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"since I am a woman, I will chastise my relatives": gender, reported speech, and the (re)production of social relations in Warao ritual wailing

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I packed my belongings and loaded them into my dugout canoe early on the morning of 7 June 1987. My research on Warao, an indigenous language spoken in eastern Venezuela, was centered in two regions. While I had already spent several months in the Mariusa area to the northwest, I was about to begin my first extended stay in Murako, a large Warao community about an hour away by motorized canoe from the mission community of San Francisco de Guayo.

Just as I was about to take my leave of the Guayo community, four young men emerged from the crowd that was observing my rather clumsy preparations. Noting that they wanted to visit a sick friend in Murako, the young men asked for a ride. Since they had been drinking, I was reluctant to invite them aboard. Still, who was I to judge, and giving rides provided a small way of repaying the many kindnesses I had received in Warao communities. I started the outboard motor, and we left.

Two surprises awaited me in Murako. In a departure from the usual sequence of events, the residents did not converge on the dock to witness the arrival of a strange vessel and to exchange greetings with its occupants. Ascending the dock in front of the house that belonged to the *kobenahoro* (governor), I soon discovered the reason. Manuel,[1] the ailing friend of the young men from Guayo, had just died. Shortly after I arrived, his body was taken out of the house and placed in a hammock in the *hisabanoko* (kitchen house) above the river. A dozen women sat on the floor around the body and began to wail, combining melody and text. What struck me was that the women were singing about my arrival, specifically the presence of the four young men from the mission community. In bitter tones, the wailers accused them of having contributed to Manuel's death by turning him, along with several other young Murakoans, into an alcoholic. The "governor," who had just arrived, heard these words as well. After conversing quietly with other leaders, he readied his canoe, filled the tank with precious gasoline, and ordered the youths from Guayo aboard. A young relative escorted the foursome to their community. With one exception, they never returned to Murako.[2]

Ritual wailing performed by Warao women at funerals in eastern Venezuela provides a paradigmatic case of the inversion of established relationships between gender and discourse. In their laments, women, excluded from principal positions in nearly all other public speech events, appropriate and rework words initially used in settings where only men are accorded a voice. I argue that in so doing, they question the dominant means of social (re)production and, in effect, act to constrain the authority of male shamans and political leaders. Research on language and gender, discourse and affect, and the poetics of gender suggests a framework for exploring the social and political significance of wailing. [gender, discourse, poetics, reported speech, affect, lowland South America]

The ritual wailing itself did not come as a complete surprise—I had participated in a funeral in a different community three months earlier, and I was acquainted with its musical features and powerful emotional impact. This event did allow me to see Warao ritual wailing as a powerful form of social action. Until this point, I had conceived of laments as expressions of the intense sorrow and rage experienced by the mourners, and my Warao consultants, women and men alike, had agreed with me that embodying emotion was indeed a crucial facet of wailing. Only in time, as I learned more about the form and thematic content of laments, did I come to see that ritual weeping was the most important public performance genre accessible to women. Moreover, once I gained a sense of the full range of Warao expressive genres and their role in constructing relations of gender, power, and hierarchy in Warao communities, I came to realize that women's wailing played a central role in Warao society.

In this article I propose to examine features of the poetic patterning and thematic content of ritual wailing as I explore the basis of its importance in Warao discourse and social relations. I argue that the centrality of reported speech provides us with a clue to how women use laments in order to create a collective voice whose words have clear social consequences and thus to counter their marginality vis-à-vis other expressive genres and the public events in which they are used. I argue in the concluding sections of the article that making sense of this voice and its character as social action presents a fascinating theoretical challenge. The literature on language and gender and on the relationship between discourse and the emotions can help us meet this challenge. I suggest that recent work on the poetics of gender, much of which is derived from literary analysis, and attention to the role of entextualization and contextualization in performance can help us achieve a richer understanding of the significance of Warao women's wailing.

Warao discourse

Some 22,000 Warao live in the delta of the Orinoco River in northeastern Venezuela and adjacent regions. The delta consists of small pockets of land that are separated by innumerable branches of the Orinoco. Until the 1920s and early 1930s, most Warao lived in the swampy interior by fishing and exploiting the starch of the moriche palm. Shortly after the arrival of the Capuchin missionaries in the 1920s, a group of Warao from the Sakobana River introduced the cultivation of the ocumo chino tuber (see Heinen 1975; Heinen and Ruddle 1974). The rapid expansion of this cultigen prompted most Warao to move from the moriche forests to the riverbanks, and this change prompted some degree of integration into the market economy and more contact with criollos (Spanish-speaking non-Indians). The neighboring communities of Murako and K^{w}amuhu, in which most of my recordings of ritual wailing were made, are primarily horticultural communities located on riverbanks.

In Warao communities the relationship between discourse and authority is closely connected with the role of male political leaders and medico-religious practitioners; these two types are referred to collectively as *aidamo* (leaders).[3] Political leaders oversee projects undertaken by the community as a whole, such as maintaining the bridges that link houses and managing the small fishing or rice cultivation projects whose products are sold to criollos. They are also responsible for maintaining order; when conflicts arise, it is their duty to organize and officiate a *monikata nome anaka*, or dispute mediation ceremony (cf. Briggs 1988b).

Just as political leaders are seen as mediating social relations, medico-religious practitioners mediate between human beings and a host of different kinds of spirits. Becoming a competent practitioner of any kind involves mastering a number of different types of sung or chanted ritual texts as well as the use of such paraphernalia as sacred rattles and *wina* cigars (cf. Barral 1964; Olsen 1973; Wilbert 1972, 1987). The contexts of performance range from individual curing sessions to large-scale festivals in which the residents from a large area celebrate the arrival of ancestral spirits. Shamanistic discourse is linguistically quite complex in its reliance on an esoteric lexicon, complicated poetic and musical structures, and special modes of interpretation. Practitioners possess the power to kill or cure, and their actions are a perennial focus of conversation in Warao communities. While only a very few postmenopausal women become practicing shamans, most men develop at least some shamanistic competence.

Another focus of Warao discourse is storytelling, which includes both *dehe nobo* (narratives of the ancestors) and *dehe hido* (narratives of recent events). Performing both types of narratives is a predominant leisure-time activity, and storytelling also plays an important role in ceremonial greetings (Briggs 1988a). The narrating of *dehe nobo* is closely connected with one type of magico-religious practice, that of the *hoarotu* shaman, because traditional narratives provide access to invisible realms that are manipulated through the use of *hoa*, songs that can help or harm. A given *dehe nobo* can be performed monologically by a single *aidamo*, dialogically by two *aidamo* who are close friends, or between *aidamo* and their juniors as a pedagogical device, and the stylistic and interactional features vary in each case (Briggs In press). In most areas of the delta, women only rarely become competent performers of *dehe nobo;* while women can perform *dehe hido,* they seldom do so in public settings when men are present.

Men thus dominate narration, political oratory, and shamanistic discourse. This is not to say that women are never able to express themselves publicly; indeed, three types of Warao discourse are open only to women. First, women sometimes compose songs of protest in the course of the celebrations that mark the end of the calendar year. These songs enable an individual to express a grievance or to announce an intended or desired course of action. In an example presented by Lavandero (1973), a young woman decries the fact that her mother has branded her promiscuous and threatens to forsake Warao for criollo society.[4] A woman can also express a complaint by speaking loudly using pharyngeal constriction while performing a task such as chopping firewood. Without appearing to address anyone in particular, she publicly chides a family member for an alleged wrong while community members listen intently.

A third type of women's discourse, songs composed and sung following the death of a close relative, is called *sana* or *ona*. The word *sana* can be glossed as "poverty," "distress," or "sadness," and the label for the genre points to the misfortune that has befallen the deceased; *ona*(-) is a noun-verb that refers either to the act of crying or, in its nominative form, to a lament. *Sana* are complex both poetically and in terms of the range of communicative functions they perform, and these powerful expressive forms are used by women alone.[5] They occupy a much more important role in Warao discourse than either songs of protest or publicly spoken complaints because of their collective nature, involving the cooperation of a number of women, and their much greater impact on social life. The centrality of their role is augmented by the high rate of mortality. The most reliable demographic figures come from the Winikina area of the central delta: Wilbert (1980:25) has calculated the prepubescent mortality for this group at 49 percent.

Warao laments and funerary ritual

The first *sana* is sung as soon as people are aware that someone has died, and it is performed by the closest relatives—the mother, grandmother, and/or wife. The women sit beside the corpse and virtually bathe it with their tears. If the deceased is a small child, the mother cradles it in her lap. The weeping follows the continuum described by E. Basso (1985), moving from nonmusical weeping to melodic sobbing to the composition of text and its fusion with a melodic structure. In the Warao case, this progression takes only about an hour. Nearly everyone in the village runs to witness the scene. In the case of a prolonged illness their curiosity is seldom motivated by the desire to see who has died, since nearly everyone in the community will have been aware of the course of the disease. Rather, the initial *sana* will articulate the first public accusation of the shaman (or shamans) who killed the individual—for no one dies a natural death in traditional Warao villages. This information will have been whispered to close family members during the course of the illness, but only now does it become public knowledge.

The weeping generally subsides in about 30 to 40 minutes. Preparations are made, and relatives who are fishing, working in gardens, and the like are summoned. Male relatives then carry the corpse to the *hisabanoko*. Each new event in the linear progression of the funerary ritual will draw more women to the *hisabanoko*, and some mourners who have fallen silent or who are singing the refrain alone (and in a subdued tone) will begin singing verses again with renewed emotional intensity. While the initial emotional peak immediately follows the death, the next follows the transportation of the body to the *hisabanoko*. The following peak is sparked by a shrouding ceremony. Here female relatives place objects, such as clothes, bowls, and combs, in the hammock that the person will need for the journey to come. A knife may be placed in one hand, and the deceased will be admonished to seek out and kill the shaman(s) responsible for the death. The mouth may be filled with poison manioc, and the wailers will admonish the shaman's helping spirits, who come to feast on the victim's blood, to carry the poison back to their master.[6]

The final disposition of the body varies from region to region. In Murako, missionary influence and the impact of the superordinate Venezuelan society are reflected in the use of coffins, which are interred in a small section of relatively dry land that lies 45 minutes away by motorized canoe. Men begin constructing a coffin within hours after the death. In the afternoon, the body is lowered into the coffin (with the hammock serving as a shroud), and the wailing reaches another peak. The lid is tied shut, to be reopened shortly before the burial in order to permit the rearrangement of items that are to be left with the body. *Sana* are seldom performed after dark in Murako, but in other regions women sing periodically throughout the night. While the burial generally takes place early the following morning, it can be delayed for as much as two days in order to await the return of the father or another close relative.

The wailing becomes quite intense at dawn, remaining at this pitch until one or more canoes leave for the graveyard at about 6:00 a.m. The coffin is placed in the middle of a canoe, surrounded by about ten wailers; the women weep continuously during the trip to the graveyard and then back to the community, although they grow silent during the burial. Upon returning to Murako, each wailer ritually washes herself in the river. The closest relatives often continue to wail for about an hour, and then all grows silent. The mother, grandmother, sisters, and/or wife will weep in private behind the house, often within the menstrual hut, for about a week.

Warao perspectives on *sana*

In discussing *sana*, Warao distinguish two components. *Akoita* (its song) refers to the musical dimensions of laments, while *aribu* (its words, its speech) refers to the verbal components. Warao stress the importance of the musical features, noting that men express grief *"dibuwitu, sana omi; tane nibora onaya"* ("in words alone, without laments; that's how men cry"). Another common way of talking about men's reactions to death is to say that they cry *"akobe eku"* ("in their hearts") or *"aobonobu eku"* ("in their thoughts").

Women and men alike emphasize the fact that wailers do not simply sing in the same place and at the same time—they sing together. One lamenter serves as the principal singer for a while, and the role is passed from woman to woman in a progression from nearest to most distant relatives, beginning with the mother or wife. The coordination of the voices is quite complex (this patterning forms the subject of another essay [Briggs 1989]).[7] Briefly, one woman generally sings textual phrases at any given point; the others sing their refrains, hold the final note, or remain silent. In this fashion, they are able to listen to textual phrases sung by other lamenters. Although the process permits parallel construction of the referential content of lines, the lamenters are free to develop themes independently as well.

The way in which Warao describe the nature and communicative functions of laments provides one of the most important keys to the poetic structuring of *sana*. In talking about the process of singing laments, men and women stress that lamenters *"nome sike onaya; obohonamo onakumoni"* ("only sing [literally, 'cry'] the truth; they would be unable to sing lies"). *Sana* serve as a central forum for establishing the "truth" about the deceased, the circumstances surrounding her or his life, and any other factors that can be construed as having contributed to the death. Men note that as they are listening to *sana*, they cry inwardly, thinking *"tai dibu nomewitu"* ("those words are so true").

The lamenters are not, however, passive vehicles for voicing impersonal, "objective" notions of what has occurred. When I played tape recordings of *sana*, perhaps the highest compliment that listeners paid to particular passages was *"tai dibu taera!"* ("those are strong words!"). The singers generated this "strength" by structuring the poetic properties of the *sana* so that certain dimensions of the events leading up to the death were revealed with particular force and clarity. *Dibu taera* were also deemed especially evocative of the anger and sadness engendered by the death. The "truth" revealed by "strong words" is not literal. *Dibu taera* are often richly ironic, exposing the circumstances in question by constructing a fictional portrayal that directly contradicts a narrow reading of what took place.

Women and men alike say that only with the aid of *sana* can the community overcome the acute anger *(yari)* and sadness *(arawana)* occasioned by a death. If women did not wail, the close relatives of the deceased would be unable to reincorporate themselves into the daily life of the community, particularly to return to the vital tasks of procuring, processing, and eating food. *Sana* are likewise deemed essential to overcoming the conflicts that gave rise to or have been produced by the death. Ritual wailing effects this transformation by juxtaposing a displacement of personal goals with the construction of a critical voice that explores alternative ways of viewing human affairs. Paradoxically, the wailers' provocative reading of the "truth" is most forcefully revealed in counterfactual representations. I will now examine a particular performance in attempting to discover the nature of this transformational process.

a performance in Murako

Let us return to the *sana* performed for Manuel, the young man who had died just before I arrived in Murako. I recorded throughout most of the morning. Shortly after noon, a friend took me to his home, helped me make arrangements for my stay in Murako, and kindly provided me with lunch. By the time I returned to the *hisabanoko*, where the wailing was taking place, the number of active wailers had dropped to two. While only a few adolescent girls were standing with the wailers, other Murakoans were listening from their houses.[8] Shortly after I arrived, Manuel's stepmother, Josefina Fernández, returned to the *hisabanoko*. She sat down in the hammock beside Manuel and began to wail, her tears falling on the young man's face. Here are the first few minutes of her *sana*.[9]

Segment of Josefina Fernández's lament for her stepson Manuel
Murako, 7 June 1987

Mauka, mahoarabita hioaubuya tekore, mauka-o.
    Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Mauka, yaroitane yaha takitakate tane takitakate, mauka-o.
    Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
    Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
    Mauka, neburatu momoyane, mauka-o.
    Manoboto, momoyane, momoyane.
    Mauka, daitayane, mauka-o.
Manoboto, yaroitane, "dakatai, hinahoro nahorokitine," takitakate,

tane tateanawitu, mauka, nakae, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Mauka, "ama ihi watabaka naria tihi, hinokabuka dobahi ekoronaka hate,"
hidakatai nokone hatine, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
"Kahido hakotai yaharaone;
'tai hitida aibia kotai tuaranaka hase?
diana hiru ekorane hate!' "
tane hoarao orikʷare nabakitane dehe dihibubuae, mauka-o,
takore hisia nokobuaine, mauka-o.
Hoarao ama hinahoronaka hase? mauka-o.
Manoboto, momoyane, mauka-o.
Hidakoi, hikʷare asayaha hiebe naruae, mauka-o;
hikʷare asaubuya tekore, mauka-o.
Marakobo sanuka, kahido, maumabawitu wabakore, dibiatine;
tiaha hiebe naruae, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o.
Hidakatai obohona sabana tihi,
" 'mabikoa oakore hisabahite monika hidahituma'," dahituma maisia dihibukore;
nokone oane duhune karamunae, tia tekore, mauka-o.
Hidakatai obohona sabana tihi, biko wanibuae, mauka-o,
manoboto, "mabikoa kʷare yarone hisabahite monika."
Hidakatai obohona sabana tihi, wabanaka, idamo tatine, mauka-o;
warao asabahiturone, hoarao yahokowabane ubayahatine, mauka-o.
Hidakoi wabamearo hoarao sabahibuaine, tane tubuaene;
ama hisamuka bahinaerone, hoarao yahokowabane ubayahatine, mauka-o.
Mauka-o, ihi sana me, mauka-o.

My son, as your *hoarabita,* I took you into my care, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, it's as if you were always going to come back, it's just like that, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, you are leaving me in your youth, my son.
My child, you are leaving me, you are leaving me.
My son, you are growing cold, my son.
My child, entering the house, "aunt, I'm going to eat your food," it's as if you were going [to say] this,
but it will never be like that again, my son, you died, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, "because you are such a sex fiend, after you [are gone] the vaginas will not be finished off,"
I, your aunt, will keep on hearing this, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
"This nephew of ours does not respect [the wives of others];
'when will you tire of always lying with your wife there?
soon your semen will be finished!' "
this is how the shamans gossiped when they assembled, my son,
that's what I kept hearing about you, my son.
Why won't the shamans be eating you now? my son.
My child, you are leaving me, my son.
Your sister, the one who used to defend you, went away before you, my son;
she used to defend you, but never again, my son.
I will be saying the same words for you, our nephew, that I said for my younger brother;
he went away before you, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.
Since I, your aunt, am ill-willed,
" 'if they touch my record player, I'm going to chastise both you and your sisters-in-law'," that's
= what your sisters-in-law used to say about me;
having put on the record player, you were seated, listening, and then you stood up, but never
= more, my son.
Since I, your aunt, am ill-willed, I was selfish with my record player, my son,
my child, "once you arrive I'm going to chastise you as well [for playing] my record player."

35 Although I, your aunt, am ill-willed, I won't die, I will live to be an old woman, my son;
although I, your aunt, am a person who criticizes her people, now I will live my life praising the
=shamans, my son.
Your sister died because I was always chastising the shamans, that's just what I did;
although I am the only one still alive, I will live my life praising the shamans, my son.
My son, oh pitiful you, my son.

In this article I argue that women's ritual wailing constitutes powerfully transgressive speech that plays a vital role in constituting discourse and social relations in Warao communities. I suggest that the nexus of its social and cultural force lies in the particular poetic properties of laments. Accordingly, in the next section I turn to an outline of formal and thematic patterning in *sana*.

the poetics of Warao laments

Listening to Warao laments, one is immediately struck by a contrast between slow, rhythmic, melodious musical phrases and loud, rapid, rhythmically irregular speechlike bursts. This effect emerges from the basic distinction in laments, that between refrains and what I will call "textual phrases."

Refrains. Each lamenter sings one or more refrains, which consist of a short musical phrase that generally begins and ends with a kin term preceded by a genitive prefix. Between the kin terms one finds a formula expressing the affective state of the deceased or the lamenter; "*ihi sana me*" ("oh pitiful you") and "*momoae*" ("you left me") are the most common. Musically, refrains generally fall within the range of a fifth. The most common pattern is a gradual descent in pitch from highest to lowest. As is the case in Josefina Fernández's *sana*, however, two consecutive refrains are sometimes characterized by a rise from lowest to highest pitch in the first refrain followed by a rise-fall pattern that ends on the lowest pitch in the second. The tempo of refrains is both slow (between .6 and 2.2 syllables per second) and regular.

Linguistically, refrains are quite simple. The kin terms are usually modified only by initial genitive prefixes, and the phrases are generally either verbless (*ihi sana*, "you" + "pitiful") or composed of a stem plus gerundive (*-ne*) or simple past (*-ae*) morpheme. The syntax is also quite simple, involving only one verb in the unmarked, verb-final order.[10] The semantic content of refrains is practically nil, as the singers repeat the same words over and over again. Individuals who are listening to wailing do not pay attention to refrains, and refrains are generally overlooked during the process of transcription.

Textual phrases. Textual phrases, which generally contain 15 to 25 syllables, form the semantic heart of laments. Musically, they also generally descend from highest to lowest pitch over the range of a fifth, although a return to the highest pitch at the end of the phrase is common. Pitch is, however, much more relative in the case of textual phrases—the indistinctness of the pitches often lends the phrases a quality that is more like discourse than music. In terms of List's (1963) proposed continuum from speech to song, laments move considerably along the scale as singers shift back and forth between textual phrases and refrains. Rhythmically, textual phrases are not only much faster than refrains (3.3 to 8.2 syllables per second) but more variable as well.

Morphologically and syntactically, the simplicity of refrains contrasts dramatically with the complexity of textual phrases. A study of textual phrases would provide an excellent beginning for an investigation of Warao verbal morphology. Verb stems are followed by long strings of tense/aspect suffixes, intensives, negatives, and auxiliaries; discourse particles, temporal and personal deictics, comparatives, and other forms also abound. Phrases often contain two or more verb stems, and highly marked constructions with verb-final agents or patients are common.[11] The syntax is sometimes so complex that it can be difficult for native speakers—including the lamenter herself—to sort it out. In short, textual phrases are so packed with semantic content that they often seem to be bursting at their poetic seams. Audiences—and other wailers—thus listen intently to textual phrases.

One of the most striking features of textual phrases is their lexical content. Laments are restricted to everyday Warao; the special "curers' lexicon" employed by shamans does not appear. Nevertheless, laments are often full of obscenities and lewd epithets, and richly salacious metaphorical descriptions of sex are common fare. In line 14, for example, Josefina Fernández quotes an epithet that appeared in gossip about Manuel, *watabaka;* morphologically derived from *wata* (penis) and *baka* (characteristic of), it graphically conveys the notion of a sex fiend. *Ai-* (to copulate) is also used frequently (see line 18). In line 19, Josefina Fernández quotes a threat against her stepson in which shamans threaten to dry up his semen—that is, to suppress his sexuality by killing him. The word she uses for "your semen" *(hiru)* is a metaphorical extension of a term commonly used in reference to the dry white powder that is produced by extracting the starch from the moriche palm. Warao seldom make such statements publicly except in laments.

In terms of the thematic content of textual phrases, the transcribed passage gives a good sense of the range of issues that emerge in Josefina Fernández's *sana.* She goes on to stress Manuel's excessive sexuality and the tremendous rage of the shamans who killed him. She further criticizes her own behavior, particularly her failure to accord him more intimate kin terms and to provide him with sufficient food. She links his death to the deaths of a son and daughter before him and to the illness that would take the life of a stepdaughter a few days later, blaming all of these woes on the same group of shamans. She laments the inability of her own husband and other shamans to cure Manuel. She also fondly recounts scenes that evoke Manuel's relationships with his sisters and friends, noting that he often took on the role of problem-solver. She proposes several ways of avoiding conflicts with shamans in the future, urging other young men to control their sexual appetites and committing herself to refraining from open criticism of the shamans. A number of other women then begin wailing, and it becomes impossible to transcribe individual voices. Shortly before this point, Josefina Fernández criticizes Warao in general for the conflict that resulted in Manuel's death: "Now I understand the temperament of all Warao."

the role of reported speech

One of the most important elements of the poetic constructions and a central key to their social and cultural force is to be found in the role of reported speech. Warao draw heavily on reported speech not only in *sana* but also in *monikata nome anaka* (dispute mediation events) and in male performances of *dehe nobo* and *dehe hido.* In the passage quoted above, lines nine through 21 are saturated with direct discourse. In line nine, for example, Josefina Fernández brings Manuel's voice to life, suggesting that "it's as if" she will continue to hear him say these words. In line 14, she quotes an unnamed source who gives a lewd and exaggerated account of Manuel's sexual exploits. The line contains a thinly veiled threat to kill Manuel; since he is such a sex fiend, only his death will bring his purported usurpation of women's sexuality in Murako to an end.

The following line (15) provides us with a clue to the way the performer employs direct discourse in her *sana.* She not only quotes the threat but uses gerundive and future suffixes with the verb "to hear" to suggest that she is likely to continue to hear the shamans gloating over their success in carrying it out. (The derivation is *noko-* [hear] + *-ne* [gerundive] + *ha-* [auxiliary verb] + *t*[e] [future] + *ine* [first person singular].) In addition to having listened to the menacing remarks uttered before Manuel became ill, she was present when the *hoarotu* shaman who was treating Manuel related the dream in which he discovered who was killing the young man and why. Moreover, since the ill-intentioned *hoarao* (plural of *hoarotu*) are her own relatives, she is indeed likely to hear them gloating in the future. In line 17, she quotes a complaint that was directed at Manuel, and the initial term of address shows that the offended party consists of more than one uncle (probably classificatory) of Manuel. In line 18, the quoted utterance moves from speaking about Manuel to addressing him directly; an uncle accuses him of spending so much time with the uncle's wife that the woman has de facto become Manuel's own wife.

Line 20 is crucial. Here we learn that the offended uncles are *hoarao*, persons who are highly skilled at converting anger into revenge. We also gain a sense of the speech event at which the complaints and threats against Manuel were voiced and revenge was proposed—a ritualized meeting of *hoarao*. The repetitive quality signaled by the suffix *-bu-* in *nokobuaine* (*noko*, "to hear," + iterative + past nondurative + first person pronoun) in the succeeding line is crucial. Here Josefina Fernández suggests that she was well aware of the meeting and its outcome, even though she was not present.

In line 26 the singer connects two of her own laments, the performances for Manuel and for her brother. In line 31 she returns to direct discourse, presenting one of her own utterances as quoted by her sisters-in-law and thereby turning our attention to a different set of events, interactions between stepmother and stepson in which selfishness undermined her ability to serve as an adequate parent. Here reported speech provides the performer with a tool for interpreting her own actions. In lines 35 through 37, she moves from the quoting of particular utterances to a far-reaching critique of her own speech. Citing her propensity to criticize people, particularly shamans, as the cause of her daughter's death (and implicitly of Manuel's as well), she commits herself to praising the very *hoarao* who killed her children. The *sana* as a whole clearly expresses her rage at these individuals, and she spends a fair amount of time chastising them as well; the lines accordingly express a deep and bitter irony. The statements are, however, not entirely ironic. As she sings lines 36 and 38 at the top of her lungs within earshot of the *hoarao*, Josefina Fernández is also proposing a truce. Her interest in ending the conflict would seem to be related to the fact that a stepdaughter, María, also lay dying. As she performed a *sana* for María five days later, she repeated her call for a truce.

ritual wailing and the creation of social relations

In pointing to the importance of reported speech in *sana*, I have suggested that reported speech does not simply draw on experiences and events—it creates them (cf. Bauman 1986). In *sana*, the performers select (or invent) strips of behavior, verbal and otherwise, and then accord them facticity, as having taken place, and some type of interpretive significance. By reporting what was said in these constructed interactions, they assert the right to replay the discourse and claim a stake in the events. The manner in which the performers insert reported speech into the lament further suggests the bearing of such experiences on the ongoing event—the death and its aftermath. This process not only creates events and experiences but explores their relationships to one another, either directly or by virtue of their shared relationship to the death. Laments accordingly provide fresh, more inclusive perspectives on what has taken place and is currently transpiring in the community.

In relating experiences and events, *sana* also relate people. Josefina Fernández was not directly implicated in the threats that the shamans made against Manuel. But, by convincing him not to take the threats seriously, she came to play a key role in shaping his relationship to his uncles and the events that emerged from it. And, by characterizing herself in the *sana* as having listened to their words and decided on a particular type of reaction, she becomes a participant in the conflict. Noting that she will "keep on hearing this" (line 15), she suggests that the events will continue to shape her relationship with these individuals in the future.

Lamenters can also construct relationships in *sana* by portraying activities that entail particular ways of relating. In line 1, the performer alludes to her role as Manuel's *hoarabita*, thus evoking the nurturing relationship that is inaugurated by assisting the mother in this fashion at the birth. She goes on to mention her role in providing his meals (line 9) and the fact that she will mourn him (line 26). Her characterization of the record-player scene provides a key example of actions on her part that are incompatible with her position as caregiver.

That *sana* are in some sense *about* relationships is evident in yet another way: nearly every line contains a kin term that indexes the relationship between the performer and the person she is mourning. The singer addresses Manuel as *mahoarabita* (my godson), *mauka* (my son, my nephew), *manoboto* (my child), and *kahido* (our nephew). These terms cast him in two major roles. *Mauka* is a term that would be appropriately used by an aunt, and the singer explicitly refers to herself as *hidakatai* (your aunt). *Mahoarabita*, similarly, points to the singer's relationship to Manuel before she became his stepmother. *Manoboto*, on the other hand, evokes a relationship of great closeness and affection. These competing terms of address move the discourse repeatedly along an affective continuum in representing the relationship between the performer and the deceased.

Performers thus do not simply *describe* a single, firmly established mode of relationship—they rather draw on terms of address and other elements in *constructing* identities for themselves, the deceased, and third parties (such as the shamans) as well as in interpreting the manner in which a broad range of individuals related to the deceased. Josefina Fernańdez's *sana* shows that identities and ways of relating can be multiple and competing. She uses the terminological shifts between *mahoarabita, mauka,* and *manoboto* to launch a self-criticism, one that she makes quite explicit later in her *sana*: *"Mauka tihi hisia aribunaka tanaka tane; 'kahidowitu' warubuaene"* ("Although you were my child, I never addressed you as such; I only used to call you 'our nephew' "). This self-criticism stands as a synecdoche for a number of instances in which the singer failed to provide for Manuel; she cites her neglect as one of the reasons that he died.

The failure to behave in keeping with kinship roles prompted Manuel's death in another respect. In lines 17 through 19, Josefina Fernández quotes an uncle of Manuel's who opened an exceedingly angry and sarcastic diatribe against Manuel by referring to him as *kahido* (our nephew). Josefina Fernández notes later that the same relative had previously killed another son and a daughter. Her stepdaughter María lay seriously ill at the time of Manuel's death, and she would die five days later. In a *sana* for María, Josefina Fernández would sarcastically call upon the classificatory uncle who killed Manuel: *"Taiwitu kekorea tihi kekoreakore yakerate; tiaine, hidakatai"* ("Since he himself is finishing us off, I hope that he will keep on finishing us off; that's what I, your aunt, believe").[12]

The use of kin terms in Warao ritual wailing serves as an interesting point of comparison with Kaluli laments. Feld (1990) has recently argued that the saturation of Kaluli laments with place-names provides wailers with a means of articulating the connections between events, experiences, sentiments, and relationships as well as of rendering laments cohesive in thematic and processual terms. Here Feld draws on K. Basso's (1984, 1988) analysis of the way in which the Western Apache use place-names to create rich indexical connections between specific personal experiences and central cultural symbols. Interestingly, place-names rarely appear in Warao ritual wailing; locative functions are accomplished through the use of deictics. Warao laments instead make systematic use of kin terms, descriptions of shared activities, and reported speech in order to juxtapose expectations about relationships with failures to respond in appropriate ways and the severance of these relationships in death.[13] Kin terms thus function, mutatis mutandis, like place-names in connecting the particular feelings, experiences, and relationships that link each wailer to Manuel both with those of other performers and with shared assumptions about the ways that relatives ought to act and feel toward one another.

But do these multiple identities remain disparate and contradictory or is there a single frame of reference that brings them into accord? My analysis suggests that the singer constructs diversity in keeping with a unified process, one inherent in the nature of the *sana* as a speech event. Let us look first at the special identity assumed by the ritual wailer. Later in the *sana*, Josefina Fernández declares, *"Hidakatai Warao asabahiturone, Warao sabahiarone, hionayaine"* ("Although I, your aunt, am a person who criticizes her relatives, although I am criticizing my relatives, I am weeping for you"). In a text published by Lavandero, a mourner declares in similar fashion, "Since I, your own sister, have a vile tongue, I will chastise my relatives; since I am a woman, I will chastise my relatives, my little brother, o!" (Lavandero 1983:12; the translation is mine). These are not isolated examples—such declarations are quite common.

In characterizing herself as a speaker of "bad words," the wailer is in one sense referring to the level of obscenity that is frequently apparent in *sana*. Nevertheless, the "bad words" phenomenon cuts much deeper. In the passage from the Lavandero text, the speaker notes explicitly that because she has a vile tongue, because she is a woman, she will openly chastise her relatives, including the shamans. Herein lies a key to the power and the salience of *sana*. Denied a voice in most facets of Warao life, women (and women alone) are accorded the right to criticize whatever and whomever they please through song following a death. This cultural license provides a sort of poetic license as well, because it allows the wailer to explore a wide range of social and kinship roles in the guise of a dominant role, that of social critic.

ritual wailing and the potent voices of women

I noted above that *sana* enable women and men alike to put the intense emotions occasioned by death behind them and to grapple with conflicts that are seen as having occasioned the death. I argued that reported speech plays a central role in the exploration of alternative perspectives and the construction of a collective vision of community life. I have frequently described Warao ritual wailing along these lines in lectures and at academic conferences, and one question has invariably arisen: "But does ritual wailing *really* make any difference? Does anything *really* change as a consequence of these laments?"

The expulsion of the drunkards from Guayo initially suggested to me the potential impact of wailing. I became aware of just how quickly men can react to *sana* on another occasion, when I myself became the target of a *sana*. I had begun to record a *sana* following the death of an infant in the Mariusa region. When the governor's principal wife, one of the few Warao I met who dislikes tape-recording, saw me approach with my machine, she began a *sana* that quite audibly announced her opposition to the recording. The governor, who is the paramount leader of the region, immediately asked me to stop recording. His wife's words were quite explicitly intended as a means of overruling his approval.

In another case, a Murako shaman was accused of taking a hand in killing both Manuel and his sister María. After María's death, the shaman started to make daily visits to the house where I was living. He complained bitterly that the women's criticism had led to his ostracism from the community. Being a widower, he had depended for sustenance on the kindness of women from other households (women distribute cooked food). Following the accusation, women would not feed him; he accordingly came each day to beg for food. He left Murako to take up residence in another community shortly thereafter. I have heard of cases in which accused shamans have been forced to live off in the jungle by themselves, along with their immediate relatives, thus facing grave isolation and suffering.

Such examples, which are hardly isolated, point to the immediate impact that *sana* can have on events in Warao communities. Nonetheless, I do not believe that pointing out instances in which laments have exhibited such direct effects adequately answers my interlocutors' question. Harding (1975) raised a similar issue some years back. In an analysis of women's verbal art in a Spanish village, she criticized researchers who drew attention to the importance of women's performances in communities in which women did not enjoy equal status for proffering romantic mystifications of the fact that such performances never really changed the status quo of male dominance. Abu-Lughod (1990:42) has recently warned that analysts should not become so keen on "the romance of resistance" that they fail to see how expressions of resistance index "complex workings of social power."

A second question pertains to the relationship between discourse and other forms of social action. As Myers and Brenneis (1984) argue, discourse can exercise a substantial impact apart from its immediate effects on events if it imposes a framework that shapes the manner in which conflict will be embodied. Discourse plays a key role in creating the relevant social alignments and cleavages, constituting the events that are seen as having given rise to them, and deciding the ways that important issues will be defined and contested. Indeed, the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1982) on symbolic capital, of Jameson (1981) on the political unconscious, and of Williams (1977) on cultural hegemony suggests that ideological control and resistance can form important grounds for asserting and challenging domination.

Thus, the scholar who wishes to account for the importance of Warao ritual wailing must develop an adequate means of analyzing the relationship between gender and genre, discourse and power. I can hardly pretend to be capable of resolving these complex and pressing questions in the course of this article, nor do I think that anyone can provide a unitary, all-encompassing "answer" to them. I would, however, like to draw on the literature on discourse and emotion, language and gender, and the poetics of gender in exploring the ethnographic and broader theoretical issues that they raise.

discourse, gender, and emotion

The importance of exploring the relationship between gender and power in lament performances by viewing *sana* as discourse that forms part of a particular genre is also underlined by studies in a quite different area—the cultural construction of emotion. As Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990:7) argue in the introduction to a recently published collection of essays, inquiry into this realm can most fruitfully focus on "the many ways emotion gets its meaning and force from its location and performance in the public realm of discourse." Since Warao men and women see ritual wailing as the central means of expressing the sorrow and rage caused by the death of a close relative—and the only way that these potentially destructive emotions can be dissipated—the relationship between emotion and discourse is particularly important to the present analysis.

Lutz (1987, 1988), Rosaldo (1982), and other writers have demonstrated the manner in which Western ideology has powerfully conditioned research on affect and emotion in other societies. While dominant Western ideologies tend to view emotions as objectivized internal states, perspectives common in many other societies stress the social and contextual character of emotions. Abu-Lughod (1986) and Besnier (1989b) show how emotions that are suppressed in certain types of discourse may be celebrated in others, and Irvine (1990) has demonstrated how such alternations may be keyed to the relative social rank of the interlocutors and their interactional strategies. Brenneis (1988, 1990) suggests that for Fiji Indians "amity" and "anger" embody differing ideologies of emotion, the first constructed in collective and interactive terms, the second in individual and solitary ones.

Precisely this sort of duality is evident in Warao ideologies of emotion. One mode of perceiving emotions locates them in the *obonona* (or *obonobu*), a locus of personal identity, cognition, and affect. The *obonona* is a personal realm, and individuals have the right to reveal only as much of it as they choose. All individuals hold emotions and senses of personal identity within their *obonona;* in general, Warao feel that this phenomenon affords persons a strong sense of self and a means of earning respect. However, when powerful emotions come to dominate one's *obonona*, disrupting personal relations and giving rise to sudden, uncontrolled outbursts, these internalized emotions are viewed as a dangerous threat to the individual and her or his community (cf. Briggs 1988b). Powerful shamans who are blamed for many supernaturally inflicted deaths are believed to have *obonona* saturated with this sort of emotion. On the other hand, emotions can be created and expressed collectively and interactively. For example, the verb *oriwaka-* (celebrate, rejoice), which contains the reciprocal prefix, *ori-*, is used in talking about highly valued contexts in which positive emotions are shared. Since emotions that are generated in such settings engender sensitivity to the feelings of others, shared, relationally based emotions are seen as requisites to community cooperation.

As I noted above, women and men alike suggest that *sana* are sung to enable the wailers—as well as nonwailing relatives—to express the sorrow and rage occasioned by a death. The fact that relatives cannot work or even eat during the period between the death and the return from the burial site is seen as evidence that their *obonona* are dominated by intense personal emotions. If women did not wail, Warao assert, the survival of the community would be jeopardized, since residents would be unable to return to their subsistence tasks. How does ritual wailing effect this transformation of emotions?

I would like to suggest that it does so by embodying emotions in a highly relational manner, one rooted in the poetic and performance-based properties of the genre. Note that each refrain and most of the textual phrases begin and end with a kin term. The singer thus points to her relationship with the deceased with nearly every line she sings. The grammatical patterning of the highly recurrent refrains is similarly relational. Many refrains contain two-place propositional ("transitive") constructions in which the deceased plays the grammatical role of agent and the lamenter that of patient. In *"manoboto momoyane"* ("my child, you are leaving me"), for example, the deceased is portrayed as having caused the singer to experience sadness because of his departure. Josefina Fernández's refrain, *"mauka, ihi sana me, mauka-o"* ("my son, oh pitiful you, my son"), is a one-place proposition ("intransitive" construction) in grammatical terms. Warao suggest that this refrain evokes, however, the pitiful circumstances of the deceased *as well as* the sad and abject state of the mourner—and particularly the connection between the two.

As I indicated above, textual phrases focus on key events in the constitution of social relations between the deceased and the members of her or his community (including the performer). Since the scenes that are described and, through the use of reported speech, are replayed by mourners are highly emotionally charged, textual phrases serve as central means of expressing emotions and inviting listeners to experience these emotions. Note, however, that the emotions themselves are seldom labeled referentially. Much like the morally charged Western Apache narratives described by K. Basso (1984), *sana* invite audience members to become active participants in the process of constructing and interpreting the discourse by inferring the affective import of the events. Men suggested to me that this was precisely what they were doing as they listened to *sana*—reflecting on the truth and significance of what was sung by exploring its meaning for them.

The compelling character of laments emerges from the relational framing of individual emotions in *form* as well as content. Urban (1988) has argued that the formal patterning of ritual wailing provides an icon of its affective significance. I argue elsewhere (1989) that the suppression of the "singing formants" of the performer's voice, along with other characteristics of voice quality and pitch, enables listeners to gauge whether a given lamenter is "really" feeling intense emotion or not. Women whose voices are not in tune, as it were, stand out quite clearly from other wailers, for various poetic features of *sana*, both musical and verbal, are tied to the fact that women wail together. This does not mean that wailing involves homophony—the participants do not all sing the same thing at the same time. The collective voice that emerges in wailing is rather polyphonic, meaning that relative autonomy and close coordination are both present. Wailers generally stay within the same range of pitch and timbre, and their *sana* all exhibit the same alternation between refrains and textual phrases.[14] Similarly, only one woman commonly sings textual phrases at a given time, as the remainder produce refrains, prolong the final *-o*, or remain silent. After listening in this fashion to another lamenter, the remaining singers often incorporate the same themes into their textual phrases while modifying kin terms, deictics, tense/aspect forms, and other features. Just as women emphasize the importance of personal expression, they stress that *"emo onakumoni—aweresike onaya"* ("we couldn't cry apart from one another—we cry very close to one another"). Research by Caraveli-Chaves (1980) and Seremetakis (1990) on Greek laments suggests that women's collective performances play a crucial role in dealing with death, emotion, and conflict in other communities as well.

In short, Warao ritual wailing is highly charged in emotional terms in that it uses both highly individual *and* collective modes of conveying emotion. Wailers express intense emotions in as "strong" *(taera)* and moving a fashion as possible. The *sana* genre places these emotions in a highly relational idiom, and its formal patterning—poetic and interactional—indexes the intensity of the emotions as well as the collective production of the discourse. *Sana* are co-performed in terms of both the polyphonic singing of the wailers and the fact that listening involves singing along, if silently, and interpreting the significance of the textual phrases. The effectiveness of *sana* in enabling communities to overcome the destructive effects of the powerful emotions produced by a person's death, then, is tied to their ability to transform these emotions from internal and individual into relational, interactive, and collective ones. This process helps explain why men and women suggest that *sana* do not make the sorrow and anger associated with death disappear, but rather enable mourners to put the state in which such feelings dominate their *obonona* behind them and thus to go on with life.

the poetics of gender

Grasping this process of affective transformation takes us a large step forward in understanding why Warao say that wailing plays such an important role in dealing with death. But the significance of wailing is not limited to the death and its emotional impact. As I noted above, Warao women's access to power is greatly constrained by their exclusion from speaking roles at most of the key discourse events in which power is exercised. Laments provide a highly public forum for commenting on social and political-economic processes in general, thus affording women a voice in the public settings in which issues of importance to the community are decided. How are we to account for this appropriation of public discourse?

The past 15 years have witnessed the emergence of a substantial body of literature that focuses on differences in the ways women and men speak and write and on the way linguistic inequality relates to gender-based social inequality.[15] Lakoff (1975) argued in *Language and Woman's Place* that a number of phonological, morphological, syntactic, and prosodic features characterized a distinctive and socially devalued "women's language." Others criticized her methodology and empirical findings, and many practitioners sought to determine whether women do use particular linguistic features more than men do. Both positive and negative results prompted an expansion of the range of linguistic variables considered in relation to gender. Some researchers have pushed for consideration of the roles that class, occupation, social role, and ethnicity play in shaping patterns that other scholars have correlated with gender (Ochs 1987; Sherzer 1987b). O'Barr and Atkins (1980) argue, for example, that what has often been referred to as "women's language" might be more aptly characterized as "powerless language" and that this speech style is used by both women and men who occupy subordinate positions in society.

The literature on language and gender has recently shifted in the direction of a discourse-centered approach to language (cf. Sherzer 1987a). Writers such as Philips and Reynolds (1987:93) have stressed the need for more analyses of "naturally occurring speech," while Sherzer (1987b:96) has chided researchers for focusing too much on middle-class speakers of

English. Schieffelin (1987) has recently warned that gender-based asymmetry is not always accompanied by linguistic differentiation according to gender. Hill (1987), Philips and Reynolds (1987), Sherzer (1987b), and others have tried to show that our understanding of the relationship between language and gender is likely to gain more from detailed studies of particular ways that women and men use language than from looking for empirical validation of a priori assumptions regarding the manner in which linguistic features "reflect" inequality between men and women.

These critiques have certainly revealed a fundamental theoretical weakness in correlational studies of the relationship between language and gender. Linguistic features are often multifunctional, and their meaning is conditioned by co-occurring features, discourse markers, deixis, and other factors. It would thus greatly impoverish our understanding of the poetics of laments to view its features simply as direct linguistic indexes of gender differentiation or the subordinate status of women. As Kuipers (1986:449) has noted, the "differential control of women and men over verbal resources, such as key speech genres," provides a fruitful avenue of investigation. It is accordingly useful to study laments' poetic features both in terms of their functions in particular tokens of the genre and in terms of the significance of the relationships they create between discourse production and reception by women and men for the constitution of social power.

A crucial step in the analysis consists in linking such empirical study of women's and men's discourse with larger theoretical questions regarding power, domination, and resistance. Recent work on the social construction of gender and sexuality in literature is of value in suggesting fruitful means of exploring this issue (see, for example, Miller 1986; Showalter 1985; Weed 1989). As a number of writers have argued, one of the most effective strategies women use in challenging relations of domination and the ideologies that are used in legitimating them is to appropriate the discourses in which those relations are constructed and exercised. Two points are of particular relevance. As Jones (1986:92) argues in an analysis of women's writing in the Renaissance, women often gain a voice by extracting utterances from male discourse and then formally reweaving and functionally reinterpreting them. Second, as Kristeva (1982), Suleiman (1986), and others point out, transgressions of *rules of discourse* can constitute social and political transgressions. Such violations include women's appropriations of men's discourses, the exceeding of formal or content-based constraints, and readings that challenge established interpretive practices. These subversive modes of writing and reading can afford women access to formerly closed domains and challenge strategies of domination and their ideological underpinnings.

A detailed examination of lament texts suggests that such transgressive appropriations of male discourse are not confined to literature or to Western societies. As a number of scholars have recently argued, reported speech enables speakers to use prosody, syntax, quotation-framing devices, and metacommunicative commentary in extracting speech from previous settings and articulating its place in the ongoing speech event.[16] Reported speech forms part of a larger set of discourse processes that Bauman and I have discussed in terms of recontextualization (Bauman and Briggs 1990). *Recontextualization* refers to the extraction of discourse from previous utterances and its insertion elsewhere in the same setting or in new speech events. Much recent research has pointed to the way that speech—including verbal art—is contextualized in keeping with its interactional setting, shaped by the identities and agendas of the participants, the time, the place, the character of the event, and so forth. Bauman and I suggest that elements of formal patterning can also be used in such a way as to facilitate the extraction of text from the performance setting and its insertion into future situations. Recontextualization bears important implications for the social and political dimensions of discourse. While gaining the right to perform in a particular setting does not automatically afford an individual the right to recontextualize her or his words in future interactions, persons denied access to the role of speaker when a body of discourse initially emerges may nevertheless be accorded the authority to determine how it will be recontextualized in the future.

Examining the place of ritual wailing in Warao discourse as a whole has important implications for our understanding both of the genre and of the role of women in general. The right to perform laments confers the broadest access to the recontextualization of discourse in Warao society. Wailers extract discourse of nearly every type from virtually every interactional setting.[17] Women are free to appropriate not only speech that was heretofore exclusively male but speech that was construed as private, that is, framed so as to prevent public recontextualizations. *Sana* allow women to take perspectives that are known to some community members alone or known to all but never discussed openly and to put them on record for the community as a whole. Dispute mediation provides another central forum for transforming private into public discourse, although it focuses on particular conflicts that generally affect only a segment of the community. In other words, the range of topics is relatively limited, and the *aidamo,* who are all male, retain ultimate control over turn taking and the choice of topic (cf. Briggs 1988b). In laments, on the other hand, senior males lose all such authority, and they themselves often become targets of criticism. Warao women's wailing is thus highly transgressive in that women penetrate the domains of men's discourse that are most closely associated with power and domination.

Wailing is transgressive not simply in the fact that women recontextualize men's discourse but also in the manner in which they do so. The poetic properties of *sana* provide them with strategies for questioning the meaning and social impact of particular utterances and for establishing new connections between heretofore disparate bodies of discourse. Wailers establish these multiple indexical connections between events, experiences, and persons through *entextualization*—using formal patterning to shape discourse into a coherent unit, a text (see Bauman and Briggs 1990; Kuipers 1990). While the formal patterning of laments draws attention to the heterogeneous and conflictive nature of the discourse they incorporate, the diverse voices are united through their shared relationship to the death and the laments it occasions. This conjunctive process is coded implicitly as well by the weaving of many voices together into a common musical and poetic warp. It is, I suggest, the simultaneous exploration of a variety of points of view and their incorporation into a new vision of the relationship between disparate experiences that enables *sana* to produce a deeper "truth," one that assists mourners in coming to grips with powerful emotions.

Sana afford a number of subversive strategies for "reading" men's discourse. I noted above that textual phrases are quite complex in morphological terms. The embedding of deictic forms and tense/aspect suffixes both in quoted utterances and in the framing discourse that surrounds them provides wailers with powerful tools for revealing the presuppositions and covert effects of men's discourse. In line 14, for example, Josefina Fernández quotes the threat that was made against Manuel; by using the gerundive and future suffixes in line 15, she suggests that the real source of the trouble was not simply Manuel's behavior but the propensity of the shamans to make threats—and to carry them out. These grammatical forms also emphasize the parodic echoing of the exaggeration apparent in the utterance attributed to the shamans. Performers use such morphological devices, along with shifts from indirect modes of representing speech to direct, nearly theatrical portrayals, to manipulate the distance between what Jakobson (1957) refers to as the narrating and the narrated events, increasing or decreasing their interpenetrability. Moreover, they use syntactic patterning, particularly the highly marked verb-final use of agents and patients, in conjunction with these morphological features to provide etiological interpretations of the events that emerge through reported speech. The original speakers' accounts of the motives that lie behind their speech and actions are thus displaced by the singers' own interpretations. This strategy is applied to the discourse of women as well as men; as I noted above, wailers often reveal their own shortcomings in precisely this fashion. Josefina

Fernández suggests that it was her selfishness *("obohona sabana tihi")* rather than Manuel's behavior that led her to deprive him of the use of her record player (see lines 30–34).

Other dimensions of these strategies draw on metacommunicative shifts. *Sana* make extensive use of metapragmatic (cf. Silverstein 1976) characterizations of the type of discourse that is being reported. In line 20, Josefina Fernández characterizes the shamans' discussion of Manuel's sexuality not as the authoritative discourse of powerful males but as "gossip." She returns to this theme later in the *sana* by noting that her assessment of the discussion at the time led her to advise Manuel not to take seriously what turned out to be quite serious warnings—"Those shamans aren't going to kill you, they're just spreading gossip." Metapragmatic transformations of the status of reported speech extend beyond the nature of the speech acts to include characterizations of speakers, audiences, and the nature of their collaboration.

Warao consider parody and irony to be among the most effective verbal strategies. Wailers produce deeply transgressive effects on the speech they report by shifting to a profoundly different key. Often, for instance, they will use a lewd and disparaging epithet in the frame that encloses a quotation: a high-ranking man may accordingly be referred to as "Bowlegged" or "Huge Testicles." The use of such epithets can shift the reception of an utterance from fear and compliance to ridicule and laughter. Josefina Fernández exposes male sexual ideologies by presenting men's statements about Manuel's purported sexual activities in a highly lewd and exaggerated fashion. Manuel himself is criticized for being willing to risk not only his own death but general social disruption in pursuing his obsession with sex. Taking a lead from French literary criticism, we can recognize the power of this strategy. Wailers zero in on discourses that quintessentially embody male ideologies of sexuality, gender, domination, and supernatural violence. By transforming the formal and functional patterning of such speech, women expose the techniques by which dominant discourses are legitimated.

Nevertheless, the force of laments does not emerge exclusively from their ability to reflect on past events. Wailers are well aware that their *sana* will be heard by the entire settlement or, in a large community such as Murako, by everyone who has gathered on the docks and surrounding houses. Residents who are away at the time of the death as well as the members of neighboring communities will ask men and women who heard the laments, "What did they cry?" Answers to the question form narratives that tell who sang and how, summarize the referential content, and quote key textual phrases. As I noted above, *sana* are also recontextualized in subsequent discussions that focus on resolving the problems exposed by the wailers. Interestingly, women remember the textual phrases that they performed, particularly the ones they produced while serving as the lead singer. The facility with which the performers recall their laments and the audience members transform the laments into narratives indicates the cohesiveness of the entextualization. When I returned to the nearby village of Kʷamuhu two years after the death of a young resident named José Fernández, his mother and grandmother sang their *sana*, and their recall was extraordinary. Father Julio Lavandero (personal communication, 1987) reports having heard Warao women sing laments that they had performed 20 years before.

The memorable quality of *sana* points to a further dimension of the entextualization process. Recontextualization is an important component of *sana* performances themselves in that women incorporate the textual phrases of other lamenters, particularly those of the lead singer, into their own textual phrases. Josefina Fernández's lament illustrates the way in which wailers recontextualize *sana* sung for other deaths—by themselves and other performers—in subsequent laments. Since audience members will recontextualize *sana* as narratives *(dehe hido)*, lamenters often attempt to shape the ways in which their laments will be retold.

The lament for José Fernández provides a striking example. I arrived in my canoe with about ten young men and women from neighboring Murako approximately three hours after he died. As we approached the dock, José's grandmother, Margarita Fernández, asserted that a man from Murako had convinced José's father-in-law to use *hoa* shamanism against him. She then sang the following verse:

Segment of Margarita Fernández's lament for her grandson José K^wamuhu, 1 July 1987

Yatu awaraotu saba warakotu, dehe warakotu,
  "anatu dehe hisia dibunae," tane dehe warakotu,
  "idamo k^wahokoida hisia dibunae,"
    tane takotu manakunarai.
5 Manatoro sanuka, ayamo wabakuna yakerate;
  wabakore maobohona iabate.

Tell [the man in Murako] to tell his friend, tell this story,
  "his grandmother gossiped about you," tell the story like this,
  "that old white-haired woman talked about you,"
    say it like that so he will kill me.
5 My little grandson, it will be good if I die along with you;
  in dying I will abandon my thoughts.

Just before this section of the lament, the grandmother quotes the shaman. She then makes explicit reference to a new contextual parameter of the performance—the arrival of the Murako youths to hear the *sana*. Next, in the passage quoted above, she tries to determine who will recontextualize her words—first the youths, then the Murako man who sought José's death, and finally the murderous shaman himself. The speech events that she anticipates indeed came to pass. As soon as the Murako youths returned home, they were asked by each adult resident what José's relatives had sung. (Since I stayed several additional hours to record *sana*, I was asked to recount the laments as well.) Although these words reached both José's enemy in Murako and his former father-in-law, the latter does not appear to have retaliated against the grandmother. It is interesting to note that this *sana* was sung at a time when relations between Murako and K^wamuhu were quite strained. While the *sana* and its transmission to Murako did not settle the dispute, it certainly did bring the conflict out into the open.

conclusion

As Bourdieu (1977, 1982) has argued, exercising power through discourse involves not only appropriating the right to speak in particular ways but, just as crucially, acquiring the power to command an audience. Warao women seize the latter opportunity during the ritual inversion of ordinary discourse patterns that characterizes mourning. Death moves the survivors to the margins of life, and normal activities are suspended. Food is neither procured nor eaten, and the *hisabanoko* in which most of the wailing takes place becomes a spatial representation of this inversion, as the cooking fire is extinguished and the area becomes a funeral parlor. Women, who seldom play an active role in public discourse events, are accorded a public voice, and men are silenced.

My analysis suggests that laments are not, so to speak, just talk. Women gain the power to shape shared perceptions of crucial events in the life of the community each time someone dies. Given the high mortality rate among the Warao and in many similar societies, this right is exercised with some frequency. I have pointed to a number of cases in which laments explicitly motivated particular courses of action—such as the banishing of malevolent shamans or drunken youths. Women's use of ritual wailing to transform the powerful emotions associated with death from internal and individual to interactive and collective ones is in many ways akin to the chiefs' use of political rhetoric in dispute mediation (cf. Briggs 1988b), a comparison made by Warao. The substantial power that lies in the hands of shamans and political leaders is constrained at least to some degree by their knowledge that *sana* will expose abuses of power. By filling the dead person's mouth with poison and exhorting the shaman's helping spirits to carry it back to their "master," lamenters can threaten the life of the practitioner deemed responsible for the death.

Nonetheless, although women criticize men's abuses of social power, they cannot keep men's strategies of control from being used—or abused—in the future. Women's appropriations of men's discourses of power do not afford women an audible voice in subsequent public speech events. One major constraint is apparent even within ritual wailing—I have never heard a lamenter use a term that is included in the special shaman's lexicon, and shamanistic songs themselves are never quoted or paraphrased. Moreover, taking effective action to redress the grievances articulated in laments often remains in the hands of men, as the incident with the drunken youth would suggest. By exposing and often mediating disputes, ritual wailing may temporarily constrain shamans from inflicting malevolent spirits. Shamans do not, however, lose their power, and more deaths will be attributed to supernatural violence in the future.

This note of caution is indeed important. While critical reflections on relations of domination may be taken as signs of resistance, it is hardly advisable to conclude that such relations are thereby eluded or structurally undermined. We must instead examine the manner in which performances, like other discourse forms, constitute symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1982; Irvine 1989) and relate to other socially and politically significant processes. What is the impact of *sana* as viewed from this perspective?

Research on the nature of women's writing suggests that the strategies Warao women employ in laments have counterparts in other times, places, and genres. Jones's analysis of women's writing in the Renaissance provides a case in point. She argues that

> for men and women, fame was not the same. Women claimed it in intricate and indirect ways: they spun safety nets for themselves from the loose ends of masculine discourse, they composed poems that record rather than harmonize the tensions they confronted in a cultural context that demanded women's silence. Reading such poets consequently requires an ear open to the half-said, the quickly withdrawn, the manipulation of masculine rituals of self-eternalization. [1986:92]

This analogy points to an important dimension of the way women appropriate power through wailing in Warao society. The poetics of gender in laments cannot be measured in terms of explicit control over public events alone, since such expressions of power lie in the hands of men, and women are not able to establish autonomous and competing power bases. We can thus shed most light on the impact of women's discourse in this setting by drawing attention to the ways in which women appropriate men's discourse and challenge its ideological underpinnings, formal and functional patterning, and representational power. We must therefore look beyond women's discourse and the settings in which it is produced to grasp its relations with other types of speech, particularly those most closely associated with social power.

The power that lies in Warao women's laments thus emerges from their relationship with the discourse norms that most constrain women. Paradoxically, this connection imbues women's silence with the power to limit the exercise of power in men's discourse. When women are excluded from active roles in most culturally focal speech events, it is easy to conclude that they have no part in the negotiations of meaning and of relations of equality or domination that are taking place there. Nevertheless, Warao men's discourse is itself not as autonomous or invulnerable as it might seem at first glance. Even though women's voices may not be heard in most key speech events, men know that in future laments women are likely to expose and criticize wrongdoing, and this possibility constitutes a pervasive if silent parameter of public discourse.

The right to contextualize the discourse in a particular setting should accordingly be distinguished from the right to recontextualize it in other situations (see Bauman and Briggs 1990). Recent research has pointed to the audience's tremendous power over the contextualization of speech (cf. Duranti and Brenneis 1986). The data on *sana* suggest the further observation that even when audience members are not accorded any active role in the contextualization of speech, their presence may shape the structure and content of discourse, as speakers try to anticipate how hearers will use their words in the future. Warao men are never able to appropriate the full value of their own words as symbolic capital—women obtain a portion of the value simply by hearing what has been said, either directly or in narrative retellings. As such literary critical frameworks as reader response theory (see Suleiman and Crosman 1980; Tompkins 1980) have emphasized, the meaning and impact of discourse are not determined once and for all at the time it is uttered or written. I would accordingly argue that the manner in which discourse signals relations of dominance and resistance can only be adequately assessed when rights to its recontextualization are considered. While men are generally able to get in the first word, the last belongs to women. This is not to say that laments are not recontextualized—to the contrary. Once the "truth" has been established in *sana*, however, it is very difficult to challenge such collective and definitive interpretations.

We must also carry this lesson over into the study of speech events in which women's voices are dominant. It is easy to see these as peripheral contexts that concentrate women's public discourse in settings with little impact on day-to-day life. In discussing recontextualization, I have tried to point to the connections between particular bodies of discourse and those that come before and after them. When reported speech plays a central role in the entextualization of discourse, performers explore these connections in multiple and highly reflexive ways.

This is not to say that such uses of reported speech simply index existing relations between independently constituted domains of words and actions. The particular power of Warao ritual weeping lies in its status as a central means of creating shared interpretations of events, experiences, identities, social relations, and the impact of these elements on social life. I have argued that *sana* are unique in terms of the range of speech events they can represent and connections they can establish. In particular, wailing women are accorded the right to reflect critically on what the shamans and other male leaders have said and done. As Abu-Lughod (1990) has suggested, this interpretive power does not banish relations of dominance—paradoxically, it indexes the power of the patterns that it resists. Nevertheless, women's discourse gains its power not simply by referring to existing events and relations but by appropriating the authority to represent—and thus potentially to transform—the reproduction of relations of dominance. Gossip too can play a powerful role in speech communities by virtue of the way in which it uses reported speech and replayed action in recontextualizing discourse. The threat of gossip can accordingly act as a powerful restraint on what people—even those in dominant positions—do and say in a broad range of settings.[18]

I noted above that research on language and gender has increasingly come to focus on discourse in its interactional context rather than on isolated tokens of "men's" as opposed to "women's" language. While I laud this step, I would like to suggest two more. Adequately grasping the relationship between speech, gender, and the (re)production of social relations in a particular type of discourse entails a detailed understanding of its formal and functional relations with other types of discourse. This does not mean that an analysis of one genre or performance is not adequately documented unless it includes an exhaustive description of the entire verbal economy. It does suggest that research which fails to consider the way the entextualization process indexes important connections with other bodies of discourse is likely to overlook the social power that accrues to *both* apparently marginal and apparently dominant discourse.

While this task requires close analysis of formal detail, discourse should not be analyzed with respect to its formal patterning and referential content alone. To the contrary: discourse production is as much a part of the reproduction of social life as marriage or gift exchange. Discourse is not simply *talk about* conflict and accommodation—it *embodies* them. The study of women's and men's discourse is accordingly unlikely to tell us very much about gender—or vice versa—unless rights to speak, to listen, and to extract, interpret, and reuse words are examined with respect to their social, cultural, and political significance.

notes

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[1] Like all names used in this article, Manuel is a pseudonym. The use of names is subject to many restrictions, particularly for women, and my consultants were also hesitant to have their names associated with accusations of death by shamanism. Manuel was about 20 years old at the time of his death. (Warao do not reckon age in precise chronological terms.)

[2] The one exception was the youngest of the four. He returned some months later when his mother moved to Murako. He was permitted to visit her, but he was not made to feel welcome in the community.

[3] See Heinen (1988) for a discussion of the *aidamo*.

[4] Note that Sherzer (1987b:100) reports a strikingly similar type of women's discourse among the Kuna.

[5] I have never witnessed any men engaged in musical weeping. Friends have told me, however, that in some areas of the delta husbands and fathers sometimes weep "like women."

[6] See Barral (1964:233–234, 249) and Wilbert (1975) for studies of Warao conceptions of the afterlife.

[7] I also examine the musical structure of *sana* in that essay (Briggs 1989).

[8] In Murako, houses are open on two sides, and they are situated a short distance apart from one another. Even in as large a community as Murako, it is accordingly possible to hear the wailing while sitting in one's house or that of a relative.

[9] This recording was transcribed and translated twice; in each case I used the process to elicit discussion regarding Manuel and his family, the circumstances that gave rise to the death, funerary rituals, and the performance itself. The first set of sessions included men and women of a wide range of ages; this social heterogeneity produced a wealth of background information. The second set of sessions involved two women. Since women perform *sana*, they are generally much more adept at discerning exactly what was said. The second session thus yielded a much more accurate transcript and sharper insights into performance processes.

In the transcription, lines are segmented on the basis of musical and grammatical features in addition to line-initial and line-final kin terms. Textual phrases begin at the left-hand margin, while refrains lie several indentations to the right. The longer length of some translated lines occasionally necessitates mechanically "wrapping" a line; this is indicated by an equal sign (=) preceding the line. Otherwise indentations preceding textual phrases indicate textual cohesion between adjacent lines.

[10] See Romero-Figueroa (1985) on word order in Warao.

[11] On the agent/patient distinction in linguistics, see Fillmore (1968).

[12] The *sana* for María Fernández, the stepdaughter, includes a very moving lament that Josefina sang after her return from burial ground; by this time all the other women had ceased wailing. In it she asserts that the animosity of the shamans was in part directed toward her owing to the jealousy of one of the shamans' wives, adding, in reference to herself, "Since your aunt's flesh is tough, they aren't killing me. My child, even though you are only a child, they passed me by in looking for a victim." She facetiously notes that "the shamans don't want to kill your aunt first, for they are fond of me."

[13] I do not mean to suggest that kin terms are not used in Kaluli laments. In the texts published by Feld (1982), each line begins with a kin term and the same term is often repeated at the end of the line. While alternations between contrastive kin terms seem to be less prevalent in Kaluli ritual wailing, the sentiments

evoked by the singer's relationship to the person who has died and the failure of others to behave in keeping with kin-based relations are prevalent themes in Kaluli as well as Warao laments (Feld 1982).

[14] Note, however, that women will sometimes "rest" by singing only refrains for periods while others are intoning both textual phrases and refrains.

[15] See Philips (1980) and Smith (1979) for surveys of the literature on language variation and gender; Graddol and Swann (1989) have recently published an introduction to the subject.

[16] See, for example, Bauman (1986), Briggs (1990), Hymes (1981), Shuman (1986), Silverstein (1985), Tannen (1990), Urban (1984), and the articles in Lucy (In press).

[17] One important exclusion is implicit in this statement—I have never heard a mourner quote, translate, summarize, or comment on texts sung in shamanistic performance. Nonetheless, mourners are not reticent to name the shaman deemed responsible for the death and to detail his motives for the act.

[18] For studies dealing with relevant dimensions of gossip, see Abrahams (1970), Besnier (1989a, 1990), Brenneis (1984, 1988), Goodwin (1980), and Haviland (1977).

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