflicted by fear (for example, before a battle) was not therefore held personally responsible for the emotion (Smith 1981: 149). Indeed, such fear was not even perceived by the self, but by a special organ, the *wairua*, which further distanced the person from his fear (perhaps because of her sources, Smith says nothing of women and fear) (ibid.: 155-6). By contrast, ‘shame’ was not located in an organ and could not be purged by ritual means as could fear. Shame, if experienced, was central to the person, not divorced from him, and could only be expunged through revenge (ibid.: 156). Hinduism, according to Lynch and his contributors, ‘grounds’ emotion not only in the person or the body, but externally, in food, scent and music, all of which of course are enmeshed within much wider sets of cultural relations (1990: 14). Elsewhere, in Malaysia, Howell reports that while the Chewong are fully aware of emotional states, they suppress them, the only exceptions being fear and shyness which are ‘positively encouraged’ (Howell 1981: 141). ‘Fear’ is thus marked out in a contrastive way through social behaviour, not (merely) cognition.

However none of this invalidates our comparative task. It is through reading back across the set of separate cases presented by the {originally planned} contributors, which are linked by the common topic, that an anthropology of fear emerges from anthropological praxis, and that the utility of the concept for further analysis is developed. In a sense the success of our project as a whole will be confirmed by whether or not, taken together, the separate cases make a polythetic set which has at its common core an emotional state that overlaps with a concept that the participating anthropologists recognise as fear.

Few if any of the studies of emotion terminology (such as Heider’s) offer any evidence of the emotional states of the subjects when they were tested. They seem to presume that the subjects (very often university or college students, faced with a printed questionnaire or checklist) were in an emotionally neutral state, able to think dispassionately about ‘love’, or ‘fear’, either on the basis of remembered experience or on the basis of linguistic association, and able to move intellectually from considering one emotion to another, to another and so to the end of the list. To be fair, some investigators such as Heider constantly stress the preliminary nature of the task they have undertaken, and point out that it paves the way for more thorough and fine-grained field investigation.

It seems unlikely that most members of any given society are used to considering the terrain of ‘the emotions’ in the abstract, until asked to do so by the researcher. No matter how carefully and sensitively the anthropologist or psychologist sets about the task of gathering data on ‘the emotions’, if the methodology involves interviews or questionnaires

designed to elicit information about the range of emotions (as most studies do) then it is inevitably going to be an artificial task for the research subjects. It seems unlikely that when a subject is in a context where they actually feel or experience 'fear', they take the cognitive time out to consider what distinguishes that 'fear' from 'panic' or 'anxiety' or 'guilt'.

Heider claims that 'Actual emotion scenes or outbursts are relatively rare in daily life, and they are usually kept relatively private' (Heider 1991: 4), and uses this as his justification for instead mapping the contours of emotion terminology through checklists and direct question sessions. If by 'emotion scenes or outbursts' he means blazing family rows, or lovers swooning at one another's feet, there may be some truth in what he says, but at another level the statement is as short-sighted as that of an anthropologist of art claiming that aesthetic judgement is exercised almost exclusively in art galleries. However, it is one thing to claim that all human beings experience (even if they do not display) emotional states all or most of the time (just as they presumably make discriminatory judgements which we might call aesthetic all or most of the time), and quite another to investigate this in the field.

The analysis of fear in context may indeed reveal similarities that are obscured by a formal semantic analysis of the kind that Heider develops. Heider stresses the separation of fear and shame in Europe yet clearly fear, shame and guilt can be associated together in a number of contexts in English. Reaction to death often includes feelings of fear as well as sorrow, guilt, and shame. In a somewhat different sense shame can be seen to be associated with fear through fear of being discovered in a shameful act, a sentiment shared widely (see the work of Telban on the Ambonwari). It can be argued that the very words that Heider uses to represent each of the emotions in the cluster must themselves have different connotations according to the sets within which they occur. The meanings of these terms can only be established by analysing the lexical items in the context of the culture in which they occur to establish the range of their meaning. This semantic analysis both requires an analysis of the cultural context in which the terms are used and in turn informs the interpretation of those contexts. This dual process is integral to anthropological analysis and a prerequisite of cross cultural analysis which is ultimately required to address questions of universality.

To this end, a more plausible line of attack would seem to be the investigation of a single emotional complex in social contexts where one might expect to find it; in a sense the anthropologist is engaged in a phenomenological study guided by the experience of his or her own society. The anthropologist is investigating an emotional complex in relation to and in the context of a wide range of social phenomena with which an anthropologist is trained to deal. Thus Margaret Trawick's work on 'love' in South India (1989) tells us as much about Tamil family life as it does about 'love', while Howell's study of fear (see e.g. 1981, 1989) tells us as much about Chewong identity and their differentiation of self from other as it does about fear. Thus, in planning our seminar we sought papers from anthropologists who had conducted extensive fieldwork at times or in places where 'fear' could reasonably be assumed to be made manifest. In as much as we solicited papers on 'fear' it could be said that we prejudiced some issues from the outset, not least in assuming that there is some universal, cross-cultural category 'fear'. But it is in the wide range of cultural contexts covered, and the

wide range of interpretations of those contexts, that we believe the term begins to define itself.

The concept of fear that we explored² comes out of this discourse. The idea that there may be a concept of fear or shame which while varying in its particular associations has recognisable core elements appears plausible. Those core elements may be definable in terms of physiological descriptions of the state, such as sweating, rapid heartbeat, and/or contexts of occurrence such as being in the presence of danger. Wendy James's report of the Uduk description of bodily fear *ko* as 'the sense of coldness, stillness, sweating, rising temperature, pulse and a pounding inside' can be seen to echo through most if not all of the physiological descriptions of fear in the work of the proposed contributors. And the contexts in which fear occurs do turn out to have a predictability cross-culturally. However the concept of fear that develops from these anthropological analyses is fuzzy around the edges; it is emergent as a property of cross-cultural analysis and is subject to modification in particular cases since it is precisely out of cross-cultural variation that the fuzziness arises.

Universalism, particularism and relative autonomy in human cultures

Such an exercise in cross-cultural analysis is ultimately premised on the possibility of creating a set of terms which reflect common components of the ways in which human beings construct the world — the cultural equivalents of Wierzbicka's semantic primitives (1991, 2021). Underlying this premise is a definition of fully modern humans as people who share certain cultural as well as physiological characteristics. These characteristics might include a capacity for aesthetic response, a concept of exchange, the capacity to fear. The task of anthropology is in part to show the immense difficulty of arriving at such a definition and to be aware of the danger that the very perspective itself is an imposition of a western concept of self on the rest of the world. None the less we have to recognise the depth of our entanglement in such a universalising process through the very language that we use.³

Even if we ultimately reject the universal application of any concepts cross-culturally, it is necessary to develop an anthropological meta-language that enables anthropologists themselves to use the term with as much precision as possible when translating concepts of other cultures: so that when an anthropologist writes about 'shame' in the case of people the anthropological use of the word shame is clear and unambiguous before it is modified by the analysis of the particular case. This perspective is surprisingly similar to that of reflexive anthropology where in a less formal sense anthropologists are explicit about their own involvement in the research process and show awareness of the presuppositions with which they entered the field. The meta-language of anthropology becomes a discourse among interpretations, which when projected on to the worlds that are being described produces a

² The papers discussed were originally presented at the ISCA departmental research seminar in Oxford in 1993 (eds.).

³ Frances and Howard Morphy have continued to develop these ideas in dialogue with Anna Wierzbicka in subsequent work, in particular in exploring the concept of mind as a cross-cultural category (see Morphy and Morphy 2020).

polythetic set of overlapping conceptual structures. Within those conceptual structures certain concepts may appear to be more universal in their occurrence than others. What anthropology should do is counterbalance the European bias in the definition of universality. Anthropologists can show that some of these more universal concepts are largely absent in the west or are more central to or more elaborated as concepts in certain non-western societies than in the case of European societies. The concept of *mana* may be such example. Though it must also be borne in mind that concepts are shared differentially within a population and that the reification of the West as a category and the implication of uniformity is as erroneous as it is in the case of any other group. Different western theories of the emotions may for example reflect precisely the kind of differences represented by the contrast between early Jain and Sanskrit *rasa* theories, which may themselves be internally differentiated.

The complementarity of universalism and particularism is difficult for anthropologists to grasp precisely because historically their research has emphasized difference and focused on societies in which cultural construction can be seen in terms of its difference from that of the anthropologist's own. While anthropologists have paid lip service to the common ground — to the 'psychic unity of man' — or to underlying cognitive and physiological constraints and potentials, these tend to have been seen as central to someone else's problematic and not to have been incorporated within anthropological paradigms. The late twentieth century upsurge of interest in cognition potentially challenges this position but has been used, ironically, to provide the basis of a critique of cultural construction and to refocus anthropology on the historically positioned individual (see for example Christina Toren's work, 2019). History replaces culture but itself remains unproblematised. However an holistic view of socio-cultural process should be concerned with the articulation of human potential (which includes the evolution of humans as culture-bearing animals — see Durham 1991), cultural construction, social context and individual agency.

In particular cases cultural construction often masks the relationship that exists between the particular and the complex underlying processes of human history and biology, and the reification of cultural construction can create overly constructed, apparently synchronous, deterministic models of social process. However the omission of culture from models of socialization and social action similarly leads to the neglect of a component of the process of socio-cultural reproduction that is integral to human action and the existence of human diversity. Jain theories of the nature of the cosmos and its embodiment in human life processes, Ambonwari theories about the gendered nature of the spirit world, Chewong theories of the integration of the opposition of their social and spiritual universe in opposition to those of others — all influence the context in which fear is experienced and how it is ameliorated. Yet at the same time worlds are not bounded, cultural structures are abstractions that are always imminent in social process, and individuals differ in their personal histories and in their position in society. This creates room for the existence of universalistic and particularistic perspectives on social context, since the content of human action is both influenced by and enabled by cultural conceptualisation and is reproduced in a relatively autonomous domain of action — one which is the product of historical circumstance, human potential and the intentional behaviour of the participants.

The complex interrelationship between culture, action and historical process comes out particularly clearly in times of social change and regional conflict, when conceptual structures are being challenged by their application to new contexts — contexts in which the ideational systems themselves are being transformed. Thus as Howell shows in the case of the Chewong, the adaptive significance of fear is being challenged by the disappearance of the forest through logging and the increasing impossibility of retreat. War and the imposition of terror from outside the community provide paradigm cases of societies out of control in which the established relationship between cultural practice and predictable outcome breaks down.

Fear, culture and the particularities of history

The seminar essays that we are discussing explored how a particular emotion, fear, may be both culturally structured in the particular case and in certain contexts be a relatively independent factor in human action and historical process. We would argue that fear is a concept that can be applied cross culturally precisely because it is a potential response that human beings have to certain situations. The particular construction of fear is something that can be understood in relation to this background. Yet it is impossible to predict in any particular case the ways in which fear is incorporated within the processes of social reproduction, or the ways in which fear is conceptualised and dealt with by members of different cultures, or the quality or value that fear has in relation to the structure of the emotions as a whole.

The contrast between Howell's analysis of the Chewong and Whitehouse's analysis of the Orakaiva demonstrates clearly the ways in which social context alters the value of an emotion, and relates in turn to the process of cultural identity and political action. Howell shows how the relations between the inside and outside worlds of the Chewong are constructed through a concept of fear. Fear of outsiders is thought positive and rational and is part of the process of the creation of community that separates Chewong from the non-Chewong. People who are fearless are to be feared and in Chewong terms are not part of the community. Violence and aggression is largely absent from within the community and the only response to angry people is their exclusion. The Chewong world includes the natural and spiritual world in which they exist and the very concept of being Chewong itself applies in oppositional terms to the whole material and spiritual universe outside.

The Orakaiva case is in marked contrast to the Chewong though, as Whitehouse shows, fear plays an equivalent role in constructing the community and in defining self in opposition to other. The Orakaiva certainly experience fear in relation to outsiders. Warfare is a not infrequent part of social life and one interpretation of the rigorous initiation system endured by Orakaiva youth is that it prepares them to face the dangers of conflict and enables them to act aggressively against others. However, a corollary of the initiation process is that the primary context for experiencing fear is an internal one. Whitehouse argues that fear binds people to the community and, using the concept of 'flash bulb memory', he argues that the group to which the individual becomes attached is a highly specific set of individuals whose

attachment to him is almost imprinted by a process of visualisation while in a state of extreme trauma (1996). Initiation in the context of the region {Melanesia} as a whole 'produces a highly fragmented political landscape composed of small, boundary-conscious ritual communities, standing in relations of hostility and rivalry'. Howell and Whitehouse's work taken together show the extent to which aggression and fear and their valuation are culturally constructed.

Telban's analysis of the Ambonwari, another New Guinea society but from the Sepik, is complementary to both Orakaiva and the Chewong cases. He shows how fear is constructed within the different contexts of Ambonwari society and how it is mediated through the process of seeing (2004). As in the case of most New Guinea societies fear is orchestrated and structured as part of the process of socialization, 'as a vehicle to quieten children', but to nothing like the extent described for the Orakaiva or for many Highland societies (see Godelier 1986, Herdt 1982). Fear is experienced within the community not so much in terms of fear of violence as fear of exposure. Fear of forces in the natural and spirit world are part of the process of structuring gender relations.

The Orakaiva represent a Hobbesian expression of human society. By contrast the Ambonwari share much in common with the Chewong for whom 'showing fear is a positive value'. Fear is associated with shame but shame is not something to be feared, as is the case in certain Mediterranean societies, but is in most respects a positive moral force that regulates relations within the community. For both the Chewong and the Ambonwari management of fear as an external agent is part of the process of creating community, though for the Ambonwari fear is also integral to the process of gender definition within the society. But in contrast to the Chewong, the inside and the outside worlds of the Ambonwari — the unfeared and the feared, the seen and the unseen, the safe and the dangerous — are not ontologically distinct: for example the spirits of dead men move to the status of maligned and alien beings the sight of whom is most feared, whereas the spirits of dead women are made publicly visible through carvings which are not hidden from anyone.

So far we have been considering relatively autonomous small-scale societies in which the significant structures of domination and subordination are largely internal to the society or circumscribe the boundaries of the social world but do not dominate daily life. Cannell considers the case of the Bicol, peasant farmers of Luzon in the Philippines, a society that has for more than a century been incorporated in a subordinate position within the political structure of a developing nation state (1999). For Bicol farmers life is hard, they live in poverty, their mortality rates are high and they are subjected to a repressive regime of land owners and state power. And yet Cannell argues that there is an absence of discourse about fear, and that the emotion of fear is largely absent from contexts in which we might predict it to be present or to dominate. Cannell's focus is on mortuary rituals, but she is concerned not so much with the fear of death as the fear of the dead and ways of transforming relations between the living and the dead. She deals with a process whereby relations of fear are partly transformed into relations of pity and a negative emotion into a potentially positive relation of 'benevolent dependency'. Fear is thus subject to cultural processes of value transformation which convert it into something else (compare Munn 1986).

It would be possible to argue from this case that fear itself as an expression of universality does not exist, since the cultural structuring of the emotions are so different in

different cases that new labels are necessary. On the other hand the absence of fear as a dominant theme of discourse could result from the incorporation of fear within an existing world of belief and way of acting that enables people to cope with fear as a universalistic emotion (associated with the dead), through processes of value transformation that alleviate its effect. Cannell argues that management of fear as a cultural category in Bicol is a symptom of more general relations of hierarchy and oppression for which cultural mechanisms and possible strategies of action have been developed.

Barnes's understanding of fear and ritual responses to misfortune in Kedang shows points of similarity with Bicol. There is however a major difference in the ways in which the respective societies are integrated into regional political systems. In Bicol fear is part of a cultural process that integrates people within the hierarchical structure of the regional system, whereas in Kédang fear is integrated within the local political structure and the history of clan relations. Barnes focuses on the embodiment of the emotions and shows how the body becomes an index of clan relations and the reflection of a wider spiritual and temporal world (see also Munn's analysis of space/time in Gawa (Munn 1986)). Barnes is able to show how Kédang ritual involves both complex representations of the physical substances that underlie or produce emotional states and an inquiry into the history of the personal and clan relations of the individuals involved. Emotion is the expression of an ongoing process within which the exigencies of everyday life and individual circumstances are incorporated. It would be a mistake however to reduce fear in Kédang to the cultural process in which it is incorporated and by which it is alleviated, and to fail to acknowledge the relative autonomy of different components of socio-cultural process and individual response to situations. As Barnes concludes: 'the physical and emotional aspects of fear in Kédang are much like they are pan-culturally but there is a culturally specific aspect to fear.'

Fear as a human universal is a potential object of value, a potential quality of feeling that can be culturally structured in ways that affect it across a set of otherwise unrelated contexts. In the case of the Chewong, fear of outsiders which is positively valued has a consequence on the way in which violence can be dealt with within the community. In this respect, fear is something which is worked on and in the case of Bicol 'an anthropological account of [fear] needs to be moving and not static; to trace not only meanings which are inscribed in fear, but the processes which people may choose instead to emphasise, by which they constantly work to eliminate it.' Indeed from a Western perspective to fear is often seen as undesirable or pathological, something whose causes must be identified and removed, and if the source of fear lies in something existential (fear of death) or something immovable (like an entrenched structure of domination) then the individual is expected to come to terms with that fear in order to keep acting.

Cannell's argument shows an interesting reversal of Telban's and Whitehouse's. Whereas in the case of the Ambonwari and Orakaiva fear structures the process of socialization and defines relations within the community, in Bicol the structure of power relations becomes the context in which fear (of death or the dead) is mediated. Yet it could be argued that the similarities are greater than the differences since in all cases fear, or the management of fear, is integral to the process of reproducing social relations. In a stable social trajectory fear is integrated within a multidetermined and complex process of reproduction

and eliminated through the maintenance (albeit a negotiated one) of a particular structure of social relations. To Telban anxiety expressed and counteracted through care has reached the dimensions of a social sentiment.

In these examples we are considering the place of fear in 'normal' times, in which it is part of a decipherable world. Fear and ways of coping with or using fear are integral to processes of social reproduction and part of people's everyday understanding of the cosmos and the world in which they live. We are dealing with predictable consequences of the unpredictable for which people have a response and an explanation. By contrast Zur, Pettigrew and James all examine cases in which the lives of the people concerned have been turned upside down by the late twentieth century imposition of violence or warfare from without. In her analysis of fear in the time of terror in Guatemala, *La Violencia*, Zur makes a contrast between the controllable fear associated with witchcraft and the fear of violent death associated with the terror (2019). This in part involves a change of agency from one which was integrated within the process of the social life of the community to one that cuts across it. The silence associated with *La Violencia* obtained, Zur argues, 'because people were unable to keep their experiences of violence in mind for they could not be integrated into cultural categories, concepts or codes of experience.'

The Sikh case that Pettigrew writes about shares much in common with the Guatemalan situation. In both cases there is a sudden change in the trajectory of the society, a normal state in which fear was part of an anticipated and imagined world into which people are socialized has been ruptured by the intervention of extreme violence. In India the violence came from outside the group as a reaction to the campaign waged by a sector of Sikh society for greater political autonomy. It too resulted eventually in the division of the community and the creation of uncertainty: the arbitrary nature of violence and the disappearance of individuals combined with increasing distrust within the community as people were suspected of collaborating with forces of oppression. There is some evidence in the Sikh case that the history of warfare and the cultural value placed on martyrdom and bravery in the face of violence means that fear occupies less of a place in people's consciousness than anger and the desire for justice (see Pettigrew 1995, 2000, 2006⁴). But in both cases the seemingly arbitrary and overwhelming nature of the violence means that fewer people are prepared to stand out against the oppression. Fear in Guatemala and in the Punjab reaches the point where everybody becomes only an individual, where trust breaks down and the community divides against itself.

James's case study of the Uduk (1997) shows features in common with both Zur's and Pettigrew's material. The Uduk have been caught up in the events of over a decade of warfare, migration and famine on the Sudanese-Ethiopian border. As a small group they have been continually renegotiating their existence amidst warring factions engaged in conflicts that they, the Uduk, have seldom initiated. As in the case of the Chewong the rational response has always edged towards retreat, scattering to avoid being caught in cross-fire. To an extent, as in Guatemala, silence and passivity have been the main responses to a situation in which experience suggests that aggression is suicidal. Among the Uduk too 'the deadly choreography

⁴ Pettigrew has pointed out in correspondence (p.c. August 2022) that a full study would have to consider the other side of the coin: where fear has produced collaboration.

of alternating partnerships and loyalties has thrown neighbours and kin against each other in unexpected ways’.

James shows how for most of their twentieth-century journey and perhaps for most of their existence the Uduk response to danger and to outrage has been one of restraint, of ‘holding the liver’. She shows how in the late twentieth century Christian missionaries have built on this perspective of fear and anger and the particular ways in which it has been embodied to establish continuity between Christian teaching and existing values. But the central case she develops shows that freed from the normal restraints of their existence by a particular combination of circumstances the Uduk too can express themselves in violent anger directed against the circumstances of their twentieth-century history. James demonstrates the transformational nature of human cultures and the way in which emotions must be understood to have an existence independent of a particular cultural form of their expression, how emotional states articulate with cultural and historical process.

In the Philippines, by way of contrast, the structure of domination and subordination has had a prolonged existence and it can be argued that the cultural structuring of the emotions in relation to social process that has developed is adjusted to late twentieth century circumstances. Life, though hard and unjust, has provided ways of coping with fear and fear has been integrated within a hierarchical structure of pity and negotiation, which in the Guatemalan case has had no time to develop. The people of Bicol represent an adjustment to long-term conditions of repression: ‘people are generally robust, resourceful and cheerful in their manner, with a strong sense of irony about the conditions of life’.

Conclusion

We are convinced that the analyses of the particular cases we have discussed reveal a useful cross-culturally comparable concept of fear, that the topic is valid and that the juxtaposition of the individual cases has enabled us to bring insights from the analysis of one case and apply them to the others. While each case shows different indigenous theories of the emotions and a different positioning of fear in relation to other emotions, and while the embodiment of fear is linked in each case to a unique set of processes and relations within the society or between earthly and spiritual domains, nonetheless strong linkages emerge between the different cases. We do not pretend to have established for once and for all an anthropological meta-concept of fear, but we hope we have shown evidence that fear can reasonably be taken to be a category for cross-cultural research. A cross-cultural category is one that should enter the anthropological process of interpretation and translation so that anthropologists can present to others the particularities of each case in terms of a more general discourse of anthropology. In the case of the emotions the aim must be to convey a sense of the experience as a means of communicating it to others and reciprocally ‘to gain access to the conceptual world in which our subjects exist so that we can in some extended sense of the term converse with them’ (Geertz 1975:24). As Wendy James writes of her own experience of fear as the Uduk would have felt it (distinguishing immediate bodily sensation from more general apprehension) on a night of violence on the Sudan-Ethiopian border: ‘as we left Karmi past the protesting

traders I certainly felt fear in the first sense [that Uduk experience it]; as we returned along the dark road back not knowing what had happened in our absence, I believe I was briefly touched by the second.' (1997:123)

Anthropological analysis of cultural data enables first of all understandings of a particular case. The next task is to place those understandings in an appropriate context of discourse that they may be communicated to others. Through analysing fear across a number of different cultures we see differences in the structure of the emotions and differences in the way fear is felt and alleviated in particular cases. But the overlap which has emerged is sufficient to give fear the status of a polythetic category applicable across cultures and, potentially, the status of an anthropological meta-category which provides a focus for cultural and cross-cultural analysis. By such means the problematic referred to on the first page of this introduction is successfully and productively reinstated at the centre of anthropological concerns.

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