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Ritual Wailing in Amerindian Brazil

As a means of charting the complicated semiotic pathway leading from ceremonialized expressions of emotion to their underlying social motivations, this article undertakes a comparative investigation of the "ritual wailing" complex of Amerindian central Brazil. Based upon fine-grained analyses of tape-recorded instances of wailing, coupled with ethnographic descriptions of their social contexts, the article argues that ceremonialized affect is itself a sign vehicle, a form of "meta-affect," designed to communicate a desire for sociability.

IN HIS CLASSIC STUDY, *THE ANDAMAN ISLANDERS*, A. R. Radcliffe-Brown observed that "weeping" was of two sorts: a spontaneous expression of "sorrow," as when a child is scolded, and a ceremonial form in which "men and women are required by custom to embrace one another and weep" (1964:239–240). He argued that the purpose of the latter form was "to affirm the existence of a social bond between two or more persons." This article reopens the question of whether and how such "ritual wailing" accomplishes this communication function, and, by extension, how ceremonially expressive forms more generally articulate, through a complex semiotic pathway, with a substratum of emotion.¹

The empirical focus of the article is Amerindian Brazil. Through an analysis of the ritual wailing form as sign vehicle, the article tries to show that wailing functions simultaneously on two planes: (1) the plane of overt expression of emotion, in this case, the feeling of sadness at separation or death; and (2) the plane of covert expression of the desire for sociability.

Grouped together under the term "ritual wailing" (*choro ritual*) in the Amerindian Brazilian ethnographic literature are a number of vocal styles in many respects diverse, but sharing in common certain resemblances to what we naively label "crying." These resemblances are of two analytically distinct sorts. First, formally, the styles typically share at least some sound shape features with crying.² Second, functionally, Amerindian Brazilian ritual wailing occurs in contexts that include those associated with sadness (e.g., death, departure, and separation).

These resemblances reveal a core set of form-function linkages, but one that washes out as we move away from the center on either the formal or functional plane. It is in regard to the limits of this outward radiation that Amerindian Brazil, especially south of the Amazon Basin, is of particular interest. For here we encounter a rich spectrum of formal devices and functional contexts for the ritual wailing complex.

Noteworthy in this regard is the so-called "welcome of tears" first remarked by the 16th-century Europeans who visited the Tupinamba.³ In the "welcome of tears," the wailing device is actually used to greet visitors whom one has not seen for some time or even to greet total strangers. This is of interest because another form, the "ceremonial dialogue" (Urban 1986), is used in northern and western South America for the same purpose. This geographical complementarity was noticed by Neils Fock (1963:228), who compared his distributional study of the dialogic complex with the earlier study by Mé-

traux (1947) of the "welcome of tears." We thus have in greetings an area where two radically distinct vocal styles are used at the same functional locus.

One purpose of this article is to examine the formal and functional limits of ritual wailing, a task for which study of the Amerindian Brazilian area is particularly well-suited. However, study of ritual wailing also raises broader theoretical questions about the nature of social order. As a semiotic device, wailing is linked to affect, just as at the core one assumes "crying" as a formal device is linked to "sadness." But it is the complexity of linkage between wailing and emotion that is foregrounded by the rich form-function spectrum of Amerindian Brazilian ritual wailing.

The central contention of this article is that ritual wailing contains within it the secret of social order, how culture comes to exercise control over affective processes. The secret is in the alchemy whereby affect becomes "meta-affect." That is to say, one emotion (sadness) points to or "comments upon" another emotion (the desire for social acceptance). Seen in the context of social action, ritual wailing involves the signaling by one actor of a feeling of grief. But the signal is emitted in a way that other actors consider appropriate. Hence the sadness itself is rendered socially intelligible, and it is through this intelligible sadness that the basic intelligibility and acceptability of the social actor emerges. Thus, an actor's own affect must be controlled as a means of signaling who one is. In short, affect becomes meta-affect.

The Sample

Regrettably, data on Amerindian Brazilian ritual wailing are few and fragmentary. This limitation has influenced this study, which consequently focuses on three reasonably well-described cases, for which tapes are available: (1) the Shokleng (Gê) of southern Brazil, for whom I draw upon my own ethnographic descriptions and tape recordings; (2) the Shavante (Gê) of central Brazil, for whom I use the work of L. Graham (1984, 1986, and personal communications), which includes tape recordings and ethnographic descriptions; and (3) the Bororo of west central Brazil, for whom I draw upon the tape recordings supplied to me by S. Caiuby Novaes and upon the ethnographic descriptions in the *Enciclopédia Bororo* (Albisetti and Venturelli 1962).

No tapes are currently available for any of the Tupian groups, for whom the "welcome of tears" was first described. Nevertheless, insight can be gleaned from the ethnographic literature on the now-extinct coastal Tupinamba of the 16th and 17th centuries, for whom I draw upon the work of the early travelers (Léry 1972[1578]; Cardim 1978[1665]; d'Abbeville 1975[1614]; Métraux 1928, 1947). This information is supplemented with descriptions of ritual wailing among the Tapirapé (Tupi) of north central Brazil (Baldus 1970). Of special interest in light of the broader concern with the transformation of grief is Basso's work on the Carib-speaking Kalapalo (1985:91-140).

The Signs of Grief

A key aspect of the formal sign vehicle of ritual wailing is its cultural specificity, the fact that each culture defines a unique form for the expression of grief. At the same time, from a comparative vantage point, it is relevant that there are certain commonalities in the sign vehicles that can be grouped under the term "ritual wailing." These provide clues to the functioning of ritual wailing as a semiotic mechanism. The three commonalities isolated here are (1) the existence of a musical line, marked by a characteristic intonational contour and rhythmical structure; (2) the use of various icons of crying; and (3) the absence of an actual addressee, which renders the ritual wailing an overtly monologic or expressive device, despite the importance that may accrue to its status as public, with the desired presence of someone to "overhear" it.

The Musical Line

In each of the cultures studied here, the sound emitted during ritual wailing shows a musical regularity, which may be described in terms of "lines." The line is essentially a

pulse unit, corresponding to the sound that is produced through exhalation from one inhalation. Lines are thus demarcated by breath pauses.

Line Length. The actual length of lines varies within a given instance of ritual wailing by a particular individual. Shown in the accompanying table are the lengths in seconds of the first five lines of tape-recorded instances of wailing from Bororo, Shokleng, and Shavante. The table also gives the average length in seconds of these lines, as well as an average from a 20-line sample. In these samples, lines may differ in length from the average by a maximum of 1.5 seconds for Bororo, 5.2 seconds for Shokleng, and 3.4 seconds for Shavante.

In some cases, the large variation is due to the use of the breath pause, rather than some other criterion, as the basis for line segmentation. Thus, in the Shokleng case line 4 of the sample, representing the extreme in length, could have been analyzed into two lines, using intonational parallelism as the means of segmentation. Nevertheless, even employing other criteria, variation in length still occurs, and seems, indeed, to be fundamental to ritual wailing as an expressive device.

The issue of variability is fundamental because it has to do with ritual wailing as an *expressive* sign vehicle, designed to communicate affect. Regularity in length, as well as in other aspects of ritual wailing, appears to signal standardization, and hence sociability or compliance with a norm. Irregularity, or variability, as the other pole of the continuum, however, seems to be essential for signaling the individual or unique aspects of the emotion. Indeed, there is in ritual wailing a necessary dynamic tension manifested in the formal sign vehicle between regularity and irregularity, uniformity and uniqueness, standardization and individuation.

At the same time as there is a tension between regularity and variability within a given occurrence of wailing, there is the tendency within a culture to a general norm for line length. The standardization of line length cannot be established with certainty at the present time, owing to the small sample size. Nevertheless, two well-analyzed instances of Shokleng ritual wailing from two different occasions show striking uniformity. This uniformity is confirmed by a study of three separate tape-recorded instances of Bororo ritual wailing.

Given this intracultural regularity, it is of special interest that there are marked differences in the standardized line lengths between cultures. This points to the fact *that ritual wailing is a culturally specific sign vehicle*. The longest Shokleng line (14.7 seconds), for example, is still below the average Bororo line length (15.9 seconds), and the shortest Shokleng line (6.5 seconds) almost coincides with the average Shavante line length (6.6 sec-

Table 1
Data on line length.

	Line number					Av. ^a	Av. ^b
	1	2	3	4	5		
	Total length of lines						
Bororo	17.1	16.8	14.1	14.1	15.7	15.6	15.9
Shokleng	8.6	9.9	7.6	14.7	6.5	9.5	9.2
Shavante	3.4	6.2	8.2	7.8	8.4	6.8	6.6
	Pause length						
Bororo	6.4	4.2	4.6	3.3	3.4	4.4	4.3
Shokleng	1.8	2.2	1.6	3.5	0.7	2.0	2.0
Shavante	0.5	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.7	1.1	1.0

^aAverage for the five lines shown here.

^bAverage for a 20-line sample.

onds). While there is overlap in the extremes, the norms for line length in these three cultures are distinct.

While each of the three cultures has a distinct line length, it is also important that in each case there *is* a regular line. Ritual wailing, like music or poetry, makes use of a pattern of parallelism, wherein a given line strikes the hearer as similar in certain respects to other lines they have heard. In this case, one aspect of similarity between lines is actual length.

Such parallelistic structures can be understood in terms of the "poetic function" of language discussed by Jakobson (1960). At their most basic level they are "attention-getting" or perceptually salient, serving to kindle interest in themselves as sign vehicles. This musical or poetic function is an extremely important aspect of ritual wailing in all three cultures considered here, and is detectable as well in the ethnographic descriptions of other cultures. By getting the attention of other members of the community, the signal is simultaneously pointing to the other aspects of itself as signal that are expressive. This is one of the ways in which ritual wailing functions as a meta-signal.

Intonation Contour and Voice. Like line length, intonation contour tends to be fixed within a given instance of ritual wailing, has a circumscribed range of variation, and tends toward uniformity within a given culture, while exhibiting considerable variation between cultures. The voice used in these cases also approximates at least in some measure a musical, as opposed to speech, voice, with the vowels capable of being protracted and carrying a musical pitch.

The Shavante represent an extreme in this regard. The instances recorded and analyzed by Graham (1986) appear to be almost fully musical. Shavante ritual wailing makes exclusive use of vowels, there being no full syllables, words, or higher levels of language involved. It is also characterized by a musical intonational contour that may be readily diagrammed using musical staff notation (Graham 1984). In general, each line shows a rise to a single peak, which may be articulated in a falsetto voice, and then a decline to a pitch level near to that where it began.

Graham's (1986) analysis shows two kinds of phrase, which she labels A and B, with different motifs based upon the number of vowel articulations after the peak. While there are regularities in how these phrase types and motifs are arrayed, it seems that the actual composition of the wailing is an individual matter, with regard to both variant motifs and the number of A phrases intervening between occurrences of B phrases. This allowance for individual creativity is arguably associated with the issue of expressivity and irregularity. Still, Shavante ritual wailing represents an extreme in being the most musical and most standardized of the ritual wailing forms considered here.

Shokleng wailing involves spoken words, and thus is more speech-like, less perfectly regular in musical terms. Yet it makes use of a distinctive "sing-song" intonation involving a number of tonal peaks. Typically, pitch rises immediately to the highest tone from an initial glide, then drops back down, then up again, with the second tone being slightly lower than the first, and so forth, in gradual descent to the end of the line. In many of the lines, there are two major peaks, from which descent occurs. The second tonal peak is invariably lower than the first. The overall affect of each line is a gradual downward tonal slope, with sing-song movements in between. However, each token has a somewhat unique intonation contour, dependent upon the specific words that are being uttered. Thus, on the question of regularity versus irregularity, Shavante is closer to the extreme of standardization, Shokleng to that of individuation.

As regards irregularity, the Bororo line is similar to the Shokleng line, both of which make use of spoken words. However, the Bororo intonational contour type itself is wholly distinct. It begins with a perfectly flat intonation contour. It then tapers slightly, prior to rising to one of several "spiked" peaks. Each peak involves a single protracted vowel, and the voice immediately tapers off in volume while it falls tonally. The length of the level

onset and the number of such protracted vowel peaks vary considerably from one line to the next.

Entering into this irregularization of the typical line in both Shokleng and Bororo is the presence of other signals, particularly the “cry break.” In Shokleng, the cry break is the only added factor, and it may or may not appear in a given line. If it does, the exact location of the break is nevertheless variable. Among Bororo, there are actually two distinct kinds of “cry break,” one of which occurs during the level onset, and the other just at the end of the line, prior to the breath.

The Bororo line also has an occasional extra feature not found in the Shokleng line, namely, a “falsetto” cry involving a single protracted non-distinct [i] sound in a pitch range far above that of normal voice. In its high-pitched falsetto character, it is reminiscent of the Shavante tonal peak. However, it is much more protracted and involves a gradual tapering off in volume and decline in pitch. This is a highly irregular feature, and is found in only a few of the Bororo lines sampled.

If there is an intonational contour “type” within each of these instances of wailing, that type is also socially shared. Within Shokleng, the different instances of wailing analyzed showed the same general pattern. In addition, an imitation of wailing that occurs in the course of one myth narration also captures the essential features of the intonationally defined ritual wailing line discussed here. The Shavante and Bororo types as well are confirmed in numerous instances. In general, therefore, the intonational type is standardized within a given culture.

While there is intracultural standardization in intonational type, it is equally remarkable how divergent the types are between cultures. The Shavante line has a single rise to and fall from a tonal peak; the Shokleng line is sing-song, with the peaks gradually descending; the Bororo line is flat at the onset, followed by a variable number of protracted vowel peaks. One can readily distinguish these types with minimal experience. The implication is that as the ritual wailing sign vehicle signals grief, it is simultaneously signaling something about sociability, about the conformance of the individual to collective norms.

Icons of Crying

If ritual wailing is a highly culture-specific form, there is also the question of whether it taps into any cross-culturally isolable devices for the expression of affect. Listening to the tapes, an American will, with greater or lesser difficulty, guess that the sounds have something to do with sadness or grief. In order to isolate precisely what about the wailing signal communicates this affect cross-culturally, I collected a number of examples of Americans imitating crying, and one instance of “actual” crying. Some striking similarities with the Amerindian Brazilian cases emerge. The four common crying signal types to be discussed here are (1) the “cry break,” (2) the voiced inhalation, (3) the creaky voice, and (4) the falsetto vowel.

While drawing attention to cross-cultural similarities, two provisos should be noted. First, the degree of similarity between the cross-cultural or “natural” signal of grief and the culture-specific icon of it is variable. In Shavante, for example, where use is made of creaky voice and the falsetto vowel to produce a “melancholy” sound, these are nevertheless washed-out or pale reflections of the “natural” signal. Second, the overall culture-specific ritual wailing may in greater or lesser measure resemble crying as a cross-culturally definable activity. In this regard, Bororo and Shokleng ritual wailing is more “natural,” and Shavante ritual wailing less “natural.”

The Cry Break. This is found in Bororo and Shokleng, but not Shavante, ritual wailing. It is found as well in imitations of crying and actual crying by Americans. From an articulatory point of view, the cry break involves a pulse of air initiated by a push from the diaphragm. Pressure from the pulse is built up behind the closed glottis, which is then released with the glottal chords vibrating to produce any of various non-distinct vowels.

This vibration is often accompanied by friction noise, as the air is forced out the mouth and/or nose. In addition, the sound is typically produced with a falling tone. The pulse is then checked through a second closure of the glottis, the entire process lasting a fraction of a second. Two variants of the cry break involve the absence of glottal closure at either the beginning or the end of the sound.

Cry breaks can be chained together to form a sobbing action. The extended sob was not found on the tape selections from Shokleng, where the isolated cry break only occasionally interrupts the ritual wailing line. However, such cry breaks in sequence do occur in Bororo ritual wailing, invariably at the end of a given line, where from one to three breaks may occur in succession.

The cry break is arguably the most transparent index of "crying," and deserves more careful semiotic study of the actual physiological mechanism. Among other things, it is closely related in articulatory terms to the "laugh," which may also prove cross-culturally isolable. The pulsing of the air flow in each case provides a signal that stands out in sharp relief against the relative calm of the airflow during normal speech and even during much of singing. It may be accompanied by the actual visual signal of the chest heaving, often accompanied by other movements of the body. The agitation of the sound and body may be an important part of the signal communicating the presence of strong emotion.

The Voiced Inhalation. Another characteristic of some of the Amerindian Brazilian wailing that is also found in American imitations of crying is the presence of voicing while inhaling. This is found consistently in Shokleng and Bororo examples, but not in the Shavante examples studied thus far. The voiced inhalation typically involves a falling intonation contour.

Voiced inhalation in ritual wailing can be compared with a signal associated in American culture, and perhaps elsewhere, with fright or with being startled. However, the intonation contour in this latter case is distinct, and the inhalation is sudden. In both cases, however, the voicing seems to signal something about the individual's intense involvement in the emotional state, which in effect interrupts the ordinary procedure of relaxing the glottal chords during inhalation. It may be this heightened emotional involvement that is signaled by use of the voiced inhalation at the line junctures in the Brazilian cases.

Creaky Voice. Another characteristic of all of the Brazilian Amerindian instances and as well of parts of the American examples is the use of "creaky voice," which in articulatory terms involves the production of sounds with the glottal chords vibrating at a lower than normal rate. There is variation again as regards (1) just how much lower than normal the rate is, and (2) how frequently the creaky voice is used.

In the Shokleng examples, the glottal chords vibrate quite slowly, and the creak occurs throughout the entire line. Among Shavante, the creak is very light throughout, becoming more noticeable at some points than at others (e.g., around the falsetto vowels). However, the voice is clearly distinct from a normal speaking voice. Among the Bororo, there is light creaking during the level onset, which, as among Shavante, becomes heavier with the protracted vowels. Similar creaking—both the light and heavy varieties—can be found in portions of the American imitations of crying.

If sadness and grief are in fact associated with this signal cross-linguistically it would be of interest to study its semiotic functioning more closely. Use of creaky voice in these contexts may have to do with its association with various abnormal states of the organism, particularly sickness or physical exhaustion, where the organism lacks the energy to produce a normal robust sound. Under this hypothesis, creakiness would be related to showing that the person engaged in ritual wailing or crying is afflicted by the situation that occasioned it, much the way an organism is afflicted by external disease or injury.

Falsetto Vowels. A further component of some instances of Amerindian Brazilian wailing that is also found in American imitations of crying is the articulation of a vowel with a pitch well beyond that of the normal voice range. This "falsetto" vowel is typically

accompanied by a slight creaking of the voice and falling intonation over a protracted articulation.

This occurs in its purest form among the Bororo, but only highly irregularly. The vowel used in this case is an [i]. It is possible that the protracted or “spiked” vowels mentioned earlier are actually modeled on this falsetto vowel. Among Shavante, the point of highest pitch in the wailing line is also an [i], and this [i] is very frequently articulated as a falsetto vowel. The vowel has also the most pronounced creaking of any vowel in the line. However, the protraction and falling intonation of the Bororo falsetto vowel is not encountered here. None of the Shokleng instances show the falsetto vowel, though its presence is not entirely ruled out.

We know as yet little about the semiotic functioning of this signal though, as in the case of creaky voice, it is possible that it obtains some of its efficacy through iconicity with other sounds produced by the organism. In particular, falsetto may be associated with shrieks or cries produced through startling, which can occur as reflex acts. If so, the falsetto vowel is probably a signal of heightened emotional response.

Communicative Type

The purported communicative function of ritual wailing, as self-represented by the sign vehicle, varies from one cultural complex to the next. Among Shavante, the wailing consists only of vowels, together with the glottal stop. There are no full syllables let alone words used here. The communicative device thus portrays itself as nonreferential. In this it differs from Shokleng and Bororo, where full words and even sentences are used. Here the signal portrays itself as referential at least in part, with the words occurring together with the cry breaks, voiced inhalations, and falsetto vowels.

No complete transcriptions of the Bororo wailing are currently available. Albisetti and Venturelli mention that “the expressions of grief vary considerably from one individual to another” (1962:971). However, they also note that the words used in wailing are of a special ritual sort, distinct from the everyday lexicon, and they give a vocabulary of these words (1962:985–987). The words are those used specifically in wailing that occurs in connection with death, but they give some idea of the overall semantic content of the wailing form: “your body,” “your fine lip,” “your head,” “tear,” “your beautiful hands,” “my brother,” “my maternal grandmother,” “their ancestors,” and “numerous relatives.”

Among Shokleng, where full transcriptions are available, it is clear that the wailing consists of a set of statements, which may be about the current plight of the person wailing or about the person whose absence has caused the grief. An example of a general statement of plight is the following:

ẽñ	cõ	ẽñ	káka	òŋ	mlè	zòŋden	mõ	nẽ	kèke	yò			
I	erg.	I	relative + pl.	pl.	with	be at peace	dat.	cont.	habit	past			
ẽñ	cõ	wèn	nẽ	ŋèke	kũ	nũ	òŋ	to	plāl	kũ	kònò	nẽ	kũ
I	erg.	see	cont.	habit.	conj.	I	they	for	cry	conj.	be sick	cont.	conj.

(Together with my relatives I used to be at peace, but now I cry for them and I am sick.)

The important point as regards the type of communication involved is that all of the statements are descriptive-expressive. There are no questions to a real interlocutor who might respond, no commands to action, and, indeed, no endeavor to communicate any information that is not already known. There may, however, be praise for the dead person, as in the Bororo case, or for someone who has returned after a long absence. There may be comments on what the other person has had to endure. However, these are of a purely expressive or empathic type, indicating the feelings of the person wailing, their high regard of the other, and their ability to themselves feel the pain the other has endured.

This conclusion is based upon a limited sampling of the Shokleng materials. It is unclear whether the generalization to Amerindian Brazilian wailing can be safely made.

The Bororo data suggest this, but we need complete transcriptions. There are also remarks of ethnographers about other groups that would tend to confirm this. Notable is Métraux's (1947:40) summary of the evidence on Tupinamba: "Although our sources do not agree about the content of their speeches [during wailing], they say that the women alluded to the death of close relatives and to the fatigue of the traveller."

It can be tentatively proposed that Amerindian Brazilian ritual wailing ranges from fully expressive (as among Shavante) to expressive-descriptive (as among Shokleng). Wailing is a process of making public the feelings of the person who is wailing. It is intended not to be heard, in the ordinary linguistic sense, but rather to be *overheard*. Ritual wailing purports overtly not to engage an addressee, but to allow anyone within earshot access to something that would otherwise be private.

The overt or represented function of ritual wailing, however, must be differentiated from its actual function for the person who engages in the wailing. The purpose of the individual's action is undoubtedly communicative—to let other members of the community know that the individual has the proper orientation to the dead person, visitor, or whatever life situation occasions the wailing—whether or not it is expressive. In other words, there is a disjuncture between how the ritual wailing represents itself and how it is actually being used. It is a kind of calculated accident, an action designed to appear spontaneous.

It may also be said that ritual wailing can motivate others to action, through kindling in them either the emotion of grief or the desire to display that they too have the socially appropriate sentiment. Graham (personal communication, 1986) mentions that one person wailing may stimulate others to do so, resulting in a veritable chorus, something hinted at by Albisetti and Venturelli (1962:971) for the Bororo: "The crying, when it is performed by various persons, men and women, frequently has the character of true duets."

Looked at in terms of communicative function, there is an obvious contrast between ritual wailing and ceremonial dialogue. The latter always represents itself as public and dialogic, as involving an interlocutor, even when it is in fact semantically monologic (Urban 1986). Ritual wailing, in contrast, represents itself as private and monologic, even though it may in fact be used to communicate with others.

Context

The situations under which ritual wailing occurs are by no means well documented, but it is clear the principal situation throughout native South America is death. This is so among the Shokleng, where the immediate relatives of a dead person may wail at any time they happen to be thinking of him or her. Similarly, Graham (1986:88) states that among Shavante "individuals may wail at any time when reminded of the deceased, such as when seeing a photograph or visiting the grave." Albisetti and Venturelli (1962) as well indicate that death is the principal motivation for wailing among the Bororo.

Ritual wailing is used in other situations as well, such as among the Shokleng, when they think about someone who has been away for some time. However, the theme that unites together all of these situations would seem to be the feeling of separation and loss that is canonically associated with death. Graham (1986:87) writes that "Shavante express intensely felt emotions associated with profound feelings of loss, separation, abandonment, and death through wailing." Wailing is an index not of the situation directly, but of the feeling associated with it.

It has already been shown that wailing is a socially communicative stylized expression. This means that it does not merely index a feeling of loss. It is an attempt to communicate to others that one has that feeling. Why should it be the case with regard specifically to death that individuals wish to signal their feelings to others?

Death is perhaps the prototypical situation in which social relations are disrupted, solitary bonds broken. It is thus appropriate that it be accompanied by profound feelings

of loss. However, the feeling of loss need not be signaled to others. It may be proposed that ritual wailing represents not simply the feeling of loss but, in a more complex way, the desire for sociability that is the inverse side of loss. Loss occasions the wish to overcome loss through sociability, and it is this sociability that is signaled through adherence to a culturally specific form of expression of grief. One wishes to signal to others that one has the socially correct feelings at the socially prescribed times.

This is not to deny that ritual wailing may in some measure index feelings of loss, but rather that this function stands in a dynamic relationship with the function of indexing a desire for sociability. These are actually two poles of a continuum, and every instance of ritual wailing probably involves some admixture of each. We can imagine situations in which the feeling of loss is the more immediate trigger for wailing, and the desire for sociability plays a more secondary role. Alternatively, the desire for sociability may be preeminent, any actual feeling of loss taking a back seat.

The general model proposed here makes sense of the whole gamut of situations reported in the literature. The "welcome of tears" in particular puzzled early travelers because of the seeming absence of "genuine" emotion that it involved. The wailer, whose face is often covered during the actual performance, may suddenly upon its completion reveal a smiling and seemingly untroubled face. The travelers mistook the surface emotional significance of ritual wailing for its underlying one.

The ritual wailing form in this case is very near the extreme of a pure expression of sociability. It is designed to communicate to visitors a desire for sociability by signaling the grief that was caused by their absence. However, it may achieve its communicative purpose even without a profound prior sense of loss.

If the sociability function of ritual wailing can be distinguished from its function of indexing feelings of loss, it must be stressed that it is nevertheless impossible for the sociability function to free itself entirely from the emotional indexical function. In fact, the ability of the ritual wailing signal to suggest a desire for sociability is directly predicated upon its ability to index emotion. What signals sociability is (1) the use of the socially proper means of expression of emotion, but (2) under the socially appropriate circumstances for its expression. For the signal to communicate, the ritual wailer must wail under circumstances in which other members of the community would find it appropriate for that individual to be experiencing a feeling of grief or loss, and the actual wailing itself must suggest that feeling, at least in some measure.

There is a sense in which the use of any collective signal (e.g., body ornamentation, posture, language) is a sign of sociability. However, there is something more involved in the case of signs of emotion, especially such powerful emotions as grief. Because emotions can be the cause of social breakdowns, it is especially significant when they are in fact socialized. Potentially an individualized and idiosyncratically differentiated response to a situation, the emotion, when regimented, becomes an especially salient signal of sociability.

To make this argument more forcefully, it is necessary to consider the ways in which the actual wailing signal differs across contexts. The general argument is that wailing becomes less regular in parallelistic structure, and less socially standardized, the closer the signal is to being a pure expression of emotion. Unfortunately, studies of the comprehensive sort needed to verify this hypothesis are not available for Amerindian Brazil. Consequently, I draw upon two sources: (1) ethnographic field observations among the Shokleng, and (2) the folk taxonomic construals of ritual wailing.

I heard but was unable to record the wailing that occurred immediately upon an announcement of a death among the Shokleng. This was of a different type than the wailing I did record, involving more high-pitched shrieks and falsetto vowels. Simultaneously, it seemed to lack the metrical structure of the wailing I did record, which is the sort that occurs days and even months after a death and in greetings.

This "style" of wailing that occurs at death is called *plāl*, which means "crying." The same term is used for the crying done by children, which is not of the specialized sort

discussed here, the term for which in Shokleng is $z\bar{o}$. Superficial observations suggest that $pl\bar{a}l$ is less regular in its line structure and more grounded in the cross-linguistically isolable crying signals discussed earlier. However, it must be stressed that there is really a continuum between $pl\bar{a}l$ and $z\bar{o}$, and that a given expression of grief or sadness can fall at different points along this continuum. One particularly striking example of this occurred in 1981, when I returned to the field after a six-year absence. I had brought back tapes from my previous visit, and, in particular, tapes of myth narrations by one man who had died in the interim. His wife and family requested to hear the tapes. The entire situation was emotion-laden for me as well as for the family. Even as the voice was only just beginning to come through the speaker, the widow began crying ($pl\bar{a}l$), at first with tears and some intermittent cry breaks, but then gradually moving into the metrical $z\bar{o}$ form, the lines becoming regular, albeit still interrupted by cry breaks.

In any case, there are very definitely in Shokleng differences in the sign vehicles associated with the expression of grief, but these seem to have to do with the two poles of crying ($pl\bar{a}l$) and wailing ($z\bar{o}$). In particular, while it is possible that there could be formally distinct wailing styles in a culture, marking different kinds of grief, different contexts, or the different social statuses of the wailer (especially, male versus female), this does not seem to be the case for Shokleng.

Nor does it seem to be the case for Shavante. Graham (personal communication, 1986) indicates that the *dawawa* is actually the generic term "to cry," coming from *da* ("of the people") and *wawa* ("crying"). There is a specialized term meaning "to ritually wail," but this is in fact a high marked form, and not used except to differentiate the wailing from crying. The markedness relationship also holds for Shokleng, where $pl\bar{a}l$ can be used generically to mean "crying" or "wailing," while $z\bar{o}$ can only refer to wailing. Nevertheless, the term $z\bar{o}$ is regularly used for the wailing form.

The Bororo data, as contained in Albisetti and Venturelli (1962), are somewhat more complex. Their Portuguese-English dictionary entry for "wailing" (*pranto*, Port.) is organized into three subcategories: (1) wailing, (2) ritual wailing, and (3) wailing due to missing someone. There are two or three Bororo terms given under each subcategory, with some overlap between them. Under the general term for wailing is $\bar{o}ku.\bar{d}u$. ("crying out," lit., "showing the teeth," from \bar{o} = "tooth" and $ku.\bar{d}u$ = "shout"). The emphasis here is on "crying out" as a voice quality. The other two Bororo terms listed in connection with the generic term for wailing are variants of this. $\bar{O}ragu.\bar{d}u$ has an apparently identical translation, differing only in the plural form $\bar{o}ra$ ("teeth") versus \bar{o} . The other term, $\bar{o}ragu.\bar{d}u.\bar{d}\bar{o}$ ("to make cry"), apparently involves only the addition of a causative suffix to the previous term. Judging from the sentential examples ("don't make your little brother cry," "my son is about to cry"), $\bar{o}ku.\bar{d}u$ and its variants may be a generic term for crying in Bororo, analogous to the Shokleng $pl\bar{a}l$ and Shavante *dawawa*.

It is not clear whether the other two subcategories, "ritual wailing" and "wailing due to missing someone," are actually distinguished in Bororo, since the Bororo terms given here overlap. $A'k\bar{o}\bar{t}aig\bar{o}.\bar{d}u$. ("song of anxiety," from $a'k\bar{o}$ = "song" and $\bar{o}taig\bar{o}.\bar{d}u$ = "anxiety")⁴ is given under both subcategories. It apparently refers specifically to the music-like attributes of ritual wailing, and we may think of it as the term that distinguishes ritual wailing from crying.

Both subcategories also contain a variant of the term $ku\bar{r}\bar{o}\bar{r}\bar{o}.\bar{d}u$. ("crying," lit., "liquid flowing," from $ku'\bar{r}\bar{o}$ = "liquid" and $\bar{o}\bar{r}\bar{o}.\bar{d}u$ = "flowing"). Evidently, this term refers specifically to the production of tears. It also apparently does not distinguish a form of "ritual wailing" from a form of "wailing due to missing someone."

Despite the complexity of presentation, it would seem that Bororo, like the Shokleng and Shavante, have only one type of ritual wailing, which is also distinguished from crying. Furthermore, the generic term for "crying" ($ku.\bar{d}u$), as in Shokleng and Shavante, can also be used to describe wailing, since this term is given under the subcategory "ritual wailing." For all of these societies, therefore, there is a linguistically encoded rec-

ognition of (1) the distinctiveness of crying and ritual wailing, and (2) a relationship between the two.

Wailing and Dialogue

The early descriptions of the “welcome of tears” found among the coastal Tupian populations indicated that wailing was primarily a female activity. Métraux (1947:40), summarizing this evidence, states that “men rarely joined in these demonstrations of grief.” This does not seem to be the case among the interior Brazilian tribes today, where ritual wailing is both a male and female phenomenon. Graham (1986:87), for example, writes of Shavante that “as a form of expressive communication that is equally available to both sexes, [wailing] cannot be considered a predominantly female genre . . .” Similarly, Albisetti and Venturelli (1962:971) suggest the involvement of both sexes: “The wailing when it is done by various persons, *men and women* [emphasis added], frequently has the character of a true duet.” And among Shokleng as well wailing is both a male and female vocal style.

Nevertheless, the comparative evidence suggests that in cultures where men wail,⁵ women also wail, but not vice versa. Graham (1986:87) formulated this as a possible implicational universal: “In societies where ceremonial keening is a male form of expression, it is also a mode of expression available to women.” If such a “universal” does in fact obtain—and, in any event, it does seem to obtain for Amerindian Brazil—it still is possible to view wailing as a more typically female activity.

This is of special interest from the point of view of the present argument because ceremonial dialogue, which is in geographically complementary distribution with ritual wailing as a form of greeting, is most typically a male activity, and the opposite implicational “universal” would seem to apply—in cultures where women engage in ceremonial dialogue, men do also. In South America, there is a tendency to connect conversational dialogicality with men, expressive monologicality with women.

In theory, therefore, ritual wailing and ceremonial dialogue could co-occur in a given culture in connection with the same “greeting” function. Men could greet a visitor through dialogue, women through wailing. Indeed, it would be possible to image different forms of greeting arranged serially, say, first a ritual weeping, then a ceremonial conversation. Moreover, it would be possible for the two forms to be used in connection with different types of visitors (e.g., wailing for a returning kinsman, dialogue for a more distantly related or unrelated visitor).

It is difficult to find clear instances of the simultaneous occurrence of these different forms of greeting. Among the Shokleng, ceremonial dialogue is not properly speaking a form of “greeting,” although it is used in the course of ritual interactions between different trekking groups. Ritual wailing is the proper form of greeting once someone has entered the village.

Despite the possibility of overlaps between the welcome of tears and dialogic greeting, however, there is a general tendency for the two to be in complementary distribution. In Central Brazil, what has attracted most ethnographic attention and what appears to be most salient is the ritual wailing greeting. Ceremonial dialogue is nowhere used for greeting, and, indeed, generally does not occur at all. To the north and west of the Amazon River, however, ceremonial dialogue is typically found as a form of greeting, and ritual wailing rarely if ever so.

I would like to suggest that the general difference here corresponds with differences in the degree to which a group boundary is permeable versus impermeable. All of the ethnographic evidence cannot be supplied here. However, a study of the ethnographic literature will reveal that in Central Brazil generally the group boundary, associated with the limits of a single community, is relatively more rigidly defined, and is low in permeability. Communities tend toward (1) endogamy, (2) economic sufficiency, with little or no trade, and (3) mutual hostility. This is an “ideal type,” and societies in this regard

differ in degree of community isolation. However, the descriptions of Shavante (Maybury-Lewis 1967), Shokleng (Urban 1978), and even the classical Tupinamba (Fernandes 1963), where the ritual wailing greeting is most prominent, generally conform to this model.

Alternatively, where the ceremonial dialogue is most prominent as a form of greeting, such as among the Waiwai (Fock 1963) and Trio (Rivière 1969), there is typically a hum and buzz of interaction between local groups, with marriage and trade especially prominent. These societies would seem to stand closer to the extreme of permeability in boundaries.

As a general hypothesis regarding greetings, ritual wailing as a sign vehicle is arguably "naturally" linked to an impermeable boundary model, and ceremonial dialogue to a permeable boundary model of relations between self and other more generally. The motivation for this may be found in the differing attitudes to the "other" reflected in ritual wailing versus ceremonial dialogue sign vehicle. Ritual wailing achieves its affect by purposely not engaging the hearer overtly. The hearer seemingly participates in the ritual wailer's personal or self experience. Alternatively, in ceremonial dialogue the other is overtly acknowledged. There is a more secure sense of boundary reflected in the relationship of self to other. These differing models of the self-other relationship would seem to correspond with the differences between the realities of separation in the two cases. In societies with permeable boundaries, going away does not in fact pose a dire threat to relationships. There is an understood probability that the other will return. In contrast, in the impermeable boundary society separation is genuinely fraught with danger; there is a probability that the person who leaves the group may not return, and going away in fact threatens relationships.

Conclusion

Figure 1 graphically summarizes the semiotic model of ritual wailing proposed here. There are really two distinct kinds of meaning associated with ritual wailing as a sign vehicle: (1) the emotion of sadness or loss, and (2) the desire for sociability. In order for ritual wailing to signal sadness or grief, it must draw on the cross-linguistically interpretable signals of crying, such as the cry break, voiced inhalation, creaky voice, and falsetto vowels. In this sense, the ritual wailing signal must be a kind of meta-signal, itself pointing to or evoking, by virtue of its iconicity with crying, the crying signal.

If the desire to express sadness is the driving force that leads to incorporation of crying signals into ritual wailing, it is the desire for sociability that leads to another meta-signaling aspect of ritual wailing, namely, the strong iconicity of a given instance of wailing with other instances. By voicing the socially prescribed signal in the correct context, the ritual wailer indicates to others adherence to a collective norm. The relationship of signal to context thus becomes itself a meta-signal about the use of socially appropriate signals.

The third meta-signaling aspect of ritual wailing has to do with its musical or poetic character. Each line is an icon of other lines within the given instance of wailing, and thus invites itself, as a sign vehicle, to be compared with other lines as sign vehicles. This leads to a saliency of the overall sign vehicle, which catches the attention by virtue of its parallelistic structure, and thus invites one to listen to it. In this sense, the line structure is a meta-signal, functioning indexically, that points to itself. In the present interpretation, this aspect of ritual wailing—like the above similarity of instances to one another—can be associated with sociability, the desire to convert the signal of grief into one that is socially appealing.

The argument here, depicted graphically in the accompanying figure, is that instances of ritual wailing should really be interpreted in terms of a continuum. As a tentative hypothesis, based on limited data, I suggest the following: the more distant an instance of wailing is from the cross-linguistically isolable contexts in which grief is expressed, namely, death as canonical separation, (1) the less it will tend to make use of the cross-

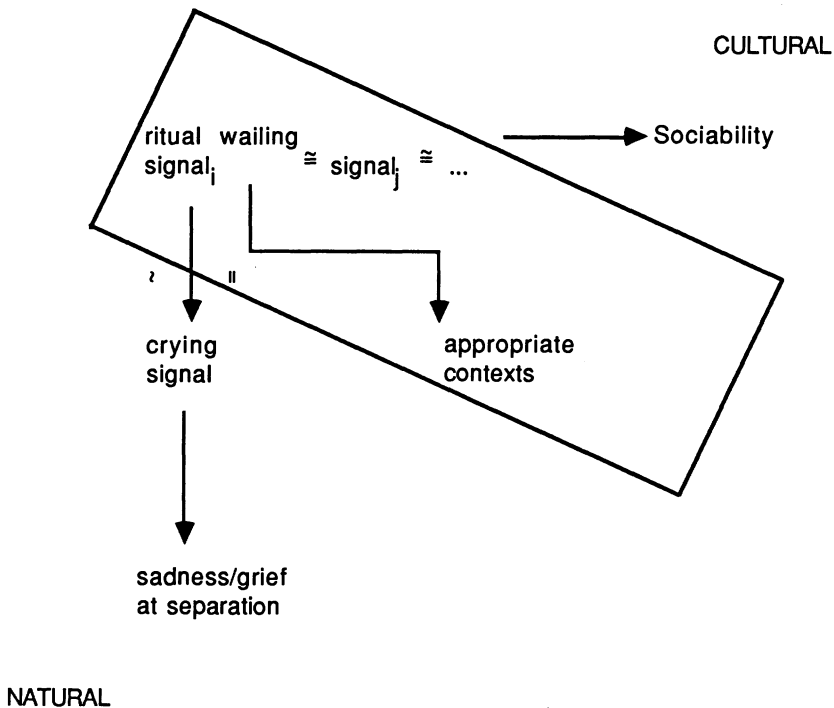


Figure 1
Semiotic model of ritual wailing.

linguistically interpretable signals of crying, (2) the more the signals within a given society will tend to resemble one another and differ from those of other societies, and (3) the greater will be the poetic or musical character of the signal.

The underlying reason for such regularities is the role of the meta-signal as a means—built into ritual wailing as sign vehicle—of interpreting the signal for an audience. The degree to which the meta-signal is brought into play reflects the degree to which the individual has managed to achieve control over the affective processes to which the ritual wailing pertains. The closer one is to the pure affective experience, the less possible it is to achieve social control of it. Rather, the affect itself controls the individual. Use of the meta-signal thus reflects a kind of socialization of the affect.

As one moves away from the more “natural,” in the sense of cross-culturally widespread, contexts for ritual wailing, such as death, to the more marked contexts, such as greeting, the question of why ritual wailing rather than some other form of expression comes to the fore. Here again the problem may be looked at from the point of view of meta-signaling.

In effect, the wailing form itself suggests to the hearer—who is not being directly addressed—that the signal is purely expressive. The “hearer” is an “overhearer,” who gains a privileged access to the inner self of the wailer. The ritual wailing signal purports to allow others a peek into the private world of the individual. The practical effect of the ritual wailing, as a means of communicating to others that one is doing the socially correct thing, is actually predicated upon this meta-signaling ruse. It is important that the feeling not be stated referentially, but rather that it be shown. Ritual wailing is precisely not talking about feeling. That is what makes it convincing.

As such, it defines the relationship to the hearer as of a special sort, namely, as one in which the hearer occupies a position *within* the self. I have argued that, in this regard, it

is opposed to ceremonial dialogue, which in effect continuously acknowledges the other "self," even when there may be a semantic monologue consisting of descriptive-expressive utterances under way. Ceremonial dialogue in particular, and dialogicality more generally, affirm a given interaction as one involving distinct individuals. Ritual wailing defines what is in fact an interaction as a process occurring within the self.

The differential employment of the two forms in different societies may be correlated with the degree to which crossing boundaries is seen as an irreversible act, with consequences for the relationships between the individuals involved. The present notion of distinct kinds of sociability allows some insight into this correlation. Allowing the other into the self is precisely the opposite of having the other taken permanently away. It represents a practical means of overcoming the sense of potential loss associated with transgression of a boundary.

In contrast, ceremonial dialogue used as a boundary mechanism reflects a different attitude toward the boundary. Rather than converting loss into solidarity through incorporating the other, it seems to convert a potential for anger at the other into solidarity through acknowledging the separateness of the other, and through affirming a desire to hear the other out, even where the desire may not be present. Of course, where boundaries are fluid, comings and goings may be construed as volitional, under the control of the other. In any case, however, the ceremonial dialogue seems to acknowledge the volition of the other. It brings two distinct selves into relationship by regimenting the interaction between them.

From a broader theoretical perspective, it is of interest that the semiotic mechanisms by means of which ritual wailing operates all have to do with meta-signaling relationships, namely, ritual wailing as (1) an icon of the crying signal, (2) an icon of other instances of ritual wailing, (3) a poetic or musical structure that is self-indexical in the sense of Jakobson's poetic function, and (4) a representation of a type of communication. The implications of meta-signaling for social process deserve further investigation.

In particular, it should be noticed that in no case is the meta-signaling relationship a semantically meta-signaling one, wherein language is used referentially to talk about or gloss the underlying sign relationships. Because the meta-signals are based upon iconic and indexical connectedness, and not the referential function of language, they do not require that the beacon of consciousness be cast upon the underlying signaling phenomenon. The signaling phenomenon itself occurs at a less than fully conscious plane.

One is not for this reason any less certain that a meta-signaling correlation is present and that it is significant. The presence of the correlations is based upon an analysis of the objective signs and of their relationships to contexts; the significance is confirmed by the cross-cultural regularity of their occurrence. However, that these meta-signals actually play a role in terms of the strategies of actors is based upon interpretation.

Moreover, arguably, if the meta-signal is to have its efficacy, it *must* remain outside the reach of consciousness. The function of the meta-signals ought not to be discussed or put into words, lest their force be diminished. Bringing them into the arena of reflection would make them appear less genuine, more contrived as part of a strategy. Despite the fact that actors in some sense "know" what they are doing, they must not let on that they know. There must be a tacit pact that the meanings remain outside the scope of discussion. To discuss them would be to challenge them, and such a challenge would have political repercussions.

Such a compact of silence may be of significance for the broader problem of how social order and affect are reconciled. If social order depends upon the possibility of empathic understanding, then it is necessary that affect be expressed through socially understandable sign vehicles. Meta-signals are precisely the socially understandable signs that interpret the expressions of affect for other actors. However, the manipulability of those meta-signals opens up the possibility of a gap between affect and expressions of affect. In effect, individuals can "lie" about what they are feeling, just as they may "truthfully" interpret their expressive signals for others.

However, for an actor—whose interests lie in getting along with other actors—interpreting the signal through its meta-signals, the question of the genuineness or falseness of the underlying expression of affect becomes irrelevant, since the meta-signal itself simultaneously indexes another subjective state: the desire to do or show the socially correct thing. In short, the meta-signal itself indicates a desire for sociability. Whether or not the underlying “falseness” is detected, therefore, there is a truth about the meta-signal that is more important to the interpreter. To question the signal is simultaneously to question the other actor’s desire for sociability. Such questioning can only be interpreted as itself a sign of nonsociability or hostile intent on the part of the interpreter. Hence, the “compact of silence” is itself a mark of sociability.

The present research has focused on one kind of affect, cross-culturally associated with certain canonical contexts. Yet the results suggest a more general model, namely, that the delicate interaction between affect, signal, and meta-signal is the wellspring of community. The co-occurrence of a signal of emotion and a meta-signal that interprets it may be a key mechanism for the socialization of affect. The socially standardized meta-signal is itself at once charged with emotion, and yet tangible evidence that the emotion has been brought into social harness.

Notes

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¹Judging from the review article by Lutz and White (1986), little attention has been paid to the complex semiotics of emotion as expressed in ritualized forms. However, there has been some discussion of ritual wailing, sometimes called “tuneful weeping,” “ritual lament,” and so forth. Especially notable among these in light of the present paper are Feld (1982) and Tiwary (1975).

²These vocal signals may be accompanied by nonvocal signals that also suggest “crying.” Notable in this regard is the concealment of the face by the hands, present in a 16th-century etching showing Tupinamba ritual wailing (Métraux 1928:Plate VIII), and that may be observed today among the Shokleng Indians.

³Despite the title *Welcome of Tears*, Wagley’s ethnography of the Tapirapé discusses the phenomenon only cursorily in one brief passage (Wagley 1977:238). Baldus (1970:455), in his more detailed discussion of the Tapirapé custom, mentions that as early as 1947 he found only “*o traço do complexo cultural*” (“a trace of the cultural complex”).

⁴It is an intriguing fact that in Bororo the term for wailing actually aligns this form with music. There is no corresponding alignment in Shokleng or Shavante, where in fact it is explicitly denied that wailing is a form of music.

⁵There may be a difference between Gê and Tupian groups in this regard. Métraux’s (1947:40) conclusion was based upon sources dealing with the coastal Tupi. Baldus’s (1970:455) discussion of an instance of Tapirapé (also Tupi) wailing also only mentions its performance by a woman. In contrast, Shokleng and Shavante are Gê languages, and Bororo, still considered an isolate, may be related to Macro-Gê. For cross-cultural differences as regards men’s and women’s speech more generally, see Sherzer (1987). Howe and Hirschfeld (1981) give intriguing evidence regarding differences between men’s and women’s verbal affective expressions among the Kuna of Panama.

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