



PART II

Language and Communication

Language, in its broadest sense, including speech, gesture, and other non-verbal forms, is critical to our coexistence. How we interpret, translate, and attune to others facilitates meaningful communications, even with people who have mental illnesses, autism, or other conditions that seem to challenge communication.

A revival of psychoanalytic anthropology in the 1960s integrated psychoanalytic, linguistic, and social-historical perspectives on individuals and their communities. This integration, in many ways, lessened the sharp distinction between psychoanalytically trained anthropologists who considered cultural symbols and expressions as paths to the unconscious, and others who considered representations in speech or gesture as objects of inquiry in and of themselves. By contrast, contributors to part two integrate ideas from both perspectives. For them, internal and external experiences, and language process and content, shape, and are shaped by, the tensions between narrative innovation and structure. Whether individual or communal, these tensions, like other notions of agency, depend on the historical, cultural situations of everyday life.

Through ethnographies of communication, the contributors to part two draw upon linguistic, psychological, sociocultural, and historical perspectives, analyzing new, often global, language forms, language pragmatics, and the tensions between language improvisations and structures. They question the extent to which people internalize and use newly available language forms. How do new language forms facilitate self-expression, communication, and agency among marginalized peoples? In what ways might new language forms challenge our ideas about healing and social justice?





CHAPTER 7

Narrative Transformations

James M. Wilce, Jr.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter concerns language use and particularly narrative as affected by globalizing modernity. Narrative is language put to the service of emplotment, weaving events into a coherent storyline. Stories are good to think with. Storytelling is as old as language itself and perhaps its root function, playing a significant role in brain evolution (Bruner 1990; Jerison 1976). Telling one's story constructs a continuous sense of self over time (Ochs and Capps 1996; Ochs 2004). Narratives concern anthropologists because they are social: they involve interaction and reflect culturally particular genres, performance values, etc. To be human is to communicate in a group according to its norms and genres; narrative genres are central to cultural participation. Narrating does not just reveal but *constitutes* the structure, processes, and contents of subjectivity.

Culture shapes the narratives in which the self emerges. Yet culture is process. Cultures have always been in motion, and narrative facilitates their movement. Movement potentiates change. Narratives and ways of narrating are changing in ways both obvious and subtle. Global change in human narrative activity includes the languages in which the stories are told. As hundreds of languages disappear, old stories are now being told in new languages (like English), or not at all. As psychological anthropologists have shown for decades, culture loss has traumatic effects. But our focus here is on subtler transformations. Languages can disappear, but so can ways of producing and receiving story-like chunks of language. Shifts in narrative may include genres, modes of transmission (oral, mass mediated) and thus of participation, key symbols and allegiances, and plot types. Proliferation of mass media entails shifts in dominant modes of popular participation in text production: narration requiring a high degree of audience participation can give way to practices and ideologies of narrative that are much more passive (Debord 1994), as some cases cited below will illustrate. And, as modes of participation shift, so do social processes of self-formation.



The sections below sketch global trends in narration. I start with trends in lamentation, weeping with words and melody. I then reflect on whether these trends reflect “modernity,” before discussing two examples of self-conscious modernization of narrative transmission by Egyptian and Chinese nationalisms. I then describe a modern trend toward “speaking from nowhere” and explore how electronic communication participates in blurring national identities.

I focus throughout on *metaculture* (Urban 2001), *metanarrative*, and reflexive processes. I hope thereby to avoid essentializing processes we call “culture” and “narrative” and to treat culture as movement and reflection as a pervasive part of everyday life, not just scholarly analysis.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN FACE-TO-FACE ORAL GENRES: LAMENT

Something is happening to one narrative form – lament. A song punctuated with sobs and words, lament is a genre of face-to-face performance that once had even wider audibility around the world. Lament tunes and lyrics are improvised to fit the occasion. The ancient practice of improvised lamenting is changing, along with those forms of social life and cultural ideals in which it thrived.

Like storytelling and blues singing, lament is verbal art, oral literature. Lament’s place has varied, as have the particular emotions through which societies encourage their members to construct the stories of their lives. To evoke audience sympathy by narrating one’s life as one of suffering and grief is to constitute oneself as a good Paxtun woman (Grima 1991). But Balinese honor a person who laughs off sorrow with words of strength, or who alludes impassively to the heartbreaks she is transcending, showing her friends a glowing face (Wikan 1990). Grief is universal. And, though the metasentiments (feelings about feelings) surrounding it – fear or shame for Balinese, a kind of pride for Paxtun women – vary markedly, Balinese discomfort with grief displays are the exception (Rosenblatt et al. 1976). To tell one’s life story as tragedy receives widespread support.

BENGAL AND THE IMPACT OF COLONIAL AND ISLAMIST RATIONALISMS

My survey of lament traditions starts with Bengal. This brief account offers no details of the ethnographic fieldwork provided in *Eloquence in Trouble* (Wilce 1998), and the time scale such a survey requires to make its point requires historical sources.

I have recorded isolated examples of lament in rural Bangladesh, along with interviews with a variety of people who say it is, *or should be*, disappearing. I asked several dozen interviewees why contemporary Bangladeshis often regard lamenting as shameful (Wilce 2001). Even a child – a middle-class child in rural Chandpur, Bangladesh – expressed his revulsion at the uneducated rural practice of weeping aloud with words and melody – *bilap*. My interviews indicated that only the highly educated easily recognize that centuries old label. What has happened to this and other types of lament?

Bangladesh was designated “East Bengal” when the British ruled India, as they did from the late eighteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. Bangladesh and West Bengal



(India) share a poetic and musical heritage, of which *bilāṣ* (lament) is a part. No colonial records I have found describe spontaneous funerary *bilāṣ*, but written exemplars of other sorts of lament predate colonization by centuries. They must represent a mass of less well preserved oral genres widespread across South Asia. Written *baṛomaṣyo* (seasonal laments) express longing – *biraho* – for an absent love; oral composition continued in twentieth-century Indian villages (Vaudeville 1986). Yet, even before the British Raj, some tried to “reform” the genre: Sufi poets transformed the sexual longing in earlier (“Hindu”) *baṛamaṣyo* into longing for divine communion (Vaudeville 1986: 38). In this premodern chapter in cultural globalization, Persian and Indic metasentiments produced a hybrid poetics of longing and transcendence.

The nineteenth century intensified globalization and new forms of cultural hybridity emerged. Two immense shifts occurred in Bengal. Islam, whose spread in rural Bengal had been slow, finally flourished beyond the Mughal court in Dhaka; simultaneously, the British were asserting hegemony over South Asia. Thus two new rhetorics – appealing, respectively, to Islamic and European rationalities – impacted Bengali emotion performances. Bengali Muslims returned from the pilgrimage to Mecca with new sensibilities, spawning religious–political movements promoting scripturalist Islam over local traditions. Bengali Muslim-reformist tracts addressed the public performance of emotion, singling out for unique criticism “readings” or performances of a poetic genre suddenly deemed excessively emotional. They condemned the “riotous reading of *marsiyā* poems on the death of the martyrs” (Mannan 1966: 171) – poems reflecting Shia rites described below. Despite their apparently Islamic content – honoring Muslim martyrs – the emotionalism of these folk laments offended modernist sensibilities forged in contact with other Muslims in Mecca.

While reformist Muslim tracts condemned emotionalism, so did their contemporaries among the *bhadralok* – the “gentlemen,” a largely Hindu and more obviously British-influenced elite. By the nineteenth century, *biraho* had come to signify a protest lament rather than a seasonal poem of longing. Some of these *biraho* used stories of Vaisnavite Hindu deities “as a vehicle for voicing women’s grievances in contemporary society.” The scandalized *bhadralok* condemned such subversive performances as the domain of “the . . . ‘lower orders’ whose base instincts, they said, needed to be tickled by such ‘obscene’ songs” (Banerjee 1988: 136, 139). Colonial dramas also poked fun at local performance genres. Such metanarratives spread a kind of shame over local narrative performances of emotion.

SHIA METANARRATIVE SENSIBILITIES: PERFORMING GRIEF FROM IRAN TO LADAKH

Shia Islam draws its meaning and unity from ritual commemoration of tragic events at Karbala in 680 AD: the martyrdom of Imam Husayn, the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad. During the Islamic month of Muharram, Shia communities from Iran to Pakistan and Ladakh reenact this sacred narrative in “passion dramas” (Beeman 1988) called *Tāḷ ziyeh* (hereafter *Tāziyeh*), “mourning.” *Tāziyeh* forms, and theological directives concerning their enactment, circulate widely among Shia communities. *Maṛaṭhī* or *marsiyā* are poems, elegies, or songs telling Karbala’s story. They epitomize *Tāziyeh* as the central inspiration of Shia arts.



Since such public displays of passion simultaneously reproduce and threaten social structure, tension pervades performances of the Karbala drama. Iranian Shias whose *Taziyeh* narratives allusively protested against the Iranian state now find *Taziyeh* and the culture of lament co-opted by the Shia state – a state of tension (Good and Good 1988). It was the “riotous reading of *mars;iya* [= *ma'ra'at'hi*] poems” that nineteenth-century Bengali reformist Muslims condemned. Yet Pakistani Shia women, whose performances of these songs have long been accepted as pious displays, somehow maintain approval even as they push the envelope of modesty in new modes of participation with electronic amplification. One woman said, “I do it for fame!” Groups of women singers compete for control of the mikes (Hegland 1998: 254). And – like Shias around the world – Pakistani Shia women participate in the retelling of Karbala’s story in bodily as well as verbal ways. Hegland calls internationally shared Shia rites like self-flagellation a sort of “religious transnationalism” (1998: 240). But we cannot miss the degree to which these women’s performances entail substantial self-assertion.

Given the tensions surrounding commemorations of Husayn’s martyrdom, it is not surprising that Shia clerics have long tried to regulate them. Shia clerics tell metastories of the impropriety of self-flagellation in *Taziyeh*. Related theological narratives pass judgment on the propriety of other dimensions of *Taziyeh* (e.g., on just when the riderless horse signifying Husayn’s death should appear in a commemorative procession where Shias are a minority). Iranian clerical rulings on details of narrative reenactment now circulate widely and quickly. Distant Shia communities are now more open to Iranian clerical attempts to “curb controversial Muharram [*Taziyeh*] practices” (Pinault 1999: 293). Ibrahim Moussawi, a Shiite academic, says: “I believe this has nothing to do with religious teachings, it’s just a tradition that has been followed around the world. Many clerics have issued *fatwas* saying this is *haram*, that it’s not allowed by religion. If you want to show how dedicated you are to Imam Husayn and you want to sacrifice your blood, then donate it to blood banks,” he added” (Ghattas 2001). A Lebanese Shia medical doctor, Ahmed Kahil, offers, among others, a biomedical warrant for opposing self-flagellation: “We worry about the spread of infectious diseases, like . . . AIDS, as [*Taziyeh*] participants are very close to each other and often use the same blade to cut their heads. Also, we believe that it gives a very backward image of Islam . . .” he added” (Ghattas 2001).

HOW TO NARRATE THE CHANGE IN NARRATIVE?

The telling of some stories – at least stories of grief and grievance (laments) – seems to be changing profoundly. But what is the bigger metastory? Should we say that laments once performed in so many societies might give way to relatively bland mini-stories like “I feel sad”? Greg Urban contrasts rainforest *performances* of emotion to urban *reference* to emotion:

In cultures with a developed ritual wailing or lamentation tradition, as in many central Brazilian Amerindian societies, grief is expressed by means of formalized crying. Your stylized weeping tells others of your grief. Contrast this expressive style with one in which an individual says referentially – as is so often the case in American culture – “I’m feeling sad.” (Urban 1996: 175ff.)



Urban makes no explicit reference here to modernity, but nonetheless contrasts a “rainforest” mode with a “modern” mode of feeling narrating. The shift from performed emotion to cool reference thereto might be just what Weber described in a passage that seems to describe lament’s disappearance from Protestant funerals in Europe:

That great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world [rationalization] . . . which . . . repudiated all magical means to salvation as superstition and sin, came here to its logical conclusion. The genuine Puritan even rejected all signs of religious ceremony at the grave and buried his nearest and dearest *without song or ritual* . . . (Weber 1958: 105; emphasis added)

Can we demonstrate that lament’s disappearance exemplifies modernity’s rationalism? To *narrate feelingly* and to *refer to one’s feelings* are two different language games. But does a grand narrative like *All that is solid melts into air* (Berman’s 1982 version of modernity’s story) really find support in relation to my examples of local shifts in lament? Yes, nineteenth-century colonial metadiscourses probably stifled Bengali genres of narrative emotionality. But close inspection turns a metanarrative of European modernity’s unilateral advance into one of cooperation between Islamist and British-inspired rationalisms. If modernity means globalization – a spatiotemporal collapse bringing people together in circumstances not of their own choosing – we see its hand not only in colonial encounters but also in Islamist reform movements in Bengal and in Lebanese Shia concern to speak about self-flagellation in *taziyyeh* to its international audience of spectators. Metadiscourses co-produced by British colonialists and their counterparts among the *bhadralok* might have spread in large part because they resonated with Islamist critiques.

No grand story can accommodate all local histories of narrative change. Narrative forms like lament have changed profoundly, but they may not be disappearing, let alone perishing at the hand of (post)colonialist regimes. Joel Kuipers (1998) describes Dutch colonial influence on Weyewa genres of expressive performance on the Indonesian island of Sumba. Before Dutch hegemony, Weyewa leaders were proud to cast themselves as “angry men.” The verbal form in which they established their authority was angry oratory delivered in couplets. Under the sway of Dutch governors and missionaries, more and more Weyewa speakers aligned themselves with a different affect – *milla ate* (humility) – whose ideal discursive form was *lawiti* – lament! Metastories like “colonialism unilaterally transforms all narratives” mislead.

What about claims central to psychological anthropology’s interests, claims in relation to histories of feeling narrative that modernity creates new selves, individualized, oriented to psychological interiority? Traditional laments tell stories and must demonstrate affect, but audiences expect that affect to be quite conventional and predictable. Lament appears “traditional” in providing a public space for conventionally shared feelings. And recent objections to lament might reflect modernity’s opposite obsession – with newness. In Bangladesh relatives dismissed one young woman’s long improvisational performances as that “same old crying” (Wilce 1998).

Further evidence indicates that, in some societies, women’s increased focus on private feelings alienates them from conventional forms, including Tongan lament (Cathy Small, pers. comm.). Benedicte Grima describes such a change among Paxtun



women in Northern Pakistan. At least through the early 1980s, these women exchanged lament-like stories of hardship in informal meetings. Such “meetings” were called *gham-khadi* – grief-hardship – for the emotional tone of those stories. If we define modernity as a psychologized and self-reflexively subjective ethos, the local sense of these gatherings and narratives is non-modern: “*Gham* and *xa\di* are two words that do not evoke for Paxtuns an image of internal emotional states” (Grima 1991: 87). Paxtuns take *gham-khadi* stories to constitute a moral, not a psychological, universe. Until recently, these narratives of the “endurance of hardship exemplif[ied] Paxtun womanhood” (1991: 79). But this equation began to shift in the 1980s, as urban women expressed discomfort about narrating their lives in terms of suffering – or, evidently, in any conventional terms at all. This left them telling folklorist Grima that, in contrast with rural tellers of *gham-xa\di*, they “have no stories” (1991: 84). We could see here another tradition crushed by the monolithic juggernaut of modernity, or urban Paxtun women telling new (meta)stories of change to new audiences (folklorists).

The conventional Paxtun embrace of suffering resonates with Shia narrative conventions surrounding *Taziye*. If the “Shia ethos” has lost its grip on mostly Sunni urban Paxtun, is modernity to blame? Paxtun women require a new relation to narrativity when they move to the city; they desire, but have trouble self-consciously “owning,” a more individuated narrative. Their longing and alienation might both indicate their participation in modernity. Is this related to the self-consciousness of Lebanese Shia leaders cited earlier, and is that, too, “modern”? When Professor Ibrahim Moussawi calls self-flagellation a mere “tradition” he adds a link in a long chain of modernist invocations of tradition as its Other. We can safely assume that, by the “religious teachings” in which self-flagellation ostensibly finds no grounds, he meant authenticated texts. Like Martin Luther, reformist Muslims oppose authoritative texts to mere tradition. And when Dr. Ahmed Kahil decries a traditional Shia practice – self-flagellation – because it might spread AIDS, we hear a modern, cosmopolitan, biomedical voice competing with theological rhetorics (both “traditional” and “textualist”). Moreover, we only have access to their words courtesy of reporter Ghattas (2001) and a website that collects “developing world news stories” for global distribution. We sense that this representation of Shia words makes sense only in a context of global media spectatorship. Dr. Kahil is media savvy, image conscious: self-flagellation “gives a very backward image of Islam and we [cosmopolitan consumers of media? Muslims?] have to move away from that.”

Do individuation, globalization, media saturation, and legitimating practices through authoritative texts all reflect one metanarrative of modern transformation? Separately or collectively, these pieces have all been treated as indicators of a modern essence reaching triumphantly across the globe. In relation to lament-like narratives, the problem with forcing the pieces to tell one objectivist metastory becomes clear when we add one more piece: modernity’s theories (narratives) are themselves stories of loss (Santner 1990). It is irresponsible to offer more metastories of loss – or to dwell on how cultural Others once coped with loss (death), but now might lose even those genres (lament’s loss) – without admitting that we who invent these neo-laments are thoroughly invested in modernity. And the particularity of each local case casts doubt on any claim that modernity advances in a single straight line from Europe. Still, modernity *is* a narrative force to be reckoned with, even when resisted or played with. Tradition and modernity may *in fact* always coexist in a



dialectic, yet globally circulating discourses – including Ghattas (2001) circulating Moussawi’s denouncement of mere “tradition” – continually reproduce their duality, accomplishing in many imaginations the division that defines modernity.

TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SUBJECT OF NARRATIVES: THE NATION-STATE AND BEYOND

For many in developing countries, self-identification with modernity emerges with allegiance to a new god, perhaps a Christian god with particular expectations regarding speaking. Religious identities leading converts in Oceania to new disciplines of truth-telling have transnational dimensions. Christian or Shia Muslim identities, for example, require learning and reenacting narratives whose spatiotemporal locus pre-dates and transcends modern nationalism. Contemporary media have a transnational reach, beaming news/stories across large regions or the whole globe and creating new imagined identities. Reading stories on the Internet causes a particularly disorienting loosening of local ties that is a prerequisite to globalization of identity.

Nation-states are far from dead. Postcolonial nations in particular struggle to build an imagination of the nation and modern citizenship. Mass circulation narrative forms have played a key role in the emergence of modern nation-states. Benedict Anderson (1991) argues vernacular novels helped to create a sense of context of fellow readers whose limits were imaginable as those of an ethnolinguistic nation. He describes Filipino novels whose readers imagine a modern city in which people share a unified timeline and a place – one day in Luzon, for example. Readers imagine a nation of people who might inhabit the novel, or be reading it simultaneously. Likewise, newspapers constitute in readers a sense of a broader, literate, middle-class audience of which they are a part. Thus, perhaps because of consumption as much as distribution patterns, print media have emerged hand in hand with nation-states. Nationalist subjectivities thrive on certain narratives. Key forms of narrative have continued to emerge, evolve, and play a role in constituting national self-imaginings.

Among the features of modern nationalist subjectivity is the desire to be seen as one nation like many others (Anderson 1991: 184). (Compare Ahmed Kahil’s desire that Muslims be seen as “just as modern as any other group” – or so we might interpret him.) This desire represents a transformation in identity narratives. Brian Honyouti, a Hopi man speaking in the 1990 PBS video *The Mind: Language*, says “our language is the language of the animals, the earth itself.” The sense of being a people with a *unique* claim on humanness – claims to an ahistoric or divine ascent from lower earth – contrasts sharply with the modernist desire to be seen as one nation among many others that have emerged in history.

The case studies below return to lament-like forms, exploring narrative genres as ideological objects, instruments in struggles to produce a *national* self-consciousness.

MEDIA, LANGUAGE(S), AND NARRATIVE IN EGYPT

Egyptian narrative forms and the subjectivities linked to them are undergoing a major shift. Egyptian middle-class intellectuals writing television melodramas intend to create a modern national consciousness. Old epic poetry now circulates widely in



print. Both of these new forms depart in interesting ways from traditional oral genres. Abu-Lughod (2000) has long documented emotional genres in Egypt. In *ghinna\wa*, “little songs” of sorrow, women “cry” aloud with words; men only “weep” (i.e., silently). Bedouin *ghinna\wa*, like *adida*, laments by non-Bedouins, are emotional in a performative way, not by way of reference. That is, they make “few references to emotional states . . . either ascribed to the lamenter or to . . . the deceased after death” (Wickett 1993: 166). They refer to tears, not inner states.

Ghinna\wa helped shape the public sphere in which signs of sentiment circulate. So did centuries of oral performances of narrative poems like the Arabic Hilali epic, the story of Abu Zayd, traditionally “recited professionally by socially marginal poets with astonishing verbal talents, not to mention prodigious memories” and wit (Abu-Lughod 2000: 97). Newer print versions of the epic are more “complete and sequential . . . but . . . they also lack the elaborate punning” of oral performances. We can describe a similar change in *ghinna\wa*. Bedouin women once performed them in ritualized settings – weddings and other occasions for oral recitation. Now the genre “has moved out of its context . . . into the *commercial cassette*, in the process excluding women reciters and being turned into a *nostalgic* form that marks regional or ethnic identity” (Abu-Lughod 2000: 113; emphasis added; note that nostalgia characterizes modernism). The once dynamic, local, improvisational genre of live narrative performance becomes a signifier not of women’s lives but regional identity.

We know too little about consumers of *ghinna\wa* cassettes to describe the genre’s meaning to them. However, Abu-Lughod’s field studies of television viewing shed light on the sorts of transformation entailed in another shift. Popular oral performances give way not only to print and cassettes, but also to TV – particularly melodramas. To collect evidence of the impact of changes in the mediated form of narrative on the subjectivity of Egyptians, Abu-Lughod watched along with, and interviewed, viewers. Abu-Lughod finds in one viewer, Amira, a particular kind of emotionality and individualism akin to that of the melodramas. Amira makes herself the subject of her own life in quite non-traditional ways, at least in interacting with Abu-Lughod (2000: 102). Her personal stories take on some of the form of the TV melodramas with which she identifies as explicitly as do some viewers of American soaps.

Egyptian melodrama writers have self-consciously nationalist–modernist agendas. Apart from conscious aims, however, their productions enact a broader agenda of subject formation related to the project of modernity. “Instead of [*ghinna\was*] formulaic phrases about tears and their plenitude . . . television drama tries to produce the inner beings who feel these emotions through close-ups of facial expressions and melodramatic acting” (Abu-Lughod 2000: 99). And in place of the Hilali epic performances’ celebration of language itself through elaborate punning, emotion performances mediated by print or television conjure up individuated subjectivities transparent to the medium (especially television cameras) and to language. Narrators’ language becomes less important than the newly constituted subjectivity of the highly individuated persons required by the modern state and constituted in the new media. As in science, news, and conversion narratives (described below), the will-to-truth joins a notion that language is for transparent reference (not play).

Egyptian melodramas, and even print versions of the Hilali epic, foster several sorts of change. The shift in medium – from oral performance to print or broadcast distribution – alters the relationship between narrators and audiences. Capitalist



metaculture – forces that propel bits of culture along (Urban 2001), here print and prerecorded cassette circulation of once-live genres – have refunctionalized epic and *ghinna\wa* narratives. Oral performances of *ghinna\wa* once constituted venues where women reproduced rhetorical skills and identified their sufferings with those of others in a generic (genre potentiated) way. Oral performances of the Hilali epic similarly drew attention to local performers. By contrast, mediatized narratives (cassettes and booklets) now function like artifacts in a museum insofar as cassette-distributed *ghinna\wa* are widely consumed as icons of regional identities.

FROM LAMENT TO “SPEAKING BITTERNESS”: NARRATIVE EVOLUTION UNDER CHINESE SOCIALIST MODERNISM

China’s twentieth-century history is one of profound transformations involving the evolution of social imaginaries. Old ways of narrating appeared backward as new ways took their place. Mueggler (2001) describes the “mortuary laments” and “orphans’ poetry” of the Lòlop’ò, a Tibeto-Burman people who live in Southwest China. The laments they composed were personal and local. Agents of the Cultural Revolution came to see lament as an ineffectual “grievance rhetoric.” They sought to replace it with a rhetoric that was goal oriented and national in its scope (McLaren 2000b). The Cultural Revolution spread the new genre, *suku* (“speaking bitterness” – i.e., denouncing the bitter suffering of old days and celebrating socialist liberation) through all of China. Though Confucian scholars and satirical representations of rural China had tried to rid respectable China of lament (McLaren 2000a, 2000b), the Cultural Revolution had more success. It left a permanent mark on rural performances of grief and grievance, shifting their focus from the personal-as-local to the personal-as-national. “In public ‘speaking bitterness’ sessions, peasants were trained to render their experiences of poverty, powerlessness, and exploitation in the old society into narrative form, working them into the national story of liberation from past injustice” (Mueggler 2001: 59). Neither the motifs (local, personal) nor the genres themselves (“orphans’ poetry” and “lamentation songs”) completely disappeared. Instead, speaking bitterness faded in the 1980s. But it had already transformed Lòlop’ò laments. Since being (forcibly?) hybridized with *suku*, Lòlop’ò laments have followed the required narrative frame of *suku*, juxtaposing personal and national suffering (bitterness) with mentions of Liberation (sweetness).

RADICAL DISRUPTIONS OF NARRATIVE: TRUTH-ING FROM NOWHERE/EVERYWHERE

Late modernity refracts and transforms narrative in two paradoxically related ways. Mediated voices *come from everywhere*: news stories from far away circulated by new technologies. News narratives claim a truth that is transparent and universal. Two cases illustrate how (post)modernity might scatter narratives and shift ways of narrating. Global news media spread stories from/to everywhere, loosening the viewer’s sense of being exclusively rooted in one locality. And Protestantism in Oceania has incited newly missionized speakers to put narrative language to the service of the



truth of the personal self in a way that might reflect Christianity *anywhere*. Contrasting with this proliferation of narrative is the stance of science. Science discourages narratives, except of its own accomplishments (Lyotard 1984), while encouraging talk that seems to *come from nowhere*, or nowhere stable and particular – the voice of objectivity. The truth visions of biomedicine and literary modernism are so inward that they render narratives peripheral or burden narrative with such introspective intensity as to parallel schizophrenic discourse.

GLOBALIZATION AND SHIFTS IN WHAT IT MEANS TO SPEAK FROM SOME PLACE: MEDIATED STORIES

Late modern globalization effects a deterritorialization of discourse. Jacquemet (2003) defines deterritorialization as “the displacement and dispersion of a subjectivity unrestrained by territorial control.” Early modern nationalist subjectivity was “contained within the territorial confines set up by centralized powers,” but now even nationalist subjectivity appears to have been set free from those constraints, while transnational subjectivities even more naturally emerge in deterritorialized communication. Those who communicate online while sitting in Bangladesh, France, or the US sometimes experience themselves and their virtual interlocutors occupying non-territorial space.

This entails a shift in indexicality. Making meaning includes not only denoting and referring, but also *pointing* to context: indexicality. All words have indexical dimensions, but words like “this” or “here” (as in “this side of the Atlantic”) depend radically on shared context for their interpretability. Face-to-face speech often indexes contextual features presupposable as available to participants’ senses. Written discourse creates context through tense (which presupposes the narrator’s time as its temporal center) and deixis (demonstratives, etc.). Whether oral or written, stories require listeners to shift from our time to the narrated time.

Most stories emerge in the give-and-take of conversation. Conversation often features short or long stories that have a key place in self-formation. Now, mass-mediated stories play an ever-increasing role (Thompson 1996). Print media laid the groundwork for our mediated age, for centuries creating audiences with looser senses of participation in the author or message-sender’s context. Now broadcast and e-media float freely across local and even national territories. Cable news networks propagate stories. Such media may transport the viewer to the site of news reports, creating a sense of you-are-there verisimilitude, a pretense of letting the viewer see events unfolding for herself. Yet, relative to oral performances of Egyptian epic poems, cable news obscures the locus and act of spinning the story – creating, in this perspective, truth from nowhere rather than everywhere.

Reading news stories online can loosen indexicality to a head-spinning degree. Jacquemet (2003) describes sitting in his New York office, reading in the online version of an Italian newspaper a story by its New York correspondent about the Socialist Scholars Conference. Jacquemet developed a case of globalization vertigo when he read the author locating the conference *al di qua dell-Atlantico*, “on this side of the Atlantic.” To interpret that indexical expression produced in Jacquemet “a deep sense of estrangement.” The article assumes readers are in Italy, consuming



the paper's print version, imagining their co-readers located in the Italian nation-state. Readers' subjectivities and publishing conventions lag behind deterritorialized realities.

Missionization, conversion, and narratives of truth: Indonesia and Papua New Guinea

The movement of missionaries and their religion around the world has often facilitated discursive modernization. Nowhere is their impact on narrative construction of selves clearer than in contemporary Oceania. Conversion narratives in Sumba (Indonesia) and Papua New Guinea invoke familiar binaries like now–before, modern–traditional, ignorant–cosmopolitan – rifts characterizing modernity's master narrative.

Stories told by Sumbanese Christians and their missionaries describe an increase in features some say constitute a universal modernity – individualization, interiorization, and eventual secularization (Keane 1997: 685). We recognize the modern will-to-truth in recent Sumbanese Christian expectations of each other's words. The universalist claims of the “project of modernity” might persuade us if we were not regularly reminded that modernity's partner is always local non-modern phenomena (Mitchell 2000). And indeed Sumbanese stories of “the progress of salvation” invoke a variety of divine and evil spirits foreign to other modern narratives (Keane 1997).

Kaluli Christians in Papua New Guinea associate traditional knowledge and discourse genres with the “time of ignorance.” New genres like Christian literacy lessons are transforming Kaluli notions of truth and talk, constituting the rift between traditional and modern ways. The change is not only in the content of the narratives but also in their participant structure. Storytelling and all discourse forms were once profoundly dialogical, involving an obvious amount of give-and-take with audiences. The new genres – sermons, stories told by literacy instructors, etc. – are relatively monological. Literacy teachers tell stories their students repeat in unison (displacing older polyphonic forms of reception), explicitly calling for local acceptance (Schieffelin 2000) of truths claiming universality.

Everyday narratives of other missionized Kaluli reflect a sea change in narrative temporality. Cassette “letters” that young men send, by missionary airplane, to families from an isolated Bible school indicate regimentation of narratable life around clock time. The very language in which stories are told is shifting. The language of cassette “letters” is mostly Kaluli; however, most of the temporal expressions are borrowed from the postcolonial vernacular, Tok Pisin. Old verbal means are inadequate to convey the new sense of time.

Truth-telling takes on new significance as talk is transformed in Oceania. Until recently, the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea considered language inadequate to represent human subjectivity. People might tell stories about the self, but listeners did not take references to inner states as transparently true. Since conversion, Urapmin feel the burden to speak truthfully and sincerely “at all times.” Urapmin – like so many peoples of the island Pacific – traditionally attribute to listeners the responsibility for assigning the meaning of talk. “From the point of view of modern linguistic and social ideology, including its Protestant form, this decentered model of speech and action encourages an irresponsible disregard for the power one's own intentions have to create meaning and shape social life” (Robbins 2002: 906). Given Urapmin tendencies



to distrust the ability of words to accurately narrate subjectivity, Christianity's call to speak truth presents problems. For while they recognize that, as modern Christian subjects, they should always accurately and openly represent themselves in speech, their traditional linguistic ideology does not constitute them or their language as capable (Robbins 2002). Hybridity resolves this tension. Because Urapmin understand themselves in Christian prayer, including stories told therein, to be addressing a totally new kind of divine hearer, the hearer elicits/enables truth-telling.

NO TIME OR SPACE FOR STORIES: BIOMEDICINE EXPORTED

The “view-from-nowhere” objectivity of biomedicine as a Foucauldian discipline and science's discouragement of narrativity compete with patients' needs to tell highly personal stories. “Traditional healing” can take more time insofar as it embraces narrative and ritual speech. After 1950 or so, at least in America, doctors' orientation shifted from *listening* to patients' stories to *looking* at the results of expensive tests (Reiser 1987). In biomedicine, high-tech tests are read (visually). While not altogether displacing discursive therapeutic practices (from psychotherapy to alternative or complementary treatments), vision dominates institutions from medical schools and teaching hospitals (Good 1994) to the structures of HMO coverages and payments. In the US, psychiatrists rely increasingly on medications. They seldom meet patients for years of talk therapy as they once did. Thus, even that psychiatric realm of medicine where narrative played the most central role now allocates less time to talk. Sufferers now talk with family and friends, in local space or cyberspace. Indeed, sufferers and their families can trade stories of their struggles in electronic or face-to-face support groups where those touched by illnesses and behavioral disorders generate shared narratives and meanings. At least in the US, what Foucault (1990) calls an “incitement to discourse” produces a culture of therapy that encourages narrating events and emotions (Wilce 1999). We see it in large domains of culture – perhaps spreading beyond the West – even as prolonged narrative engagement less often typifies the psychiatrist's office. The hegemony of technology is partial, displacing but not effacing narrative.

In Bangladesh, the shift in medical care of the mentally ill involves similar forces but different contextual factors. Nothing like a culture of therapy exists for the vast majority of Bangladeshis. They have stories to tell but are painfully aware that information escaping the privacy of homes can damage one's position in social networks, which are much more economically and socially determinative than for most Americans. Some deride visiting psychologists – even having psychological pain – as a luxury (Wilce 2000).

Bangladesh has few psychiatrists, though madness is neither rare nor traditionally regarded as radically beyond the pale of various healing practices. Eliciting long stories is integral to “traditional” Bangladeshi healing – though the storytellers can be family members as well as patients (Wilce 1998) – but only marginal to the efficiencies psychiatrists cultivate. Psychiatrists with private clinics may see many dozens of families in an evening – virtually no patients come without relatives – for about three minutes each, providing a diagnosis and prescribing medications for each. The longer stories families have to tell are profoundly disturbing. Whether or not they



have direct clinical relevance, their stories are extremely complex, and the gap between brief clinic talk and long stories I heard in patients' homes is striking. Families spin narrative worlds foreign to scientific sensibilities: stories of sorcery causing madness and of lawsuits against alleged sorcerers; stories of succubi causing nightly semen loss upsetting the balance of the victim's whole being; or claims that one woman's acts of grieving (and love charms planted in her courtyard by her ex-husband) caused her "madness" – family claims countered by her own insistence that such claims justified the family's "torturing" her (Wilce 1998). When families do choose to take deviant members to psychiatrists, stories stay at home. After seeing a psychiatrist, in at least a few cases, the patients' stories even come to reflect something of the psychiatrist's rationalized, disenchanting world.

LITERARY MODERNISM, MADNESS, AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Another modern nook – literature – offers narrative a friendlier if perhaps a transforming home. Literary modernism pushed the envelope of subjectivity. Faulkner and Joyce presented very new sorts of narrative. At least this form of modernism cultivates a very particular subjectivity:

Modernism is associated with attempts to render human subjectivity in ways more real than [nineteenth-century literary] realism: to represent consciousness, perception, emotion, meaning and the individual's relation to society through interior monologue, stream of consciousness, . . . defamiliarization, rhythm, irresolution." (Childs 2000: 3)

Premodern narratives sometimes represented inner states, but modernist novelists made this their chief end. Indeed, modernism peripheralized the event chronologies that dominated realist narrative. Its organizing principle was not time but inward-facing tropes of space (Sass 1992: 33). This inward move reflects modern thought more broadly. Freud and Jung interpreted characters and events of classical mythology as operating intrapsychically, interpreting narratives of events in the world as tropes for subjective occurrences.

This hermeneutical strategy reappears in Lévi-Strauss's (1963) argument that the myth of Muu's journey, which Kuna shamans recite over a woman in difficult childbirth, is "being enacted in [her] internal body." That is the myth's point. "The modern version of shamanistic technique called psychoanalysis thus derives its specific characteristics from the fact that in industrial civilization there is no longer any room for mythical time, except within man himself" (1963: 204). Lévi-Strauss might have had it all wrong. Notions of modernity are themselves mythic in projecting a past that never was – a distant past in which races or ethnic groups existed as unchanging essences, or one in which nation-states existed at all, though they are a recent invention. "Narratives of the modern age – the mythologies, tonalities, and rhythms of nation, race, and ethnicity – are . . . tales of forgetfulness, memories of a time that never was" (Erlmann 1999: 6). Yet such modern grand narratives serve as charters of a new order – myth's chief function.

The inward turn of modernist novelists and thinkers reflects the twentieth century's sense of the inadequacy of linguistic surfaces and conventions, of older shared



meanings. If only a new idiom could be invented (and reinvented in each new work of fiction), perhaps the individual author could find a voice, and find herself. Yet, for many folk and academic analysts (such as Childs), “modernity has not fostered individual autonomy or profitable self-knowledge . . . meaning . . . [or] spiritual life” (2000: 17). Why should the narrator’s quest to uncover true selves meet with such frustration? The quest to transcend all narrative conventions and even the need to make/share sense cuts such seekers off from others (Sass 1992). Modernist narrative struggles so much to immerse readers in streams of consciousness that characters become lost as centered subjects. Sass calls this the “paradox of the reflexive” and notes that modernism finds remarkable parallels here with schizophrenia. In both, “acute self-consciousness actually contributes to an effacing of the self, while simultaneously obscuring its own role in this effacement” (1992: 220). The person with schizophrenia loses what Blankenburg calls a capacity for “‘temporation,’ which is defined as a basic sense of retro-continuity that sustains the possibility of projecting oneself into the future” (Corin and Lauzon 1994: 7; citing Blankenburg 1991). The narrative capacity depends on temporation. Yet, in modernism as well, tropes of space fragment narrative temporality.

The modernist sense of loss of self appears in postcolonial literatures around the world. Anthropologist Stefania Pandolfo describes two modernist discourses in Morocco – the local psychoanalytic voice and the Arab-modernist-literary voice – that resonate with Freud’s model of melancholia. For Pandolfo, Arab modernism entails perpetual loss without the ability to mourn; thus the subject of such discourse, like Freud’s melancholic, “become[s] that loss” (Pandolfo 2000: 125). Postcolonial narratives brim with loss, offering no possibility of return to the past and no obvious path toward a less conflicted future.

TRANSNATIONALISM

The borders of nation-states are increasingly porous. Globalization threatens to erase them. CNN and al-Jazeera, the Arabic network sometimes called the “CNN of the Middle East,” help shape identities globally. In telling stories (“news”) from a perspective attractive to different sorts of audiences distributed over large regions of the planet, they foster transnational identity in ways unimaginable before the electronic age. Regional and especially global media transform identities by distributing myths and postmodern stories that reflect transnational connections.

Postmodern stories include episodes of television shows like *South Park*. Rupert Murdoch’s Hong Kong-based Star TV now broadcasts a Mandarin version of *South Park* into Taiwan, where it has an enthusiastic and growing following of teens. Hollywood licenses these broadcasts, but each Taiwanese episode has a new, locally relevant script. The humor often entails off-color allusions to events current in Taiwan. Sometimes more than half the dialogue is rewritten. The title becomes “‘Nanfang Sijianke’ or [South Park’s] Four Slackers,’ which in Mandarin also sounds like ‘The Four Musketeers.’” “The Jewish mother in the original who gets upset over a Christmas parade at her son’s school becomes an outraged Buddhist in the Taiwanese version, who suggests that her son, Kyle, recite Buddhist scriptures in the campus pageant” (Chu 2000). Jacquemet (2003) brought this example of global narrative circulation to my attention.



In each broadcast, some “thing” is circulating while much is made *new*. Indeed, this typifies what Urban (2001) calls the metaculture of modernity. Though new cultural productions follow past models, newness is modernity’s obsession. Globalizing modernity means the rapid spread, not of unchanged Western narratives but the metacultural fusing of hybrid stories. Still, the metastory of *South Park*’s circulation represents some hierarchy, the exporting of subtle “sensibilities”:

In true Hollywood fashion, [*Nanfang Sijianke* producer Michael D. K.] Mak and [Michelle] Chen [*Nanfang Sijianke*’s head-writer] are . . . working on another animated show for Taiwan called “Mother Nature” – which, they promise, will have a “South Park” *sensibility*. (Chu 2000; emphasis added)

It is just such subtleties – the typically asymmetrical flows of metanarrative sensibilities, transforming old modes of cultural (narrative) reproduction – that this chapter emphasizes.

CONCLUSION

Narrative presents thought. But since narrative is public, it helps constitute shared thought and thus culture itself. Twenty-first century narrative circulation transforms participants and the very nature of participation and identity. Even local conversational narratives, including stories told by New Guinean Protestants about themselves and their self-transforming project, partake of globalizing modernity. As older narrative forms like the novel helped create national identities, newer forms help constitute transnational identities – in Islamist or Christian religious transnationalism or in youth-oriented media-fostered global savvy (*Nanfang Sijianke*). As the distribution of narrative rights and responsibilities shifts, some contexts (Western hospital encounters, at least in a busy doctor’s dreams) might become narrative-free zones at least in terms of the salience of narrative’s role in doctor–patient interactions now vis-à-vis earlier generations. Other zones for narrative, such as support groups, arise to take their place. But, at least in the case of rural Bangladeshi lament, there appears to be a rift between a future in which a woman-friendly civil society appears and the past when spontaneous lament once formed a commonly available venue for women to participate in local public discourse. Such narratives of loss are at modernity’s core and are far from objective. Still, if narrative increasingly becomes spectacle, especially through mass media, this represents a profound transformation in the ways that social thought circulates and social and cognitive worlds are transformed.

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