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Traditional Laments and Postmodern Regrets: The Circulation of Discourse in Metacultural Context

This article locates laments in interdiscursive chains and explores them in relation to four dimensions of interdiscursivity: (1) their inclusion of reported speech, (2) their anticipation and evocation of particular responses, (3) the generic constitution of each lament (its relation to others in the same genre), and (4) the global or local metacultural orientation of laments and related discourses. I argue that links between traditional laments and (post)modern mourning not only are ideological constructions but also are quite substantive. The article raises questions about nonlinguistic, gestural, and melodic modes of textuality and about the tendency of lament to be retrospective and to be labeled "backward." The fact that some voices label lament "backward" or "primitive" at the same time that others generate new laments on "the death of culture" illustrates the fundamental instability of (post)modern metadiscursive regimes. [lament, metaculture, postmodernism, circulation]

Prelude

This article locates performances of lament—spontaneous tuneful texted weeping¹—and talk *about* lament(s) in interdiscursive chains. It describes those chains as "metaculture"—reflexive bits of culture (such as judgments as to whether or not "this represents 'our culture'") that affect the movement of other bits across time and space (Urban 2001). Just as "linguistic practice is . . . always metadiscursive at some level" (Jaffe 1999:14), so with metaculture: The analytic category designates a (reflexive) dimension of culture rather than setting some phenomena apart from "culture."

Laments take on particular importance in (post)modernity.² Rather than asking "Why do the far-off so-and-so's cry as they do?" I ask (following Harbsmeier 1987) about our own curiosity—and about links we ourselves forge in long chains that only *begin* with traditional lament on the Other's end. Why do some of us write about ritual weeping and its disappearance (e.g., Wilce 1998:vi; Bourke 1993:161–162; Schieffelin 2002:S9)?

Such writings help constitute the "rhetoric of mourning" that pervades (post)modern theoretical discourses (Santner 1990:7). There is something lament-like in foundational works of modern and postmodern theory, from Marx (who, describing the impact of capitalism, wrote, "All that is solid melts into air") to Weber

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(capitalist rationality as “iron cage”) to Lyotard, who writes of “lamenting the ‘loss of meaning’ in postmodernity” (1984:26). Postmodern *ethnography* is the ethnography of mourning, if we take as our example Marilyn Ivy’s work on how Japanese modernity hinges on loss, the “phantasmic,” “nostalgia,” “recalcitrant spectacles of the elegiac,” “absenting,” and “image[s] of the unrecoverability of tradition” (1995:4, 10, 12, 20, 148–149). In light of the importance of such a rhetoric of mourning to (post)modernity, I find special significance in ethnographers’ words about traditional laments, for example Seremetakis’ description of “the modernization of death [on Mani, in which] . . . urbanized kin attempt to silence discursive polyphony and singing [laments]” (1991:221).³ Although we cannot equate unsung dry-eyed (post)modern academic mourning with traditional lament, this article will demonstrate their connections.

This article draws on several periods of fieldwork in Bangladesh—including nine months of participant observation and later stints involving scores of interviews focused on lament and attitudes toward it—and on more recent work in Finland. In the following section I acknowledge the semiotic complexity of lament and the nonlinguistic dimensions of lament’s textuality. Then I advance my main argument concerning the four dimensions of lament’s interdiscursivity; in the process I analyze representations of lament as a “backward” practice. Finally, I analyze recent (meta)cultural products—films and scholarly and journalistic discourses—substantively linked with traditional lament. Such recent attentions highlight the ambivalence surrounding representations of “traditions” like lament in (post)modernity (Bauman and Briggs 2003). I describe (post)modernity as a regime of representation focusing on and exploiting the very forms of interdiscursivity I describe in relation to lament.

Lament’s Multimodal Textuality

Semiosis is multimodal⁴ (Goodwin 2003), and lament is more than discourse; local models typically include required nonlinguistic features—melody, tears, and a “crying voice.” And certain stereotypical uses of the body are also widespread among lament traditions. Such features exemplify not only the “coherent action packages” displayed in a moment of interaction (Goodwin 2003:29) but also the “coherent bodies of signs” said to define textuality (Hanks 1989), the regularities that render texts quotable and portable (Bauman and Briggs 1990).

It is useful to locate song, singsong, and conversational intonational contours along a single continuum of *tonal textuality*; repeatable lament melodies represent regularizations of the less constrained intonation patterns of unmarked conversational complaint (Wilce 1998). Melodic structure is to song as linguistic cohesion is to discursive textuality. It is possible to identify a particular performance as “a lament” by its adherence to certain melodic conventions (Feld 1990). Just as entextualization renders discourse quotable (Bauman and Briggs 1990), laments remain singable across contexts by virtue of their memorable and repeatable melodic structures.⁵

Rocking or swaying—apparent in laments I videotaped in Bangladesh and Finland—may be universal to lament, even if it does not figure in the definition. Other, more emblematic gestures play a more salient role in laments’ textuality. The entextualization analogy is particularly tempting in relation to the kinesic continuities Wickett (1993) traces in Egyptian tomb paintings and modern laments. To “quote” an Egyptian lament or perform a new example, one must quote the visible embodied tradition as well as the metaphors that have characterized lament texts since the Pharaohs (Example 3, below).

As useful as this recognition of multimodal textuality is, the relations among laments, and between traditional laments and (post)modern reflections, are clearest if we focus on lament as discourse. The following section defines four interlocking dimensions of lament’s interdiscursivity.

Interdiscursivity Surrounding Lament

By interdiscursivity I mean the Bakhtinian relations—double-voicing, stylizing, polyphony, heteroglossia—that Kristeva (1980) labeled “intertextuality.”⁶ The first and simplest level of laments’ interdiscursivity is their *inclusion of reported speech* (Briggs 1992a, 1992b). This could be speech outside of but relevant to a particular lament performance, or it could involve quoting an older lament.

The second dimension is the inverse: Laments may quote other discourse but are also likely to be quoted. This dimension, stated more generally, is lament’s *anticipation and evocation of particular discursive responses*. Through strategies of entextualization, performers make later quotation of their lament a particularly likely response. Some laments keep people gossiping for a long time. Briggs (1992a) describes how Warao shamans gossip about women’s laments that accuse them of causing a death and how this gossip register attempts to delegitimize the laments, women, and non-shamans in general.

Then, listeners often classify performances. Each lament’s *generic constitution*, its interdiscursive relation to others in a local tradition, represents a third dimension. The way a lament fashions itself for reception as a token of a particular discourse genre (Bauman 2000) reveals its essential interdiscursivity. In its generic constitution as “a lament” (or a Bengali *bilāp* or Finnish *itkuvirsi*), each performance indexes others. Metadiscursive labels and performances construed as instantiating them stand in a dialogical relationship. Chains of performance and reception subject discourse to metapragmatic regimentation.⁷ Listeners were already classifying the longest Bangladeshi lament I recorded *during the performance itself*, an excerpt of which is presented below—and in doing so, helped end it and control its later representation.

But the metacultural context in which a lament is received is not necessarily confined to local generic traditions. The *orientation of performances or responses to local or global metacultural networks* is the fourth dimension of lament’s interdiscursivity.⁸ Modern Egyptian women’s laments reproduce gestural as well as discursive features of Pharaonic laments (Wickett 1993), and the criteria for judging performances reflect and reproduce a local metaculture of lament. By contrast, a global metacultural orientation is salient when missionized Kaluli people say that lamenting is incompatible with a seemingly Christian deportment, and in so saying echo the sermons and fundraising letters of Australian missionaries. Metacultural sensibilities increasingly reflect people’s awareness of global media looking over their shoulder. Media savvy may thus induce a layering of sensibilities in which the global does not eliminate but complicates the local. Some Lebanese Shia Muslims, whose memorializations of the seventh-century murder of Imam Husayn have always included laments and self-flagellation, told a journalist that news cameras should not show this “backward” custom to global viewers (Ghattas 2001). They say that self-flagellation represents not the teachings of (textualist) Islam but rather a mere “tradition” that happens to be common in many Shia populations. Shia reformists seek a decontextualizing cure—textualism—for a translocal Shia disease. Representations of lament thus participate in global metacultural flows. Orientalists conspire with fundamentalists to circulate a particular regime of interdiscursivity, reifying Islam by confining it to foundational texts with global circulation. Thus, Christian missionization and Islamist reform often bring about a similar shift, a metacultural orientation favoring the global.

The following examples provide further illustrations of lament’s fourfold interdiscursivity.

Lament’s Interdiscursivity Illustrated

Example 1: Latifa’s Lament in Bangladesh, 1992

During my fieldwork in Bangladesh, I recorded several spontaneous laments (*bilāp* [lamentation] or *āhājārī* [wailing]) including those of Latifa, a twenty-something rural

Bangladeshi woman upset about her treatment by her brothers. During her two-week visit to the home in which I lived—her uncles' home—she lamented almost continually. After she left I inquired into laments and why Latifa's had been violently stopped. Dozens of Bangladeshis have since told me that lamentation is now rare; most indicated "good riddance."

The longest recording I made of Latifa illustrates lament's four interdiscursive dimensions, starting with the inclusion of represented speech, which I have bolded:⁹

3L	āmi ni "kāro bārit jāwnā mānuṣ," mānuṣ,"	[They said] I was "one to go to others' homes,"
4L	āsīlām bun, bun go o o bun.	sister, sister o o sister
5L	kono māṅṅ-e te āmare kono din	Yet no person ever
6L	de[k]h-e nāy, bun go o o bun.	saw me, sister o o sister.
7L	māṅṅ-e dekhle nā āmare, kae	If people [do] see me [now], they ask
8L	āmnner ki o go [h]ai(ye)ché,	"What on earth happened to you?"
9L	bun go bun.	sister o sister.
10L	āmār śa[r]il dekhle man[u]ṣe	If they see my body,
11L	[s]hīrbā diyā •hh uḍ-e •hh	people shiver,
12L	bun o o o go •hh	sister o sister.
13L	hārā-e ka-e bārā-e kae •hh	(Family and outsiders) say,
14L	bun go a bun •hh	sister o sister,
15L	i-school-er-o sir-erā kae •hh	The sirs [teachers] at the school say,
16L	bun go o o bun •hh	sister o sister,
17L	he māyāre kemte heman k(h)uno	"How they have murdered that girl!"
18L	go karlo •hh bun go bun o o. •hh	sister o o.

By recontextualizing other speech, laments position themselves as links in interdiscursive chains. Latifa's lament was recognizable as such (to scholars if not kin) by multiple semiotic features, including the crying voice, visible signs of weeping, and rocking. But it was the discursive dimension that allowed her to represent speech fragments, selected for maximal advantage in her struggle to persuade her aunt, cousins, et cetera that her brothers had "murdered" her. Latifa claimed that it was her *schoolteachers*—and not she alone—who condemned her brothers' treatment of her (lines 15-17). Their voices gave hers a kind of leverage.

In this performance the second and third dimensions of interdiscursivity became entangled, politicizing the question of genre. Typifications of speech, especially vis-à-vis some genre, are among the tools used in competing representations of persons and classes of persons (Briggs and Bauman 1992; Bauman and Briggs 2003; Wilce 1998). Standing near Latifa as she sang were cousins, aunts, and uncles—responding to what she was doing and assessing its generic orientation. They did not call Latifa's performance a *bilāp* (the genre label for laments used by Bengali scholars who sometimes romanticize the old tradition [Wilce 1998]) but rather *ai purān kāndā* (that same old crying). This recontextualized the performance, adding links to a chain her relatives evidently conceived as a merely personal history—Latifa's complaint log. Such negative recontextualization is precisely what performers try to prevent by entextualizing their discourse (Bauman and Briggs 1990:77).

In relation to the fourth dimension, the metadiscursive weapons Bangladeshi Islamists use against laments like Latifa's are at least somewhat global. The fifty or so Muslims I interviewed about lament invoked a translocal, textualist Islam that opposes "local tradition." Participants in a December 2000 focus group interview on the theme of cultural change in northern Mymensingh District told me that lament is waning because mass education was inducing an appropriate degree of *lajjā* (shame), an important social value in rural Bangladesh. Loud weeping was locally popular, but "*Islam* does not like this." Thus, as a globalizing scripturalist Islam spreads in Bangladesh, "lament will disappear."

Example 2: Li Hwa's Lament in China, 2002

The next example illustrates three forms of interdiscursivity. It comes from a radio broadcast, when a lament slipped into an NPR segment from China.¹⁰ NPR's East Asia correspondent, Rob Gifford, was presenting a story on rising joblessness in China and interviewing a middle-aged unemployed man whom he called "Li Hwa." Li was venting his frustration in an intonationally unmarked speech register, when suddenly he broke into performance with a tuneful lament. This "ancient" (or antiqued)¹¹ lament became (defeasibly) his, to the extent that reported speech can. Performing a text that one represents as ancient links past and present and constructs the entextualized form as timeless. Over Li's song, Gifford said:

Suddenly Li Hwa starts to sing, his proud forehead straining with emotion and his eyes welling up with tears. [Li's singing-crying briefly rises over Gifford's voice.] It's a lament from the Sung Dynasty, 1200 years ago. [Gifford 2002]

Li knew his complaint would provoke responses. Gifford's decision to include it in his broadcast was one of them. However, Li's anticipation of a response from the Chinese government—expecting trouble if his complaint were identified as his—made the generic constitution of the lament particularly attractive to him. Like other texts in this local genre at least through the 17th century C.E. (Chen 1998), it thematized injustice and thus provided Li with a textual post on which to tie his grievance. Yet, spinning this performance as a reproduction of an "antique" allowed Li to offer a critique of contemporary injustice with impunity. Such ventriloquism—source ambiguity or "voice-centered indirection" (Brenneis 1988)—is an automatic entailment of the first form of interdiscursivity, providing defeasibility and thus safety to vulnerable speakers. The reanimation of an ancient lament thus served the same self-protective function as quoting teachers did for Latifa.

Gifford, no doubt relying on Li's off-air interpretive comments, located his performance within a Chinese tradition. But the radio broadcast embedded the local genre in a global metacultural context, making the lament fit for consumption by the sort of listeners who might also visit a traveling museum exhibition of Sung Dynasty art.

To link speech acts across a span of time—as Li, Gifford, and I have done—is to forge an interdiscursive chain. Actor-analysts who do so manipulate intertextual gaps—minimizing (as when Li and Gifford asserted that Li was performing a Sung Dynasty lament) or maximizing the gap in order to self-consciously create an innovative hybrid (as in the fourth [Bosavi] example described later).

Interdiscursive Chains and Their Metacultural Orientation**Example 3: Egyptian Women's Laments**

Beyond China, the literature on lament reveals—or creates—other extremely long chains involving ancient and recent performances of lament. Elizabeth Wickett's magisterial dissertation (1993) analyzes dozens of contemporary Egyptian women's laments. Most include reported speech, such as the first in her appendix, from Karnak (East Bank, Luxor, by the singer Āfkār, "For a Young Woman." It includes the poignant lines asking, "Where is the beloved to say, 'Do come in'?" (1993:424). A later example, "For the Young Man," consists almost exclusively of a reported dialogue (1993:542–543).

Wickett traces 4,700 years of continuity in Egyptian lament performance—both in the metaphors they use and in their particular deployments of singers' bodies. Contemporary Egyptian women reproduce gestures visible in ancient tomb paintings—such as upraised arms bent at the elbow, or a hand cupped to the mouth. The latter is a stereotypic gesture accompanying ululation, by which a lament leader might have given rhythm to the singing of a larger group (1993:94–96). This conti-

nunity can be described as a kind of quotation in which the text is kinesic as well as discursive. Such “traditional” features fashion recent laments as exemplars of an ancient-contemporary Egyptian genre. But in addition to this local focus, recent responses to Egyptian women’s laments situate them in relation to more regional or global metacultural trends (second and fourth dimensions): A rising tide of Islamist criticism of this local (Egyptian) tradition induces a metacultural reorientation, proposing scriptural condemnations of lament as the salient evaluative criteria (Wickett 1993:335).

Example 4: Bosavi Laments and Gita Gisalo

It is not only scriptures that circulate widely. Music also circulates globally, often spawning hybrids; “rain forest country music” in Papua New Guinea is a compelling example. The intersemiotic chain that Steve Feld (in press) describes is one that includes old laments and very recent hybrid songs partly inspired by global country music. The Bosavi bands that Feld has been recording of late call their music *gita gisalo* (guitar songs—distinct from the traditional *gisalo* that Feld [1990] has famously analyzed).

One song Feld describes—“My father, my heart”—quotes traditional Bosavi laments, though the Christianized Bosavi people discarded them decades ago. This quotation is achieved through the song’s repetition of the “sound syllable *ya:-*” that “represents the sound of the crying voice; it is the onomatopoeic root of the Bosavi verb for ‘cry.’” This syllable, plus the “vocal break of the crying voice . . . makes Bosavi listeners think of the sound of the sung weeping of funerary laments for the recently deceased” (Feld 2001:32). The song’s cowriter, Oska, is quite conscious of the way *ya:-* links past and present. Oska says of the song, “I’m coming back to that one, the way it was, in his [my father’s] time.” He and Feld have thus cocreated an account of interdiscursivity in which *sa-ya:lab* lament becomes something new. Quoted in *gita gisalo*, a bit of lament lives on in the metacultural response (second dimension). The defunct lament tradition, eliminated by missionary pressure (Feld 1995:100), becomes central to marking a discourse defined, paradoxically, by loss and creativity. *Sa-ya:lab* laments memorialized one death; Oska’s song creatively memorializes those very laments and the cultural past they epitomize.

In a 1961 brochure to recruit others to join the effort to proselytize the Bosavis, pioneering missionary Dick Donaldson of the Unevangelized Fields Mission wrote that Bosavi people were “behind the mountains” and “a thousand years behind the times” (Schieffelin 2002:55). Later missionaries were particularly scandalized at Bosavi laments. Was this because they saw them as a sign of their backwardness?

If so, how would such a view relate to the focus of many laments, which can be characterized as retrospective?¹² Modernist critics (as described by Danforth and Tsiaras [1982:72], Magee [1999], and Ghattas [2001]) might satisfy themselves with this characterization—despite the equally salient tendency of laments around the world to ground their authority in spontaneity and to anticipate a future without the departed. Modernity requires its Other. It constitutes itself by representing Others as backward or primitive. Laments are vulnerable to characterization as backward because their performance presupposes a backward-stretching chain (“tradition,” genre) and because their texts often refer to the past. But the unique power of “backwardness” as a signifier is due to its place in the self-construction of globalizing modernity. Any co-optation of lament to represent backwardness is more a reflection of modernity’s need for an Other than of any essential discourse feature of lament.

Two reorientations of Bosavi lament have taken place since the 1960s. In both, global metacultural forces are significant. In the first, scandalized missionaries pronounced Bosavi laments a part of the primitive past that had to go. Due in part to the pining emotional tone of global country songs, a second reorientation rehabilitated the defining syllable of *sa-ya:lab* laments in a move of “resistant nostalgia” (Stewart 1988; Feld in press).

Such moves are not unusual today. The iconoclastic voice of modernity often gives way to the voice of nostalgia. The representation of loss (of tradition, lament, or even culture) is a narrative constitutive of (post)modernity, just as lament ritually reconstituted "premodern" worlds (Tolbert 1990). And in significant ways, (post)modern narratives of loss are consubstantial with traditional lament.

(Post)modern Mourning over Lament

Recent forms of scholarly and popular metaculture memorialize lament traditions. The similarity of these metalament memorializations to traditional lament's memorializations is essential, not trivial. It is a link describable as a mimesis based on identification with "the dead"—in this case, with lament as a synecdoche of "dead" or "dying culture," the same sort of identification scholars have found in laments (Anderson 1991:69).

Scholarly and popular metalaments bring a particular, ideologically charged attention to transmission chains in the moment of their purported breaking. Put differently, such accounts build longer chains, some of whose links they represent as absences. And those metadiscursive chains are globally oriented—or more accurately, they position themselves as harvesters of cultural forms across the globe and across history.

Some writers, therapists, and Christian clergy grieve the absence in "our culture" of anything like "ritual lament." Consider the title of Protestant theologian Walter Brueggemann's 1986 article, "The Costly Loss of Lament." Or consider Tamara Bernstein's "lament" for lost genres, her search for a way to grieve the murder of 14 women in the 1989 Montreal massacre. For Bernstein, no requiem mass, no mourners' kaddish can help. How, then, to mourn the women?

I've wandered from one rally or memorial to another, lines from Adrienne Rich's poem, "A Woman Dead in her Forties" running through my head: "*But from here on I want more crazy mourning, more howl, more keening.*" [. . .] Western society has commercialized and 'civilized' music until its magico-religious roots are all but forgotten. Ours is also a society that . . . offers precious little in the way of healthy and empowering mourning rituals [. . . of the sort present] in many ancient and traditional cultures [particularly] the singing of funeral laments. [Bernstein 1993:22-23]¹³

Is this not a (meta)lament? Bernstein's reference to her own "wandering," her resistance to forgetting, and her indictment of those she blames for the death of the beloved (lament)—all these have their counterparts in traditional laments. Homologies with traditional laments and with Oska's and Bernstein's metalaments can also be found in some comments about lament by anthropologists and their academic kin. Feld's (2001:28) description of the passing of Bosavi lament uses some of the dramatic imagery we find in laments. He speaks of a new generation of Bosavi people "stripped" of knowledge of ritual practices such as laments.¹⁴ Traditional laments refer to death; academic mourning refers to lament's death (Bourke 1993; McLaren 2000; Tolbert 1990). Some metalaments point out killers ("modernization" [Seremetakis 1991], "missionization" [Feld 1995; Schieffelin 2002¹⁵]), just as Warao women lamenters accuse shamans (Briggs 1992b). Naturally, differences—especially the conventionalization of traditional lament's formal features, mostly absent in metalaments—are also significant.

There is, of course, no single voice of (post)modernity. Some voices iconoclastically celebrate the passing or cannibalization of old forms—while voices of nostalgic longing, or simply complication, disturb the celebration or the funeral. These voices constitute different ways of construing interdiscursive links. Nostalgia represents traditional links as broken but covertly reconstitutes them in metalaments. Iconoclasm embraces the new—for example, silent grief (more seemly than loud wailing), constructing the break with the past as radical, placing lament on the other side of an unbridgeable chasm. Regardless, the tendency is to resituate lament in a global metanarrative.

The Language You Cry In

Interdiscursive chains do not form themselves in positivist space; contemporary writers represent performances as joined (or broken, then rejoined) in such chains. The (post)modern culture industry finds lament and (even more) its purported loss appealing tropes for the (post)modern condition. The 1999 film *The Language You Cry In* (hereafter, TLYCI) markets itself in terms of broken-restored chains. It not only reorients the local (Gullah or Mende) in terms of the global but also illustrates homologies between a metadiscourse's orientation, its paths of circulation, and its referential object. TLYCI's metadiscourse about dirges and folklore targets educated viewers around the world. Its market (path of circulation) is that otherwise comfortable (post)modern class that is still hungry for stories of lost-and-found traditions. And its referential object (an ocean-hopping dirge) perfectly suits the global circulation of such texts about loss—and of slaves under an earlier era of globalization.

The film documents the 20th-century discovery that the song of Amelia Dawley—a Gullah woman—recorded by Lorenzo Turner in the 1930s, preserved elements of a Mende ritual dirge. Its globetrotting American heroes, anthropologist Joseph Opala and ethnomusicologist Cynthia Schmidt, uncovered remarkable links—a song essentially preserved for two centuries, through the Middle Passage and slavery—and eventually convened a gathering of Dawley's American descendants and their Sierra Leonean "kin."

TLYCI opens with the losses suffered by African Americans—including the loss of "memory." Shared memories, narrator Vertamae Grosvenor implies, require a shared genre (see Wilce 2001)—and not just any genre, but one imbued with what Grosvenor calls "mystical power," a genre that by its very nature "links the living and the dead." Interdiscursivity fetishized!

This film offers not only an account of but also a remedy for genre loss. Its distributor, California Newsreel, plugs the film as a "scholarly detective story" (<http://www.newsreel.org/films/langyou.htm>). It highlights the collaboration of Americans (black and white) and Sierra Leoneans in recovering the steps by which the song left Africa, traveled to the Gullah Islands, was recorded in the 1930s by Lorenzo Turner, was rediscovered in Africa by Opala and Schmidt, and became the center of a (post)modern ritual. In this ritual convened by the Sierra Leonean government, local musicians, visiting Gullah Islanders, and the scholars, African Americans joined Sierra Leoneans in "recognizing" that the song once lost was now restored. But because "the Tenjami ceremony" in which the song once figured has not been observed since before World War I, the celebrated "find" turns out to be a creation—a dirge made to be a part of something new, rather than a dirge recovered, strictly speaking.

Like Liu Bingjian's 2002 film *Cry-Woman* and Kalpana Lajmi's Hindi film *The Funeral Wailer*, *The Language You Cry In* represents the salience of lament as a sign in two intersecting semiotic domains—a partly imagined domain of traditional performers and their audiences, and a newer domain in which media producers and consumers use lament as a phantasmic signifier to constitute a (post)modern sense of unease and loss. Thus, although (post)modern regret prefers dry discourse to teary song, it conceives of itself via an Other that it constructs as primally connected to more powerful genres of mourning—while denying itself access to them.

Postlude

Where it retains a foothold in modern societies, lament is caught between competing metacultural forces (the pull of newness versus tradition) and situational requirements to maximize or minimize intertextual gaps. Christian and Muslim modernists decry lament as backward, while at the same historical moment, not only a vague rhetoric of mourning but also formal and substantive links anchor other (post)modern discourses (and ethnography) to traditional lament. The "modern in-

dividual" may need no traditional genres to face bereavement, whereas postmodern post-nationalist wanderers seek "grounding" in Others' traditions. And these are often the same (unstable) people, suffering from a metacultural neuroticism.

But the diverse semiotic modalities that constitute lament texts are not equally salient in this struggle. In June 2003 I traveled to the Finno-Karelian village of Uukuniemi to participate in a "lament course," part of a recent, local metacultural invention called "Ancient Culture Week," a series of lectures, performances, and classes for the urbanites who swell Uukuniemi's population every summer. Instruction began with the playing of recordings of Karelian lament-women archived by Finnish folklorists, and a live performance by organizer Pirkko Fihlman. She "quoted" the embodied signs that traditionally accompanied Karelian lament, swaying and covering her face with a cloth.¹⁶ Fihlman has composed many laments on a single melody, which became the first melody we used in our fledgling attempts at lament. By the end of the course, in keeping with the metaculture of newness (Urban 2001) that pervades Finland as well as the United States, few participants were using Fihlman's melody. Aili Nenola's assertion that it is ineffective to use others' words to vent your own sorrows also held up. That metacultural embrace of newness encourages improvisation and discourages direct quoting of others' laments as a means of "getting [sorrow] out."¹⁷ Yet it allows for the validity of quoting *gesture*, perhaps conceived as a manifestation of a universal human "nature." Several participants imitated Fihlman and the cry-women in old photos she showed by covering their faces with a handkerchief and rocking. Thus, they engaged in selective quoting of the multimodal text features of old Karelian laments. That selective process was, no doubt, guided by crosscutting ideologies about authenticity, tradition, emotion, and textual "self-expression." But it also reflects the different sorts and levels of consciousness attached to linguistic and nonlinguistic modes of textuality.

In reaching for a dynamic understanding of culture, intertextuality offers itself as a key, an important model for discourse processes that are perpetually slipping in and out of objectified form as text (Silverstein and Urban 1996). Building on an understanding of (post)modernity as a more or less coherent set of discursive practices—a way of producing, conceiving, extending, and representing interdiscursivity—I have argued that lament has been an important object of, and model for, those processes. As a particular way of linking discourse forms, (post)modernity uses lament not only as an old and possibly broken link but also as a model for constituting itself as a narrative of loss. Despite laments' centrality in this sense, scholarly attention has mostly relegated them to "tradition" and neglected a critique of representations of lament that would reveal their utility in (post)modern discourse. Perhaps it is not laments that are primitive but our means for studying multimodal texts and their natural histories.

Notes

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1. I have focused my analysis narrowly and thus eliminated some of the phenomenal diversity lumped under the term *laments*. I have not offered a linguistic anthropological review of the literature on lament, which was very effectively done by Feld and Fox (1994).

2. I take postmodernity to be a cyclical phase in, rather than radically distinct from, modernity (Lyotard 1984:79). I underscore their closeness by writing "(post)modernity."

3. Joel Robbins' argument for the substantive (not just institutional) nature of modernity is in many ways compelling, but his figuring of modernity as a shared set of "promissory notes" misses the centrality of discourses of loss and nostalgia that also circulate globally and help constitute local uptakes of "canonical" modernity (Robertson 1990).

4. On the multimodality of "text," see Herman (2003).
5. On the relation of melodic and linguistic textuality, see Langleben (1997).
6. To follow Richard Bauman (a discussant for the panel in which these papers originated) in preferring "interdiscursivity" is, to me, to bracket the tendency to reify discourse as text. Absent the term itself, approaches to interdiscursivity were brilliantly laid out in Asif Agha and Stanton Wortham's abstract for the panel.
7. Even the earliest available link in any chain of lament-plus-representations is already metapragmatically ordered. The earliest mentions of lament in Greek literature are already regimented through Homer's use of genre labels—for example, *thrênos* (lament) and *gôos* (wailing).
8. Compare Agha's (2003) notion of "role alignment"—the alignment of a receiver's self-image vis-à-vis the "characterological figure" constituted in the message received, including the accent and other registral features in which it is delivered.
9. In this transcript, italics represent words uttered originally in English. •hh represents sobbing. For context, and more on transcription conventions, see Wilce 1998 in which I devote parts of several chapters to Latifa.
10. The relevance of the broadcast segment is obvious, but its "collection" was fortuitous rather than the result of a systematic search.
11. The "traditionalization" (Bauman 1992), "antiquing," or "distressing" of performances has become well-known in folkloristics. Since the European Enlightenment, "a number of oral forms . . . have been 'antiqued' and reproduced by literary culture. . . . In creating such 'distressed genres,' the literary culture was itself undergoing dramatic changes in its modes of production and reception" (Stewart 1991:5).
12. From a correspondent's e-mail signature: "Sorrow looks back, worry looks around and faith looks up."
13. Respectable academics (e.g., Wheeler 1999) also characterize modernity's stance toward history and culture as one of failed mourning (i.e., melancholia), and postmodernity as a search for healthy mourning of the losses modernity induces. Wheeler's frontispiece is Enzenberger's "Sinking of the Titanic," a self-deprecating poem about modern misadventures with, or trivializations of, wailing.
14. "Stripping" evokes the tearing of clothing and hair associated with violent wailing (Anderson 1991:69-77). What Feld (in press, personal communication) sees happening among the Bosavi, however, cannot be reduced to "loss." The creativity of Bosavi responses to overwhelming missionary pressure to abandon lament comes out, I hope, in my recounting of the song "My father, my heart."
15. "Few initially realized what it would mean [for missionaries] to retain the language while changing so many cultural meanings. Innovation co-occurred with the erasure of entire expressive genres—song, lament, and traditional narrative that were the memorializing practices of a people" (Schieffelin 2002:59; compare Feld 1995:100). Is there not a touch of metalament and a whiff of ethnocide in the juxtaposition of "erasure" with the scope determiners "entire" and "the . . . practices of a people"?
16. Swaying helped old Karelian lamenters to fall into trance (Tolbert 1990:50, 56). Its salience in the workshop confirms that this old semiotic form, widely described by Finnish folklorists, is still being transmitted, if only in that context.
17. Aili Nenola, interview, 6/17/03, tape 1. Nenola is a Finnish lament expert who has watched the emergence of a revival of lament, as it were, from a distance. The metaphor of getting sorrow "out" came up many times in the Uukuniemi course.

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