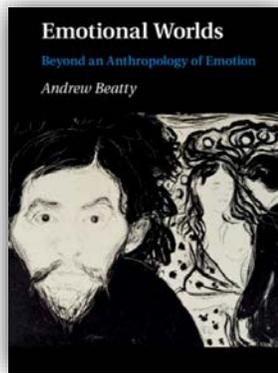


BOOK REVIEW

EMOTIONAL WORLDS: BEYOND AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF EMOTIONS

By Andrew Beatty

Reviewed by **Adriana Myland**



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Andrew Beatty considers the emotional worlds that anthropologists are not only seeking to interpret but embody through experience. Beatty recognizes that if emotions are misunderstood, so is the cultural scene, and most significantly the narrative (3). His fieldwork in Nias and rural Java, Indonesia supports his argument well. He examines the challenges anthropologists have faced in the past seeking to describe emotion to inform understanding (6, 8). This benefits anthropology as he seeks to flee from “anthropology’s cardinal sin,” projecting the way we think *and* feel on others (10). Beatty is not confined to psychological anthropology, rather he employs relevant interdisciplinary thought (11). He proposes an “emotionally engaged anthropology” to enhance ethnography through human encounters that outweigh theory (12, 14-15). Beatty does not present a new theory about emotions, but an epistemological humility that embraces emotional encounters with informants, as he stewards his privilege, and ensures ethnography reaches its full potential.

Beatty strongly believes emotions deserve space in anthropological thought. He desires to enhance ethnography by incorporating emotional experience without sacrificing human complexity (17). Beatty acknowledges the depth of emotion that penetrates

human experience and is often sifted out of ethnography. I believe incorporating emotion enhances the ontological turn in anthropology to grasp ways the human spirit flourishes through encountering the divine, which is often infused with emotion.

Beatty pleads for a narrative approach to understanding emotion that allows informants to divulge their feelings and the ethnographer to capture “emotions in action” (37). However, a problem Beatty does not fully address is the commitment and length of time needed to witness informants’ emotional worlds. Although Beatty’s experience with the Nias demonstrates that Western psychology does not translate across culture, it is possible to enter informants’ experience through narrative (38). This enriches a theology of culture by acknowledging the diversity of emotional experiences that narratives help illustrate. An example of how Beatty’s emotionally engaged anthropology compliments the value of a theological understanding of culture is the introduction of Christianity to the Nias. An entanglement of emotions followed the Nias’ repentance and Beatty recognized their emotions which helped him navigate their spiritual experience, as well as grasp their values and understanding of Christianity (73). This shows humanity cannot be fully understood without concern for emotions, and the latter will effectively transform conversations about faith and cultural diversity.

Next, Beatty explores the Javanese emotions that are analyzed “inward” in contrast to the Nias (75). There is a consistent theme that emphasizes the distinctiveness of humanity and the complexity of emotions, illustrated through the influence of linguistic tradition, meaning drawn from orthodox Islam, and mysticism that shapes the Javanese emotions (77-78). This helps us understand the way the Javanese express their feelings. He states emotions are like “navigational tools” to understand the emotional terrain of Java (84, 90). It is clear a narrative approach allows for emotionally engaged encounters to enhance cultural understanding, one of anthropology’s primary purposes.

Emotions emerge through story and writing precise accounts of a culture's narrative makes for exceptional ethnography. Beatty provides a threefold concept of why narrative matters including: 1) the "construction and shape of an emotion episode," 2) understanding the sequence and linked emotions to grasp the structure, and 3) reporting effective words or images to carry the construction through all its phases (111). This is vital to understand as narrative structure is intrinsic to emotion that naturally unfolds (111). This supports Beatty's approach as he does not theorize about emotions, but ensures ethnography accounts for emotional experiences that are embedded in narratives. Also, it is important ethnographers recognize the emotional baggage they bring to the field without diminishing their experience. Beatty could have included a short reflection on his emotional experience to bring to life the challenges and commitment required to ensure narratives are reported accurately.

Beatty urges ethnographers to provide deeper accounts of narrative context and introduces two perspectives on emotion: personal and biographical. Emotional experiences are *personal* in that they are not social constructions such as norms, and they are *biographical* which attend to one's history (126). This raises concern for ethnographers reporting on emotions because feelings are both personal and subjective experiences. So, what is the purpose of including emotions in ethnography? Beatty recognizes that narratives are anchored in shared cultural experience, not the bubble of an interview, and he reckons the complexity of cultural, social and psychological experiences of community while maintaining particularity (130). But by accounting for emotion he puts human experience and narrative first, followed by cultural analysis, as emotions often remain tacit or embodied (148). This explains how narrative approach to emotion considers the whole person including what remains unspoken.

Narrative context is key to making sense of emotion, however, Beatty provides a few precautions. Emotions cannot simply be labeled but must be understood in the broader scene that carries significance (166-167). This informs ways ethnographers effectively write about emotion while examining the flaws from anthropology's past (170). The work of prominent anthropologists is interesting to examine with Beatty's emotionally engaged ethnography. For example, Beatty claims Geertz's interpretative anthropology was on the right path, but rich reflections on symbols were consuming, leaving out emotional experiences, which Beatty acknowledges is part of ethnography's design (181, 183). This is understandable considering the historical scientific objections to anthropology and its questionable credibility. Therefore, an interdisciplinary

approach to understanding emotion cross-culturally will help cross this bridge.

In critique of Beatty's work I believe he belabours the discussion on affect theory, which does not align with his emotionally engaged ethnography, and the discussion could be condensed. He describes affect theory as relying upon the verb "to affect [or] to have an affect on" (197). Beatty argues this theory does not enhance shared emotional encounters with informants, instead it is "object-oriented ethnography" and distant (221, 224-226). I agree with Beatty and appreciate the fine line he draws between embodied emotional experience versus affect theory despite the lengthy discussion.

Beatty introduces challenges and practical ways to navigate the semantics of emotional experience. Beatty reminds us that "emotions are moving targets, not fixed entities," which emphasizes how lived experience with informants ought to capture the intricate complexities of emotional meaning that are often difficult to name (236). Again, this reinforces the shortcoming of affect theory. Beatty makes a strong point that emotions and emotion words cannot be distinguished, as language interacts with experience, and emotions cannot simply be labeled (250). This emphasizes anthropologists' duty to faithfully report their informants' emotional worlds through embodying shared experience with their informants to help untangle the difficult semantics of emotions.

Beatty also addresses a perplexing question considering ways emotions are experienced cross-culturally that challenges ethnography. He asks, "Are emotions that are not named or otherwise formulated in a given culture nonetheless experienced?" This indicates the limits of cross-cultural understanding and empathy (250). However, it strengthens Beatty's case for an informant-based narrative approach that honours cultures and informants' diverse emotional worlds.

Above all the strongest point in Beatty's narrative approach to emotion is the use of empathy. He states that the dynamic understanding of narrative empathy is described as a tool for engagement and "not a mystical act of communion," but I would say it *is* close to a mystical encounter (262, 276). There seems to be an unexplainable part of empathy that allows ethnographers to truly understand and communicate narratives well. Beatty pleads for "emotionally alive anthropology" that will enable us to get the story straight without theorizing about emotion (268, 271, 281). Further exploration on narrative empathy in ethnographic examples would enhance Beatty's approach and direct areas for future research on emotion in anthropology.

Overall, I highly recommend Beatty's *Emotional Worlds* and believe it will improve the practice of ethnography, while raising further questions about

emotion across cultures, especially in our increasingly globalized world. Also, Beatty's emotionally engaged anthropology parallels a theological anthropology as his fieldwork experience in Nias exposes how relevant emotion is to exploring and understanding spiritual experience. For instance, humanity's response to sin, suffering, dreams and visions, death and life are infused with complex emotions that can no longer be filtered out of anthropology. Ethnographers must account for their informants' emotional worlds who are created as both spiritual and emotional beings.



Adriana Myland is a student in the Masters of Arts in Theological and Cultural Anthropology at Eastern University. Her research interests include Hausa culture in Kano, Nigeria, honour and shame and interfaith relations between Muslims and Christians. She looks forward to beginning her thesis research in Kano and learning from the Hausa community.

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