Unmaking the Anthropology of Mourning in a Psycho Analytical Perspective

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Abstract

Death often raises questions that science is unable to answer. Science may delay death, but it cannot stop it. Death is marked by grief and mourning. Mourning serves in a smooth transition, such as a liminal ritual of grief serves as a rite de passage between loss and re-enactment to the routine life. Generally, mourning or grief is described as a very private, personal emotion which is characterized by social withdrawal and shutting oneself off from the world. However, mourning also serves as an overt and public expression of grief whereby it serves as an identity marker to a community. The paper attempts to present a cross-cultural account of mourning and presents a psychoanalytical perspective of mourning with special emphasis on azaadari. The study presents an ethno theory on grief and reflections of mourning from a cross-cultural perspective.

Introduction

Death often raises questions that science is unable to answer. Besides advancement in science, all traditional values and rituals have worth of their own which last since antiquity. Science may delay death, but it cannot stop it. Similarly, it can offer alternatives to the way we grieve but we cannot at once accept the reality at one, very scientifically. The prospects and approaches of death of our own and our loved ones remain a question that can always be tackled afresh. Each society has come up with its own modes of tackling their grief through different types of mourning across cultures in a complex web of beliefs and customs. Anger, fear and crying have been so common at the time of death that most of the cultures sanction the flow of such emotions, but generally western cultures are not appreciative of this kind of overt expression of mourning (Parkes, Laungani, & Young, 2004).

Mourning is considered as a regular reaction to the loss of a beloved or some abstraction one is associated with, either it is their identity, country or liberty (Freud, 1917). Mourning or grief is 'often described as a very private, personal emotion, characterized by social withdrawal and shutting oneself off from the world' (Solomon, 2011). We can differ between grief and mourning by saying that grief is more of an internal; inward feeling of sorrow whereas mourning is external; it reflects behavior related to grief (Boyd, 2014). Again, the very definition and style of mourning vary cross-culturally. In some instances, it is a highly private matter, whereas in others it is a collective emotion and grief is shared just like merriness. Butler suggests that what binds us together as humans is the experience of mourning (Butler, 2004). A community's mourning is essentially universal and that all mankind is moved by the same traumatic event (Engle, 2007). It is also said, that mourning serves in a smooth transition, such as a liminal ritual of grief serves as a rite de passage between loss and re-enactment to the routine life. Mourners must learn to "find a way to resume the obligations of learning to live, to risk new attachments in the world, and to demand something of the living" (Britzman, 2000).

So, the question arises; why do we (the humans) mourn? Mourning helps by stressing the restorative task which empowers the actions and voices of people who have gone through the experience of bereavement and

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loss (Zembylas, 2011). Remembering the dead is the universal phenomenon. The Nobel deeds of the godly souls, the infallible imams, and the progeny of Prophet PBUH is venerated each year through commemoration by the *Shias* throughout the word. The followers of the imam in *Karbala* are highly respected. Commemorative processions are not just limited to Muslims the European Christians and the native of Belgian are famous for their zeal and fervor for what they demonstrate in their religious festivals. The procession of birth of Jesus is one of those ceremonies. The case of mourner specific to this study is that of an *azaadar*. The one who grieves and laments on the happening of Karbala in 61 AH; a politico-religious engagement where the progeny of the Prophet including his grandson Hussain was slain brutally to legit the rule of Yazid.

Research Question

1. How does the ethno theory on grief reflects mourning?
2. What are the experiences of grief from the perspective of an *azaadar*?

Review Of Litrature

The review of literature has been organised in three sections. The first part suggests how mourning is shaped up by religion in general; broadly in a cross-cultural, inter religious and intra religious perspective. It takes into account the mourning prescription and practice across revelational or Abrahamic religions and also sheds some light on the small scale societies. The second part sheds light on the psychology of mourning. It deals with the symbolic aspect of mourning with reference to the evolution of the culture of *azaadari* and how it forms the psyche of an azaadar in terms of its structure and function. The third section deals with the concept of mourning in Anthropology.

Religion On Mourning

Mourning is not merely cultural; it is shaped up by the religion as well. Religion broadly shapes self-construal; it can be instructive in terms of how culture gets inside people's heads (Cohen, 2015). When to mourn, how to mourn, how long to mourn, mourning singularly or collectively, what to eat and offer others, how to sit, what to wear while mourning is all religio-culturally prescribed. Within religions, often sects play their part in culturally shaping up the religious practices based on varying interpretations.

Judaism and Islam are emblematic of the religious belief and tradition which stress on orthopraxy; correctness of practices. Procedural prescriptions are predefined by the jurisprudence in both religions; Judaism and Islam as *halakha* and *sharia*. Social transformation is embodied in theological principles with fully conceived and thoughtful agendas which set the acceptable and reprehensible. The *rabbis* and the *ulemas* are the religious authority who often determines the expression of mourning in both religions. As Judaism differentiates between the non-monotheistic ways of Amorite; similarly, Islam distinguishes the very era by referring it as the age of *jahiliyah* to create a remote distance from the pre-Islamic practices. An ethnic designation has been used by Judaism whereas a temporal one has been used by the Universalist Islam to mark a difference between the pagan (non- monotheistic) and monotheistic religion. Judaism has a scriptural basis for shunning excessive expression of grief and it does not permit self-mutilation according to both Deuteronomy and Leviticus (Deuteronomy) & (Leviticus, 1985).

When it comes to Christianity, there is in Exhibit of Jesus' blood which is taken out in huge procession with respect and great reverence in Belgium annually (Ravenscroft, 1992). Faithful from all over the world gathered and take part in the very procession to see the drop of Jesus' blood with their own eyes. It is said that the prince Theodor got blood of Jesus from Jerusalem which he in case in a glass cage placed in the church at Burgess annually the large procession is taking out with this glass cage, richly decorated come to pay tribute bareheaded and barefooted to hold the sacred glass case on their heads and walked through the procession slowly (McGhee, 1965). The members of the Dutch royal family walk in veneration solemnly. The death anniversary of a Christian lady from morocco, Saint Vittovitti who was martyred is taken out every year on seventh of January.

The devoted Christian and followers take out huge processions on roads and streets as a sign of blessing and benediction in her remembrance each year. Taking the example from the east thousands of the devotees of Buddha

visit the Sri Lanka temple each year from India, Japan and China to have a glimpse of the tooth of Buddha buried in the temple in Sri Lanka. The biggest procession in Tibet is carried out to commemorate the death of Japan's crown prince who died thirteen hundred years ago. Interestingly the casket carried out by the devotees in a reverential manner is a replica of *taazia* (People of nation vol 1). When the emperor of Great Britain died in 1910 his faithful remained mourning in black for six months and it lasted for one year. People tied black armband during this period. The day when he was buried all the offices and employees, in fact all the people were order to stand still. The entire British Empire came to a complete halt for fifteen minutes to show their affection and love to their leader.

In case of small-scale societies, expressions of grief and mourning for your loved ones are often permissible. It is not just permissible but also desirable to express intense grief through crying, sobbing and even calling out to the dead for a restricted time period at the funeral, near the effigy of the body or the deceased's body, or after returning home for the first time after death or on annual death anniversaries (Rosenblatt, 2004). Normative guidelines are offered to religious traditions of death rituals axiomatically.

It is believed that detachment and grief are not uncommon to anyone. When it is our turn and we are called to grief, that we have the courage, the faith, and the support, to stay open to the pain, open to the loss, open to the love, and even grateful for the ability to feel (Bilimoria, 2011). An ethnological account of mourning is gathered with the help of this anthropological account of mourning. Each sub-culture has internalized the rituals of *azaadari* in its own way. Each culture coins the notion of grief and mourning as per their own cultural traditions. It brings us an understanding of the dynamics of cultural and political interplay with the belief system. Ethnographic writings help to develop an understanding of the relationship of the observed behavior to factors in the social or physical environment.

Psychology of Mourning

Mourning is symbolic. Psychology preoccupies itself with symbolic "content" and "purpose" of thinking (Weston, 1972). Freud's own construction of religion and science seems confusing and opaque. When the historical proves of secularization is re-introduced, religion is believed to gradually give way to science. He mistakenly believed that the religious ideas of man's thinking could be replaced by his scientific or analytical self. The relation between religion and science is as historical as cognitive. They are very complex, intimate and subtle (Homans, 1989). However, in psychoanalysis, regardless of the school of thought, identification to object loss, cathexis and decathexis remained a central debate. Mourning is considered transmuting internalization of function and structure of the lost object; self (Hagman, 1995). An *azaadar* is believed to let go of his self (melancholia) while performing the mourning rituals.

Mourning is considered as a crucial stage in a phenomenologist passage to philosophy of reflection (Homans, 1989). Loss of a beloved is a centrally organizing theme that develops out of the elucidation of such losses in reference to the pathological and normal response (Pollock, 1989). Also, there is a link between the developmental moments of mourning and mourning as a concept that is generally understood. The former prepares us for the latter; and the latter is repetition and recreation of the former (Lear, 2014). Their Reverberations can be seen through anniversary reactions such as annual Muharram rituals in this case where the creative geniuses can transform to master the central theme of the article; psycho-analytical perspective of mourning (Pollock, 1989).

In terms of understanding the Psychological structure of mourning, we need to understand that it serves an enduring function. Mourning specifically serves a function that results out of the gradual neutralization which occupies that part of the psyche which is veiled by repression (Goldberg, 2020). From a psychological perspective, at the deepest ideological level, industrialization fostered the culture of fantasy which can also be termed as technologizing fantasy. Collective mourning by *azaadars* is more of a central element in contemporary societies observing this culture. Re-appropriation for the past and reliving the Karbala paradigm by believing in it helps them interpret the shared fantasy which binds them together and separates them from the rest alongside. In this paradigm, Azaadari serves as a psychoanalytical treatment that develops them to grow through transmuting internalizations.

Concept of Mourning in Anthropology

Funerals and mourning customs have remained a significant domain of research for anthropologists however, grief and mourning were largely left to psychology, psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Over past three decades, the Freudian model of grief was questioned and theories were built upon it. Some anthropologists have documented work which tends to illustrate the diversity of grief across intra and inter socio-cultural groups. Some work has been done for interrogating the epistemological premises that an Anthropology of grief could be built upon. Ethnographers often face limitations and methodological issues while making pluri-disciplinary approaches of grief, especially in Anthropology. Such seminal work was carried out 30 years ago by Nancy Shepher Hughes which was based on cultural diversity of grief; Death without weeping based on posthumous reflections and Kleinman's work on Culture and depression focusing on manifestation, variability and similitudes of grief across cultures and societies.

The process of mourning has certain protocols. The very act of ritualized mourning, when observed ethically, gives an aura of what Victor turner coins "Social Drama".... 'the actors or the mourners get high blood pressure, increase in rate of heartbeat, papillary dilation, sweating, inhibiting the gastro-intestinal motor and sensory functions' ([Lex, 1979](#)). Richard Schechner describes that when it comes to restoring the past, it is exactly how we ascribe the meaning to the "social dramatic" ([Schechner, 1979](#)). It is believed the theatrical rituals are a mere exaggeration of social drama, the simple replication, hypertrophy of the complete processual pattern. The mythic, supernatural, numinous and sacred character of religious action is seen in practice where something of investigative, judgmental and punitive character of law of action comes in place. The religious action can be of sacrificial in nature as well such as self-sacrificial or self-punitive, where he (the mourner) is no more a "secular sacrum" rather a "holy actor" ([Turner, 1982](#)).

Methodology

This article is based upon some findings from my MPhil dissertation which was basically a multi-sited ethnography of *azaadari* and *taazia* symbolism in a diachronic perspective. The data for this article was gathered from both mourners from both *Shia* and non-*Shi'ites* through participant observation and in-depth interviews. The primary tools of data collection were observatory checklists and interview guides. The ethnographic account on mourning of *azaadar* (individual mourner) and *azaadari* (process of mourning) as a collective ritual has prepared and later analysed in a psychoanalytical perspective. The paper sheds light on how does the ethno theory on grief reflects mourning and what are the experiences of grief from the perspective of an *azaadar*.

Discussion

Azaadari has evolved as a culture of its own one can say that people have adapted with it in their own cultural ways that is one of the most crucial moment that signifies the departure of the soul from this world. Death of a loved one or a dear one is something that is highly grieved upon. It is the high relationship with the deceased that determine the kind of tribute and veneration we pay to him. Burial of dead is witness as the process by the entire community who is associated with him in any way. Whenever an extraordinary person is departed his family tribe and countrymen flock together to the cremated or burial site to perform collective prayer or hold such social gathering where they remember good deeds performed by him.

Psychoanalytic perspectives on mourning provide an understanding of this culture of mourning. The general perceptions of respondents concerning their beliefs led to the attitudinal prejudice they held on grief; based on the way they have been encultured. Their ethnicity, linguistic affiliation, socio-economic status and gender-wise differences have further shaped up their perception of the non-observers of *azaadari*. The results showed that the practice of mourning and its cultural acceptance of mourning rituals are largely shaped by the respondents' experiences, background, education and their perceptions towards *azaadars* or *Shia* community.

People grieve over the loss of their loved ones. Understanding the psyche of human being justifies this 'grief' through a 'mournful' exhibit in certain cultures. Mourning the dead is found across most of the religions, especially the *Abrahmic* religions, but its duration and protocols are not similar. The paper focused on a specific kind of mourning; *azaadari*. *Azaadari* is from the word *aza*, which means 'to mourn'. *Azaadari* particularly is

"mourning for Husayn" (Howarth, 2005). It is considered a Muslims' traditional ritual mainly representing the *Shia* faith. *Azaadari* is the 'ritual representation and enactment of *Karbala* myth' (Hegland, 2013).

Karbala serves as central symbol in the life of an *azaadar*. The Karbala paradigm is a whole set of symbols that are highly contextual. In order to gain a deeper kind of understanding of symbolism, one needs to understand the mnemic symbols and residues of how we suffer and heal at the same time from the reminiscences (Homans, 1989). The *Shia*s, on the other hand, observe mourning as a component of their belief system, pointed to the event as a confirmation of their faith (Jaffery, 1983); (Yusufzai, 1983). The mourners strongly believe that it was the Abrahamic sacrifice that initiated the tradition of salvation which came in their descent and lasted by Hussain's sacrifice in *Karbala* which was meant to call upon salvation for the entire *ummah*, as promised by his grandfather, the Prophet (PBUH). For *azaadars*, sacrifice of the progeny of the Prophet (PBUH) holds a central place in social behavior and sectarian mythology (Ahmed, 1986). The very concept of *Aza* emerged with the dissemination of news of Hussain's martyrdom when his sister Zainab started lamenting after the martyrdom of her entire family at *Karbala*. According to their belief system, along with the *Imam -al-Waqt*, Zain-ul-Abideen spread the message across their journey while they were held captives and were taken to Syria. The news of this martyrdom was kept undercover and the Muslim community was not aware of this incident. Keeping in view the rebellion against the rule of Yazid, the news was not spread by his army and personnel.

The *azaadars* believe that the caravan of captives of Muhammad's family publicized Hussain's message and forced the people to think over the tragedy. It would make the Muslims think of the whole event and would stimulate their consciousness. This is exactly what happened when Hussain succeeded in his purpose' (Pinnault, 1999). The local theorization by the mourners suggests that each year mourning is taken as the point of revival and dispersion of that message, which is meant to educate the masses not just about the event of *Karbala* but to instill their thoughts and feelings on rising against the brutality; "the religion of protest" (Dabashi, 2005).

The *azaadars* justify their mourning by referring to Hamza's death; Prophet's mourning for Hamza and all those who mourn on the loss of Hamza were thanked for the sympathy, prayed for their wellbeing by the Prophet. Al-Hasham quotes similarly on lamentation and weeping women (History of Tabari). The very event is quoted in the following way by *Al Muhadith* Abdul Haq Dehlvi in *Madarij un Nabuwat* "The Prophet heard the cries from the houses of Ansar when he reached Madina but not from Hamza's place. To which he said, 'Wasn't there Anyone to cry over Hamza?' The Ansar's asked their women to lament and mourn over Hamza first and then over their own martyr. When the Holy Prophet asked about it he was told the whole thing. The Prophet P.B.U.H blessed them by saying "May Allah is pleased with you and your children".

Mourning rituals are performed annually from Muharram till the 8th of Rabi-ul-Awwal. According to Bell's functional Taxonomy of rituals, these rituals fit into the category of the "calendrical or commemorative rituals", which are celebrated around the globe by *azaadars* during the months of Muharram and Safar in commemoration of martyrs of *Karbala* (Bell, 1997). Mourning is carried out in congregations in *Imam bargah* and the processions. The mourners gather to share the grief by recalling the tragedy of Karbala and pay condolences to the Prophet (PBUH).

The mourners lament in congregations in their holy places, where they gather following the protocols of solemnity. Usually, they wear black or plain neutral colors on such events. The protocols demand to sit barefoot on floor or mats. However, this type of mourning has taken multiple forms at various times and spaces. The spread of this mourning always had certain cultural, political, social, economic and psychological manifestations. However, from an ethnographic perspective on mourning, it is a subjective phenomenon. The beliefs of the *azaadars* suggest that the practice of *azaadari* is deep-rooted in a historical *Karbala* paradigm.

The mourners annually visit the places of veneration as per their belief; Karbala; Iraq, Syria and Iran to the shrines of the progeny of the Prophet. Mourning and monuments go hand in hand. Several times honoured connection and distinctions between the two existed in conventional wisdom (Homans, 1989). Often the mourners are seen visiting the monuments; graveyards, relics and shrines of the bereaved ones that put them to solace. The shrines and tombs of the holy figures are open to pilgrims. But the shrines of the Progeny of the Prophet is not merely visited in reverence but often in deep sorrow and mournful manner by the ones who relate to the Karbala paradigm. Also, the symbolic replicas of those monuments carried out in mournful processions

call for lamentation. These observations have been cast in several Muharram and Ramzan processions where the mourners gather to offer symbolic condolences to the Prophet.

Mourning the dead amongst Muslims is for a limited amount of time according to most of the references, but the believers hold this perspective, that mourning for Hussain is a revered ritual; it is not only the martyrdom of Hussain but rather the message that *Karbala* leaves for humanity is believed to revitalize each year. Several anthropologists have scrutinized processual paradigms- Key encultured concepts that represent, explain, and or order the course of events in human history (Hegland, 2012). Mourning for Hussain, which is recurrent in different forms for 1400 years. The tradition of mourning in the Indo-Pak tradition has been flourished and elaborated. It is believed to enrich the inner lives of those living by a religious worldview, without necessarily diluting that worldview (Mehmood, 2015).

Mourners hold the Prophet and his progeny close to their hearts. They believe that this sacred and spiritual kind of mourning keeps them away from any other kind of worldly mourning. However, from a psychoanalytical perspective, cathexis by a mourner is drawn from the Karbala paradigm. Each year, decathexis results whenever a mourner leaves the mournful congregation or whenever the annual commemorative rituals are over. The state of mourners can be synonymously co notated with melancholia when it is analysed in an etic perspective. The mourner situates himself in a trance every time he is mourning which bars the spacio-temporal boundaries. He mourns every year not only on the tyranny of the events but also relates every other happening to his own sufferings. The series of repetitive mournful ceremonies are in line with the hypothesis presented by Rosenblatt which suggest that 'Where final ceremonies [for deceased] were present prolonged grief was less likely to be Present or frequent; where final ceremonies were absent prolonged grief was more likely to be present and frequent (Rosenblatt et al., 1976). Also, in societies with final funeral ceremonies, grief after the end of mourning is less likely to occur, the heavier the attendance at the final ceremony. These mourners believe that since the final mortuary rituals of their beloved holy figures were not performed, the grief prolongs and the mourning never ends.

Conclusion

Mourning the assassination or martyrdom of the historical holy figures is not uncommon. In commemoration of these personalities, mausoleums and shrines are built to pay them a tribute. From the saints of the past and from the civilization we see magnificent building and monuments and mausoleums which are built in the memory of such personalities. There is nothing unnatural about these ceremonies' condolences, edifices meeting and memorials which people practice cross-culturally apart from their religion, ethnicity, caste, creed and race. The study suggests that there lies an ethnic flavor to the practice of mourning among people of various ethnic group but they are majorly diffused in our national and regional culture of the Indo-Pak. The days, length of mourning, the sequence of rituals, types of processions, the narratives, accounts of grief, themes of speech are more are less similar. The *Karbala* symbolism is depicted in very similar terms through *azaadari* through the use of *Alams, taazia, taboots, zuljanah* by almost all the ethnic groups. Self-flagellation is a uniform ritual among these mourners but the extent and style of flagellation vary as per their ethnicities. The most pertinent difference between this kind of mourning and the types of mourning observed cross-culturally is the overt expression, extent and annual commemoration of mourning that is uniquely observed.

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