



WILEY

A · M · E · R · I · C · A · N
A N T H R O P O L O G I C A L
A S S O C I A T I O N

The Effectiveness of Shamans in an Indonesian Ritual

Author(s): Jane Monnig Atkinson

Source: *American Anthropologist*, Jun., 1987, New Series, Vol. 89, No. 2 (Jun., 1987), pp. 342-355

Published by: Wiley on behalf of the American Anthropological Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/677759>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

American Anthropological Association and *Wiley* are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Anthropologist*

The Effectiveness of Shamans in an Indonesian Ritual

Healing is the ostensible purpose of the mabolong, a shamanic ceremony of the Wana of Sulawesi, Indonesia. But the ritual serves political ends as well by providing an arena for performers to establish and maintain their reputations as shamans. Shamans' attempts to attract and to hold an audience can eclipse their efforts to heal. In light of this dynamic, the ritual's therapeutic potential for patients can be considered only when its symbolic and dramatic appeal for an entire community is understood. The interplay of symbolism, drama, and therapy is examined with special reference to theories of ritual and catharsis proposed by Lévi-Strauss and T. J. Scheff.

JUST HOW AND WHY HEALING RITUALS HEAL has been the focus of creative speculation and suggestive exchange among the fields of anthropology, psychology, and medicine (see Frank 1974, Moerman 1979, Prince 1982, Dow 1986). Investigations of symbolic healing typically highlight the ritual centrality of the healer-patient dyad and posit a means-end relation between a ritual form and a patient's state of being. Ritual structure and practice are examined for the bearing they have on a patient's condition. Overemphasis on therapy as the goal of ritual, however, can distort a reading of ritual symbolism and performance, whose implications for therapy may be subtle and indirect.

This article considers the "effectiveness" of a shamanic ritual for an Indonesian minority culture. To that end, it examines the interaction of participants and the interplay of symbolism, drama, and therapy in the ritual. If one envisions a triangle composed of shaman, patient, and audience, it follows that the relationship of any two elements is dependent on the relationship of each element to the third. The ritual in question serves both as an occasion for healing and as an arena for shamans to establish themselves as influential "men of prowess" (Wolters 1982) or wielders of "spiritual potency" (Errington 1988) for their local communities. Performers who seek reputations as shamans are faced with a vexing conundrum: successful shamans are individuals on whose spiritual powers others depend; yet performers are in fact dependent upon audiences to acknowledge their shamanic claims. To overcome this difficulty, performers seek to engage audiences by identifying the community's fate with their own. The healing of patients may be eclipsed in the process. Only when this dynamic is understood, can the therapeutic effect of the ritual be assessed.

A Sketch of the Wana and the Mabolong Ritual

The Wana are swidden cultivators who inhabit an interior region of eastern Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. Farming settlements range in size from several to a dozen or so households, each typically consisting of a conjugal couple and their dependents. Wana rely on the services of *tau kawalia*, 'people with spirits', to monitor and protect their health and well-being. Most farming communities include at least one resident *tau kawalia* (hereafter referred to as shaman¹), often more. Shamans treat patients in a variety of ritual

JANE MONNIG ATKINSON is Associate Professor of Anthropology, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Lewis and Clark College, Portland OR 97219.

and nonritual contexts, but the most popular shamanic event is the *mabolong* or 'drumming' ceremony. Space precludes full analysis of the *mabolong* in this article, but textual and contextual dimensions of the ritual will be used to illustrate the complexity of ritual "effectiveness." A preliminary sketch of the *mabolong* follows.

Shamans are hosted by their communities at *mabolong*. The household that has requested the *mabolong* prepares an array of refreshments for the shamans who have been asked to perform that evening. In a winnowing tray or shallow basket are placed rice wine, tobacco, betel fixings, and an assortment of plants that the performers' spirit familiars are known to fancy—pretty berries, glossy shoots, and fragrant leaves. More wine is supplied by others attending the ceremony, as a gesture of 'mutual support' (*kasintuwu*), a key social value, and as insurance that the shamans will devote particular attention to their requests for treatment.

Shamans are invited to the offering tray (*lango*) to enjoy its contents and to summon their spirit familiars—hidden beings from distant haunts—to do the same. Just as a shaman is hosted by his human audience, a shaman in turn hosts his spirit familiars whom he invites to join him at the *lango*. Once they have congregated, he enlists their aid to examine patients, to cast off intrusive objects afflicting the patients, and to accompany him as he dances on spirit journeys to recover lost elements of his patients' being. Thus, audiences request the assistance of shamans who in turn enlist the aid of spirits to work on the patients' behalf. (For a fuller account, see Atkinson 1979.)

Symbolic Healing and Ritual Performance

In a rare excursion into ritual analysis, Lévi-Strauss (1963a) explored how symbolic effectiveness might translate into therapeutic efficacy in a Cuna ritual performed for difficult childbirth. Like a psychoanalyst, Lévi-Strauss proposed, the shaman helps the patient construct a reading of her condition and thereby effects its resolution. Lévi-Strauss's speculations about processes of abreaction and transference at work in the ritual are intriguing. By moving too hastily from the ritual text to its presumed goal, however, Lévi-Strauss failed to ask how therapeutic efficacy might be conditional on ritual performance. Because the Cuna text is intended for use in difficult childbirth, Lévi-Strauss assumed it effects a medical cure. He did not ask whether potential efficacy could be other than medical nor did he view success, medical or otherwise, as something to be negotiated in a given performance. Lévi-Strauss presumed that the cathartic value of therapy lies primarily in verbal insight. Sherzer (1983:134) indicates that a Cuna shaman's chant may not be comprehensible to a patient, hence calling into question Lévi-Strauss's attribution of therapeutic efficacy to the symbolic correspondences between the words of the text and the patient's anatomy. Finally, Lévi-Strauss ignored Cuna conceptions of ritual efficacy. He presumed that the dynamics of healing he outlines take place with or without the actors' awareness or encouragement.

The present analysis will deal with these issues of symbolic, dramatic, and therapeutic efficacy in relation to the Wana *mabolong*. In his Cuna analysis, Lévi-Strauss focused on the effect of a collective myth on a single individual in distress.² In the Wana case, one must deal with the effect of a public performance on a collected audience as well. Whereas the Cuna performance involved a single shaman and a single patient (a pairing reminiscent for Lévi-Strauss of a psychoanalytic session), the *mabolong* involves at a minimum two or more shamans, an entire community, and a series of patients with complaints ranging from casual to critical. The difference in scale relates to a difference in emphasis. While the Cuna ritual appears from its text at least to be directed solely at alleviating the source of the patient's suffering, the Wana *mabolong* serves a variety of aims besides a medical one, including general entertainment and shamanic self-aggrandizement. Despite the greater complexity of the *mabolong*, however, one might still ask whether processes of symbolic healing, such as those proposed by Lévi-Strauss, are at work in the ritual.

Lévi-Strauss proposed that the therapeutic effectiveness of the Cuna ritual lay in the patient's experience of abreaction and transference. He located the abreactive potential of the Cuna performance in the shaman's text, which poses a parallel between the Cuna shaman's spirit journey and the physiology of his patient. From this association, he concluded that "the song constitutes a psychological manipulation of the sick organ and it is precisely from this manipulation that a cure is expected" (p. 187; see Neu 1975, 1977 for a critique). By contrast, Wana shamans' *mabolong* chants do not offer a parallel between the geography of the shaman's journey and the distressed anatomy of the patient. As in the Cuna case, the shaman's struggle to save his patient is featured in sections of Wana shamans' songs. But ritual performance highlights the shaman challenging a problem, not the patient resolving it. In keeping with this emphasis, the role of the patient at a *mabolong* is a totally passive one. In contrast to rituals like Sinhalese exorcisms (Kapferer 1983) and the Malay *main peteri* (Kessler 1977), Wana patients have no active role in the ritual nor are signs of psychic or physical transformation expected from them. The ceremony attends to the matter of reconstituting hidden sides of the patient's self, but as I shall show later, the significant transformations of self in the *mabolong* involve not patients, but shamans, and have implications apart from healing.

Consistent with the lack of emphasis placed upon patients' involvement is the fact that the conditions of the *mabolong* do not enhance the likelihood of a patient's abreaction in the manner set out by Lévi-Strauss in his article.³ One's hopes for establishing an abreactive effect for a Wana patient falter when one observes a shaman treating a patient in absentia, using a bottle or a housepost as a surrogate—or when the drum and gongs of a *mabolong* performance drown out the voice of the performer. Or again, when the patient is a small child who cannot understand the shaman's words. Or when one notes that late at night most of the shaman's audience, including his patients, may be fast asleep. Shamans often object to being ignored and insist that others attend to them, but their complaints are directed not at patients, but at hosts and colleagues. One may care to argue that for those patients who are present, conscious, and mature enough to understand the shaman's chant, it may prove abreactive. No doubt. But abreaction is a potential neither systematically sought nor invariably realized in ritual performance.

Symbolic Healing and Cultural Notions of Efficacy

Not only ritual practice but Wana notions of shamanic efficacy as well run counter to Lévi-Strauss's model, which locates abreactive potential in the shaman's chant. A patient's reception of and response to a shaman's words are not deemed essential in Wana theory nor are they promoted intentionally or otherwise in actual performance.

Efficacy (a concept Wana would translate as *kamonso*, a word that covers the English senses of "effective" and "true") lies not in the public side of a shaman's performance, but rather in the shaman's secret knowledge and personal association with spirit familiars (Atkinson 1979). A shaman's words and gestures are not in themselves efficacious. Instead, they hint at and testify to the shaman's hidden resources, while concealing them at the same time. Informants are aware of the potential disparity between appearance and reality, between outward gesture and underlying truth. They comment on how some may flaunt powers that they in fact lack, just as others may possess knowledge and spirit ties without displaying them publicly. Still, an audience must rely on outward show as indication of hidden powers, though in theory what is concealed from public scrutiny, not external embellishments, embodies shamanic efficacy.

Symbolic Healing and the Construction of Shamanic Reputations

If abreaction on the part of patients is culturally rather beside the point, what about transference, another process Lévi-Strauss uncovered in his Cuna analysis? Identification of a Wana shaman with a cultural ideal may be instructively compared to the use of transference in psychoanalysis. An analysis and experiencing transference characteristically

casts the analyst as a parent figure (Freud 1958:32). One need not go far to find associations of a Wana shaman with a parentlike figure. Wana explicitly equate the styles of shamans' songs and lullabies. Shamans typically refer to their patients with phrases like *pomuli kiondodi*, 'little child', be the patient in question old and gray, or in fact an infant. Conventions of shamanic singing present the shaman as a nurturant and caring adult. But it would be wrong to exaggerate the degree to which a Wana shaman mimics a parental prototype. Shamans themselves hold a special place in a person's life from the beginning. It is a shaman who furnishes 'breath' (*nosa*) to a babe in the womb and ministers to an infant from its earliest moments. Shamans routinely monitor children's well-being at *mabolong*. Even healthy children learn at an early age to present their hands with palms pressed together to a presiding shaman and to submit to his ministrations. As they grow, they hear it said that they owe their lives to particular shamans who rescued them from early death. Given the part a shaman plays in sustaining health and life during Wana childhood, the figure of the shaman (often, in fact, a parent, grandparent, or other senior relative) is a significant prototype woven into earliest memories.

As an analyst projects past associations onto an analyst, so Wana associate images of shamans past with present-day performers. Symbolic identification of the shaman with prototypes from the past pertains not simply to the personal history of a patient, but to collective images Wana share of the shaman as protector and protagonist. What is more, a shaman seeks to bring about this identification not for a single patient only, but for a general audience as well. Consequently, much of the action of a *mabolong* involves performers' efforts to appropriate the powerful imagery of Wana shamanship.

The "shaman as hero" (Lévi-Strauss 1963a) is a central image in Wana culture both inside and outside ritual contexts. In the *mabolong* itself, the shaman is ideally a powerful protagonist who leads his spirit cohort in a struggle against the sources of illness. In everyday life, it is the shaman who presses beyond the limits of ordinary experience to engage hidden sources of power. By associating himself with existing images of the shaman as "larger than life," an individual bids for the faith and confidence of his community. Storytellers recount tales of Towambo, a legendary shaman who was said to 'defeat God' by saving the lives of people destined to die. Although no living shaman can match that hero of an earlier age, people hope for great ones in whom they can place their trust. Contrary to the biblical dictum that a man cannot become a prophet in his own land, a Wana shaman, to be successful, must develop renown in his own community to foster the dependence of his neighbors on his special knowledge and ability. To do so, he must approximate in a convincing way traditional images of what great shamans do, and innovate within that range.

Identification of an individual with cultural images of a shamanic ideal offers people assurance in time of illness. It may also have further ramifications for a shaman's relation to a community. A shaman is one upon whom others depend for their well-being. Their dependence in turn may offer a shaman leverage for wielding influence in other spheres of life. A "hero" in *mabolong* ceremonies may sometimes be able to call forth compliance, assent, and assistance in other contexts from those who count on his talents in times of illness.

It would appear from this discussion that something "transference-like" does indeed characterize the relationship of a Wana shaman and his following both within and beyond the *mabolong*. Yet the implications of the shaman as hero in Wana culture is a far cry from the therapeutic use of transference in psychoanalysis. In psychoanalysis, the patient is expected to cast the analyst in a role laden with affect from the patient's past. The analyst may then help the patient to identify and work through the transference, thereby ending it. Such is one goal of analysis—ending the repetition of transference, the continued replaying of patterned dependencies in the patient's life. Freud (1969:32), in an essay on psychoanalytic technique, warned analysts not to play up their position into one of "teacher, model and ideal" lest they foster a new dependence in their patients. By

contrast, a Wana shaman strives to become all three—a teacher, model, and heroic ideal for patients, for would-be shamans, and for his public at large.

To sum up, the shaman's efforts to become identified with a shamanic ideal are directed not at a single patient, but at an entire community. And rather than a transference, which must be overcome to effect a cure, an identification is sought as something to be sustained within and beyond the ritual context.

A Dramatic Conundrum

From the account of the *mabolong* presented so far, it is clear that a dominant feature of ritual action involves shamans negotiating with hidden powers on behalf of their community. Now I want to argue that this fact introduces a problem for *mabolong* performers, namely, a lack of involvement on the part of their audiences. Whereas a shaman is culturally one upon whom others depend for their lives and well-being, performers are in practice dependent upon their audiences to acknowledge their shamanic claims. It is through dramatic performance that shamans establish and maintain their reputations.

In the course of a *mabolong*, each performer repeatedly summons and encourages his spirits by singing and dancing. Those with reputations for healing treat patients on and off throughout the evening. There is something pro forma about much of this activity. While fine performers lend drama to their investigations of patients' conditions and their recovery of soul parts, audience members are free to distract themselves in conversation and later in the evening to sleep with the knowledge that the shamans are managing the problems at hand. Delegating the task of tending patients to the shamans, audience members enjoy a good party.⁴ Shamans are not immune to the fact that they are often ignored. Late at night they may complain vociferously and insist that people rouse themselves to attend to their efforts. One shaman I know fell unconscious one evening because, it was said, his spirit familiar objected to the shaman's wife sleeping during the performance.

The dramatic difficulty in the *mabolong* has to do with the fact that much of the ritual action *presumes* the alliance of shamans and spirits to work on behalf of the community. It is no surprise that audiences are often more interested in the efforts of novices to attract spirits to them than in the routine performances of accomplished shamans. As a solution to problems of meaning in Wana existence, ritual performance on occasion begs the question—what problems?

It is for this reason, I suspect, that the most entertaining episode of the *mabolong* is typically not one in which shamans treat patients, but instead one in which shamans make demands on their audience. Analyzing this type of episode in some detail will highlight the dynamics of the ritual as a whole and bring into focus the question this article asks: What are the effects of the ritual for a Wana audience? As detailed earlier, the logic of the ritual is that a human community asks a shaman to enlist the aid of his spirit associates to treat patients. But in the following episode, the tables are turned, as a spirit familiar enlists his shaman companion to make demands upon the audience.

Food for the Spirit Familiars

The episode begins when a shaman in his song announces that a certain spirit has arrived with a craving for a special food. The spirit's request is always phrased in an intricate metaphor which the audience must decipher in order to satisfy the spirit's wish. Disguised language is a hallmark of spirits, the hidden sources of power in the Wana world (cf. Atkinson 1984). By phrasing the requests in riddle form, the shaman underscores the point that the audience is hosting someone with powerful hidden acquaintances.

The likelihood that a shaman will request special food for his spirits requires that someone attend to his singing, lest a request go unheeded. Sometimes the request is a familiar one and can be granted without disrupting the proceedings. If the metaphor is an unfamiliar one, a riddle session ensues that may involve most if not all of the audience. Once

a request is understood, the shaman should be furnished with what it is he and his spirit have asked for—be it honey or fish poison, burning resin or breast milk. The shaman then ingests the ‘food’ and expresses the pleasure both he and his spirit familiar experience as they enjoy the treat.

The following excerpt from an evening’s festivities represents a successful resolution of one shaman’s request. The excerpt begins as Iki, a prominent shaman, shifts from exhorting his spirit familiars to making a request of his audience:

Wegaku to tu’a motoko poraju napongande

My spirit, the old one who walks with a staff, wants to eat

nempo ojo kiondodi

even if only a little

salu pojene ntayu leta taa tibangu

bath water of a person lying down who does not rise

As in the rest of his chant, Iki is using a special shaman’s speech style, comprehensible to his audience, but full of distinctive shamanic vocabulary. In normal speech, this request would be phrased in the following manner:

Waliaku to tu’a motoko porani napongkoni nempo ojo sangkodi ue pondiu ntau turu taa makore.

Someone in the audience guesses that the shaman is requesting the dirt in which a chicken scratches itself. (In contrast to the shaman’s song, audience members respond in ordinary speech.) The shaman answers:

Rianya to ele; taenya tayu mate tuwu

It’s not that; that’s called a person dead [but] living

pai kutaeka nggomi salu pojene ntayu taa tileta taa tibangu

but I say to you bath water of a person who does not lie down and who does not rise

[He’s changed his wording slightly here]

A member of the audience guesses that the shaman is calling for the water used to bathe a corpse in preparation for burial.

O rianya to ele wega

Oh, it’s not that, spirit

Yande to taawa monaya, yande nto tu’a matoko

[It’s a] food that is not yet familiar [i.e., something he and his spirit have not requested before],
a food of the old one who walks with a staff.

Someone now ventures the guess that he’s calling for a melon rinsed with water. The logic is that a melon simply lies stationary in the field and does not move around.

O rianya to ele wega

Oh, it’s not that, spirit

At last someone guesses a whetstone (*watu pangkape*).

O wegaku bara i ele yande nto tu’a matoko, wega

Oh, my spirit, probably that is the food of the old one who walks with a staff, spirit.

Ia naoamo, ojo naledo ntinumbo pai kasuola

He is deceptive, only when moved by wine is he a spirit familiar.

Shamans often joke in deprecating fashion about their claims to special powers. Here the shaman implies that his spirit, and by inference himself, is inspired only by liquor. While a shaman may venture such an opinion about himself, no one else should voice the same opinion. To do so is to risk sorcery from the performer (whose hidden powers may in fact be formidable) and to violate a convention that the powers of performing shamans should never be doubted.

At this point, a whetstone was located. As he prepared to pour water over the stone for the shaman to drink, an audience member solicitously asked the shaman how much water he wanted. Answering not in song, but in his ordinary speaking voice, the shaman said:

Taamo pangaa nanu palaku. Nanu palaku ne'e polaeka koju. Ane re'em sangkodi, taom.

It doesn't matter, something that's a lie. Something that's a lie, don't pay it much heed. If there's a little [water], that's good enough.

In this episode, audience members humored the shaman by heeding his request and working together to decipher his riddle. Not all such episodes transpire so smoothly. If a shaman's request is not attended to, not understood, or not granted, the danger is that the shaman's soul will go off hurt in the company of his spirit familiars, leaving his body unconscious and unresponsive to treatment. Should this happen, other shamans must treat their comrade as a patient and lure his soul back to his body. In this case, the shaman assumes the role of a patient and demands the attention of both audience and co-shamans.

Ritual Logic and the Evocation of Meaning

Shamans' requests for foods for their spirit familiars can be among the most entertaining moments in a *mabolong* for Wana audiences and anthropologists alike. Why it should be so requires consideration of both ritual text and context.

Beginning with the former, I propose an interpretive reading that compares the structure of the ritual segment to a series of conventionalized Wana narratives or cultural "scenarios" (Ortner 1973; Schieffelin 1976) concerning persons, emotions, community, and polity. No informant ever overtly compared these narratives for me, but as the following analysis demonstrates, all contain a common theme: without a powerful counterforce, things fly apart.

My proposal is the following: by tapping into this common theme, the shaman's request for a spirit food evokes a set of homologies in the constitution of both individuals and communities. These homologies are distinctive for their generality and redundancy. They hammer home an identical message apart from any specifics about person, community, and polity. The message is that unity is desirable and dissolution is not, and without a powerful counterforce, things fly apart. The symbolism, I suggest, does not constrain onlookers' reaction to a specific problem, but has the potential to open their feelings to an array of existential dilemmas. By this interpretation, the shaman's threatened collapse derives dramatic force from its multivocality. The message is broad enough to key into the experience not only of patients, but of virtually every member of the audience. It can recall past experiences of illness, suffering, and loss. It can serve as an acute reenactment of hurt feelings and desertion. It can be a general reminder of the tenuousness of fellowship, the fragility of community, and the pathos of contemporary Wana existence. More positively, its successful resolution suggests that these problems can be staved off, if not solved once and for all, through shamanic mediation between human and spirit realms. The episode resonates not with a single kind of personal crisis, but with many, and in this way, I argue, derives its appeal. The symbolic effectiveness of this ritual, as I read it, stems in part from its potential to invoke a series of existential problems that threaten the integrity of psychic and social life. This set of braided associations will be explored here strand by strand.

Personhood, Illness, and the Flight of Souls

First, the feared flight of the shaman's soul-parts recapitulates the dissolution of the person in illness. Invisible except to shamans, but vital to a person's being, is a concatenation of elements including, most importantly, souls and a dream agent (cf. Atkinson 1979, chapter 4). The presence of these elements within the body is a sign of health and well-being. Their absence from the body is associated with weakness, sickness, and eventually, death. There is nothing in the person that promotes the stability of these critical components of being. They are likely to fly off on their own or be lured away by malevolent spirits. The centrifugal tendencies of these vital elements can be countered only through magic and the machinations of shamans. In this way, all Wana are dependent upon shamans to mediate the conditions of their very existence.

By threatening soul flight, which represents the dissolution of a person in illness, the shaman confronts his audience with the possibility of his death. Death is phrased in emotional terms as desertion of the living by the dead. A person who has died is commonly said to have 'run away' or 'fled'. The shaman's flight with his spirit familiars is explicitly read by informants as an act of abandonment that demonstrates his unhappiness with his audience.

Polity and Entropy

Wana regard their land as the origin of the world and the source of 'knowledge, power, and wealth' (*pangansani*, *baraka*, and *kasugi*). When these resided in the Wana area, the land thrived. But sometime in the past, they went off to the 'end of the earth', leaving the Wana homeland poor and wretched. Wana forecast that 'knowledge, power, and wealth' will return home to their point of origin and the Wana land will prosper once again. Wana visions of the homeland—clear responses to the hegemony of a succession of coastal powers including Islamic sultans, Dutch and Japanese colonialists, and Indonesian nationalists—show a striking resemblance to their conceptions of the person. In a former age, when 'knowledge, power, and wealth' resided at their source, the Wana land thrived. I would note the parallel to a person with soul parts intact. But when 'knowledge, power, and wealth' departed, the Wana land grew weak and languished. This reaction matches that of a person suffering soul loss. Like a sick person, the homeland can be revived with the return of its constituent parts. That Wana look to shamans to monitor both the well-being of individuals and the imminent return of 'knowledge, power, and wealth' is consistent with the analogy.

Community

The conceptions of person and polity sketched so far contrast concentration as a positive state of well-being and dispersal as a state of weakness. The constitution of actual Wana communities further illuminates the cultural salience of this model. Swidden settlements are the effective social and political unit. Settlement composition is by no means stable. Farms are relocated annually and at that time constituent households decide whether to reside together another year. There is no land shortage or stipulations of ownership or land rights to prevent people from moving to other settlements. In times of poor harvests, households may move days away from the last year's farm. What is more, fears of government efforts to resettle, control, and convert the Wana population also contribute to residential instability (cf. Atkinson 1983, 1984).

Counterbalancing these centrifugal tendencies are loyalties to neighbors and the persuasive talents of influential community leaders upon whose talents as rice magicians, shamans, and legal orators their neighbors depend. Like the shamans who counter the centrifugal properties of a person's soul parts, influential individuals seek to hold communities together by encouraging reliance on their talents (Atkinson 1984).

It would seem that Wana notions of personhood and polity "reflect" in some way Wana social experience. Like the concatenation of soul parts that constitute a person and the triad of knowledge, power, and wealth that invigorates the homeland, Wana settlements are friable unions with little but neighborly good will and the influence of shamans, rice magicians, and arbiters to hold them together. But what unites these homologies is more complex than a simple reflection of social structure by symbolic forms. Ritual does not mirror political realities, but constitutes them. As Tsing (1985) has argued for a similar Indonesian population, politics in loosely structured Wana communities consists of creating and holding an audience. Indeed, in the ritual episode under investigation here, a shaman seeks to engage an audience and extract from it a demonstration of 'great feelings' (*bae raya*) for him. To untangle what that might mean, it is necessary to explore another cultural scenario concerning its opposite, 'small feelings'.

'Small Feelings' and Emotional Partings

The emotional stance the shaman assumes in this episode is called *kodi nraya* or 'small feelings'. People experience 'small feelings' in response to insult, rejection, or neglect. A characteristic response to 'small feelings' is withdrawing from those who have caused one injury. Withdrawal, called *kawu*, is a standard interpretation applied to people who separate themselves from others.

Dying on account of hurt feelings is an extreme action that is attributed to two categories of people: tiny children and adults who possess spirit familiars. The association of these two categories of persons is based on the idea that both have hidden agents augmenting their sensitivity. In the case of an infant, still too young to think for itself, a special spirit monitors emotions and experience. Should this spirit detect parental rejection, neglect, or abuse, the child's soul parts may flee. Adults with spirit alliances may react to emotional slights in more conscious fashion by making suicide requests to their spirits. Interpreting a death as a suicide makes the dead person the author of his or her own demise instead of the victim of a malevolent agent. It also implies the dead person's dissatisfaction with the living and thus carries an emotional rebuke.

The shaman who threatens to die in the *mabolong* ceremony resembles both the infant and the adult suicide. Like the child, his emotions are augmented by a spirit's sensitivities. And like the adult suicide, the fact that he can in theory die during a performance attests to his spirit connections.

Loss of spirit assistance on account of hurt feelings is a theme in Wana folklore. Legend has it that once upon a time, friendly spirits called the Bolag lived side by side with the Wana until the Wana did something to offend them. Some say that stingy Wana hosts deceived the Bolag about the date of a feast. When the Bolag arrived late for the festivities, they experienced 'small feelings' and withdrew from Wana company. As a result, Wana are bereft of aid from these benevolent spirits. The parallels to the *mabolong* episode should be clear. Inhospitability toward a shaman requesting food for his spirit familiar, like the stinginess displayed by the Wana hosts toward their spirit neighbors, will result in 'small feelings' and withdrawal of spirit assistance.

In principle, it is in the interests of the audience to ensure that a shaman's hurt feelings are heeded and mended. This segment of the ritual may well have a cathartic side that allows a shaman to indulge in hurt feelings without the consequences doing so might have in ordinary life. At the same time it permits members of the audience to identify and empathize either with the injured shaman or with those who try to bring him around. Most importantly, a shaman who expresses a sense of rejection challenges his audience and his fellow shamans to affirm their strong feelings toward him. In doing so, they acknowledge his associations with spirits, his claim to spirit powers—in short, his shamanic reputation.

Thus far, I have developed a symbolic analysis of the ritual text. Moving from textual connections, however, to dramatic performance requires caution. On the one hand, there is no reason to assume that the symbolic associations the episode shares with other cultural forms automatically and invariably translate into a patent set of meanings in a ritual context.⁵ On the other hand, it would be underestimating the dramatic possibilities of this episode to presume that audience members simply react to the performance at hand apart from its relations to other significant facets of their lives. While symbolic effectiveness cannot be presumed, its potential should be recognized.

Ritual Logic and Dramatic Performance

The actions of shamans throughout the *mabolong* parallel the oscillation between focused concentration and dissolution noted in the narratives above. Each shaman summons his own hidden constituency from distant realms and concentrates it around him, thereby transforming himself from a weak human being to an empowered 'person of spirits'. Thus enhanced, a performer identifies harmful and malevolent influences afflicting

patients, then travels off to distant places to recover lost elements of being and restore them to their owners. In doing so, a shaman and his spirit familiars recapitulate the centrifugal flight of a patient's soul. Through his union with spirit familiars, representatives of distant and powerful realms, it is possible for the shaman to conquer the centrifugality of his own and his patients' beings. In ritual and in everyday life, this is the accomplishment of a successful shaman: ritually, he overcomes the dissolution of his patients' beings; socially, he attracts and maintains a following of neighbors whose commitment to and dependence on him lends stability to a community.

The shaman's request of food for his spirit familiars is one way to articulate the centrality of shamans in Wana life by hinting at the negative consequences—soul loss, death, the dissolution of community—that could ensue without shamans and their spirits to maintain order. Dramatically, a shaman's request can challenge an audience's complacency. Whereas heretofore the shamans have been asking favors of their spirits on behalf of the human community, passive observers are now asked to demonstrate their commitment to the evening's alliance of humans and spirits.

The event serves as an occasion for performers and audience to express explicitly or implicitly their feelings about others. Performers bid for support and affirmation from their audience. They may express feelings ranging from self-pity to affection. A shaman may testify in song to his devotion for the fallen companion he seeks to revive. Alternatively, a shaman may chastise his fellow shaman for oversensitivity. Powerful shamans may temporarily ignore their juniors who have fallen unconscious. Resisting pleas from audience members to tend to his fallen cousin, one shaman boasted, 'So long as I don't die tonight, neither will he.' By contrast, when this shaman lapsed into unconsciousness, he was treated quickly and, if necessary, by every shaman in the room. Usually it took a shaman equal to him in prominence to revive him. Questions of fakery, while supposedly forbidden, are raised when a performer's shamanic claims are in doubt. I was told of one young man who keeled over unconscious with his head in the lap of an attractive young woman. Threats by other youths to hammer his allegedly erect penis brought him to consciousness without shamanic intervention, a sure sign, people said, that the episode was faked. Even in such questionable cases, Wana wisdom suggests shamanic care. When a retarded youth from a distant community fell unconscious at a *mabolong*, the response was hilarity. But an older woman insisted that he be treated, lest he die and his father, a powerful shaman, take revenge on the community. (The senior shamans left the task to their juniors.) As these examples show, when a shaman deviates from his customary tasks and challenges his audience, neither he nor his audience can be sure where this departure will lead. The suspense of the improvisation that follows can engage a hitherto unfocused audience.

Part of the attraction this episode has for Wana audiences may derive from its unpredictability. Sometimes a performer can be placated with assurances that the audience wants to furnish what he wishes, but cannot understand or procure what he wants. Other times, a performer may simply drop the request. Occasionally, when the item is finally furnished, the shaman refuses it, saying that the spirit who desired the substance has departed. But an unfulfilled request for spirit food can escalate with unforeseen consequences for everyone present.

It is intriguing to note audience reactions to a protracted and dramatic instance of this episode. As a shaman shows signs of unhappiness, audience members call out for skilled interpreters to decipher his riddles and to placate his feelings. Strong men are roused to support an unsteady shaman so he will not fall or go out of control. Once a shaman falls unconscious, cries go up to other shamans to stop what they are doing and tend to their companion. Audience members may become energized with both laughter and distress. Some may even venture off in the dark to seek shamans in nearby farmsites to help revive a performer. While some expressions of concern seem conventionalized, occasionally individuals, particularly older women, become so distraught they flee the scene. A commonly repeated concern is that if the shaman dies his close kin will take revenge by killing

those responsible for his death. Given the lack of violence characteristic of Wana life, this outcome is highly improbable. Implicit, however, is a statement that the death of a shaman would be the death of a community. Certainly the death of anyone, old or young, shaman or not, would create emotional trauma and a significant social breach in a small Wana farmstead. But the exaggerated fear of social disruption and reprisals in the event of a performer's death underscores the degree to which the well-being of a community is entrusted by the logic of the *mabolong* to its shamans. Without shamans to hold it together, the ritual seems to say, the social fabric would rend apart. The power of the episode derives then in part from the fact that in the midst of a ritual devoted to restoring order in individual patients, a shaman suddenly invokes the specter of disorder, not only for himself, but for the entire community. In this way, the dramatic performance reveals the symbolic logic of the ritual.

Along with concern, there is high comedy as well. The riddle session, the sight of a grown man crying for want of some trivial substance, as well as occasional doubts about the veracity of the performance contribute to a sense of merriment that can go hand in hand with distress. Humor can be linked not only to the comic antics of performers and to anxiety about possible outcomes, but also to the "make-believe" quality of the episode. While no Wana would doubt that in theory a shaman may actually die during this episode, I sense that an element of fantasy mitigates this possibility for Wana audiences. Iki's remarks cited above—quite typical of experienced shamans—support this impression. The reader will recall that Iki mocked the concern of those trying to humor him by saying 'Something that's a lie, don't pay it much heed.' One might be tempted to relate such a remark to the so-called "rationality" debates (Wilson 1970). Scheff's (1979:119) work suggests an alternate reading: namely, in order to achieve its emotional effect, a ritual must maintain an "aesthetic distance." If its performance seems too real, a ritual denies its participants the emotional space to react. Iki's self-deprecation can be read as a means of diffusing the concern of the moment, of reestablishing "aesthetic distance" after momentary suspense. The tension here is not so much faith versus skepticism as anxiety versus humor.

A Reconsideration of Therapeutic Effectiveness

Still, one might say, the *mabolong* is an occasion for healing. What about the patients in all of this? Here it is appropriate to reconsider the issue of catharsis which Lévi-Strauss and subsequent authors have argued must be at the heart of symbolic healing. Scheff (1977, 1979) proposes that emotional "distancing" is critical to the cathartic process.⁶ To achieve catharsis a dramatic performance must be at one and the same time "distressful" and "vicarious," a balance he refers to as "distancing." If distressing, but not distanced, a drama leaves observers inured to their own pain. If too distanced, the observers fail to make a connection between the performance and their personal experience. To illustrate, Scheff (1979:106) quotes from Borquist a passage from Tennyson's poem "Princess":

Home they brought her warrior dead;
 She nor swooned nor uttered cry.
 All her maidens, watching, said
 'She must weep or she will die.'
 Then they praised him, soft and low,
 Called him worthy to be loved,
 Truest friend and noblest foe;
 Yet she neither spoke nor moved.

Stole a maiden from her place,
 Lightly to the warrior stept
 Took the face-cloth from his face;
 Yet she neither moved nor wept.

Rose a nurse of ninety years.
 Set his child upon her knee—
 Like a summer tempest came her tears—
 ‘Sweet my child, I live for thee.’

Scheff would claim that the heroine could let her emotions well unchecked only when drawn a step away from the immediate source of her grief. Empathizing with an orphan alleviates the numbness she experiences as a widow. The mother sees in a new light her child's fortune and her own. And she weeps.

Similarly, I suggest, the *mabolong* episode involving the food of the spirits temporarily deflects attention from what may have been for at least some members of the audience the source of concern, namely the condition of the patients being treated at the ceremony. It substitutes a new source of worry, the condition of a shaman. The two concerns—the patients' condition and the shaman's—are different, but not unrelated. By becoming a patient, by experiencing soul loss, and requiring shamanic treatment, the shaman identifies with the plight of the patients. But his identity as 'a person of spirits' sets him apart. As the mediator between the spirits and the human community, his threat to die poses more than the death of an individual; it suggests withdrawal of spirit aid from the community as well. By switching attention from patients to his own condition, the shaman may create a temporary "separation from an overwhelming subordination" (Kapferer 1977:495) to the emotional tensions surrounding the patients' own problems, in other words, catharsis. But if so, it does so incidentally not as a primary end in itself, but rather as part of a multifaceted appeal to a general audience.

Conclusion

A ritual like the *mabolong* can be variously read as religion, as therapy, and as theater. As in the story of the blind men investigating an elephant, it would be patently wrong to claim exclusive validity for one of these readings at the expense of the others. If taken alone, questions of symbolism can be too text-oriented; questions of therapy too patient-oriented; and questions of performance too focused on strategy. The aim of this article has been to demonstrate that these questions are inextricably related and their answers mutually enhancing.

As the analysis here has demonstrated, the relation between a ritual's symbolic action and its therapeutic benefits may be neither obvious nor direct. And as one might expect in a shamanic culture that posits the interconnectedness of person, community, and cosmos, the ritual under question simultaneously addresses patients and a wider audience as well. Just as it is essential to clarify the relationship between a ritual's therapeutic potential and its wider symbolic effectiveness, so too it is vital to address the tensions between the meaningful logic of a ritual form and its dramatic performance. If primacy is given to the former, there is risk of reading ritual action as rote repetition. If primacy is accorded the latter, there is risk of missing structure altogether by overemphasizing practice. The analysis presented here has revealed a complicated logic to the *mabolong* ritual, one that powerfully encodes a number of facets of cultural experience. But ritual logic does not automatically unfold into meaningful experience for performers, patients, and audience. Instead, it constitutes a series of potentials that may be realized in diverse and novel ways.

Notes

Acknowledgments. Research for this paper was carried out in Indonesia from June 1974 to December 1976 under the auspices of the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia. I thank the following

individuals for their helpful suggestions: Greg Acciaioi, Jean Comaroff, John Comaroff, Elizabeth Coville, Van Dusenbery, Jane Fajans, Deborah Heath, Karl Heider, David Holmberg, John Leavitt, Fred Myers, Benjamin Paul, Michelle Rosaldo, Renato Rosaldo, and David Sapir. I am particularly grateful to Terence Turner for his insights on Wana shamanism; Anna Tsing for her perceptive reading of an earlier draft; and to H. Russell Bernard, Thomas C. Greaves, and several anonymous readers for their helpful suggestions.

¹For my use of the term "shamanism" in this article, I invoke the same qualifications Lévi-Strauss (1963b:15–16) applied to his use of the term "totemism." While some would restrict the term "shaman" to the Central Asian culture area from which it derives, I prefer Rosaldo's (1975) approach, namely to allow both polysemous use of anthropological concepts, and recognition of the complexity and variety of cultural phenomena to which we apply them.

²Lévi-Strauss (1963c) treated another "leg" of the shaman-patient-audience triangle in "The Sorcerer and His Magic." That paper highlights the relationship of a shaman and his community.

³Schieffelin (1985:717–718) makes a similar observation regarding the "ostensible work" of a Kaluli seance.

⁴Kapferer (1979) offers an insightful analysis of the engagement and disengagement of audiences during Sinhalese exorcisms.

⁵In reaction to overly "textual" analyses of ritual, Kapferer (1983) and Schieffelin (1985) emphasize ritual's performative dimensions. Their turn from meaning to performance in the study of ritual parallels a turn from structure to practice in social analysis more generally.

⁶In citing Scheff here, I am not subscribing to his entire theory of catharsis to explain the ritual proceedings. As Beck (1977:490) notes, Scheff implies that the only rituals worthy of the name are those that lead to emotional discharge. Indeed, audience members occasionally do report heightened emotional states during this episode of a *mabolong*—e.g., laughing so hard they nearly urinate or becoming so distressed they flee. But such forms of emotional expression are by no means suppressed or forbidden in other contexts. By contrast, expressions of anger are culturally problematic for Wana, but do not figure in the *mabolong*, contrary to what an "emotional discharge" model of ritual might suggest. Part of the attraction of the episode for Wana audiences may well come not from releasing pent-up emotions, but from sharing infectious laughter and distress over a fantasy built on a general theme that touches their lives in so many ways (cf. Karp 1977:496).

References Cited

Atkinson, Jane Monnig

1979 Paths of the Spirit Familiars: A Study of Wana Shamanism. Doctoral dissertation, Stanford University.

1983 Religions in Dialogue: The Construction of an Indonesian Minority Religion. *American Ethnologist* 10(4):684–696.

1984 Wrapped Words: Poetry and Politics Among the Wana of Central Sulawesi, Indonesia. *In* *Dangerous Words: Politics and Language in the Pacific*. D. Brenneis and F. Myers, eds. Pp. 33–68. New York: New York University Press.

Beck, Brenda

1977 Comment. *Current Anthropology* 18:490–491.

Dow, James

1986 Universal Aspects of Symbolic Healing: A Theoretical Synthesis. *American Anthropologist* 88(1):56–69.

Errington, Shelly

1988 Meaning and Power in a Southeast Asian Realm. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (In press.)

Frank, Jerome D.

1974 Persuasion and Healing: A Comparative Study of Psychotherapy. Revised edition. New York: Schocken Books.

Freud, Sigmund

1958 Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis II). First published in 1914. *Reprinted in* the Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Vol. XII. J. Strachey, ed. London: Hogarth Press.

1969 The Technique of Psycho-analysis. *In* *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*. J. Strachey, transl. Revised edition. New York: W. W. Norton.

- Kapferer, Bruce
 1977 Comment. *Current Anthropology* 18:495–496.
 1979 Entertaining Demons: Comedy, Interaction and Meaning in Sinhalese Healing Ritual. *Social Analysis* 1:108–152.
 1983 *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Karp, Ivan
 1977 Comment. *Current Anthropology* 18:496–497.
- Kessler, Clive S.
 1977 Conflict and Sovereignty in Kelantanese Malay Spirit Seances. *In Case Studies in Spirit Possession*. Vincent Crapanzano and Vivian Garrison, eds. Pp. 295–331. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Lévi-Strauss, C.
 1963a The Effectiveness of Symbols. *In Structural Anthropology*. Pp. 181–201. New York: Anchor Books.
 1963b Totemism. R. Needham, transl. Boston: Beacon Press.
 1963c The Sorcerer and His Magic. *In Structural Anthropology*. Pp. 161–180. New York: Anchor Books.
- Moerman, Daniel
 1979 Anthropology of Symbolic Healing. *Current Anthropology* 20(1):59–80.
- Neu, Jerome
 1975 Lévi-Strauss on Shamanism. *Man* 10(2):285–292.
 1977 *Emotion, Thought and Therapy*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Ortner, Sherry
 1973 On Key Symbols. *American Anthropologist* 75:1338–1346.
- Prince, Raymond
 1982 The Endorphins: A Review for Psychological Anthropologists. *Ethos* 10(4):303–316.
- Rosaldo, Renato
 1975 Where Precision Lies: 'The Hill People Once Lived on a Hill.' *In The Interpretation of Symbolism*. Roy Willis, ed. Pp. 1–22. London: Malaby Press.
- Scheff, T. J.
 1977 The Distancing of Emotion in Ritual. *Current Anthropology* 18:495–496.
 1979 *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual, and Drama*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Schieffelin, Edward
 1976 *The Sorrow of the Lonely and the Burning of the Dancers*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
 1985 Performance and the Cultural Construction of Reality. *American Ethnologist* 12:707–724.
- Sherzer, Joel
 1983 *Kuna Ways of Speaking*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt
 1985 Gender and Performance in Meratus Dispute Settlement. Manuscript.
- Wilson, Bryan
 1970 *Rationality*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wolters, O. W.
 1982 *History, Culture, and Region in Southeast Asian Perspectives*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.