

UC San Diego

UC San Diego Previously Published Works

Title

Bodily transactions of the passions: el calor among Salvadoran women refugees

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8pg6z0bj>

Author

Jenkins, Janis

Publication Date

1994

Peer reviewed

7 Bodily transactions of the passions: *el calor* among Salvadoran women refugees

Janis H. Jenkins and Martha Valiente

Over the course of the last decade, there has been a paradigmatic shift in anthropological thinking on the construct of "emotion." No longer assumed to index a fundamentally universal, psychobiological event for individuals, emotion is currently theorized as culturally constituted and situationally specific to social realms (Lutz 1988). The largely unanalyzed convergence between Western scientific and popular views of emotion was until recently not noted as particularly suspicious. Indeed, previous universalist-individualist accounts of emotion are now construed by many as but one ethnopsychological creation myth (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990; Kleinman and Good 1985; Lutz 1985; White and Kirkpatrick 1985). Feminist theories have also deconstructed the ideology inherent in symbolic representations of emotion within dichotomous realms of the devalued natural, dangerous, and female, on the one hand, and the more esteemed cultural, controlled, and male, on the other (Haraway 1991; Ortner 1976; Rosaldo 1984; and especially Lutz 1988, 1990). Not surprisingly, the new emphasis on the sociocultural construction of emotion has occasioned a wave of cultural studies in this area (Abu-Lughod 1986; Desjarlais 1992; Gaines and Farmer 1986; Good and Good 1988; Jenkins 1991b; Kleinman 1986; Lutz and White 1986; Markus and Kitayama 1994; Matthews 1992; Myers 1986; Ochs and Schieffelin 1989; Rosaldo 1980; Roseman 1991; Schepher-Hughes and Lock 1987; Schieffelin 1976; Shweder and LeVine 1984; Wikan 1990; see also Lyon and Barbalet, Chapter 2 of this volume). In a celebratory mood, anthropologists echo Geertz's (1973: 81) observation that "not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts."

A consequence of culturalist approaches to emotion, however, has been the estrangement of culture from the body in the name of anti-reductionism.¹ Only recently have notions of the body as a generative source of culture, experience, and orientation emerged alongside more cognitive interest in mental representations such as knowledge, symbols, and meanings as the presumed loci of culture. Long-standing dualisms of the mind as cultural and the body as biological have often served to render the physical, sensational world of pangs, vapors, and twinges theoretically insignificant and largely absent from cultural-symbolic analysis.

1994 (referencia
al end)

While some anthropologists and psychologists (e.g. Levy 1984 and Frijda 1987, respectively) suggest an operational separation of "feeling" (sensation) and "emotion" (cognized interpretation), we prefer here to problematize this distinction from the vantage point of the body. From this perspective, we wonder about the heralding of "complex" emotions such as *amae* (Doi 1973) at the expense of "simple" sensationally and bodily based emotions such as "angry livers" (Ots 1990). We wonder whether this line of thinking is predicated on the traditional dualist idea that the closer we come to the body the farther away we must be from culture. As will become more vivid following our ethnographic discussion, we intend our essay as a critique of conceptualizations of the body as a *tabula rasa* upon which culture inscribes its codes. Rather, we are impressed with the degree of intentionality and agency of the body in creating experience. Although it is possible to access such worlds through analyses of mental representations such as language and ethnopsychological knowledge, the cultural creation of intersubjective realms of social space via the body has often eluded the anthropological gaze.

Another orienting premise of this essay is that social domains of power and interest are constitutive of emotional experience and expression (Corradi et al. 1992; Good et al. 1988; Jenkins 1991a; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Kleinman 1986; Scarry 1985; Swartz 1991). While recognition of the essential interrelations between the personal and the political has long been central to feminist scholarship (Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974), this point has yet to be adequately integrated in theories of culture and emotion. To this end, Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) have recently proposed new theoretical directions for analyzing sociopolitical dimensions of emotion in everyday discourse. Scholarly discourse on the emotions has also been considerably expanded by Good and Good (1988) through conceptualizations of the "state construction of affect." Jenkins (1991a: 140) has urged that the emerging scholarly discourse on the emotions include the nexus of the role of the state in constructing a "*political ethos*" and the personal emotions of those who dwell in that ethos.² Suarez-Orozco (1990: 353) proposes examination of the formal structures or "grammar" of collective terror such as is now widespread in Latin America.

In this chapter, we are concerned with the cultural and sociopolitical basis of bodily experience.³ Our interest lies not merely with the sociopolitically "inscribed" body but also with the body as seat of agency and intentionality through resistance, denial, reactivity (Shweder 1990; Scheper Hughes 1992). We present an ethnographic analysis of a particular form of bodily experience – *el calor* (the heat) – among Salvadoran women refugees seeking help at an outpatient psychiatric clinic in North America.⁴ Our analysis of the narratives of Salvadoran women is presented (1) as documentation of a

culturally specific form of bodily experience that is relatively unknown in North American medical settings; and (2) as an empirical basis for theorizing on the interrelations of culture, emotion, and the body. The argument is intended as a contribution to discourse on the state construction of affect, on the one hand, and of the intersubjectivity of those affects, on the other.

The present study of Salvadoran refugees is based upon the clinical and narrative presentations of twenty-two women living in a metropolitan area of the northeastern United States. The study was ethnographic, including semi-structured and informal interviews, and participant observation in home, community, and clinical settings. Each woman was encountered in the process of seeking or receiving help from an outpatient psychiatric clinic at a university teaching hospital. At the time of contact with the hospital, nearly all women reported symptoms of major affective or anxiety disorders, especially including major depressive and post-traumatic stress disorders.⁵ Most of the women had been in the United States for at least one year and had family, including young children, who were still residing in El Salvador. Many worked long hours – sixty or more in two jobs – in vigorous efforts to make as much money as possible to send back home to relatives.

Escape from *la situación*

Refugees' narratives of their emigration from El Salvador often highlight escape from *la situación*.⁶ *La situación* is a rhetorical term that implicitly, and possibly covertly, refers to unrelenting political violence and poverty from which these women have fled (Jenkins 1991a). Although violence and civil warfare have been common in El Salvador throughout this century, the most intensive sustained conflict to plague the country occurred in the period of 1979–92. Since 1979, the wave of warfare and terror has decimated the population by death and emigration. At least 75,000 persons were killed during this period, with several thousands more “*desaparecidos*” (or disappeared), 500,000 internal refugees, and an estimated 1,000,000 more who fled to other countries such as Mexico, Honduras, Panama, the United States, and Canada. In a country that, in 1979, had a population estimated at 5.2 million persons (Fish and Sganga 1988), the decimation of the Salvadoran people becomes all too evident.

In various combinations, the women in the present study gave three primary reasons for their flight from *la situación* in El Salvador: escape from large-scale political violence, escape from “domestic” violence,⁷ and escape from impoverished economic conditions. These practices of the state, the economic conditions, and the domestic environment are appropriately understood not as independent factors but as coordinate dimensions of a single political ethos. Martin-Baro (1990) has characterized the entire

nation as one in which state induction of fear, anxiety, and terror is elaborated and maintained as a means of social control. Through long-term exposure to this political ethos the experience of the "lived body" is dominated by anxiety, terror, and despair (Jenkins 1991a: 149). Regular encounters with the brutality of the war were commonplace: mutilated bodies along the roadside or on the doorstep to one's home, disappeared loved ones, the terror of military troops marching through town and shooting at random and arresting others who would be incarcerated and tortured (Jenkins 1991a). Life within this landscape of political violence compelled these Salvadorans to flee in search of a safe haven (see also Farias 1991).

The stirring of bodily memory: an experiential analysis of *el calor* (the heat)

For nearly all of the women in the study, flight from political violence is narrated within the context of problems with *nervios* (nerves). *Nervios* refers at once to matters of mind, body, and spirit and does not make cultural sense in relation to mind-body dualisms. While the cultural meaning and specific symptom profile of the indigenous condition of *nervios* varies across cultural settings (Low 1985, 1988, Chapter 6 of this volume), the cultural category appears widely throughout Latin America. *Nervios* indexes a broad spectrum of distress and illness and includes everything from minor situational upsets to an established schizophrenic illness (Jenkins 1988).⁸ *Calor* (heat) has sometimes been included as a component or symptom of *nervios* as a condition as well as of episodic *ataques de nervios* (Guarnaccia et al. 1990).

Within the context of El Salvador, narratives of *nervios* are deeply embedded within the life situation of chronic poverty and exposure to violence. Among these women, *calor* is but one among several bodily phenomena associated with *nervios*. Other bodily sensations include *escalofríos* (shivers, chills), *un hormigueo en la piel* (sensation of a swarm of ants on the skin), *un adormecimiento* ("sleepiness" or numbness) localized on one side of the face or body, *choques electricos* (electric shocks), and feelings of being *inquieta* (agitated), often with *ganas de correr* (the urge to run). Because reports of *el calor* emerged for the majority of women and because these are problematic for anthropological and medical understandings of culture, emotion, and the body, we choose to examine it here. The remainder of this section of the chapter is organized into a discussion of (1) narratives of *el calor*; (2) ethnographic accounts of the perceived bodily sites and degrees of the severity of *calor* (3) tropes and other linguistic conventions for describing *calor*; and (4) the social situational and emotional contexts of *calor* experiences.

Narratives of calor

Accounts of personal experience with *calor* were either spontaneously offered during the course of the interviews or were given in response to direct queries.⁹ Excerpts from the narratives provide evidence of the polysemous, multivocal nature of discourse on *el calor*:

1. From Gladys Gonzalez, a 39-year-old woman living with her husband and five children:

Heat is something like fire that you can feel from toe to head . . . throughout your body . . . nothing more than a vapor that you feel and then it passes . . . a hot welling up.

2. From Adelina Valenzuela, a 56-year-old Salvadoran living with her daughter, grandchildren, and three other extended family members:

I used to feel hot currents rising up in inside of me, hot, I felt like I was suffocating, and that despair that comes when the heat rises up, something hot, I couldn't [resist it] and I didn't feel well and my vision blurred . . . [the heat] rose upward inside from my feet to my head throughout my body . . . throughout my body, I felt like the fire was shooting out of me, from here and here and my eyes felt like they were being pushed out by the fire, like they were going to come right out, and from the ears I felt it coming out of me . . . and in my mouth I could begin to taste . . . vapor, my own breath. I felt like it was fire, a flame, and it was inside of me . . . I was desperate, the heat, a terrible thing . . . I felt like I was suffocating and that I was dying [and] I went and turned on the cold water to take a cold shower . . . the heat feels as if, you know, with a match [you light] a sheet of paper and then swallow it, and inside the heat that feels so terrible, those flames of fire welling up.

3. From Elsa Hernandez, 36 years old, whose family still resides in El Salvador, and who lives with a Euro-American couple as a maid and caretaker for their children:

Calorias [Heat attacks], that's what we call them here in El Salvador, my mother also had them and they say it has to do with the blood, apparently it becomes irritated and well, my hands and neck become . . . as if I had fever and I get real hot, but only in my hands and neck . . . it's a type of heat, yes, that they call "the urge to bathe," yes, it doesn't matter what time, the heat you feel, even though it's cold . . . it comes from worries, more than anything worries about important things, one is startled by one's nervous system and blood that are stirred by bodily memories.

4. From Dora Campos, a 30-year-old woman separated from her *compañero* (partner) after repeated violent assaults upon her:

Heat, like some kind of vapor that rises upward from the feet, I don't know, I feel hot, I'm not sure how to explain what it's like. As if it begins in the feet and moves up until it reaches my head, at least that's what it was like before, but it's been a while since it happened . . . [it happened] when I was back in my country, and also here a few times, but more back home – from time to time, I would feel bad and my body

would feel like it was getting hot, as if . . . I were to suddenly become very chilled [but] with sweaty palms, I think that it could be because of all of the problems I had that I couldn't vent, and the only thing I did was cry, and that didn't do me any good, also I didn't want people to see me crying, and I think that was the cause of all of this, the fact that I had so much pent up inside of me which I wasn't able to vent . . . from the feet upward, something hot that made my face and head feel hot and then it dropped down and my hands began to sweat [and shake] nervously.

Bodily sites and severity of calor

El calor refers to intense heat which suddenly pervades one's whole body. Some report a particular body site, such as the head (face, ears, nose, and mouth, including taste and breath), neck, back, leg, stomach, chest, and hands, as an intense "centering point" from which it emanates. The onset of *calor* is rapid. It may commence in the feet, progressively intensifying and rising to the head. Other experiential accounts, however, describe *calor* as beginning in the head or neck and then spreading through the whole body. Although the experience is perceived as occurring *inside* one's body, it is thought to originate from without. It may be fleeting (a few minutes), or sustained (several days).

While some of the Salvadoran women affirm only occasional experience of *el calor*, others cite their experiences with it as too numerous to count. The range in this study was from four or five episodes to daily occurrences. The frequency and severity appear interrelated: the greater the number of episodes, the more intensely dysphoric the experience. Thus while some women said that they had known *calor* only a few times and in ways that were inconsequential and less than debilitating, others' more frequent episodes were recounted as virtually unbearable.

Thus the seriousness of *calor* varies considerably: for some it is perceived as a mild occurrence that is a normal part of everyday experience while for others it is experienced as a frightening event of potentially mortal consequences. In the fourth example cited above, Dora Campos recalled that following her relatively inconsequential *calor* experience she resumed her daily household activities without difficulty. In Adelina Valenzuela's (second example above) narrative, *calor* was described *como que era fuego* (as though she were fire), and the experience as a whole in terms of a dissociative state: *yo me sentía que no era yo* (I felt that I wasn't me). So terrifying was this *calor* experience that she feared she would surely die:

I felt a burning flame . . . I felt I was dying, I felt an agony, something, I felt death was just above, with that heat.

In her frequent encounters with *calor*, she would typically feel compelled to take off her clothes, shower in cold water, and consult with both a psycho-

therapist and a *santero*¹⁰ for healing. During one especially bad episode in which she thought she might asphyxiate, she ran out of her apartment and into the street. Upon recovery she remembered nothing. This particular case example falls within the indigenously defined cultural category of *ataques de nervios*, more fully described among Pureto Ricans by Guarnacia, Kleinman, and Good (1990).

Tropes of calor

Vapor (vapor), *corrientes* ("electrical currents/surges), *fuego* (fire) or *llama* (flame) are common tropes for describing *el calor*. *Un vapor* (a vapor) is a steadily rising sort of "steam heat" that is felt throughout one's body. Although qualitatively intense, the experience nonetheless may have an insubstantial, fleeting quality that ultimately leaves the body, "evaporating" as would a steam heat. *Vapor* thus represents *calor* as a kind of incarnate substance. The sometimes "electric" movement of *calor* is captured by *los corrientes* (currents, surges) flowing through the body. This sense of fluidity may also be expressed as waves of fire or flame: "the heat is like fire in your whole body." Another woman described *calor* as the sensation of rolled up newspapers that were set ablaze in her chest. Yet another described it as *un vapor* like *el aliento* (the breath), felt as *un fuego* (a fire), or *una llama* (a flame) causing heat inside her body. In still other cases in her clinical practice, Valiente has observed that *calor* can also be colloquially communicated as *un fogaz* – a flame that shoots up through the body. Finally, the experience was also occasionally referred to as *calorias* (*calories*, *heat units*) or even *ganas de banarse* (the urge to take a bath). The women's attempt to communicate the phenomenon of *el calor* raises the perennial problem of the relation between language and experience. There is little doubt that *calor* is a cultural phenomenon for Salvadorans, but it is only a partially objectified one. We are constantly shifted among what appear as direct description, simile, and metaphor. Is *calor* itself a direct description, or a metaphor of an emotional state? Different informants may use the same word, for example *vapor*, as a simile (expressing similarity) or as a metaphor (expressing shared essence) for *calor*. In one of the examples just cited, we found *calor* to be a vapor that was like a breath felt as a flame causing heat.

Fernandez (1986) has given us the notion of the play of tropes, and Friedrich (1991) the term polytrope for such examples of metaphor upon metaphor upon simile. Friedrich notes that all tropes contribute to both ambiguity and disambiguation, and paraphrases Tyler to the effect that "a trope may mislead in exact proportion to the amount it reveals, but that is the price of any revelation" (1991: 24). Our example of *el calor* suggests not so much the masking of experience by linguistic representation as the

indeterminate flux of bodily existence. The indeterminacy of these tropes reveals them not so much as cultural meanings imposed on experience as fleeting, evanescent disclosures of inexhaustible bodily plenitude. Metaphor and simile emerge from this plenitude in, to borrow Kirmayer's phrase, the body's insistence on meaning, which is "to be found not primarily in representation but in presentation: modes of action or ways of life" (1992: 380). This tropic movement is best described not in terms of Fernandez's (1986) dimension of inchoate to choate, but as a movement from preobjective indeterminacy to inexhaustible semiosis (cf. Daniel, Chapter 10 of this volume).

In addition to the reliance on simile and metaphor to partially communicate a largely incommunicable bodily experience, this indeterminacy is evident in the women's linguistic confusion over how best to refer to *calor*. Quite in contrast to their use of the culturally salient category of *nervios* (Jenkins 1988; Low 1985, Chapter 6 of this volume; Guarnaccia and Farias 1988), many fumbled or varied in the use of a definite or indefinite, feminine or masculine article prior to the nominal *calor*. For this reason, we inquired about their knowledge of *calor* as "*lo que le llaman*" (what they call) *el calor* or *la calor*. To be grammatically correct, the masculine "*el*" would be preferred. Nevertheless, our informants disagreed even on this point. Some informants readily employed and applied the term *el calor* to their experiences as described above, but a few claimed to know little of the term yet went on to describe the experience itself in ways that were relatively indistinguishable from those who did. These considerations suggest that while *calor* is a *cultural* phenomenon in so far as it is by no means commonly reported cross-culturally, it remains only *partially objectified* in the experience of Salvadorans. Let us follow the trail of meaning of this shadowy phenomenon farther into the lifeworld of the Salvadoran women refugees.

Social situational and emotional contexts of calor

Emotions associated with *calor* are nearly all dysphoric: *miedo*, *temor*, *susto*, and *preocupaciones* (fear, dread, fright, and worry); *desesperacion* (despair, desperation); *agonia y muerte* (misery, death agony); and *coraje*, *enojo*, *enfado* (anger). All these diverse affects are strong, to be sure, and were generally mentioned in relation to forceful experiences of *calor*. More mild experiences generally were not accompanied by this particular vocabulary of emotion. Thus experiences perceived to be "lighter" in character were noteworthy for the emotion words they failed to evoke in narrations. The possibility also exists, however, that some women simply eschewed specific mention of emotional terms on the grounds that these were unnecessary, inappropriate, or even unthinkable.

During the narrations of *calor* experience, some women provided examples of specific contexts, often the last time in which it had occurred. A few of these follow:

1. From 39-year-old Gladys Gonzalez, living with her husband and five children:

Before we were in El Salvador when my mother-in-law died and they called me to give her some water when she was dying. I felt my body very hot and numb but I had to face up to it. Then a neighbor was there too in those days. I had felt it too, because I had a nine year old son with a broken leg. I told him to get up but then I saw that he was in pain – he had lost his color – and that his heart hurt from the force he exerted with the crutches and just at that moment I felt a hot surge. I said to myself “he died.”

In this example, Sra. Gonzalez provides two intimately intertwined family contexts of *calor* experienced as intense fear of actual, and imminently imagined, death. Faced with the real or potential loss of a family member, she responds bodily with what she thinks of as *el calor*.

2. From 35-year-old Lucrecia Canas, married mother of two, who still reside in El Salvador with her mother:

(Take what happened yesterday). I dropped a casserole dish with dinner in it and then nerves came on because my husband was right in front of me. When I dropped the casserole dish it gave me a shiver throughout my body and I felt immediate pain and then, so my husband wouldn't see that I was afraid, I didn't say anything. . . . he had seen I dropped the dinner and since he is really angry, well, I, so he would see that I'm not afraid I said nothing to him. I had the heat attack in the moment I dropped the dinner. I felt an electrical charge was put inside my body. It was because of the fear I have of him, it's because he would have hit me at that moment, he would have beat me because I dropped the food.

Another example of Lucrecia's experience with *calor* as intensely embodied fear:

When he goes out drinking on Fridays, he comes back at three in the morning on Saturday, then I feel my face is on fire, really numb, the middle [of my face] only, and the agitation in my chest, I feel desperate, with an urge to leave [the apartment] running, and running, running to get far away . . . I feel the desire to run away, but I don't actually do it [just as] there's the same pressure when he goes out drinking and returns irritable. Then I want to focus my attention and not be afraid of him, be strong, but I can't.

And a final example of embodied heat and *susto* (fright) in response to *la situación* prior to fleeing El Salvador:

In my country I had *un susto* (a fright) when a man was dying. Already the man couldn't speak [but] he made signs to me with his eyes. It was during the daytime, and I was going to get some chickens for a Baptism. He could barely move his eyes. He had been shot in the forehead. It was the time of the fair in November. When I

came back he was already dead. I returned home with a fever, a great fever, and it wasn't something I'd ever experienced. Since it was carnival time, strangers came. They kill strangers.

3. From 47-year-old Reina Torres, married mother of three:

It happens to me if I feel bored, or it happens to me most when I am walking to the store with my husband, in the store, because with him it's boring to go out. Because nothing entertains him, nor does he say anything to me if I buy something or if something fits me well. He never says anything to me and then all of a sudden it grabs me, my leg goes to sleep, almost a side [of my body] like painful or my knee goes out, or my ankle.

This somewhat darkly amusing example of the body taking itself literally by actually "going to sleep" of sheer boredom is unique in the *calor* narratives. In terms of the emotional context of *calor* experiences, it fits neither with so-perceived prosaic, unemotional occurrences of mild impact nor with intense emotional experiences of anger or fear. Interpretively it might only be assimilated to one of these types if we were to consider it an example of angry boredom.

4. A powerful example of anger associated with heat, not part of a *calor* experience *per se*, was generated by Dora Campos, a 39-year-old mother of three who was presently torn over whether to separate from her physically assaultive husband:

[I]t is as if your blood . . . it's like putting water in a pot that's being heated and then letting it boil, it's as if your blood were boiling, and I feel as if I want to wreck everything [the world] if it were possible, but at the same time I can control myself a bit, because when my world is dominated by anger I prefer not to say anything [to hurt others] because I don't want to use angry words to express or reveal myself; I never know if such reactions are good or bad, for example when my husband becomes violent and mistreats me I fill up with anger [I become rabid], I feel angry but at the same time I overcome it and I say nothing, and if he comes up to me and threatens to hit me, I tell him to go ahead, and it is this manner which I believe allows me to control my anger.

Political and medical objectifications of the *calor* experience

Emotional orientations to cultural and sociopolitical realms

How might these diverse accounts of bodily experience be interpreted? *Calor* is an ethnographic example from a phenomenological world neither recognizable nor widely shared across cultural groups.¹¹ Within the realm of personal experience, *calor* can be conceived as a form of emotional engagement with social and political realities. Specifically, it is a somatic

mode of attention (Csordas 1993, 1994), a mode of attending to and with the body in an intersubjective environment. Cultural variation in the elaboration or suppression of such somatic modes of attention is a potentially valuable dimension for examining cross-cultural differences in experiential and communicative worlds of emotion. We must insist that it would be a mistake to regard concepts such as *calor*, that only point to or outline a mode of attention, as sorts of bodily analogs of elements in the conceptual “belief system” of traditional cultural anthropology.¹² As Ots (1990: 22) has observed, “[t]his problem becomes even more acute when the concepts of others are not just a different mode of thought but can be viewed as created by a different kind of bodily perception, e.g., the concept of *qi* in Chinese culture.”

In this context, difference in bodily perception refers not to the observation that different cultures tend to locate emotions in particular body sites or organs. The problem with organ-specific descriptions of emotion has been a failure to link body (or body part) to the social world, such that in fact they remain modeled on an intrapsychic conception of emotion (Lutz 1988). Ots (1990) considers bodily organs such as the “angry liver, the anxious heart, and the melancholy spleen” as evidence of the body’s role in generating culture. In a critique of contemporary models of somatization (which he views as relegating bodily processes to psychological mechanisms presumed to be of a higher order), he argues that bodily manifestations can be considered as correspondents or equivalents of emotion (*ibid.*: 24; see also Ots, Chapter 5 of this volume; on pain as an emotion see Jackson, Chapter 9 of this volume). This intriguing idea repositions the construct of emotion within the lived body – quite the opposite of the more typical psychosomatic strategy that describes transformation of an essentially psychological event into a secondary somatic expression.¹³

Along these same lines, we can understand that *calor* is existentially isomorphic with anger and fear, with variations in the degree to which it is configured as primarily anger or fear or a thorough admixture of these. One significant contextual basis for these emotions is personal encounters with violence: violence of male kin and the immediate conditions of civil war represented as *la situación*. Each of these contexts contributes to the political ethos of a culture of terror in which brute violence is regularized. Cultural proscriptions of outwardly directed verbalizations of anger and rage by women are of obvious importance here.¹⁴ Our analyses of refugees’ narratives revealed that certainly not all or even most explicitly associated their experiences with either anger or fear. *Calor* may actively engage unjust worlds of violence through justifiable anger, but may also reactively engage these same worlds through fear and trembling. Personally and culturally unwelcome, the anger and fear that construct *calor* experiences engage the intentional body. In their accounts of *nervios*, on the other hand, these

Salvadoran women speak specifically of their perceived need to control themselves, to harness their anger and fear. In this regard, they are not unlike most other women worldwide who, relative to men, feel a disproportionate need to suppress their passions (Lutz 1990). The need for the domestication of emotion was evidenced, for example, in the common use *vapor* (vapor) as a metaphor. Since *vapor* is a term more normally employed within the domestic context of ideal cooking time (*al vapor*), the perceived need for the domestication of the raw (female) emotion is implicated. One woman described the experience of *calor* as the "stirring" of bodily memory throughout one's nervous system and blood.

While images of *vapor* and stirring evoke the notion of domestication, that of bodily memory evokes the engagement of affect associated with trauma, and incorporated in what Casey (1987) has called habitual body memory. Casey notes that traumatic body memory risks the fragmentation of the lived body such that it is

incapable of the type of continuous, spontaneous action undertaken by the intact body ("intact" precisely because of its habitualities, which serve to ensure efficacy and regularity). The fragmented body is inefficacious and irregular; indeed, its possibilities of free movement have become constricted precisely because of the trauma that has disrupted its spontaneous actions. (Ibid.: 155)

In the closely knit family atmosphere of Salvadorans, such trauma may be equally poignant if it occurs to immediate kin as if it occurs to the self. There is certainly ample narrative evidence for the importance of actual or near-death experiences of family members that may elicit the bodily sensation of *calor*. In sum, *calor* is the bodily channeling of emotions seen as emanating from without that must be thrown off, not only to regain a comfortable stance of being-in-the-world, but indeed to ensure one's very bodily integrity and survival.¹⁵ As an existential phenomenon associated with *nervios*, *calor* is a vivid example of what Setha Low has described as an "embodied metaphor" (Low, Chapter 6 of this volume) of trauma that constitutes the habitual body memory of *la situación* for these women.

Medical and psychiatric diagnostic considerations

The clinical relevance of understanding *el calor* is all too evident in the following incident. While waiting for the resident to come into the hospital examining room, a patient was overcome by intense heat throughout her body. To relieve herself she took off her blouse and soaked it in cold water from the sink. When the resident entered the room and saw she was not only distressed but also half-nude, he apparently assumed she was "psychotic" and immediately transferred her to the local state psychiatric hospital,

where she remained without the benefit of an interpreter for several days until her family discovered her whereabouts.

Clinical confusion over how to biomedically diagnose and treat *calor* was abundant in the women's narratives. Several of the Salvadoran women reported what they regard as common mis-diagnoses, including menopause or high blood pressure. The inadequacy of an explanation based on menopause is evident from the fact that *calor* is commonly experienced well before the onset of menopause (age range in the twenties and thirties) and the fact that men also experience *calor*.¹⁶ Nevertheless, we cannot entirely rule out the interactive effects of menopausal symptoms among some women in the study. The overarching point is that the phenomenology of *calor* sensations varies substantially from symptoms of menopause, and that much if not all of the *calor* experiences described here are clearly not reducible to such explanations. In addition, *calor* (not unlike pain) is not clinically observable or measurable. The frustration surrounding clinical encounters was captured in one woman's comment that "I tell the doctors to look for something inside of me, but they tell me it's only what I feel."¹⁷

What are possible psychiatric renderings of *calor* experience? From the clinical perspective, these women were diagnosed as suffering from symptoms of one of more disorders including depression, panic attacks, generalized anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders. Major depression is especially common. In this connection, we note that the experience of "central heat" has been observed among depressed patients in societies such as Nigeria (Ifabumuyi 1981). The dynamics of this phenomenon in depression have yet to be fully appreciated in North American clinical practice. The *calor* component of the depression picture, however, may warrant identifying this phenomenological type of depression as "engaged" vs. "withdrawn," in so far as the women's subjective reports during the interview sessions did not, for us, have the "feel" of clinical depression.¹⁸ Relevant to post-traumatic stress disorder, the occasional presence of dissociative states, numbness in the face or other body part (paresthesia and akisthesia), and "vigilant" startle response, all represent varying degrees of the fundamental human tendency to "flight or fight" in response to threat. The *calor* experience occurs both under conditions in which such a response is not only appropriate but essential, and under conditions that are possibly inappropriate or personally oppressive. This being said, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that *calor*, like *nervios* (Jenkins 1988) or depression (Kleinman and Good 1985), can in some circumstances be understood as normal, non-pathological experience. As one Salvadoran woman put it: "No pienso que es enfermedad" (I don't think it's illness).

The bodily reality of *el calor*: shared or culture-bound experience?

The foregoing discussion, as might be expected of any discussion that participates in a relatively new problematic, raises more questions than can be answered: how does the body "experience" itself, on the one hand, and "think" about itself, on the other? How does the body "select" certain things to experience or "think" about? Can any bodily experience or representation be considered apart from the affective context in which it occurs? Are all bodily experiences infused with "feeling" or "emotion"? Can bodily experience and representation be considered discrete sets of evidence or "symptoms" of "disorder" ("mental," "physical," "social," "emotional," or "cosmological")? Within the body of Latin American literature on *nervios*, how should *calor* be conceptualized? (1) as a subset of the general cultural categories of *nervios*? (2) as a discrete phenomenological experience of anger and fear in the context of gendered power inequities?

We would hope that our exposition of Salvadoran women's narratives of the experience of *calor* can serve in part as a basis for addressing these questions, and thus further the development of culture theory from the standpoint of embodiment. We conclude by identifying several problematic assumptions which must be scrutinized in the process of this development:

1. *The body is a tabula rasa upon which culture inscribes its codes.* This common, often implicit view of the relationship between culture and the body has tended to overlook the capacity of the body to generate cultural worlds of meaning in relation to being-in-the-world. In contrast, our standpoint assumes the body to be characterized by intentionality and agency.

2. *Personal experience of bodily-felt emotion is suspect on both theoretical and methodological grounds.* The notion that cultural discourse on emotion is superior to bodily-felt personal accounts runs the risk of contributing toward reductionistic accounts of affect; we note that studies of culture, emotion, and the body have typically not been carried out from the vantage point of experience.

3. *Because emotion is culturally constructed and not usefully conceived as psychobiologically universal, the biological (and hence the body) can reasonably be downgraded or excluded from our theoretical formulations.* Contrary to this assumption, we would argue that it is essential to understand the body as both cultural object and cultural subject. Cultural anthropology's flight from the biological ought not to have included the body.

4. *We can know only language and never experience.* We argue for the inherent inseparability of "raw" bodily experience at the immediate, sensate

level and its "cooked" linguistic, ethnopyschological representation, and further that this is equivalent to the inherent inseparability of being-in-the-world and our representations of experience.

5. *Culture theory is the primary starting and end point for studies of emotion.* On the contrary, cultural analysis that is conducted in the absence of sociopolitical considerations of power and interest is incomplete. In particular, as can be seen in our focus on women's lives to advance understandings of the body's emotional experience, it is essential to consider the highly gendered dimensions of these relations. The emerging agenda for studies of emotional processes and experience in any of an array of intentional worlds must explicitly incorporate political dimensions of such worlds large and small.

NOTES

- 1 My thoughts on emotion in relation to culture and "estrangement" originated in a somewhat separate context from consideration of Lutz's (1988) ethnopyschological analysis of emotion as "against" (or in contrast to) estrangement or disengagement in North American popular representations.
- 2 See Bateson (1958: 118) for a definition of ethos as the emotional environment of an entire culture and Jenkins (1991b) for an analysis of emotional atmospheres within families. Jenkins (1991a) conceives of political ethos as the culturally standardized organization of feeling and sentiment pertaining to the social domains of power and interest, and discusses its effects within particular family contexts among Salvadorans.
- 3 The authors wish to thank the editor, Thomas J. Csordas, and two anonymous reviewers for their comments. To the Salvadorans who participated in this study, we are much indebted.
- 4 The clinical setting is the teaching hospital of Harvard Medical School where Jenkins worked for three and a half years as a psychiatric anthropologist and Valiente worked as a clinical psychologist. Methods of the study included semi-structured conversational interviewing designed to obtain narratives of current and past life experience. With the exception of one informant, Jenkins conducted all ethnographic interviews and observations of home and community settings. The interview questionnaire was collaboratively constructed, with special attention to cultural and ethnopyschological issues by Jenkins and clinical and linguistic translation by Valiente. The majority of the patients in the present study were referred by Valiente.

Since the majority of the patients who utilize this clinic are women, and since women's refugee experience is distinctive from that of men's, a special focus on women was deemed appropriate both clinically and anthropologically. Depending upon the research participant, from two to fifteen interview or observational visits were completed. For a smaller set of participants who served as anthropological "key informants," and with whom Jenkins developed special rapport, visits were more numerous. The women in the study were between 20 and 62 years of age and primarily of peasant background, with little

- formal education. Most of the women were Catholic, monolingual Spanish-speakers.
- 5 Diagnostic data are in accord with Diagnostic and Statistical Manual III-R (American Psychiatric Association 1987) categories according to the Schizophrenia and Affective Disorders Schedule (SADS). Women in the study reported symptoms from a host of Axis I affective and anxiety disorders, including major depression, dysthymia, post-traumatic stress, generalized anxiety, somatization and panic disorders.
 - 6 In a psychosocial study of motivation and achievement among Central American refugees who attend US high schools, Suarez-Orozco (1990) also reports common usage of the term *la situación*.
 - 7 Regular, so-termed "*domestic*" violence and abuse are the bodily experience of many of the Salvadoran women refugees in the study. Indeed, some of them cited escape from abusive husbands and fathers as a principal reason for migrating from El Salvador.
 - 8 See Jenkins (1988) for a discussion of the strategically broad nature and meaning of the category of *nervios*.
 - 9 Special thanks to Jeff Jacobson and Maria-Jesus Vega for research assistance in the transcription, translation, and data organization of the interview material. Both have made contributions to the analyses developed here.
 - 10 A *santero* is a religious leader or priest practicing within the religious tradition of *santèria*. See Harwood (1987) and Gonzales-Wippler (1989) for ethnographic accounts of *santèria*.
 - 11 Kirmayer (personal communication) observes that the cross-cultural commonality of heat experiences has apparently been greatly underestimated. This may be due in part to Euro-American biases in the collection of basic ethnopsychological and ethnopsychiatric data.
 - 12 For a critique of the concept of "belief" in anthropological theory, see B. Good (1994).
 - 13 Adequate consideration of the extensive epistemological difficulties with cross-cultural application of the concept of somatization is beyond the scope of the present chapter; the most thorough treatment to date is to be found in the works of Kleinman (1986, 1988) and Kirmayer (1984).
 - 14 The women who reported personal experiences of domestic violence would typically do so with shame. The cross-cultural commonality of violence by male kin within family settings is alarming (Levinson 1989).
 - 15 Ethnopsychologically, this is likely to be also related to indigenous "hot-cold" theories common throughout Latin America.
 - 16 Although our focus is on women's experience, ethnographic and clinical experience suggests that experiences of *calor* are not confined to women.
 - 17 See Scarry (1985) for a discussion of the relationship between clinical gaze and the experience of pain.
 - 18 This intersubjectively based observation is beyond the scope of this chapter. We briefly note here that, for these women, the interactive qualities of depression differ from those of other women diagnosed as suffering from clinical depression. This observation is based on ethnographer-informant encounters and clinical observations.

REFERENCES

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1986) *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila and Catherine Lutz (1990) Introduction: Emotion, Discourse, and the Politics of Everyday Life. In Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bateson, Gregory (1958) *Naven*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press (second edition).
- Casey, Edward (1987) *Remembering. A Phenomenological Study*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Corradi, Juan, Patricia Fagen, and Manuel Garreton (1992) *Fear at the Edge: State Terror and Resistance in Latin America*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Csordas, Thomas J. (1993) Somatic modes of attention. *Cultural Anthropology* 8: 135-56.
- (1994) *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Desjarlais, Robert (1992) *Body and Emotion: The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Doi, T. (1973) *The Anatomy of Dependency*, J. Bester, trans. New York: Harper and Row.
- Farias, Pablo (1991) Emotional Distress and Its Socio-Political Correlates in Salvadoran Refugees: Analysis of a Clinical Sample. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 15: 167-92.
- Fish, Joe and Cristina Sganga (1988) *El Salvador: Testament of Terror*. New York: Olive Branch Press.
- Fernandez, James W. (1986) *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Friedrich, Paul (1991) *Polytropy*. In *Metaphor: The Theory of Tropes in Anthropology*, James W. Fernandez, ed. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Frijda, Nico (1987) *The Emotions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gaines, Atwood and Paul Farmer (1986) Visible Saints: Social Cynosures and Dysphoria in the Mediterranean Tradition. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 10(4): 295-330.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Good, Byron (1994) *Medicine, Rationality, and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio and Byron Good (1988) Ritual, the State and the Transformation of Emotional Discourse in Iranian Society. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 12: 43-63.
- Good, Mary-Jo DelVecchio, Byron Good, and Michael Fischer (1988) Introduction: Discourse and the Study of Emotion, Illness and Healing. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 12, 1-8.
- Gonzalez-Wippler (1989) *Santeria: The Religion. A Legacy of Faith, Rites, and Magic*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Guarnaccia, Peter and Pablo Farias (1988) The Social Meaning of *Nervios*: A Case Study of a Central American Woman. *Social Science and Medicine* 26: 1231-3.

- Guarnaccia, Peter, Arthur Kleinman, and Byron J. Good (1990) A Critical Review of Epidemiological Studies of Puerto Rican Mental Health. *American Journal of Psychiatry* 147: 1440–56.
- Haraway, Donna (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Harwood, Alan (1987) *Rx: Spiritist as Needed: A Study of a Puerto Rican Community Mental Health Resource*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Ifabumuyi, O. I. (1981) The Dynamics of Central Heat in Depression. *Psychopathologie Africaine* 17: 1–3, 127–33.
- Jenkins, Janis H. (1988) Ethnopsychiatric Interpretations of Schizophrenic Illness: The problem of *nervios* within Mexican-American Families. *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 12(3), 303–31.
- (1991a) The State Constructions of Affect: Political Ethos and Mental Health among Salvadoran Refugees. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 15: 139–65.
- (1991b) Anthropology, Expressed Emotion, and Schizophrenia. *Ethos* 19: 387–431.
- Kirmayer, Laurence (1984) Culture, Affect and Somatization, Parts 1 and 2. *Trans-cultural Psychiatry Research Review* 21(3): 159–88, (4): 237–62.
- (1992) The Body's Insistence on Meaning: Metaphor as Presentation and Representation in Illness Experience. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 6(4): 323–46.
- Kleinman, Arthur (1986) *Social Origins of Distress and Disease. Depression, Neurasthenia, and Pain in Modern China*. Yale University Press.
- (1988) *Rethinking Psychiatry*. New York: Free Press.
- (1992) Pain and Resistance: The Delegitimation and Relegitimation of Local Worlds. In M. J. DelVecchio Good, P. Brodwin, B. Good, and A. Kleinman, eds., *Pain as Human Experience: An Anthropological Perspective*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Kleinman, Arthur and Byron Good, eds. (1985) *Culture and Depression: Studies in the Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Psychiatry of Affect and Disorder*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Levinson, David (1989) *Family Violence in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Levy, Robert (1984) Emotion, Knowing, and Culture. In Richard A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine, eds. *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Low, Setha (1985) Culturally Interpreted Symptoms or Culture-Bound Syndromes: A Cross-Cultural Review of Nerves. *Social Science and Medicine* 221(2): 187–96.
- (1988) The Diagnosis and Treatment of *Nervios* in Costa Rica. In Margaret Lock and Deborah Gordon, eds. *Biomedicine Examined*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Lutz, Catherine (1985) Ethnopsychology Compared to What? Explaining behavior and Consciousness among the Ifaluk. In Geoffrey M. White and John Kirkpatrick, eds., *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- (1988) *Unnatural Emotions: Everyday Sentiments on a Micronesian Atoll and Their Challenge to Western Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- (1990) Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power and the Rhetoric of Emotional Control in American Discourse. In Catherine A. Lutz and Lila Abu-Lughod,

- eds., *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lutz, Catherine and Lila Abu-Lughod, eds., (1990) *Language and the Politics of Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lutz, Catherine and Geoffrey White (1986) The Anthropology of Emotions. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 15: 405–36.
- Markus, Hazel and Shinobu Kitayama (1994) *Emotion and Culture: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*. American Psychological Association Press.
- Martin-Baro, Ignacio (1990) De la guerra sucia a la guerra psicologica. *Revista de Psicología de El Salvador* 35: 109–22.
- Matthews, Holly (1992) The Directive Force of Morality Tales in a Mexican Community. In R. D'Andrade and C. Strauss, eds., *Human Motives and Cultural Models*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Myers, Fred (1986) *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Ochs, Elinor and Bambi Schieffelin (1989) Language Has a Heart. *Text* 9: 7–25.
- Ortner, Sherry B. (1976) Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture? In Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, eds., *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ots, Thomas (1990) The Angry Liver, the Anxious Heart and the Melancholy Spleen. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 14: 21–58.
- Rosaldo, Michelle (1980) *Knowledge and Passion: Ilongot Notions of Self and Social Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- (1984) Towards an Anthropology of Self and Feeling. In R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine, eds., *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosaldo, Michelle and Louise Lamphere, eds., (1974) *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Roseman, Marina (1991) *Healing Sounds from the Malaysian Rainforest: Temiar Music and Medicine*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Scarry, Elaine (1985) *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy (1992) *Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday life in Brazil*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Scheper-Hughes, Nancy and Margaret Lock (1987) The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 1(1): 6–41.
- Schieffelin, Edward (1976) *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Shweder, Richard A. (1990) Cultural Psychology: What Is It? In James Stigler, Richard Shweder, and Gilbert Herdt, eds. *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shweder, Richard A. and Robert A. LeVine, eds. (1984) *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Suarez-Orozco, Marcelo (1990) Speaking of the Unspeakable: Towards a Psycho-social Understanding of Responses to Terror. *Ethos* 18: 353–83.
- Swartz, Leslie (1991) The Politics of Black Patients' Identity: Ward-Rounds on the

'Black Side' of a South African Psychiatric Hospital. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 15(2): 217-44.

White, Geoffrey M. and John Kirkpatrick, eds. (1985) *Person, Self, and Experience: Exploring Pacific Ethnopsychologies*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Wikan, Uni (1990) *Managing Turbulent Hearts: A Balinese Formula for Living*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Embodiment and experience

The existential ground of culture and self

Edited by

Thomas J. Csordas

Case Western Reserve University

 **CAMBRIDGE**
UNIVERSITY PRESS

1994