

that arise from conflicting desires for both affinal and agnatic solidarity. Neither mythical transformations nor divined repairs alter the underlying oppositions, yet each offers temporary respite. Nuckolls argues that "the real work of divination . . . is to build argument structures convincing enough to motivate social change" (p. 230). The change he refers to, however, seems limited to rearranging particular relationships. More systemic changes, such as trends toward independent residence or marriage between nonkin (pp. 222, 230), are not easily accounted for by the arguments possible within the frameworks of divination.

Nuckolls concludes by emphasizing the place of theory in anthropology and arguing for the value of structural explanation in the discipline. His case rests largely on the insight we gain from the framework and evidence already presented and this reader is persuaded. Nuckolls offers us a principled synthesis of emotion and complex knowledge that simultaneously gives content to emotional response and depth to rules and rationalizations. His book is intriguing and promises to inspire interesting and increasingly adequate accounts of agency and cultural systems. ■

*The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart.* Ruth Behar. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1996. 196 pp.

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I would advise readers of *The Vulnerable Observer* not to be repelled by their first impression, for it may seem a pathologically gloomy book. I was glad to read it thoroughly because it contains some unique and lively anthropological material. Ruth Behar is famed for her fieldwork writing, and fieldwork writing is after all at the heart of anthropology. The whole book is an appeal for the personal in fieldwork: the freedom of the anthropologist from (1) having to pretend to the absence of one's own body in one's story (Ruth was crippled for a time as a child, and that fact went on living with her); (2) having to forswear the influence of one's own personality (here self-portrayed as supersensitive and, in particular, afraid of death, yet facing the fact of death: "fieldwork is about nothing more primitive than confronting, with our contemporaries, our own mortality," p. 172); and (3) the new drive in anthropology to "re-scientize" (like "sanitize") the discipline, the threat to "abandon . . . narrativity for the . . . rigors of empirical and statistical research" (p. 164).

Clearly, the book is a continuation of the discussion in the chapter "The Biography in the Shadow" in Behar's book *Translated Woman* (Beacon Press, 1993, pp. 320-342). Behar is fighting hard for the right to

suffer in her fieldwork, the right to speak personally. She puts her finger on the continuing coldness of critical anthropology, which critiques existing practices in the field, the practices of the "Other"; exploits the prestige value of high theory, producing unpeopled accounts about concepts ending in "ism"; or retreats into the safety of the study of the past, to history (p. 25). Behar's voice will not be liked for this, but we have real problems here. Then she comes through with a superb passage of field material, portraying an argument between a couple of Catholic Spanish women, Hilaria and her modernist Catholic daughter Maribel. The old lady cannot see why paying for masses for her own dead relatives is not a virtuous act, but the daughter resists the personal mass idea: such prayers should be for all the dead. Behar comments, what a loss of the personal here; the dead in the new church are "depersonalized, rendered anonymous, stripped of their communal and family identities" (p. 62). This whole chapter, "Death and Memory," is a plea for the personal, the felt. Now Behar backtracks dizzily to the car accident that crippled her temporarily at the age of nine. As is the case with children, she did not seem to suffer psychological trauma at the time of the accident, but rehabilitation was fearfully difficult. The psychological trauma recurred much later in life, giving Behar an experience that opened her up to sympathizing with many other people's times of horror. The writing here is unforgettable; it is the anthropologist as a native of her own body writing with all the stops pulled out. As a supporter of the anthropology of experience, I would truly recommend that fieldworkers lend their own experience to the process of enriching and dynamizing the fieldwork material itself.

Finally, I would draw attention to an account in a style I have never seen before: the interesting "I-was-there" narrative in chapter 6 of how Behar gave a paper at an American Ethnological Society conference at Austin, Texas, speaking in defense of Renato Rosaldo's "Grief and the Headhunter's Rage," about the primacy, even culture-free primacy, of emotion at the level of great bereavement. Rosaldo's article was a kind of watershed document, separating the kind of anthropological analysis that determines that all human activity is under the aegis of "the social construction of reality," from the kind of anthropology that recognizes primary experience as the *source* of culture and as yet *not* under its aegis.

*The Vulnerable Observer* is an imperfect, vulnerable book; it would be poor-spirited to deal with it piecemeal. (But still, the editor ought to have seen to an alphabetized list of references.) Those who read it with sympathy will find unique nourishment, things of surprising value that are needed to feed the new anthropology. ■